**Lecture 1: Introduction**

1. Contemporary metaethics differs in two important ways from the metaethics of the 1950s and 1960s, and even the later 1970s, when John Mackie wrote *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. In that earlier period, discussion in metaethics focused almost entirely on morality: on the proper interpretation of claims about moral right and wrong, and other forms of moral evaluation. Today, although morality is still much discussed, a significant part of the debate concerns practical reasoning and normativity more generally: reasons for action, and, even more broadly, reasons for belief and other attitudes, which are increasingly recognized as normative, and as raising questions of the same nature as those about reasons for action.

The metaethics of the mid-twentieth century also focused on the question of *motivation*. With respect to morality in particular, the question was how agents can be motivated by their moral judgments. In *The Possibility of Altruism,* Thomas Nagel was attacking the prevailing Humean orthodoxy*,* and he considered requirements of ethics and prudence to be rational requirements. But he nonetheless presented the problem he was addressing as a problem about motivation. Thus he wrote, “I conceive of ethics as a branch of psychology. My claims concern its foundation, or ultimate motivational basis.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Today, although motivation is still mentioned, questions are also likely to be put in terms of *reasons*. With respect to morality, the question is when and why it is true that a person has a reason to do what will benefit him or her in the future, or to do what morality requires.

It may be tendentious for me to say that metaethics as a field has undergone these two changes. Perhaps they are only changes in my own thinking, or the thinking of those I talk with most frequently. But, whatever may be said about the field as a whole, my approach in these lectures will fall on the second side of each of these dichotomies: my focus will be on normativity in general, treating morality as a special case, and I will be concerned centrally with the idea of a reason—mainly with the idea of a reason for action, although I will have a little to say about reasons of other kinds.

My lectures will offer a qualified defense of cognitivism about reasons: the view that claims about reasons for action can be correct or incorrect, and that the accepting such claims can be seen as a kind of belief. My defense of this position is not “qualified” because I am tempted by other views, but rather because I believe that a cognitivist view of the kind I defend faces problems that need to be recognized, although these are not the problems that are most frequently discussed.

I will maintain that truths about reasons are fundamental in two senses. First, they are not reducible to or identifiable with truths of other kinds, such as truths about the natural world of physical objects, causes and effects. Second, their normativity cannot be explained in other terms. So I am what might be called a Reasons Fundamentalist. There are also two further ways in which reasons might be fundamental. Reasons might be the only fundamental elements of the normative domain, other normative notions such as *good* and *ought* being analyzable in terms of reasons. Second, the normative domain might just *be* the domain of claims about reasons. I am inclined to believe that reasons are indeed fundamental in these two further ways. But these beliefs are controversial, and I will set them aside in what follows. The Reasons Fundamentalism that I will be defending is just the thesis that reasons are fundamental in the first two ways I have mentioned.

2. The idea that there are truths about reasons for action is strongly supported by common sense. Consider, for example, the following claims.

1. For a person in control of a fast moving automobile, the fact that the car will injure and perhaps kill a pedestrian if the wheel is not turned is a reason to turn the wheel.
2. The fact that a person’s child has died is a reason for that person to feel sad.
3. The fact that it would be enjoyable to listen to some very engaging music, moving one’s body gently in time with it, is a reason to do this, or to continue doing it.

These things seem, to me at least, obviously true. But the philosophical thesis that these are irreducibly normative truths may seem unsatisfactory, because it leaves unexplained many things that need explaining. Consider the following questions.

*Relational Character*: Reasons are reasons *for* an agent. How is this relational character to be understood?

*Determinate Truth Values*: Are statements about reasons true or false, independent of our opinions about them? Does the idea that there are irreducibly normative truths of this kind have unacceptable metaphysical implications?

*Supervenience:* How are facts about reasons related to natural facts? They are not entailed by natural facts, but they cannot vary unless natural facts vary. This seems puzzling, and in need of explanation.

*Knowledge*: If there are irreducibly normative facts about reasons, how can we come to know such facts?

*Practical significance*: Judgments about reasons play a different role than other beliefs—such as beliefs about the natural world—in practical reasoning and in the explanation of action. How can they play this role if they are beliefs?

*Strength*: Reasons have varying strengths. The reason to turn the wheel of the car, for example, is a stronger reason than the reason to go on listening to enjoyable music: the fact that turning the wheel to avoid hitting the pedestrian would interfere with one’s enjoyment of the music on the radio is not a sufficient reason not to turn it. So there is a question about what this strength amounts to.

*Optionality*: Some reasons seem to be “optional:” they are merely considerations it makes sense to treat as reasons. Whereas other considerations are non-optional: they provide reasons that should be taken into account, whether or not they are conclusive. The pleasure of listening to music, in the example I just gave, is an optional reason—merely something it makes sense to count as a reason if one decides to do so. Whereas, at least in most circumstances, the fact that doing X would substantially reduce one’s risk of an early death is a non-optional reason to do X, whether or not it is conclusive in a given case.

3. All of these questions might seem to answered by an account of reasons that bases them on desires, such as

1. X has a reason to do A just in case doing A would promote the fulfillment of some desire that X has.

or

1. X has reason to do A if doing A would promote the fulfillment of a desire that X would have if X were fully aware of the relevant non-normative facts and thinking clearly.

A view of this kind explains the relational character of reasons: reasons are *reasons fo*r a person who has the relevant desire, or would have such a desire if fully informed and thinking clearly. It might also seem to account for the phenomenon of strength: desires have varying strengths, that is to say, varying motivational power, and a desire theory might hold that one reason is stronger than another just in case the desire on which it is based is stronger in this motivational sense. The fact that some reasons are optional might also be explained by saying that they are reasons for doing something *if you desire or want to do so*, and the idea that some reasons are non-optional would thus be the idea that there are some things that promote the fulfillment of desires that everyone has (or everyone who is fully informed about his or her situation and thinking clearly.)

There also might seem to be no difficulty explaining how we can know what reasons we have according to a view of this kind, since we can, at least sometimes, know what we desire and what would fulfill those desires. And we can explain how reasons can motivate, since desires motivate a person to do what would promote their fulfillment, and a person has a reason to do something has a desire that that action would promote the fulfillment of.

Finally, a desire theory might claim to explain the phenomenon of supervenience. At one level, this seems obvious: if the reasons for action that people have are a function of natural facts about their desires and what will promote their fulfillment, then as long as these natural facts remain unchanged, people’s reasons for action will remain the same as well.

The ability to explain these aspects of reasons is, I believe, a large part of what makes desire-based accounts appealing. There are, however, well-known difficulties with accounts of this kind. Some of these difficulties concern the counterintuitive implications of desire theories about what reasons people have. Does a person really have a reason to do what will fulfill any desire he or she has, not matter how foolish? Does the reason the driver has to turn the car really depend on his or her having a desire that would be fulfilled by doing this? These problems might be lessened by shifting from actual desires to informed desires, and making suitable assumptions about what people would desire if fully informed. But this move brings problems of its own for the desire view’s account of motivation, since it is less obvious that people are always motivated by the fact that an action would promote the fulfillment of desires if these are desires that they do not have, but only would have under different conditions.

I believe that substantive objections of this kind count strongly against desire theories of reasons. But I want to set these objections aside for the moment, and instead consider what may seem to be a deeper objection, which claims that the explanatory potential of these theories is in an important respect illusory. The illusion arises from the fact that desire theories can be understood in two very different ways, and statements of these theories often do not clearly distinguish between them.

One way in which it is natural to understand desire theories is as substantive normative claims about what reasons people have. It may be quite plausible to claim (in many cases) that people have reason to do what will promote the satisfaction of their desires. Such a theory could explain some features of reasons for action, such as the relational nature of such reasons, and their strength, in the ways I have mentioned. (Although the idea that the strength of a reason do so something is proportional to its motivational effectiveness does not seem very plausible.) But since a normative desire theory is itself just a very general normative claim, it does not seem to address many of the other questions I have listed.

If there are serious metaphysical problems about the idea of irreducibly normative truths, a normative desire theory would not respond to these worries because it is itself a normative truth of this kind. Nor would a normative desire theory provide a general explanation of how we can come to know normative truths. It simply makes a general substantive claim about reasons for action—that we have reason to do whatever satisfies our desires—which, if true, leaves us only with the empirical problem of figuring out which actions will do this. In the same way, the thesis that the only thing we have reason to do is to get as much money as possible would leave us just with the problem of figuring out how to get rich. It would not solve the problem of how we can come to know normative truths, but would simply offer one such truth, which it claims we know. These points might be summed up by saying that normative desire theories are not rivals to Reasons Fundamentalism but are quite compatible with it. Perhaps they even presuppose it.

An alternative interpretation of a desire theory would take that theory to offer a reductive claim about what it *is* for someone to have a reason, rather than a normative claim about the reasons for action, according to which for *p* to be a reason for an agent to do *a* just is for the truth of *p* to help explain how doing *a* would promote the satisfaction of some desire that the agent has.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Interpreted in this way, a desire theory might provide answers to some of the questions I have listed. It would respond to metaphysical worries about irreducibly normative truths by holding that facts about reasons for action are just a kind of natural fact. And it would respond to epistemological worries as well, by holding that we can come to know truths about reasons for action through the usual kinds of empirical inquiry.

The question, however, would be whether identifying facts about reasons with non-normative facts would explain reasons or eliminate their normativity. The “action guiding” force of reasons, on such a theory, would seem to be purely causal and explanatory. If the fact that one has a strong reason not to do *a* (and no countervailing reason to do *a*) is just a natural fact about what will satisfy one’s desires, then this fact might explain one’s failure to do *a*. But it does not explain why believing that one has such a reason (believing that this natural fact obtains) can make it irrational for one to do *a*.

A reductive desire theorist might reply, as Mark Schroeder does, that all normativity is to be understood in terms of the idea of a reason. So if it is true that *a person’s having a reason just consist in some fact about that person’s desires and what will promote them*, a reductive desire theory preserves normativity, since it preserves the idea of a reason.[[3]](#footnote-3) So the question is whether this reductive claim should be accepted. I myself believe that this claim is refuted by the evident lack of intrinsic normative significance of facts about desires. But simply asserting that this is so may seem to lead to a stand off. To move beyond this standoff, one needs to consider and assess the evidence offered in support of the reductive thesis. In Schroeder’s case, much depends on his claim that facts about desires, rather than, say, about what a person would enjoy, are the best explanation of the reasons that one person (who likes dancing) has to go to a party where there will be dancing (as compared to the reasons of another person, who does not like to dance.)[[4]](#footnote-4) This claim does not strike me as plausible. Pursuing the matter here would take me too far afield, but I will take up the question in my next lecture.

It seems, then, that desire theories face a dilemma: either they begin with a normative claim about reasons for action, in which case they do not explain the features of reasons that may seem puzzling; or else they make a reductive claim, which eliminates normativity altogether. This raises two questions. The first is whether there is any way of understanding the appeal of a desire theory that avoids this dilemma. The second is whether explanations of the kind offered by normative desire theories are as unsatisfactory as they seem. I believe that a normative desire theory is unsatisfactory, but not for the reasons I have just been discussing—not because of its lack of explanatory depth. I will return to this question in Lecture 4.

4. A different way of explaining truths about reasons holds that reasons can be grounded in an idea of rationality. A rationality-based account has the following general form:

1. The fact that *p* is a reason for a person to do *a* when and because rationality requires such a person to count this fact in favor of doing *a.*

The right hand side of this formula employs the idea of a reason—the idea of counting a consideration *in favor of* an action. But what it employs is just the idea of an agent’s *treating* something as a reason. It thus involves no appeal to conclusions (arrived at independently) about what reasons people actually have. The work in this formula is done instead by the concept of rationality, which is taken to support such conclusions.

There is a familiar sense of ‘rational’ in which the rational thing to do is just the thing one that is required or supported by the reasons one has or, perhaps, by the reasons would have, if one’s other beliefs were true. People use ‘rational’ in this sense when, for example, they claim that it is rational to do what is in one’s self interest (or would be in one’s self interest if one’s other beliefs were true.) Such a thesis does not explain claims about reasons in terms of rationality, but rather presupposes, or asserts, claims about what reasons people have.

A rationality-based account of reasons would be trivial, and fail in its aim of explaining the idea of a reason for action, if it appealed to a notion of rationality of this sort. So an account of reasons of the kind I am considering must employ a conception of rationality that does not consist of or depend on a substantive conception of the reasons people have.

In a Kantian theory, which is the most familiar view of this type, the fundamental claim is that the Categorical Imperative is a condition of rationality. The claim is that anyone who sees him or herself as a rational agent must, on pain of irrationality, see the Categorical Imperative as the fundamental principle of practical reasoning. A consideration *p* is a reason for an agent to do *a*, according to this theory, if a failure to count this fact as a reason to do *a* would be incompatible with the Categorical Imperative. So far, this seems to cover only moral reasons, broadly construed. Christine Korsgaard’s version of a Kantian view extends this by adding that the fact that *p* is a reason for an agent to do *a* if failing to see it as such a reason is incompatible with some “practical identity” that the agent has adopted (and adopting that identity is itself compatible with the Categorical Imperative.)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Consider now how a view that bases claims about reasons on requirements of rationality might explain some of the puzzling features of reasons that I mentioned above. A view of this kind can explain what I called above the relational character of facts about reasons, since such facts are, on this view, facts about what an agent can (consistent with rationality) treat as a reason. It can also explain what makes claims about reasons correct when they are correct: they are correct if they do indeed follow from requirements of rationality. We can know what reasons we have, on such an account, because we can know what rationality requires, and insofar as we are rational we will be moved to do what have reason to do. The “strength” of reasons can be explained in what might be called a “top down” fashion, in contrast to the “bottom up” explanation offered by a desire theory. It is not that reasons “come with” particular strengths, as they would on a desire-based view. Rather, one consideration is a stronger reason than another if it would be irrational to refrain from doing what the former reason counts in favor of because the latter reason counts against so acting.

It is less clear how a rationality-based view should explain the optional character of some reasons. But I will leave this aside for now in order to consider what has been seen as one of the main advantages of such a view over rival accounts, such as Reasons Fundamentalism.

This concerns what Christine Korsgaard calls “The Normative Question,” of how reasons acquire their normative force or, as she sometimes puts it, how reasons “get a grip on” an agent. A view of the kind I am calling Reasons Fundamentalism, which takes there to be facts about which things are reasons, cannot, she says, give a satisfactory answer to this question. If a consideration’s being a reason for a person is just another fact about the world, she says, then the person could still be perfectly indifferent to this fact.[[6]](#footnote-6)

What kind of grip is in question here? If it were the “grip” that moral conclusions have on us, then this could be intelligibly explained by offering reasons to do what morality requires. But the move from morality to reasons in general rules out such an answer. The Normative Question cannot be, “What reason do I have to do what I have reason to do?”

We might say that the question is one of motivation. But here we need to distinguish several different issues. On the one hand, there is the question of how a person can be motivated by the thought that some fact is a reason for action if this thought is a mere belief that something is the case. This is the problem coming down to us from Hume. I believe that, as I will argue in Lecture 3, the idea of rational agency provides an answer to this question, which might be called the internal question of motivation. I will not discuss this question here, however, since I do not believe it is the question that Korsgaard has in mind.

A second way of understanding Korsgaard’s Normative Question in terms of motivation would be to see it as what might be called an external question of motivation—a question about how the fact that *p* is a reason for an agent to do *a*, if it is just a fact, could get the agent to accept that *p* is a reason to do *a* and treat it as such. The agent could simply deny that it is a reason. If he did, what could we say to him? A Reasons Fundamentalist, Korsgaard might say, would simply insist that *p* is after all a reason, and that is all there is to it.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is obviously not going to move the person who denies it.

The challenge here is not, I think, correctly described as a question of motivation if that is understood to mean a question that might be answered by a psychological explanation of how a person could be moved to respond to a fact in a certain way. The problem is not a matter of motivation in this psychological sense, but rather of something more like normative authority. The question is not how an agent might come to respond to the fact that *p* is a reason for her to do *a*, by accepting that it is a reason, but rather a question of why, if she does have these reasons, she *must* so respond. That is why she calls it “the *normative* question.”

Korsgaard is quite correct about what a Reasons Fundamentalist, or at least *this* Reasons Fundamentalist, would say in a situation of the kind she imagines. According to a Reasons Fundamentalist, the relation that holds between an agent and a consideration X in such a situation just *is* the relation of *p*’s *being a reason for that agent to do* a. The “grip” that this has on the agent just is this relation: *being a reason for* him or her (or, in the strongest cases, a conclusive reason.) As Korsgaard puts it, quite correctly, a Reasons Fundamentalist “insists on the irreducible character of normativity.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The fundamental disagreement here concerns whether some further explanation can and should be given of why the agent in this situation *must* treat *p* as a reason.

Korsgaard believes that in order to explain the force of this ‘must,’ we have to find something *about the agent* in virtue of which she must accept that *p* is a reason for her to do *a*. Whatever plays this role can’t just be another truth about what reasons the person has, or else the whole problem would begin again. But in order to have normative force; the explanation we are looking for can’t just be a psychological principle. It follows that the problem can be solved only by finding a kind of normativity—some grounding for a “must”—beyond the normativity of reasons. Korsgaard finds this in the idea of rational agency itself. As she puts it, “Kantians believe that the source of the normativity of moral claims must be found in the agent’s own will …”[[9]](#footnote-9) I believe that what she here says explicitly about moral claims is in her view true of all claims about reasons. Claims about moral requirements are grounded in things that an agent must accept insofar as she sees herself as acting at all. Other reasons are things that an agent “must” see as reasons in virtue of some more specific identity that she has.

5. The idea that claims about the reasons an agent has must be grounded in something that is already true of that agent (or of that agent’s own attitudes) is shared by a surprisingly wide range of views, many of them not at all Kantian. I am tempted to say, although it would no doubt be an exaggeration, that it is shared by almost all those who believe in normative reasons but are not Reasons Fundamentalists.

Consider, for example, Gilbert Harman’s view.[[10]](#footnote-10) Harman writes that an agent’s reasons for action must follow from his or her “goals, desires or intentions.” He does not put it this way, but it seems in the spirit of his view to add that claims about reasons that are not so based fail to “get a grip on the agent.” I believe that something similar might be said by proponents of desire based views more generally, such as Bernard Williams’s view that the only valid claims about reasons are what he calls internal reason statements—that is, claims about what could be reached by a sound deliberative route from the agent’s actual subjective motivational set.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Williams’ idea of a “sound deliberative route” allows that a consideration can be a reason for an agent even though the agent is not presently motivated by that consideration. It is enough that being so motivated has the right kind of connection with the agent’s present attitudes. This connection might be described in terms of motivation, but it seems to me at base a *normative* connection, as indicated in the fact that what is in question is a *sound* deliberative route.[[12]](#footnote-12) What the soundness of this route does is to ground the reason normatively in something to which the agent is already committed, thereby making it something the agent cannot deny without irrationality.

Another claim that Williams once made may be relevant here. Arguing against proponents of “external” reasons, he said that there are many criticisms that might be brought against a man who treats his wife badly and does not care at all about this—he may be cruel, heartless, and so on, and it might be better if he were not like this. But a defender of “external reasons” statements, Williams said, wants to go beyond this and say that the man is *irrational* if he fails to recognize that he has a reason to treat his wife differently.[[13]](#footnote-13) A defender of external reasons need not make this claim, as Williams later recognized.[[14]](#footnote-14) But I conjecture that Williams made the claim in the first place because he himself believed that claims about reasons must “get a grip on the agent” in a way that would ground a charge of irrationality if the agent ignored these reasons. He therefore thought that his opponent would want to claim this as well.

A similar thought seems to be what draws Michael Smith, in *The Moral Problem,* to identify reasons with what a person would desire for him or herself if fully rational.[[15]](#footnote-15) The fact that the reason is determined by what *that person* would desire if fully rational (fully informed, thinking clearly and so on) ensures a connection with the agent him or herself, perhaps close enough to make it irrational for the person to reject the reason. As Smith has said more recently, “If morality requires some limited form of altruism then… the principle of limited altruism is a principle… on all fours with *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* and the principle of means-ends.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Here again, the idea seems to be that claims about the reasons an agent has, if correct, must be claims that the agent cannot deny without irrationality.

The idea of grounding claims about an agent’s reasons in attitudes that that agent already holds may derive some of its appeal from the dialectical context in which argument about reasons for action is imagined to take place. In Williams’ example of the man who sees no reason to treat his wife better, the context is an instance of what Gilbert Harman calls “external reasoning,”a context in which two people are arguing about what reasons for action one of them has.[[17]](#footnote-17) In such a context, facts about one party’s actual attitudes (as opposed to the merits of the content of those attitudes) have a particular salience. It is an obvious dialectical advantage to be able to “get a grip” on your opponent by saying: “But you accept that … and it follows from this that the fact that *p* counts in favor of *phi-*ing.*”*

 It is noteworthy, I think, that much of Williams’s discussion in “Internal and external Reasons” involves cases in which one person is trying to force some other person to agree that he has a reason to act in a certain way. (The example just mentioned, of the man who treats his wife badly, is a case in point; the Owen Wingrave example is another.[[18]](#footnote-18) These are, I think, typical.) Part of Korsgaard’s argument early in *The Sources of Normativity* assumes a similar dialectical situation. She imagines two people disagreeing about whether something is a reason for a certain action, and she observes that it is mere reiterative stone-kicking for one party to say, in the face of the other’s denial, “But it just *is* a reason!”[[19]](#footnote-19) A much more effective response would be to come up with an argument that begins from something that the other party accepts, or cannot deny on pain of irrationality.

But what it takes for a claim to be correct need not be the same as what it takes for the claim to be one that one’s opponent in argument cannot consistently deny. These two things are certainly different with respect to claims about empirical facts, and I believe they are also different with respect to claims about reasons, which is the matter at issue. That they are different is strongly suggested when we shift to what Harman calls a case of “internal reasoning,” which is reasoning about what reasons one has oneself. In this case, the mere fact that one cannot consistently reject a claim about reasons given that one has some desire, intention or other attitude does not itself settle the matter. One can always ask oneself whether why one should have these attitudes—whether they can be justified in the relevant way. From the agent’s own point of view his or her own attitudes are largely transparent to the subject matter under consideration.

Korsgaard recognizes, indeed emphasizes, the possibility of this kind of reflective “stepping back” when one is thinking about what reasons one has. In such a situation, she says, a person must keep on asking “why” until she comes to a point at which it is “impossible, unnecessary or incoherent to ask why again.”[[20]](#footnote-20) This is what she calls the search for the unconditioned. But, leaving aside whether it is possible to find an unconditioned starting point for reasoning about what reasons one has (a starting point that does not itself involve some substantive judgment about reasons), must we always seek such a starting point? The claim that we must continue stepping back until it is “impossible, unnecessary or incoherent to ask why again” would be much less plausible without the disjunct ‘unnecessary.’ But when is it unnecessary to ask any further? I would say that this depends on the substantive merits of the answer one has reached—on whether this answer is clearly correct, or whether there is any reason to doubt it.

Grounding claims about reasons in claims about rationality (that is to say, claims about what is required to avoid *irrationality*) thus has greatest appeal in the case of external reasoning. In internal reasoning what comes to the fore are substantive conclusions about the subject matter being dealt with—in this case reasons about what to do. There is a reversal here that may at first seem surprising, but should not be so. Claims about irrationality are in one sense more internal than substantive claims about reasons. As John Broome says, they depend only on the contents of the subject’s own mind.[[21]](#footnote-21) But such claims are not as relevant in internal reasoning as in the external variety, and it is the point of view of internal reasoning that is primary in an investigation of reasons and normativity. From this point of view the question of how reasons “get a grip on one” properly disappears. There is only the question: what reasons do I have?

6. In these introductory remarks I have tried, first, to identify the position for which I will offer a qualified defense: claims about reasons can be correct or incorrect, and such claims are fundamental—not reducible to or explainable in terms of claims of other kinds. I have tried to identify this position in a way that brings out what seems unsatisfactorily incomplete about such an account. I have considered two ways of providing a fuller explanation of reasons, by basing them in desires or in an idea of rationality. I have explained briefly why I find these unsatisfactory, and I will have more to say about this in later lectures. If these explanations are unsatisfactory, and if, as I will argue in the next two lectures, the appeal of expressivist views should be resisted, then unless there is some other general account of reasons (which I doubt) Reasons Fundamentalism will be left as the only available position.

Even if this is so, however, the various problems about reasons that I have listed still remain to be answered. In my next lecture, I will argue, in the light of a general view of ontological issues, that the idea of irreducibly normative truths presents no metaphysical problem. I will also present an account of the relation between normative and non-normative facts which, I believe, explains the phenomena of covariance and supervenience. In Lecture 3, I will argue that an account of judgments about reasons for action what interprets them as a kind of belief can still explain the practical significance of such judgments and their role in the explanation of action. In Lecture 4, I will take up the related questions of how normative statements can be true independent of us and how we can have knowledge of such truths. Finally, in Lecture 5, I will offer an interpretation of the strength of practical reasons, and explain in what sense reasons can be “optional.”

1. *The Possibility of Altruism*, p. 3. (Works will be cited in footnotes only by title. Full publication information can be found in the bibliography.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As Mark Schroeder argues in *Slaves of the Passions*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Slaves of the Passions*, pp. 79-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Slaves of the Passions*, Chapters 1 and 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *The Sources of Normativity,* esp. pp. 102-107, 239-242. For a non-Kantian view that bases reasons on rationality see Joshua Gert, *Brute Rationality: Normativity and Human Action*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *The Sources of Normativity*, pp. 44-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As expressed in “Moral Relativism Defended.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See his “Internal and External Reasons.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I said earlier in discussing desire based views that the move from an actual desire account to one based on informed desires might involve sacrificing the connection with motivation that is one of the hallmarks of desire theories. The fact that desire theorists are not troubled by this move may support the point I am making—that what may be described as motivation is actually a matter of rational connection. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Internal and External Reasons,” p. 110. Korsgaard makes a similar suggestion about what a realist might claim in “Acting for a Reason,” p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In “Replies,” p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *The Moral Problem*, pp. 151ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “Objectivity and Moral Realism: On the Significance of the Phenomenology of Moral Experience,” p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Harman, “Notes on Practical Reasoning,” p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Internal and External Reasons,” p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 38ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *The Sources of Normativity*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Broome, ”Does Rationality Consist in Responding Correctly to Reasons?” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)