Motivation and Motivating Reason^{*}

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1. Introduction

For quite some time now philosophers have stressed the need to distinguish between explanatory (motivating) reasons and justifying (good) reasons.¹ The distinction is often illustrated with an example of someone doing something that is intended to strike the reader or listener, at least at the outset, as incomprehensible. The next step is then to add some further details about the allegedly abnormal agent — typically some information about his or her beliefs and desires — providing some sort of explanation of the agent's peculiar behaviour, making it suddenly intelligible. The added piece of information is intended to reveal what motivated the agent to act in such an odd way. The story continues, however, and in the next step we are introduced to further information. This time the information relates, rather, to our own epistemic position, or understanding of the situation, and only indirectly to the agent's beliefs. Thus, we are assumed to hold some true beliefs that the agent either lacks or actually believes to be false. As a result we can be expected to form an

^{*} It is a great pleasure to contribute a paper to a Festschrift in honour of Ingvar Johansson. Since Ingvar moved to Lund I have been fortunate to have many enjoyable and profitable conversations with him. At one point, and rather superficially, my tribute touches upon the nature of intentional attitudes. I am therefore pleased to be able to refer the reader to Ingvar's penetrating work on intentionality in *Ontological Investigations* (2004). This book was a source of inspiration for me. I am also grateful to Pascal Engel and Kevin Mulligan for discussing motivation with me at the dormant harbour of Assos, and to Professor Orsan K. Oymen for inviting me to give a talk on this topic at the 2012 international meeting of *Philosophy in Assos*. My work on this paper was generously supported by the Swedish Research Council.

¹ It is sometimes said that the distinction goes back to Francis Hutcheson. However, as Stephen Darwall has shown, Hutcheson's understanding of a justifying notion departs from ours today: "For Hutcheson, /.../ justifying reasons must, again, in the first instance, be truths *about* motives or motivated actions and not, therefore, truths that could be reasons for action or motives themselves. What justifying reasons justify is *approbation* — an observer's response on contemplating a motive or motivated action — not action or an alternative for choice for an agent deliberating about what to do" (Darwall 1997: 80; see also Dancy 2000: 20–21).

opinion about what ought to have been — or, minimally, what ought not to have been — the agent's reason.

The story of Abraham on Mount Moriah, who decided to sacrifice his son, Isaac, illustrates this pattern. Killing one's own child is a horrific thing to do, and it is hard to understand what would drive a parent to do such a thing. But once we are informed that Abraham actually believed God had told him to do so, we can see (allegedly) that there is at least an explanation of why he decided to kill his son. In the eyes of most people the planned act remains awful. But once we assume that Abraham was mistaken (say, because the best explanation in this case need not postulate the existence of God), we can see that his decision to kill his son is not a response to a normative good reason.¹ So in a few lines we have outlined two reason notions: explanatory and normative (good) reasons.

Cases like this afford an intuitive grasp of the distinction between explanatory and normative reasons — the difference between what explains Abraham's motivation and behaviour and the good or bad reasons that apply to him. However, more recently (see e.g. Dancy 2000) the picture such cases present has been supplemented, or perhaps even corrected. There is a further feature of the Abrahamic story that needs to be teased out — one that gives a finer-grained understanding of what is going on than that provided by talk of the agent's explanatory reasons. I share this view,² and so what I will be doing in this paper is mainly to underline the need to dig a bit deeper. Motivation, as I shall argue, comes in different forms.

2. Introducing Some Terminology

Since there is really no general consensus on terminology here I shall begin by making a few stipulative, and I hope clarificatory, remarks. The following biconditional captures, I think, the general idea of what some writers refer to as motivating reason, but I will be calling an explanatory reason:

¹ Interestingly, explanations of actions in terms of a person's motivating reasons need not, therefore, be entirely factive, since, obviously, some element of the *explanans* might be false. Is this a problem? I do not think so, but I will not go into this matter here. In this connection, see Dancy (2000: 131–37).

² However, what follows is not an account of Jonathan Dancy's views on reasons, which would require more space than is available here.

ER: R constitutes an explanatory reason for agent x 's ϕ -ing at t , iff stating R explains what motivated x to ϕ at t .

The above is not very helpful, though. For one thing, we need to have some idea of what such an explanation consists in. And there is yet another respect in which **ER** has to be qualified. After all, explanations may be more or less successful depending on context. Also, there can be different kinds of explanation, and we would need to know more about the relations between these sorts of explanation. Only then, it seems, would we begin to understand what actually motivated the agent. Still, **ER** captures the way in which explanatory reasons often are conceived in the literature.

One well-known attempt (of course, not the only one) to make **ER** more precise comes from so-called Humeans, who suggest that **ER** should specify some beliefs and desires of the agent's that fit together. The following is based on Michael Smith's influential suggestion:

R at t constitutes an [explanatory] reason of agent A to ϕ iff there is some ψ such that R at t consists of a desire of A to ψ and a belief that were he to ϕ he would ψ .¹ (Smith 1987: 575)

It should be stressed that Smith uses R to refer to what he calls motivating reasons. However, since I want to reserve the label 'motivating reason' for something slightly different, I will treat this formula as an account of *explanatory reasons*.

The idea that an agent's explanatory reasons consists in his or her beliefs and desires, gives us, then, a plausible answer to the question: Why did A ϕ ? For example, why did Abraham prepare to kill his son? A plausible explanation is that he desired to obey an order he believed he had received from God, or something to that effect.

However, as mentioned earlier, the Humean attempt to flesh out **ER** has come under fire as incorrect — or, at least, as providing an incomplete picture of the person's reason for acting. Recently, for instance, Dancy (2000) has convincingly argued that there are two approaches to

¹ See Smith (1987: 36–61). Compare the way Donald Davidson, in 'Actions, Reasons and Causes', characterized his thesis about reasons: " R is a primary reason why an agent performed the action A under the description d only if R consists of a pro attitude of the agent towards actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that A , under the description d , has that property" (1963: 687).

the reasons that motivate agents, and both need to be taken into account: while what he calls Psychologism claims that “our motivating reasons are psychological states” (2000: 15), Anti-psychologism denies this claim. Just how strong a claim Anti-psychologism makes is of course open to discussion. Here I will take it to involve a rather bold claim, namely that motivating reasons are never psychological states.¹

To see what the discussion is really about, consider once more the case of Abraham. It seems clear that if we are interested in how killing his son could in any way appear to make sense to Abraham, it will not do to refer to the fact that he believed that God had told him to do so. It was not the fact that he believed that God had ordered him that motivated him; what motivated him was, of course, *that God had told him to do so*. A fine but nonetheless crucial distinction.

This suggests that Psychologism is incorrect, and that we should endorse Anti-Psychologism: our motivating reasons are not psychological states, but rather some propositional (or proposition-like) entities. But, importantly, there is more to the idea of a motivating reason than the notion that such reasons are to be identified with some attitudinal content rather than with the attitude itself. The very point of this idea of a motivating reason is that such reasons explain what motivated the person from *his or her point of view*. Thus, I shall henceforth focus on motivating reasons of the following kind:

MR: The propositional content of a favouring-attitude, *y*, is a motivating reason for a person *x* iff (i) *x* favours object *z* on account of *y*, and (ii) *x* believes that *y* counts in favour of (his or her) favouring *z*.

MR takes a stand on two matters that **ER** leaves open. First, motivating reasons are proposition-like entities of a certain kind;² and, second, they

¹ Although Dancy does not formulate Anti-psychologism more explicitly, I think this is what he would say.

² In what follows, I will not take a stand on whether they are propositions, or states of affairs, or even features of states of affairs or something else. However, see Rønnow-Rasmussen (2011a, 2011b), where I argue that normative reasons, at least, are best regarded as obtainings of states of affairs. Since I see no major difficulty with the idea that normative reasons are not identical to motivating reasons, I think one of the differences is precisely that the latter are propositions rather than ob-

appear to the agent as (good) reasons.¹ The latter point, that the content appears to the agent as counting in favour of doing some act, i.e. as being a reason for him or her to do something, is quite in line with the way a number of philosophers handle the intentional content of attitudes like desires and wants. It is also in keeping with the way many regard motivating reasons. Scanlon's view of desires in *What We Owe to Each Other* is a case in point here:

A person has a desire in the directed-attention sense whose object is P if the thought of P keeps occurring to him or her in a favorable light, that is to say, if the person's attention is insistently directed toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of P. (Scanlon 1998:39)²

Suppose the object of a desire is the realization of some state of affairs. The above then seems to suggest that the content of the attitude (representing this state of affairs) appears to the agent as a reason, in the sense that the agent takes it as counting in favour of some action.

In analysing motivation, there is one question we must not lose sight of: At, or on, what is the motivation directed? This question admits of at least two related answers, because motivating reasons might govern overt behaviour or different kinds of attitudes. Suppose I want a glass of wine, and I believe that wine is served next door. If I go to the room, my walking there seems to be governed by a certain motivating reason. What explains my conduct is that the proposition-like content — that wine is served next room — appeared to me (most likely in combination

taining state of affairs. Cf. Dancy (2000), where it is argued that motivating reasons are state of affairs rather than propositions.

¹ Of course, the fact that they appear to the agent as good reasons does not imply that they are or represent good reasons. In fact, in Rønnow-Rasmussen (2013), I consider and eventually reject the idea that all good reasons can be motivating reasons.

² Cf. Mark Schroeder's more recent account in *Slaves of the Passions*. Roughly, his idea is that desires "involve certain states — salience-strikings — which have perception-like contents, because they involve 'seeing things as reasons'" (Schroeder 2007:160). Schroeder also suggests that "the best prospects for an explanation of how [the salience-strikings] come to have a content about reasons, lie in the hypothesis that reasons are themselves intimately connected with desires" (Schroeder 2007:161). This suggestion strikes me as less convincing.

with other beliefs I have, such as that I am able to walk there) in a favourable light. That wine is served next door counts in favour of me going there, in other words. However, notice, too, that this content might easily figure in an explanation of why I wanted to go to, or at least be, in the next room. Thus, if I were asked why I *wanted* to go to the room next door, a perfectly reasonable answer would be that wine was being served next door. That discerning pro- and con-attitudes are in general reason-sensitive, in the sense that we often list the considerations on account of which we favour something as our reasons for favouring something, is important and something we must not forget. Henceforth, I will use ‘favour’ as a hypernym for different kinds of pro-attitude and ‘disfavour’ for different kinds of con-attitude. Moreover, since favourings interest me more than acts, in what follows I will be focusing mainly on these attitudes.

Given what emerged in the last paragraph, we should clarify **MR** somewhat. The following ought to bring out the essential elements in a motivating reason that governs an attitude:

MR*: MR* is person x’s motivating reason for favouring z at t iff x favours z at t and (1) MR* is that content of x’s favouring z on account of which x favours z at t, and (2) x believes at t that MR* counts in favour of x favouring z at t.¹

The first conjunct, (1), emphasizes the intentional and propositional side of motivating reasons; I will refer to it as the *discerningness*-clause. What makes a favouring into an intentional attitude has in part to do, I think, with it being a state that is directed at some object, and in particular that it has a certain direction of fit² which tells us something about the way it is directed on its object. The discerningness-clause tells us what the favouring is directed on. The second conjunct, (2), which I shall refer to as the *motivation*-clause, ensures that the attitudinal content plays a certain motivating role by appearing to the agent as a reason for favouring.

¹ A caveat: this does not mean that the object of the favouring is necessarily realized at t.

² For an account of *direction of fit*, see Anscombe (2000) and Smith (1994); cf. Ingvar Johansson’s chapters on intentionality in (2004).

MR* is not the way motivating reasons are normally depicted, as far as I know. But the fact that pro- and con-attitudes are often conceived as intentional attitudes that involve reasons is, I think, clear. In fact, my interest in addressing this issue in the first place had to do with the fact that the distinction between (1) and (2) is often fudged in discussions of motivating reason and attitudes. The intentionality of favourings is taken to be normative in nature, so that favouring (say, desiring) that p on account of some feature of p 's is taken to necessarily involve p appearing to the agent as some sort of reason for desiring that p . But this relationship between intentionality and normativity or reason, though reasonable in many cases, needs nonetheless to be argued for; it should not be taken for granted. This becomes clear, I think, when we recall that the expressions we use in order to relate favourings to their intentional content are ambiguous. When one says that someone favours x 'on account of' or 'for' or 'in virtue of' some features, one employs expressions that admit of a purely causal (non-evaluative) reading. In fact, as I have stressed elsewhere (Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011a), English, and for that matter the other languages I am familiar with, has no single expression that would settle the issue whether the content of our attitudes are referred to as having a normative (from the point of view of the agent) or purely causal role. So we need to explicitly add this piece of information. This fact, then, explains why we should include in our *analyses* mention of the fact that the content appears to the agent as something calling for an action.

3. Favourings and Motivating Reasons

Are all favourings, or at least all discerning favourings, governed by an **MR***? This is an issue of some importance, and I would like next to address it right away.

Plausibly, two reasonable claims can be made about this issue. I mean, we might endorse what I call the ALL-claim:

(ALL) All favourings are undertaken for an **MR***, i.e. all pro- and con-attitudes are intentional attitudes the content of which appears to agent as counting in favour of the attitude in question.

Or we might be more cautious and endorse the SOME-claim:

(SOME) Some but not all favourings are undertaken for an **MR***.

I suppose the ALL-claim might be preferred to the SOME-claim on the grounds that it is entailed by the definition of what it means to favour something, or at least, to favour something discerningly. This is, I think, a perfectly respectable thing to insist upon. That is, we might make the ALL-claim true through a definition of acting, or true in virtue of the view we take of intentional attitudes. Obviously, there are theoretical gains in terms of simplicity in such an approach. There is also, quite apart from such a consideration, I think, a tendency to take something like the ALL-claim to be true, and to do so without any further explanation or justification other than that it seems, intuitively, to be applicable to so many cases. Such a position is in a sense also understandable, especially if it reflects the fact that people have spent considerable time and effort trying to determine the characteristics of the standard cases, even if they have focused on the interesting ones rather than the odd ones. However, while I can see the point in treating the ALL-claim as being more interesting for reasons that are in fact consistent with it being false (i.e. reasons that have rather more to do with the effect of endorsing it than with its truth), I do not know of any weighty, fundamental arguments in support of it.

I therefore take the SOME-claim to be quite plausible, at least as a point of departure. However, even if this approach is conceded, the question how, exactly, the SOME-claim should be understood remains to be answered. (Curiously, and as we shall see in Section 4, some philosophers who think that not all acts need to be governed by a motivating reason do not thereby endorse the SOME-claim. Obviously, denial of the ALL-claim together with endorsement of the SOME-claim implies that we conceive, at least, of the possibility that some favourings are not governed by an MR* — either because the favouring in question is not a discerning one (the discerningness-clause is not satisfied); or because the content of the attitude does not appear to the agent as normative (the motivation-clause is not fulfilled); or because neither the discerningness-clause nor the motivation-clause are fulfilled.

It seems, then, that we need to describe in more detail an example of a favouring not undertaken for a motivating reason. As mentioned, we might wish to claim that there are favourings that do not have any *directedness* at all; there are in effect no properties in their content. The explanation for this would then be that these attitudes are not discerning

or intentional attitudes at all. While I do not think we should rule out this possibility at this point — just what, in the end, counts as a pro- or con-attitude is not a clear-cut issue — my interest in favourings derives largely from their role in analyses of value. In this context, it is more interesting to focus on discerning attitudes; after all, the *bona fide* examples of favourings that are relevant in value analysis will plausibly all be intentional ones. Values are supervenient features, and attitudes are directed on to the value bearers on account of the bearer's value-making properties. For this reason I will focus from here on upon the motivation-clause, and in particular I shall question the idea that all favourings involve a belief on part of the agent that something counts in favour of his or her favouring.

Incidentally, notice that **MR*** leaves it open precisely how this idea of something 'counting in favour' should be understood. According to one interpretation, the belief referred to in (2) (i.e. x's belief at *t* that **MR*** counts in favour of x favouring z at *t*) need not be seen as part of the very favouring itself. It might be external to the attitude. On this approach, the belief is a reaction to properties in the intentional content. It is, in effect, an evaluation of these properties; they are considered to be normative. However, there might be another way of understanding the belief referred to in (2). It could be held that the content of the attitude presents itself without any further belief as counting in favour of favouring. On this 'adverbial approach' the properties are internally normative. To favour something consists, in part, in being in a cognitive state to the effect that something counts in favour of favouring.¹

It is quite hard to come up with examples that clearly support only one of these suggestions, so I think we need to keep both in mind as we proceed. In fact, so far as the questions I am interested in are concerned, I doubt it matters greatly whether we believe that the count-in-favour consideration is internal or external to the favouring. In my view, it is at least conceivable that something could constitute the content of an inten-

¹ The two possibilities raise similar but not identical metaethical issues. For instance, it would seem that the idea that it is the properties of the favouring that provide the 'call for an action' function is quite hard to understand unless these properties are evaluative ones. Still, whether this is the case remains to be argued; it might be that similar issues will arise if we allow relational properties in the content to be reason-makers.

tional favouring without being accompanied by an external count-in-favour consideration, and I also think it is believable that an attitude may have an inert content that did not count in favour of anything. In view of this, we have a reason to be at least suspicious of the ALL-claim.

Endorsing the ALL-claim together with **MR*** gives us an excessively intellectual account of the relation between us, as agents, and the world we live in. Together these commitments imply that we regard the world more or less constantly as being normative for us, or as ‘counting in favour’. Certainly, things around me often count in favour of my doing something, but this is not so *all* of the time.

The SOME-claim together with **MR*** promises to provide a subtler picture of favourings, and it is on that account preferable. Yet another argument for preferring the pair (SOME)/**MR*** to the pair (ALL)/**MR*** is the latter’s implication that in order to have attitudes such as desires and wants we need normative notions. Are we really ready to affirm this about, say, very young children and many animals? Perhaps, but it is a controversial idea nonetheless. I find this line of reasoning interesting, but unfortunately to address it properly here would be to embark on too grand a project.

Now (SOME)/**MR*** is consistent with the idea that the majority, or the normal, or the most interesting kind of favouring is **MR***-governed. Such favourings are acts in a broad sense of the term: that is, they are things we do with an eye to a reason that justifies (more or less), in our view, our favouring:¹ we favour something because we believe (internally or externally) that something counts in favour of our favouring it. Of course, we need to tread carefully here. Being **MR***-governed does not necessarily involve the precise judgement that ‘*R* is a reason’ or ‘*R* counts in favour’, where *R* refers to some set of properties. However, it needs at least some sort of belief, or awareness, that something is required of you, or that something calls for your action, or, minimally, that

¹ Admittedly, the analogy is not perfect. While some of the things we undertake to do are in some sense voluntarily, this cannot be said unproblematically about most kinds of favouring. Still, a position on whether or not we believe there is an interesting sense of ‘voluntarily’ that cannot be applied to favouring something should not prevent us from talking about desiring, wishing, admiring, *et hoc genus omne*, as things the agent does, and can do, in a sense that corresponds with what good reasons prescribe.

you sincerely accept an evaluation (e.g. that you ought to favour...). In other words, that for which I favour x — i.e. the set (or more likely the subset) of x 's properties on account of which I favour x — must in some sense appear to me as minimally counting in favour of my favouring. However, this belief need not be in the foreground of my thinking¹ (an important qualification²).

Another caveat needs entering. I am assuming that there is nothing mistaken or even extraordinary about explaining a person's behaviour in terms of his or her beliefs and desires and at the same time denying that he or she acted for a motivating reason. While I think this assumption is reasonable, given the SOME-claim, it would be nice if we could actually arrive at it independently of our endorsement of the SOME-claim. In fact, I will try later to present a case in which it seems we can describe a person's action in terms of his beliefs and desires without it being the case that the desire which resulted in the action was MR*-governed. For now, though, I will simply proceed on the basis that endorsing the SOME-claim is consistent with believing that there is an explanation of the agent in terms of explanatory reasons without it being necessarily the case that the agent acted for a motivating reason.

Earlier I expressed sympathy with the idea that all favourings should be understood as being MR*-governed. I said this idea has theoretical advantages inasmuch as it secures a degree of simplicity. But this should not conceal the ease with which cases can be imagined in which a person's favourings do not appear to be reason-governed in the sense outlined earlier (because they do not satisfy both the discerningness-clause and the motivation-clause). A great many of the things we do seem to be expressive of what we want, or even desire, to mention two kinds of favouring that are hardly *always* MR*-governed. Again, this does not mean that those attitudes are not discerning attitudes; they may still be intentional attitudes; they are attitudes that have certain content, and in virtue of their nature (some would say their direction of fit) they are directed at some object — whether it is actually realized or not. But the properties towards which the favouring is directed — i.e. features of

¹ For the distinction between foreground and background, see Pettit and Smith (1990:565–92).

² In fact, as I shall outline shortly, it need not require an additional belief (whether in the foreground or background) at all.

the desired object *x* — do not appear in the intentional content of the attitude as counting in favour of directing the attitude to *x*. So, although being about something in a way that typifies favourings is a necessary condition of an act (in the wide sense including intentional attitudes) being MR*-governed, it is not sufficient. As we might say, ‘being a discerning favouring’ does not imply ‘being a reason-motivated act’.

4. Favourings that Are Not Governed by a Motivating Reason

Next I will try to set out some cases in which, arguably, a favouring of some object figures without it being necessarily the case, as the ALL-claim implies, that it is undertaken because the agent regards something as being a reason for favouring the object. My examples will be anecdotal (which, of course, is unfortunate). Also, none of the cases I present are conclusive examples of favourings that are not governed by a motivating reason. In fact, I think it would be hard to provide a case of this kind. However, if I can come up with some examples that plausibly allow us to see that, and why, the motivation-clause does not apply, we shall have at least some justification for regarding the ALL-claim with suspicion.

Here, then, is the first sort of example. When, much to the dismay and despair of my family, I improvise on the piano, the way I place my fingers, the order of the notes I choose, and the somewhat irregular rhythm with which I do all this, is not obviously MR*-governed. Perhaps part of what I do is not really improvisation, but rather a sort of habitual way of playing, in which case the example would most likely admit of another kind of analysis.¹ But it does seem that part of what is going on in improvisation (or any creative act, for that matter) is a sort of genuine acting and favouring. To me, it makes sense to say that something, in all that is going on during my improvisations, is the object of different discerning attitudes of mine — e.g. some preferences I have concerning music. Still, it is hard to see that my movements are really accompanied by the sorts of belief required by the motivation-clause.

¹ I return to the issue of acting out of habit later, in Section 6. In the literature one often comes across the idea that such acts, in contrast with non-habitual ones, are not open to the belief/desire-pattern of analysis (in terms of explanatory reasons). I find this idea obscure; I will return to it later on.

Here is a different kind of example. Sometimes we describe capricious people as if they are acting on a whim. Precisely how these cases are best understood will probably involve not one, but many explanations. Setting capriciousness aside, and focusing on favouring on a whim, one possible scenario would be the following. Sometimes we discover that we want something, but we are at a loss to explain why. We realize that we just want it. One might object that this seems to make so-called final, or intrinsic, favourings into favourings on a whim.¹ Perhaps this is true in some cases. However, we should not forget that many of our fundamental final, or intrinsic, favourings are not like this: we are *not* puzzled by their presence. We have been having them for a long while. We are often able to point to things that have influenced us. But more importantly, these favourings may in fact be MR*-governed. That is, the properties of their intentional content do appear to us as counting in favour of, say, wanting their objects. This is not always the case, to be sure, but when it happens we face what would more appropriately be called a ‘whim favouring’, which, of course, might be a final favouring.

So here is a less presumptuous example than the piano-playing case of a favouring on a whim: consider the person who wants her house painted in a certain colour — say, blue. She might want to do this to annoy or please her neighbours, or because someone has offered her money to do so. In these, and probably most other, cases her discerning desire is also, I would say, governed by a motivating reason. But given that we agree that a desire in operation may not be accompanied or governed by any content that presents itself as a reason to the agent, we now have the tools to explain in what way her favouring would be a favouring on a whim. She wants the house to be blue, period; and she has never wanted a blue house before, and there is nothing about the house of a kind that would intelligibly give her a reason to paint it, or count in favour of her painting it, blue. In fact, for a long while she has not been able to decide what colour she prefers. So many would look great, she has thought. Even the fact that the house is *not* blue need not be what makes her want it to be blue. Of course, we cannot rule out the possibility that there is some reason consideration in the background — something which, in our analysis, we have failed to notice. Perhaps this is the case. But that it need not always be the case also seems plausible. Her desire for blue, as

¹ I owe this objection to Dan Egonsson.

it is, is the result of a decision of hers. This decision probably has to do with other desires of hers, such as the desire to get on with things, to lose no more time, and so forth. However, these explanations of why she suddenly has a desire for painting the house blue — and this should be underlined — need not be part of the intentional content of her desire. These ‘second-order desires’ may, of course, cause her to have a desire for a blue house. But that is quite another matter.

It might be objected that what she desires is in fact blueness, or at least that blueness counts in favour of something. However, I am not sure this is correct. First, it is not clear that the notion that a person desires blueness, period, is intelligible. Can we really make sense of blue being desirable without casting that notion in terms of desiring something to be blue? Also, I am not sure it makes more sense to say that for the agent the colour blue ‘counts in favour of’, or appears as a reason. What presumably counts in favour is the realization of a blue house. Still, if we want to describe the case as a probable example of a whim, then it seems that what we have here is someone who lacks the belief required by M and who cannot come up with an explanation as to why she has the desire she has. She just has it.¹

Even if it makes sense to say that my motivation for desiring x can derive from my awareness that I desire x , it is, in my view, unconvincing on purely phenomenological grounds to conclude that this sort of ‘reason awareness’ is always present when we desire something. In fact, I think we can go a step further and maintain that there is no phenomenological evidence at all that the intentional content of our motivational reasons refers to our desires in any way other than indirectly. Admittedly, this might be denied by someone who thinks that we have introspective access to our favourings, or to our desires.

The idea that we sometimes favour without motivating reasons can be backed up with other examples. Thus when the phone rings, and I pick it up, I can imagine various things explaining why I do so. Not all of these scenarios are equally characterizable as cases of MR*-governed acting. In fact, on most occasions when I pick up the phone it is because it rings, and not because I take ringing to be a reason for picking up the phone.

¹ But does this not show that she is irrational? I am not sure. It depends, I think, on how she behaves, with regard to her desire on a whim.

(As it happens, on many occasions I think of there being reasons for *not* picking up the phone despite picking it up when it is ringing).

Again, in such a case we could still explain the behaviour in terms of my explanatory reasons. We would certainly say that the discerningness requirement was satisfied, and that it was therefore true from a first-person perspective that I favoured picking up the phone because it had certain properties (e.g. that it was ringing). So, again, I am not denying that an account of why I took the call couched in terms of explanatory reasons would include my belief that it is ringing and some suitable desire. However, what motivates me to take the call is not that *I believe that* it is ringing, nor necessarily that I think I have a reason to pick up the phone. Instead I might just act in response to the fact that it is ringing; I am simply disposed to act that way whenever I hear the ringing tone.

As ought to be clear by now, the motivating-clause implies that if it is to function as a motivating reason for me to take the call, the intentional content (i.e. *that it is ringing*) must have acquired some further property: it must be such that I regard this content as, in some sense, counting in favour of my doing something. One might object that since we have agreed that the belief that ringing calls for an action on my behalf need not be in the foreground, we cannot exclude the possibility that somewhere, often buried in the background, there is always a belief to that effect present when we act for a reason. Again, this is certainly a possibility, but mere possibility has never been a strong argument. The lack of phenomenological evidence for the presence of such beliefs is a weightier argument. For this reason I think we can say that, although such beliefs in the background cannot be excluded, they need not always be present.

Sometimes my acts *seem* to be triggered in a way that many other, more straightforwardly voluntary, acts are not. I venture to suggest that the fact that we all see a distinction between acts that are prompted directly, without any trace of deliberation, and acts that follow deliberation, lends support to the idea that, *post facto* at least, we sometimes regard our own acts as acts that are not governed by a motivating reason. Opening the door because you hear someone knocking, and turning your head when someone calls out your name, are but two salient examples of such triggered acts we perform without necessarily doing so for an MR*.

5. Expressive Acts

The idea that not all intentional acts are performed on account of some reason has been discussed in recent years. However, the discussion has focused mostly on a certain kind of act, so-called expressive acts. Joseph Raz, in *Engaging Reasons*, tells us that an expressive act

is intentional at least in part because—it would seem—it is expressive, not because it is undertaken for a reason. The most persuasive example of this kind of action may well be the simplest: in the course of a conversation I suddenly get annoyed by something said/.../ and I bang the table in exasperation, for example. (Raz 1999: 37. *My italics*)¹

Such outbursts fit well into the picture of acts that are not necessarily constituted or accompanied or preceded by a motivating reason. It might be objected that even in cases like the one Raz describes we could always ask the agent why he or she acted so. Moreover, we could reasonably expect the agent to have something to say about what it was that he or she found annoying. This certainly seems right, but given the distinction between the discerningness-clause and the motivating-clause we should be cautious about what sort of conclusion we draw from this observation. The conclusion that ‘found annoying’ is evidence that the outburst was actually accompanied by a belief to the effect that something counted in favour/disfavour, is too hasty. We cannot conclude on the basis of the person’s report that the favouring associated with the outburst involved a belief to the effect that something was annoying.

Suppose we simplify the example, turning it into a case involving a desire to hit the table in front of you with your fist.² That desire will most likely be discerning; the agent desire to hit the table because he or she agent beliefs that *p* — where *p* refers to some set of properties (related to the table, his fist, and the other person). However, these properties need not appear to the agent at the same time as counting in favour of hitting the table (and therefore desiring to hit the table); nor does the

¹ For some other convincing examples, see Monika Bentzler (2009: 272–292).

² I am not certain Raz would agree with the idea that there is a desire involved in this case. He mentions in one place that we do what we want to do whenever we act intentionally (Raz 1999: 110). However, whether this really applies to expressive action is unclear to me. I return to this matter below.

agent at the time need to accept the external evaluation that any of these properties are annoying. But notice, it would still make sense if, *post facto*, the agent evaluated those properties that did figure in his intentional content as being the ones that annoyed him. There is nothing necessarily peculiar, or strange, about his making this evaluation.¹

6. Habits and Explanatory Reasons

There is a possible rejoinder to the sort of approach I have taken here vis-à-vis many of the examples presented, and I need next to comment on it. It is something like this. True, there are acts that are not governed by MR*. In this I am right. However, I am mistaken in thinking these so-called acts involve pro-attitudes. That is simply not the case. How do we explain these so-called acts that are not MR*-governed? We might follow Raz and speak about in part intentional acts, i.e. acts that are expressive of emotions like anger. Still, the sort of intentional acting Raz describes as “intentional at least in part”² admits of many interpretations. One might, I suppose, object that the acting is not ‘genuinely’ intentional — not even ‘in part’. After all, it could be argued that the agent did not intentionally express his reason. Certainly, there was some sort of coincidence, but not an intentional tracking of reason, and therefore the acting is not genuinely intentional acting. There might be something in this line of reasoning. However, Raz has a reply that I think is on the right track. He suggests that, despite the fact that they are not done for a reason (e.g. they are not done to express these emotions), expressive acts *are* intentional:

Their intentionality can be established by the fact that they are under the control of their agents, control that is manifested in two crucial respects. First, the instantiation of the action is up to the agent, and

¹ Would it make sense to say that something in the situation annoyed the person without it being the case that his outburst was a result of the fact that these properties seemed annoying to him? According to the approach I take here, yes. However, nothing in what follows depends on me taking a stand on this issue.

² See Raz (1999:37). Also, more recently Monica Bentzler (2009) has developed this sort of idea. If I understand her correctly, she holds that in some cases actions expressing emotions are intentional in the sense that they are caused by an emotion that tracks what the agent evaluates. This idea — that the acting results from an emotion that in its turn relates in some sense to what the agent endorses as a reason — seems promising.

second, the execution of the action is also under the agent's control. (Raz 1999: 39)

However, Raz is at pains to emphasize that control is not a sufficient condition for intentionality.

To show that an act is intentional it is not enough to show that its initiation and conduct are under the agent's control. They must also have a story to tell about it, a story which makes its performance intelligible. It explains why they exercised their control to perform it, rather than to avoid it. That is where the expressive aspect of the action comes in and provides the missing element which in other actions is filled by the reason for which the action was performed. (Raz 1999: 40)

As far as I can see, Raz might well have put his finger on a significant aspect of intentionality. However, if we take the separation of the discerningness-clause and the motivation-clause seriously, I think we can come up with a slightly different picture of expressive acting. I will return to this in a moment. Meanwhile, let me briefly comment on a different reply to my examples. This will then lead us back to the alternative interpretation.

The kind of rejoinder I have in mind suggests that some of my examples are indeed cases of acts that are not reason governed, but only because they illustrate things we do out of habit. Such habitual acts are not examples of what we desire to do, so if we cannot apply the belief/desire model to them, we have already a plausible explanation of why they are not reason-governed.¹

We all do things from habit. People often cross their legs without thinking. I certainly do so at times, seemingly without reflecting on what I am doing. I just do it out of habit. It is not difficult to come up with examples and contrasts here. Going to the sea rather than going to the mountains expresses my desire in a more obvious way than, say, crossing my leg while talking or twiddling my thumbs while watching birds in the park.

¹ Pascal Engel has pressed a more general worry (personal communication). This asks whether my account of favouring is ultimately inconsistent with a Humean theory of motivation. I am not sure it is, but this is too big an issue to settle here.

In the literature, acting out of habit is often depicted as something not resulting from, or expressive of, the agent's possession of appropriate desires and beliefs. On this view, especially if we are not inclined to toy with the idea that these acts are "in part intentional", it follows that the acts are not being MR* governed. In other words, acting out of habit is not something to be explained in terms of a person's desires and beliefs; hence, there is no motivating reason involved in cases of habitual actions.

That we sometimes do something that is not intentional seems fairly obvious. We withdraw our hands from hot stoves, we suddenly walk in pace with people around us, we tap our fingers to rhythms and we yawn even when try not to do so. This kind of behaviour (yawning being a possible exception) can, it seems, be intentional on occasion. The control conditions Raz pointed to do seem to apply more or less to these cases, too. If the crossing of one's legs is, to use Raz words, "up to the agent", and if the agent to some extent controls the execution of that action, we have at least a rudimentary account of intentionality. But, as we also saw, we need something more — some further element that makes the performance intelligible. I agree. Perhaps if we looked more carefully we could find something analogous with what is going on in expressive acting. However, I do not think we need to go there. In fact, why not simply take even these cases to involve acts that are expressive of what the agent desires and believes. As we have seen, this is consistent with denial that the acts are done for a reason; they are not necessarily MR* governed. Again, it seems reasonable to ascribe a desire that *p* to a person *x* if *p* in fact obtained and it was "up to" *x* that *p* obtained.

One consideration ought to make us cautious about invoking a person's desires in cases like those we have considered. If we assume some thick notion of desire and/or belief — e.g. if desires were like cravings, accompanied by some experienced hedonic property — it will be understandable why, for instance, crossing one's legs is not the result of a desire-belief pair. At least, in cases like this a hedonic feature is not always involved. But a thick desire notion is simply not suitable — for both logical and phenomenological reasons. Some of the things we do are not habitual, but equally they are not preceded by any felt mental state. (Nor is there anything strange about saying 'I desire a glass of water but I do not feeling anything at all at this very moment'). If the

criterion of whether or not we have a desire is that we should be in a certain state of feeling, these acts could not be understood in terms of the agent's beliefs and desires.

But there are other ways of accounting for desires (and favourings). For instance, we might endorse the idea that desires are dispositions to act. If we add to this picture the notion that when these dispositions are combined with certain beliefs, or belief-like states, an 'occurrent desire' emerges (otherwise the dispositions constitute dormant desires), we obtain a view of desires that can be employed in a number of cases of where someone can be said to be acting out of habit.¹

Let me finally comment on an issue that needs to be investigated in greater detail than I can manage here. It concerns the more precise relation between explanatory reasons and motivating reasons. We have seen that we probably can understand a person's acting in terms of beliefs and desires without ascribing to him a motivating reason. But while it seems plausible — so I have argued here — that a belief/desire explanation need not introduce a motivating reason explanation, we still have not made the exact relation between these two explanations explicit. I have one particular case in mind. Personally, I find this case intriguing. Suppose an agent has a motivating reason; there is some favouring whose content appears to him as a reason for favouring. Let us also imagine that in this case we correctly list a certain belief, *B*, and desire, *D*, as what constitutes a person's explanatory reason. Must we now say that the agent's motivating reason is to be found in the intentional content either of *B* or of *D*?

¹ Interestingly, Mark Schroeder has suggested that instead of endorsing Scanlon's account of directed-attention desires, which understands desires in terms of reasons, we should embrace a dispositional account that "does not invoke reasons in its analysis of desires" (Schroeder 2007: 157). Schroeder's account involves an element that could easily be understood in normative terms: "So when you want a cup of coffee, you find yourself thinking about a wide range of topics, and considerations having to do with these topics strike you in a special *salient* way" (Schroeder 2007: 156). Schroeder might be right when he claims that salience need not be interpreted as a normative notion. Still, even if desires sometimes involve seeing things as salient, as I accept they may, I think we can understand desires purely — to use Schroeder's own expression — "phenomenologically-cum-dispositionally" without involving a salience requirement at all.

In Schroeder (2007: 14) the author defines motivating reasons in a way that obliges us to answer this question affirmatively, but I am not sure that his definition offers the best understanding of motivating reasons. Perhaps it makes sense to understand something as a motivating reason even when it does not actually motivate. Research by psychologists,¹ at any rate, does seem to suggest that some of our decisions may occur in the ‘background’, whether or not we deliberate in the foreground. This opens up the possibility that what made a person act is to be looked for in that background — a background which, as far as I can tell, is amenable to the standard belief/desire model explanation. On such a picture the person’s foreground belief might contain an intentional content which *would* have motivated him were it not rendered, as it were, redundant by what had already occurred in the background.

Such an account needs to be clarified in several ways, of course. In my view, however, it does raise some interesting possibilities. For the time being those possibilities will have to wait. But I hope the picture that has gradually emerged here shows persuasively *both* that being motivated is often a matter of having a set of beliefs and desires whose content appears normative to the agent *and* that sometimes being motivated does not involve motivating reasons but is rather a matter merely of having the right sorts of belief and desire.

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¹ Going back to the neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet’s work in the 1980s.

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