

PRINCIPLES FIRST

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–draft¹–

1 Introduction

I've decided never again to let an insult pass unavenged. From now on, an insult will be a reason to retaliate.

Take this to represent a simple view about what reasons are: Reasons are consequences of principles, such as never to let an insult pass unavenged. This also exemplifies a view about principles: Principles are things that can serve as the contents of decisions such as the above. And this also represents a relationship between the two. Principles are, in roughly this way, basic to practical reason, or at least more basic than reasons. The details are considerably more complex of course.² But, details aside, as a package, this is the right way to look at these things.

By contrast with this, many seem to think reasons are not at all explicable in terms of such things as principles.³ Practical reasoning is a kind of sensitivity to facts that brutally count in favor of or against things. This is a basic element of practical reasoning for such philosophers, even sometimes at the expense of coherence and other principle-based evaluations.⁴

I am against these views. Reasons are just facts that favor what they do because

¹This benefited from many conversations. Thanks to

²E.g., for Scanlon, 'is a reason for' is a four-place relation, $R(p, x, c, a)$, such that "for an agent in circumstances, c , p counts in favor of doing a ... p is a consideration that it would be proper to take into account, as something counting in favor of a , in considering what to do in those circumstances". Scanlon, **Being Realistic...** (pp. 31, 37)

³Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, pp. 17-25, Kolodny, Parfit, Nagel, et. al.

⁴Kolodny (2005)

of the practical principles that guide our reasoning. Although our thought and talk about practical reasoning often represents reasons that no principles back up, and also principled people who do not in virtue of their principles have reason to act, I nevertheless argue here that the view that agency in general is principle-based better explains relationships of practical reasons to objectivity and practical rationality. It provides a straightforward explanation of why certain facts are reasons, what makes them reasons, why facts are reasons for some but not for others, and why still other facts are reasons for anyone. This view's strength can be seen even if we proceed, as I will, at an abstract level.

My inspiration is Kantian, but others also represent agency and practical reasoning as principle- or rule-based.⁵ Since my thoughts are tied to elements of a Kantian outlook, however, I use some of Kant's ideas as a touchstone.

2 Reasons, Principles, Practical Reasoning

I begin with 2 skeletons of theories of practical reasoning. I won't consider others. These are enough to illuminate my ideas. I approach the topic in terms of practical reasoning rather than the faculty of practical reason or norms of practical rationality. This allows me to discuss practical reason without having to focus on the latter, more difficult, topics. Practical reasoning, then, is either:

1. Responding (spelled out in some way) to reasons (spelled out in some way)⁶,
or
2. Being guided⁷ (spelled out in some way) by practical principles (spelled out in some way).

The idea behind 1 is that practical reasoning is sensitivity or responsiveness to reasons. Deliberating agents are supposed to be, metaphorically, reasons-detectors, while reasoning includes the exercise of capacities to see or recognize which facts count in favor of which decisions and actions. That detective aspect is then tied to a proper practical orientation in the direction of choice and action that one perceives the reasons to support or indicate. By contrast, 2 represents practical reasoning as

⁵e.g., Broome (2013), et. al.

⁶E.g. Kolodny, "Is there..." 2005, et. al. I will hereafter make no distinction, as do some, between responsiveness to reasons as practical reasoning and responsiveness to **beliefs** about reasons as practical reasoning.

⁷Not to be confuse with 'being responsive to' as in 1. See below.

thinking about what to decide and do guided by practical principles deploying whatever capacities are required to be guided by them. Principles orient our choices and actions in a particular direction. And when the principles that orient our choices and actions are *rational* principles, then our agency is rational.

I contrast 1 and 2, but they do not seem to be on their face incompatible: There are reasons. There are practical principles. One might think that the two are simply building blocks of practical reason. Or, if reasons are principles or principles are reasons then one might think there are not, in fact, two skeletons at all. For instance, one might think that principles are propositions, and since reasons are facts, and facts are just true propositions, reasons are just true practical principles.

Indeed, when one reflects on examples of practical reasoning, some cases conform to 1, others to 2. Sometimes a fact strikes us as a reason to do one thing or another and no principle seems apparent. That I'm hungry, for instance, seems plenty reason to eat; I need no additional principle. At other times, we consider plans but no reasons to act seem apparent. And so, by themselves, these two skeletons may simply be two perfectly compatible descriptions of practical reasoning.

Once we turn to 1 and 2 as explanatory approaches to practical reasoning and put meat on these bones, however, they become incompatible. As explanations, one or the other should be (if one thinks there are both) foundational. Which of 1 or 2 explains the other? Do reasons explain principles or do principles explain reasons in practical reasoning?

A view in which practical principles are first in explanations of practical reasoning doesn't claim that we're always "acting on principle" in the usual meaning of that phrase. The view isn't, for instance, that we're always, or at least always trying to be, consistent. Much less does it require that practical reasoners grasp normative principles that are in some way metaphysically outside of us. For instance, intuitionists hold that principles exist independently of us that are rational norms. Indeed, the view is not even new. It is simply the view is that that agency is a principle-based capacity.⁸ The norms by which we judge the rationality of agency might well exist in the nature of things, independently of those whose rationality is judged by them. Or they might, by contrast, additionally compose or make up practical reason itself, as they do within a fully constitutivist-style theory such as Korsgaard's.⁹ But either are compatible with treating agency in a way that puts principles first in the

⁸I am thinking of 'practical principles' as playing the role logoi do in Aristotle's view of practical deliberation. A useful discussion of this, see Moss (2014).

⁹Korsgaard, Velleman, et. al.

explanation of practical reasoning.

Agency is a faculty of principles, but not necessarily good principles, much less norms of full rationality. The latter idea would challenge the view I am considering avoids.¹⁰ A principles first view of practical reasoning limits itself to the nature of agency, reasons and reasoning, whether or not these are *good agency*, *good reasons* or *good reasoning*. Being a practical reasoner is a functional entity: Rules, directions and the like create, make up or define it, like any other similar functional entity. To be a custodian, for instance, is being the agent of caring for something, and so must follow this, that and the other rule. Directives compose the position of 'being a custodian'. But being a custodian is distinct from being a good custodian, from the person in the role and how well they live up to those rules or directives. Those directives define the role no matter how well or badly (within limits) the person who occupies the role follows them. Likewise, a teacher or lifeguard is defined in terms of directives. Being a custodian just is being a person takes care of something. Being a teacher just is being a person who instructs others. And so on. Likewise, being an agent, the most basic practical role, just is being a thing that makes things happen according to practical principles (or, as Kant puts it, acts "in accordance with the representation of laws, i.e., in accordance with principles" G 4:412). Of course, simply acting as a custodian or a teacher is to act isn't sufficient to make you a custodian or teacher. You have to be appointed, hired, or what not, according to further procedures. But the analogy gets the idea across. The view that not that agency is constituted by *rational* practical principles, in the sense that only a *good* agent is truly an agent or some such thing, but only that it is constituted by practical principles, and that these explain practical reasons.

I think that the best way to understand the endpoint of practical deliberation for a principles first view is as being our identity, in 'I'm a custodian', 'I'm a teacher', 'I'm the father' and so on. This, I take it, is the rationale behind Korsgaard's idea of "practical identities", and the above I believe fits with that part of her picture. But a practical identity, famously, is also what Sartre found disturbing.¹¹ It was troubling to him because deliberation about what to do, he thought, cannot legitimately end in 'I'm an F', and hence cannot legitimately end in 'I'm a rational agent' (as the picture I offer here has it, anyway). Undoubtedly, in one sense this is right. In the original Star Trek series, for instance, Dr. McCoy's catch phrase was "Dammit, Jim, I'm a doctor, not a [bricklayer, engineer, mechanic, etc.]" This was an attempt to side-

¹⁰for instance, it seems to imply that I don't exercise my agency at all when I don't act fully rationally. See, e.g., Railton

¹¹Sartre, J. P. Being and Nothingness. Barnes Tr. Waiter example.

step Captain Kirk's order. Worse, "I'm only human" and such proclamations often express an attempt to avoid responsibility. But such cases are different from those in which the appeal to identity completes an explanation of decisions and actions. Ending deliberation in our identity as an agent, as the cause of our actions. This is the ultimate explanatory basis for practical reasons. For a Kantian, deliberation ends in our rational agency, our humanity. But even setting that aside, we can cheerfully embrace what Sartre rejected, identity as the culmination of practical reasoning. As a consequence, identity ultimately explains why some facts count in favor of what we propose to do, and others do not.¹²

A reasons first approach to explaining practical reasoning makes any practical principles there may be to be functions of reasons—say, as explananda of or generalizations over sets of reasons. Alternatively, some such approaches are skeptical that there are any practically relevant principles.¹³ To be sure, just as a principle-based view need not rely on grasping intuitionist-style principles, reasons-based views need not view reasons as non-naturalistic self-standing normative inhabitants of the world. Reasons first views can regard reasons as being as non-mysterious as, say, desires. Indeed, desires do point brutally favor things such as actions. But, and this is important, they do not do so *as reasons*.¹⁴ Even so, on a reasons first view, any favoring that desires provide as reasons need not do so via grasping a non-naturalistic property. The contrast in approaches I discuss here is only between reasons-based and principle-based views of practical reason. Thus, while principles may be constructed, say, by disjoining individual reasons, the explanatory issue is why any fact in such a disjunction favors what it favors. The disjunction of such reasons itself does not explain that. This is precisely the explanation a principle-based view provides.

¹²I think it is significant, though not necessarily central to his view, that Aristotle picks out "who is acting" as one of the "particulars in which the action lies and with which it is concerned". NE 1110b 25-1111a 8. He immediately dismisses ignorance of this as a ground of involuntary action. But "who one is" is clearly relevant to deliberation and decision in his view. When he notes that the object of deliberation must be something within our power and can be done, this contains an ineliminable reference to our identity. What *I* can do, what is within *my* power is circumscribed by who I am.

¹³e.g., Dancy in "Particularism", Hooker, ed....

¹⁴This is precisely the reason Williams introduces the sub-Humean model in which a "sound deliberative route" is required to provide the element of a desire that favors something insofar as it is a reason. 1981 p. 78.

3 Practical Principles

Kant's term for what guides us when we think about what to do is 'practical principle'. His conception of a practical principle however is not unusual. Principles, such as the excluded middle, guide us in thinking about what to believe, for instance.¹⁵ *Practical* principles, by contrast with principles guiding belief formation, are

propositions (*Sätze*) that contain a general determination of the will, having under it [i.e., the general determination of the will] several practical rules.

Although he uses the term 'propositions', his examples are like his first example of a practical principle in the 2nd **Critique**, namely:

P: Let no insult pass unavenged

and P is not a proposition in any standard sense.¹⁶ The claim that principles are propositions may simply reflect the ambiguity of the term 'principle', which can mean either proposition in a standard sense or a law. But this ambiguity here masks an important issue about the nature of practical reasoning. Propositions in a standard sense don't seem to govern; they represent things. Laws, by contrast, do govern. So although 'principle of practical reason' might refer to either a description of how reasoning works, or something that governs that reasoning, the latter is how Kant uses the term. So for now I will set aside details about how propositions and such guiding thoughts might be related.¹⁷ Whatever the relationship, the principles that guide deliberation, practical principles, are not propositions in a standard sense.

¹⁵Kant introduces practical principles as *Grundsätze* but goes on to refer to these with the term *Prinzip*, for instance, in the rest of the 2nd Critique, so there is no meaningful distinction between the terms in this context.

¹⁶Compare O'Neill (1975) pp. 4-11. O'Neill assumes from the beginning that practical principles are propositions in the standard sense, viz., statements about acts, persons and circumstances bound by a quantifier. Given her interests in the problem of relevant act descriptions, this assumption does no harm to her overall project. In my view, however, it vexes the problem of action-guidance and principles. In effect, it pushes the theory of practical reason within which she is working into the first skeletal view above.

¹⁷Beck reads Kant as proposing that "any proposition that is effective through being entertained in deliberating on action is a practical proposition, even though its content may be the same as that of a theoretical proposition expressing mere knowledge, without direction for use" (77). The difference between them is in their manner of presentation rather than in their content (77n). I find this explanation unhelpful, but it is not clear what Kant wants us to take to be the relationship between these propositions. I find it clearer to just think of practical principles as simply not propositions at all.

This embodies the idea that the content of practical principles is a ‘determination of the will’.

Practical propositions, continuing within Kant’s framework, have a structure. They “contain a general determination of the will”. What distinguishes practical propositions from theoretical propositions is that the structure of the latter is (and this is how Kant contrasts the two) “determined by the constitution of the object”. With regard to the latter, to use a common trope, there is a world-mind direction of fit. Objects in the world in some sense are what theoretical representations are supposed to conform or apply to. Thus, they are propositions in a standard sense whose structure is in the business of conforming to the structure of things, and thus can be true or false either by their content conforming or not conforming to that structure. By contrast, practical ‘propositions’ such as P do not purport to conform to the world. Being practical, their structure is not determined by “the constitution of the object” but by the will. They are in the business of bringing about something whose structure will match the structure determined by the will. They are thus mind-world oriented. The representation of a practical reasoner is in the driver’s seat, and the structure of the world must come to fit the agent’s will. It is worth pointing out that a view in which facts favor some things at sometimes but other things at other times, or favor nothing at still other times, have ‘favoring’ characteristics that lack structure of the sort provided by practical principles. Thus, inferring a generalization from a collection of such individual ‘favoring facts’ won’t explain why any individual fact favored what it did precisely because it won’t explain why it favored the subsequent structure of the world coming to match any structure at all.

A “general determination of the will” is like a general direction or instruction. “The constitution of the object” determines the content of theoretical representations but not practical representations. It makes indeterminate representations determinate. So the determination of the will contained in a practical principles such as P makes an indeterminate (i.e., undirected) will determinate. For instance, an instruction (e.g., ‘Do this or that’) orients choice (e.g., ‘Do’) in some direction (e.g., ‘this or that’). In that sense, the content of P ‘determines the will’. Perhaps the three most dreaded words come from Ikea, ‘Some assembly required’, which accompany Allen wrenches and instructions. Each instruction is a ‘determination of the will’. But directions can be specific (as in “Leave the gun, take the cannoli”) or general (“Don’t ever take sides against the family again”). Instructions can be arbitrarily general. Imagine that Ikea’s instruction was simply ‘Assemble this’ (sadly, not hard to imagine). Kant reserved the term ‘practical principle’ for directions that are general, though not so general as to be as vague as is ‘Assemble this’. P is general.

Moral principles such as ‘Never lie’ are general. They are directions for how to act and live in general. I won’t look further for a precise way of defining what ‘general’ comes to beyond these examples since nothing in what follows hangs on it.¹⁸

This makes salient a notable fact about rules, directions and thus principles: They are ubiquitous. Although we may not always follow directions, we can and sometimes do. We follow rules such as chess’ that are exceptionless, and rules that require interpretation, such as to economize when shopping.¹⁹ Still others appear on their face to apply to everyone (with a bounded quantifier) such as ‘Everyone with blue eyes take two steps to the left’. It is also a commonplace fact that rules often conflict, that some rules are broader, more or less encompassing, more or less stringent, etc., than others. We routinely make judgments about which rule takes precedence over which, and by extension, which facts are ultimately reasons and which aren’t. Sometimes doing so is wickedly difficult, at other times, relatively routine. We are nevertheless guided by practical principles and make our way through complications relatively easily. So, as I see it, there is no special mystery about a rule-based view of practical reason because of problems about following, applying or interpreting principles.²⁰

Some might worry that this supposed salient fact about following principles isn’t relevant because Kant’s ambitions were, and ours is, to explain what is, so to speak, going on under the hood of the phenomena. If someone claims to have a theory of perception according to which it is a rule-governed faculty, it seems perverse to claim that there is nothing odd about the idea since our perceptions follows a rule when, say, we’re looking for Waldo. Yet the examples Kant himself uses are exactly the sorts of principles I have just referred to as ubiquitous. Do we always follow such principles? On the view offered here, Yes, but not in the ”sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought” nor in the ”when I deliberate the chips are down” sense. Just enough so that we can explain agency. Moreover, to regard principles as first in explanation only requires accepting whatever principles at whatever levels of generality are needed to explain (in an exploded diagram way) practical reasoning.

¹⁸L.W. Beck notes, however, that Kant’s use of the term *Grundsatz* indicates that the level of generality of particular interest to him is that appropriate for principles that are ‘basic’ or in some sense not derived from or based on other principles. Beck, Commentary, p.

¹⁹Herman, pp.

²⁰cf. Foot (1954).

4 Objectivity

Even if practical principles do not guide us 'from the outside' of deliberation, a distinctive Kantian conception of objectivity provides an adequate way to understand the difference between subjective and objective reasoning, and so reasons just for me or for anyone. Practical principles are subjective when, as Kant puts it, the "condition [of their applicability] is regarded by the subject as holding only for his will". These Kant famously dubs "maxims". By contrast, principles are objective "when the condition is cognized as . . . holding for the will of every rational being". These are "laws". I will take this on board as an approximation of objectivity and then consider some of its worrisome features. What is it for a principle to 'hold for' or 'apply to' an agent? If principles are not propositions, then 'holding for' every agent isn't 'describing' every agent. Kant speaks of the 'bindingness' of principles, so I will adopt this for the time being, and say that 'holding for' or 'applying to' just means 'binding on'.

Objectivity, then, concerns how 'subjects' (Who? Ordinary folk? Ideal agents?) 'regard' or 'cognize' the condition under which the principle applies to them. Some may regard the notion of objectivity as requiring a strong sort of independence from the activity of reasoning. But the rationale for including 'cognition' here is well-founded since the principles purport to be practical and so essentially guide deliberation. Moreover, practical principles are practical both in their content as well as their result, though in this, the 'condition' that a subject cognizes is part of the content of the principle, namely, to whom that principle applies. A principle cannot guide deliberation unless in some sense or other it has a grip on that deliberation, and that grip is supposed to be supplied by the deliberator's cognition.

Someone's deliberation might be guided by a principle they 'regard' or 'cognize' as holding 'for the will of every agent', yet that principle not in fact hold for everyone. People are wrong about such things. One might think everyone lives by 'Let no insult go unavenged', for instance. If a principle is objective when merely the subject whose principle it is believes that its condition holds for everyone, how are we to distinguish principles that are merely *believed* to hold for everyone from those that *really do* hold for everyone? We need to distinguish between those principles that really are objective from those that only seem so.

Suppose instead the cognizing element is a success term. Thus, when deliberators are guided by a principle that they *recognize* or *know* holds only for their will, it is subjective, but when they *recognize* or *know* that the principle holds for everyone, it is objective. This would eliminate the problem that 'regards' introduces. Since

'Let no insult pass unavenged' is only a principle some might propose, for instance, it is only a maxim, not a law. The problem with this supposition is that we aren't always aware of the conditions under which a principle applies to us.

There is a fix for this problem: Idealize. If the subject were fully rational and aware of all of the facts, they would be aware of whether a principle's condition holds for everyone or just for them. There are well known problems with idealization, but at least it would secure a sense in which a principle that can provide deliberative guidance might also be objective. Thinking in ideal terms allows us to assume that a deliberator, in some sense, is aware of whether a principle applies universally or because of their own interests. This in turn allows us to use the idea of this awareness within a conception of practical objectivity. I will return to the problem of applying an idealization below.

Can a principle bind those unaware of it or that it holds only for them? A practical principle, to be practical, must be able to guide deliberation, and something of which a subject is unaware it seems cannot guide their deliberation. This is puzzling. When I think about where to have dinner, my deliberation over the alternatives is limited to those within a manageable distance. Restaurants in other regions are left out of consideration. Am I aware of this as a guideline? How could it guide my deliberation without being present in that deliberation? Yet even if I might prefer closer restaurants, no amount of deliberation would involve my opting for a wonderful little restaurant in a far flung region of Ghana. Much as the principle of the excluded middle is not an object of the reasoning that is guided by it, practical principles are not objects of the reasoning that is guided by them. People sometimes think, talk and behave guided by principles that hold just for them, other times, holding for everyone. For now I'll just stipulate this, and that principles of practical reasoning, much like principles of theoretical reasoning, are normally not the objects of the reasoning that they guide, whatever level of awareness of those principles that guidance requires.

The conception of 'objectivity' in this principle-based view of practical reason is thus just this kind of universality.²¹ It is not necessary to appeal to the idea of 'truth'. Objective practical principles are simply those that bind all agents. Moreover, there need be no appeal to 'mind-independence'. From the fact that a principle binds everyone, one can conclude that it doesn't bind only me or people like me. So,

²¹This is too formal and overly simple. Objectivity as universality should ultimately be cast along the lines that Rawls does, viz., "a suitably constructed social point of view that all can accept" (1980: 519) Thanks to Steve Darwall for pointing this out in his recent paper on PL.

an objective principle is independent of my mind or minds like mine in that sense, but nothing more than this. Practical principles are objective, then, even if not necessarily mind-independent or propositional. A principle such as the Categorical Imperative can therefore be objective in that sense. It is objective because, even if it is not a proposition that describes all practical reasoning agents, it binds all such agents .

The ‘conditions’ cognized by deliberators are things such as desires, goals and, importantly, being a rational agent. When the last is the ‘condition’ under which a practical principle applies, the principle is objective, again, because it applies to all agents. If a principle applies to you simply in virtue of your rational agency it would apply to any agent and therefore be a law of agency. By contrast, if a principle binds you in virtue of anything other than your agency, such as what you want, it is subjective, a maxim. This forms an important element of the appeal of the Kantian picture of deliberative principles: The only principle that binds you simply because you are an agent of a certain kind is a principle of causality that is appropriate for that kind. That principle, the principle of agent causality, is a principle that, Kant thought, ‘brings with it’ the idea of universal law. That, he thought, was supposed to yield the CI. But of course his many readers have found otherwise.²²

5 Practical Deliberation

Principles that guide deliberation are general, so if deliberation is to reach action there must be “several practical rules under” a principle’s general determination of the will. These would be, for instance, “how to” rules for executing the guiding principle of our deliberation more generally. Such rules are the upshot of reasoning on the basis of a principle with a particular structure to it, together with acquired information about the circumstances.

What constitutes enough information for deliberation depends on the context. And again it need not be “sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought”. Deliberation is involved, I’m supposing, whether you look or not, whenever you leap. And deliberation may discover that one needs more information. The process is open-ended. The formation and adjustment of the ‘how to’ practical rules that fall under governing principles will likely feel the impact of new information first. And some facts will have an impact on the principles guiding deliberation. Suppose, for instance, my governing deliberative principle is to let no insult go unavenged. I then get the news

²²See, e.g., Allison’s attempt to fill the gap in the argument. Allison 1991

that someone has insulted me. This information is a part of the fact-finding aspect of deliberation, but then a new stage of that aspect is engaged: revenge. Further information about revenge may reveal a high cost. That could have at least two effects on deliberation. First, the principle of revenge may give way to a superseding principle of self-interest. The second, however, may lead to a revision of the principle, say, to let no insult go unavenged depending on the cost. Either way, the weightier principle of self-interest would be guiding that adjustment. Thus, for the invocation of any reason that conflicts with a principle, the principle-based view opposes treating that reason as a fact that brutally counts for or against the principle. Instead, there is an explanation of why in this case self-interest is the reason I take no revenge against an insult. It is because the principle of self-interest explains the fact that is the self-interested reason. This principle is what makes the fact that it is not in my interest count against avenging the insult.

It's natural to ask why would I make it my principle to avenge insults, and equally natural for me to reply that I have a reason to avenge them. But the forthcoming explanation will be a further practical principle, perhaps a principle of self-interest. That does not, however, mean that it is "principles all the way down". As I mentioned above, there is an end to deliberation for the principles first view, one's identity as an agent.

Notice this approach differs from a conception conforming to 1 in my initial two skeletal proposals. Within skeleton 1-type views gathering information goes beyond facts about oneself, causal connections, consequences and setting, to the discovery and assessment of facts that brutally favor certain lines of conduct, i.e., reasons. These favoring elements factor into deliberation not only by molding practical rules concerning how to implement whatever deliberative principle is guiding deliberation. Nor do they limit their effect on deliberation to awakening or uncovering deeper normative commitments of the agent, such as self-interest, that will lead to a revision of the guiding principle. These reasons supposedly discovered in a fact-finding mode of deliberation are supposed to construct further normative factors such as practical principles. Deliberation is conceived of on this model as not merely responding to facts in implementing the agent's practical agenda, but as forming that practical agenda itself. Deliberation is tasked with perceiving or apprehending what certain facts favor, and then measuring their favoring valence and weight. It must find, not just facts, but what and how much they favor. This would be so on either subjective (desire-based) or objective (non-desire-based) conceptions of reasons.

It is fair to ask why a principles first view conforming to skeleton 2 would not also count principles that brutally favor certain conduct among the relevant information,

thus trivializing this supposed difference between the approaches. But even if some practical principles are among that information, this isn't relevant to the difference in approaches. On a principle-based view, agency operates on the basis of practical principles, and principles explain why things of any kind come to favor what they do. Scanning the practical horizon in search of which facts count in favor of or against things is not an element of practical deliberation on the principle-based view. Principles determine which facts take on the mantle of being reasons and are in this sense a consequence of practical deliberation, not a determiner of it.²³ In a principle-based view, any foundational principles that are elements of agency will engage with other principles such as P above that are more general than 'how to' rules for implementing general principles. In a sense, these mid-level principles could be thought of as information gathered in practical deliberation. I return to this below.

That the operation of practical reasoning and deliberative conclusions waits on the collection of facts in this way has as a progenitor in Hume:

In moral deliberations we must be acquainted beforehand with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation. No new fact to be ascertained; no new relation to be discovered. . . If any material circumstance be yet unknown or doubtful, we must first employ our inquiry or intellectual faculties to assure us of it; and must suspend for a time a moral decision or sentiment.²⁴

Facts counting in favor of or against actions are not among the "objects" to be "acquainted beforehand with" on Hume's view, nor on the present view. The subsequent deployment of practical reasoning connecting one's ends to the arrayed facts is different in Hume, of course. But the approach is the same.

²³It is natural to suppose that practical principles have to be supported, explained or in some way grounded in facts of a certain sort. For instance, using G.A. Cohen's example, the principle that people should keep their promises has to be supported by facts such as that keeping one's promises is necessary to pursuing one's projects. But, Cohen argues, no fact can explain (support, etc.) a practical principle unless there is ultimately some further fact-independent practical principle that explains why that fact explains that principle. See Cohen, 2008, pp. 234-7.

²⁴"Appendix I. Concerning Moral Sentiment". L. A. Selby-Bigge, P.H. Nidditch, eds. Clarendon: Oxford; p. 290.

6 Objectivity Light

Above is my sketch of the origin of practical principles and how they direct action. Over and above this, there are standards of rationality. These are distinct elements of practical reason. A brief reminder of the Kantian view that there are two overarching standards of rationality, the Hypothetical Imperative (HI) and the Categorical Imperative (CI). The HI is a relatively uncontroversial principle that tells us to take the necessary and available means to our ends (or else give up those ends), and the CI, a quite controversial principle, tells us to act only on principles that could at the same time be willed as universal laws. Now on views in which reasons are just facts picked out by practical principles, the character of reasons will depend on the character the principles that pick out the facts that are those reasons. As a result, facts that hypothetical imperatives pick out will reflect the instrumental character of that principle (e.g., “That’s a reason to x if you want y.”). Likewise, the facts that categorical imperatives pick out will reflect the categorical nature of that principle. A principles first view, however, is not wedded to a Kantian view of full rationality. Whatever standards of rationality there are, the principle-based view explains the normative character, as well as the objectivity, of reasons in terms of the normative and objective character of practical principles. That said, a Kantian style account of norms of rationality fits well with a principle-based view.

Information about who I am, what habits and desires I have, how strong they are, how able I am to cope with them, and so on, as well as how these facts affect the achievement of my ends, will be facts collected in practical deliberation. And there will be facts to which I do not have access or of which I have only a distorted picture because I am imperfectly or at least finitely rational. So information will be tainted. How could any principles that might inform a fully rational practical reasoning agent, then, come to favor or count against my decision or action?

Kant, speaking again of the norms of rationality, did not think that the HI and CI, being formal principles, are directly applicable to particular circumstances and decisions, no more so than our sense experiences are directly subsumable under the pure categories of the understanding. In the latter case, Kant argued that although sense experiences are not directly subsumable under the categories, it is possible for them to be indirectly subsumed through the intercession of the imagination. This is why he thought that a version of the *Schematism* in the **1st Critique** was necessary for the **2nd Critique**. This practical version is included in the section of the **2nd Critique** under the title *Typic*.²⁵ This is where Kant attempts to explain how purely

²⁵Beck explicitly appeals to the parallel between the *Schematism* and the *Typic*; see also Tim-

formal principles of practical reason can be action-guiding. The *Typic* in this way provides the rationale behind his working out of the several formulations of the CI in the **Groundwork**.

Apart from whether standards of rationality are thought of in Kantian terms or not, my proposal is to think of the guidance of idealized practical principles as requiring a *Typic*. Moreover, this is something like the progression Rawls presented as a gradual lifting of the veil of ignorance.²⁶ After choosing two principles of justice under conditions of ignorance about details of themselves and others as well as their social, economic and political situations, persons in the original position gradually come to know more facts about their circumstances. For instance, they are initially given information about the state of their economy and political culture. At each stage, different tasks required for application of the principles are engaged in.²⁷ These stages represent different questions persons living under a given social scheme will have that will need to be answered. An analogous procedure, I'm supposing, is involved in how purely formal principles of practical reason might guide deliberation. They are not applied in their formal state directly, but in a stage-wise process of reconceptualizing those principles in more concrete terms, incorporating information about human beings and their situations, from general and abstract to more specific and concrete principles.

The *Typic* was to explain how it is possible for particular judgments of right and wrong to be subsumed under formal principles of practical reason (CI and HI). The *Schematism* represents the analogous subsumption as operating by way of schemata. The schema of substance, for instance, is what makes it possible for us to imagine all sorts of different substances, as well as recognize all sorts of things that are substance as substances. The *Typic* provides the role of the schemata through the development of mid-level principles that apply to particular cases. My proposal is to think of idealized practical principles, whether normative principles or not, as applicable in some way such as this. Thus, P is the sort of thing that would be a schematized principle, a mid-level action-guiding practical principle.

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²⁶Rawls. **A Theory of Justice**, pp....

²⁷see Rawls on the 4 stage sequence, 1972; pp. 65-

7 Principles First

I think that practical principles explain reasons, but, again, not that agents only act in 'principled' ways. Practical principles are simply what guide our deliberation, and reasons are facts picked out by those guides. But what needs explanation? First, we need an adequate explanation of the contours of our discourse about practical reasoning that shows why and how the phenomena fit together in the way that they do. The second are our epistemic practices, in particular, how we come to know or believe what we do about the reasons we have to act or decide as we do. That reasons are just facts picked out by principles guiding deliberation best explains the area of discourse about, as well as the epistemology of, reasons.

The central puzzle about how we talk and think about reasons that needs explanation is how facts can direct behavior. The fact that my tire is flat is enough for me not to drive it. The fact that a stranger is in pain immediately leads me to care for them. We are (now Hume)

surpriz'd to find [an "imperceptible change"], that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, [we] meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not.²⁸

What must facts be like in order to have practical upshots and become, for instance, reasons to help and not to drive? It has seemed to some that any explanation of what a reason is will only return to the notion of "a consideration that counts in favor of" something.²⁹ So, one might conclude, instead of explaining how facts get their favoring upshots, we should treat favoring itself as a basic feature of some facts. However that, to my mind, simply deepens this puzzle and makes the explanatory burden more acute. How can the flat tire by itself favor not driving, or the stranger's pain by itself count in favor of helping? It may be tendentious to ask, but an explanatory burden remains.

On a principles first view, the content of my decision to go to the store makes the flat tire count in favor of not taking the car, and a long-ago decision to help others in need and that's what makes a stranger's pain now guide me to help them. Facts, such as the flat tire or the stranger's pain, favor the actions they do because they are picked out by my practical principles, such as my plan to go shopping or to help those in need. Those facts would just be facts among many others unless my principles picked them out. By contrast, the flat tire favors nothing at all for those who have no

²⁸Treatise, Book III, Part i, Section i, p. 469

²⁹Scanlon. What We Owe, p. 17

plans that involve driving. The same fact favors something for me but not for them. This principle based approach begins with an action-guiding directive contained in, for instance, a decision, and asks what that action-guiding thing be like in order to be objective, or at least near enough to explain what we want explained in practical contexts. My parents direction to help others is more than just a quirk of my family or community. It has an important independence from me and my ilk. On the above view, this is understood in terms of universality, or at least as near enough to universality as the case calls for.

Sometimes it is obvious what, for instance, a flat tire or a stranger's pain favor in their circumstances. But not always. We often need to know what favors what and what makes facts favor some things while other facts do not. On the principle first view, we will not discover anything favoring anything until a deliberative principle is present, either explicitly or tacitly. This is how a principles first view explains the discovery of facts that have a practical upshot. Return to my initial example. Suppose you see me insulting someone and, shocked, ask for an explanation. I say they insulted me first. That is unlikely end your questions: "Why is that a reason to insult someone?" My answer is P, that I decided never again to let an insult go without a response. That is an adequate (if puerile) explanation of why the insult favors the response in kind. What P does is to make something, an insult, both favor a response, and makes it visible as counting in favor of it.

The invocation of P is unlikely to end the discussion, but take this, so far it goes, as a canonical form of explaining how facts come to count in favor of things in terms of a practical principle. P may do the job, but as with most explanations, it depends on what exactly needs explaining. More importantly, once a practical principle is cited, we are able to identify which facts count in favor of what that may be otherwise obscure or invisible in the circumstances. Often what is needed is a way of identifying reasons in a circumstance. And this is made possible by coming to understand the deliberative principle guiding an agent. That is, the principle-based view of practical reason has a straightforward account of how we come to be aware of or know about what favors certain actions, for whom those facts favor the action, and so on.

The "How (or why) is that a reason to insult someone?" question on the principle first view is in effect a request for a principle that makes the insult count in favor of avenging it. That may not be the only thing one might think the request is seeking. The principle-based answer that I have presented ties the explanation to the will or to our agency, so insofar as our agency is in terms of practical principles, the principle-based view answers that question. But that is consistent with explanations that seek something outside of our agency such as certain constituents of such principles, such

as what we find desirable, or external normative standards of such principles. I think the explanation tied to agency is most fundamental, however, and that is what ties the explanation to practical principles. The key position is that some explanation of why a fact *favours some action* is required. "Favoring", in other words, is not a brute feature of any facts.

That does not mean that on a reasons-based view the question makes no sense or can only be answered with the equivalent claim that it is "a consideration that counts in favor of" some action. Given such an account, rather than offering some explanation in terms of a practical principle that makes some consideration favor a line of conduct, one would need further details or descriptions of the elements of the reasons-for relation. That then would supposedly bring into clearer view the relation and its elements. For instance, take Scanlon's account of a reason as a four-place relation between some consideration, a person and an action in some circumstance ("R(p, x, c, a)"). The question "How is that a reason for x?" might be interpreted as a request for further details on some one or more of the four places of the relation to bring the reason relation into view. It will not, however, explain the favoring relation, only better describe it. Moreover, what must be treated as a mere circumstance of the relation on such a view would be precisely the element that the principles first view takes to be explanatory, viz., the practical principle guiding the deliberation of the person. And it is that element of the circumstance that turns the consideration into a reason and the relation into a reasons-for relation.

The dialectical context of asking for and giving reasons is not simply that of arguing someone into behaving one way or another, as Scanlon points out, and the assumption that it is is problematic.³⁰ I think that one of the reasons it is problematic is that this context makes it difficult to see a more comprehensive set of questions about explanation, explanations in terms of practical reasoning, that may be clarificatory rather than argumentative, epistemic as well as metaphysical. But the key question, it seems to me, is What makes that a reason? And the simplicity of the answer, "I decided to not do such and such, or to do so and so" makes a compelling case that this is all there is to being a reason.

The above proposal with regard to whether a given consideration is indeed a reason (is a "real" reason, or does indeed favor something) has to do with its conception of objectivity. Is the relevant principle or directive universally applicable? Setting aside for the moment other issues having to do with "fact-hood", on this conception, the fact that someone needs help becomes a reason for me to help because of the

³⁰Williams, B. "Internal...", Scanlon, *Being Realistic*, pp. 11-15

principle to help others when I can. That principle explains why the fact of need is a reason. It does not, however, explain whether it really is a reason. That hangs on whether the principle applies or binds not just me. Here, it is worth departing from my working assumption that ‘applies universally’, instead of ‘true of’, means ‘universally binding on’. We might, for instance, want to say that the fact of the stranger’s pain really is a reason, not when the principle that picks it out as a reason is universally binding, but when the principle that picks that fact out is universally *acceptable*. The explanatory setting here should be pretty straightforward. But the nature of the reason in this case will depend on the content of the decision. If the content is roughly to help others in pain, that will indeed make a stranger’s pain reason to help. But if the content of my decision is that helping others in pain is a directive for anyone in such a situation, then a stranger’s pain really is a reason to help them, and not just a reason for people such as myself. I admit that the requirement of universality may be too blunt an instrument to carve out the space of what is and is not really a reason. Real reasons exist in the space of the permissible, after all. But if we turn now to the approach in which reasons are foundational, we do not get an explanation of why the stranger’s pain favors my helping. It is a brute feature of the pain that it favors doing something about it, not a principle of helping that informs my agency.

It might seem that a principle-based view as I describe it overlooks a central feature of practical deliberation. Reasons conflict with and are weighed against each other when deciding what to do. But isn’t it in considering and resolving such conflicts that we come up with any principles there may be? And doesn’t this obviously support reasons foundationalism. This, at any rate, appears to be consistent with the methodological approach of philosophers who explore the endless ways in which changing the detail of a context reveal new reasons.³¹ The idea is to trust one’s reasons-detector by careful observation, perhaps in the hope of constructing a defensible deliberative principle, or, alternatively, proving that there is no defensible deliberative principle available. As I see it, however, a principle-based view need not contest this observation about the role of weighing reasons. By being the source of a fact’s status as a reason, a principle is the source of whatever importance it has with respect to other reasons, facts whose status as reasons have their sources in other principles. What is uncovered in deliberation of this source is the details of the practical principle that makes these facts reasons.

The principle-based view has a ready-to-hand explanation of what reasons there are for this or that action, why they are reasons and why they have the force that they

³¹e.g., Parfit (2003), Kamm (2008)

do. If principles rather than reasons are deliberatively fundamental, and reasons are just facts picked out by practical principles, then that a practical principle picks out a fact in the way that it does makes that fact significant in deliberating what to do. The fact that something is an insult, for instance, favors nothing if no principle picks it out as such. ‘Being a reason for’ falls out of the fact that a practical principle applies to the circumstance. And some fact picked out as a reason to do something by some principle really is a reason to do that thing just in case the principle that picks out the fact is objective, normative if the principle is justified by standards of rationality.

This explains how facts come to be reasons and how we find out what is and isn’t a reason for some action, indeed how a fact enters into the ‘reason for’ relation: Facts are reasons because they are picked out by the principles that guide deliberation. ‘Let no insult go unavenged’ picks out a fact that is an insult as a reason for setting one’s will in the direction of revenge. But reasons, of course, explain much of normative life. You should have beliefs you have most reason to have, and those reasons should normally explain why you have those beliefs. You should perform actions you have most reason to perform, and again those reasons should normally explain why you perform those actions. These and much more, are explanations in terms of reasons. A principle first view, however, does not resist these explanations, just the supposition that they are fundamental and that there is no explanation in terms of a principle. What makes the reasons that explain what you should or shouldn’t do reasons is, ultimately, that those facts figure into deliberative principles. That is what gives them their explanatory value as reasons. The reason I engaged in revenge was that I was insulted. But how is that a reason for revenge? Because it is my principle to let no insult go unavenged.

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