



**KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE:  
REASONS, RATIONALITY AND THE A PRIORI**

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## Keep Things in Perspective: Reasons, Rationality and the A Priori

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**R**EASONS FOR ACTING ARE, OR ARE GIVEN BY, FACTS. Call this view *factualism*. According to it, the fact that it is snowing might be a reason for Holly to put on winter clothes, while the fact that Maybelle is hungry might be a reason for Todd to feed her.<sup>1</sup>

Factualism is a view about *normative* reasons.<sup>2</sup> A normative reason for acting is a consideration that favors performing an action, perhaps by revealing a respect in which so acting is good or right. A reason, so understood, can be *pro tanto*. A *pro tanto* reason has a weight and (so) can be weighed against or alongside other reasons. For example, that a new Coen brothers film is showing might be a *pro tanto* reason for Hayley to go to the cinema but that reason might be outweighed by the fact that her friend is in the hospital and without company – in which case, Hayley does not have overall reason to go to the cinema.

Reasons, so understood, determine what one ought to do. If Hayley has reason to go to the cinema – because a new Coen brothers film is showing – and no reason as weighty not to go or to do something else, she ought to go to the cinema.

Factualism is not here a view about *motivating* reasons, the considerations *on the basis of* or *for which* one acts. The fact that it is snowing might be a normative reason for Holly to put on winter clothes even if Holly does not do so, either because she does not realize it is snowing or because she does but is unmoved by that consideration.

Some factualists claim that, for a fact to provide one with a reason for acting, it must bear a suitable relation to how one is motivated to act or to what one desires (see Schroeder 2007). For ease of presentation, I will not make reference to motivations or desires but such reference could be added without affecting the arguments.

Factualism contrasts with the view that reasons for acting are, or are given by, one's mental states. Call this view *mentalism*. According to it, Holly's belief that it is snowing might be a reason for her to put on warm

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<sup>1</sup> In a similar fashion, one might hold that reasons for psychological states or attitudes are, or are given by, facts. The fact that it is raining might be a reason for believing that the streets are wet, while the fact that a vicious dog is behind the door might be a reason to fear opening it. While I think that the arguments to follow generalize, I focus on reasons for acting. Certain issues arise when thinking about reasons for belief, in particular, that do not arise when thinking about reasons for action. Those issues call for separate discussion and I set them aside for another occasion.

<sup>2</sup> Factualism is arguably the dominant view of reasons for acting. Alvarez (2010), Dancy (2000), Parfit (2011), Raz (1975), Skorupski (2010) and Thomson (2008) are among its many proponents. Some factualists suggest that, for a fact to provide one with a reason, it must pass through an "epistemic filter," i.e., it must be knowable (cf. Dancy 2000: 57–59). This issue is for the most part orthogonal to those I explore here. In § 7, I discuss one kind of case that some appeal to in order to motivate this constraint and outline an alternative way of accommodating it.

clothes, while Todd's belief that Maybelle is hungry might be a reason for him to feed her.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I focus on factualism, though I explore a way of developing it that closes the gap between it and its competitor. I start by introducing what appears to be a difficulty facing factualism, namely that, according to it, what one has reason to do and what it is rational to do come apart (§ 1). Next, I introduce a distinction several factualists appeal to in order to tackle that objection, a distinction between objective reasons, which are given by the facts, and subjective reasons, which are given by one's perspective on the facts (§ 2). Subjective, not objective, reasons determine what it is rational to do. I then examine critically a prominent account of subjective reasons (§§ 3–4). The principal problem with that account, as I explain, is that it makes subjective reasons insufficiently *subjective*. In view of this, I introduce an alternative account of subjective reasons that avoids the problem (§ 5). After highlighting its strengths (§ 6), I consider how it bears on a certain sort of case widely discussed in the literature – a “three-envelope” case (§ 7).

The upshot of the paper is a novel account of subjective reasons, and hence of what it is rational to do, by appeal to which factualists can address one of the main challenges to their view of reasons for action. The aim is not to defend the account of subjective reasons against all objections, or to establish conclusively that it provides the key to understanding rationality, but to arrive at the most promising version of that account.

## 1. Rationality

According to Parfit:

When we call some act “rational,” using this word in its ordinary, non-technical sense, we express the kind of praise or approval that we can also express with words like “sensible,” “reasonable,” “intelligent,” and “smart.” We use the word “irrational” to express the kind of criticism that we express with words like “senseless,” “stupid,” “idiotic,” and “crazy” (2011: 33).

It is clear that what it is rational to do in this sense can diverge from what there is reason in the factualist sense to do.

Not everyone accepts that rationality is to be understood in the way Parfit suggests.<sup>4</sup> For present purposes, I do not need to engage in a debate over what rationality (really) amounts to; instead, I will simply take for granted the conception of rationality that Parfit's remarks gesture toward. My goal is not to defend that conception but to consider what the factualist might say about rationality so conceived. That said, it is worth noting that the difficulty I introduce in this section can be expressed

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<sup>3</sup> Mentalism comes in many varieties. One dispute among its advocates is whether (only) factive mental states, such as knowledge, provide reasons. A hybrid view would be that what reason one has for acting is determined by *facts about one's mental states*. Though the letter of this view is close to factualism, its spirit is closer to mentalism.

<sup>4</sup> For alternative conceptions of rationality, see Scanlon (1998: 25ff); Broome (2013, esp. chs. 7–10).

without appeal to the notion of rationality. What we have reason to do, in the factualist sense, can diverge from what it is smart, sensible, intelligent, etc., to do. This seems enough of a problem for factualism. I put it in terms of reasons and rationality making competing demands but nothing substantive turns on this.

To make the issue at hand more concrete, consider the following. Holly, having looked out the window to see (what appears to be) snow falling, and having heard forecasts predicting snow, believes that it is snowing. In this case, it is rational (sensible, etc.) for Holly to put on winter clothes before going outside. However, unbeknownst to Holly, the forecasts are wrong – spring has sprung early and it is a warm, sunny day. What looks to her like snow is the fall of early blossom. Given the facts, Holly does not have reason to put on winter clothes; indeed, she has reason not to do so.

Tom is suffering from an illness that, if not treated immediately, will cause long-term damage. His doctor, Martha, holds a pill that she believes would kill Tom were he to take it. The many medical reports she has read and clinical trials she has conducted appear to confirm this. In this situation, it would be irrational (stupid, etc.) for Martha to give Tom the pill. However, due to an unusual quirk in his physiology of which no one is aware, the pill will cure Tom. Given the facts, Martha has reason to give Tom the pill.

These examples serve as a reminder that what it is rational to do, in the above sense, and what factualism predicts that there is reason to do, come apart. It can be rational to do what, given the facts, one has no reason to do and, given the facts, one can have reason to do what it is not rational to do. Insofar as there is nothing special about the examples, the point is a general one.

Of course, the cases are underdescribed. But it is highly plausible that there will be ways of filling them out such that a difference in each case between what it is rational to do and what one has reason to do remains.

Reflection on examples like the above suggests that what it is rational to do is determined, not by the facts, but by one's *perspective* on the facts.<sup>5</sup> For ease of presentation, I will often focus in what follows on *belief*, but that is in no way a suggestion that what one believes is the sole determinate of one's perspective. How the facts appear is determined also by one's judgments, credences, memories, perceptions and the like, as well by relations among them. If Tom has a perceptual experience as of a person in pain, it might nonetheless not seem to him that someone is in pain if he recalls that she is acting in a play. How the facts appear might also be determined by one's affective states. That the dog seems dangerous might be a result in part of what Barbara believes – say, that it is baring its teeth – but also of her fear of dogs.

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<sup>5</sup> The dependence on one's perspective of what it is rational to do is a theme in Gibbons (2010). Gibbons objects to factualism on the grounds that it "drives a wedge" between reasons and rationality.

I will say more about what determines a perspective later. To return to the issue at hand, it appears from Holly's perspective that it is snowing, though in fact it is not. That, very roughly, is why it is rational for her to put on winter clothes.

There are some complications and qualifications to note at this stage. First, it would not be rational for Holly to put on winter clothes if her belief that it is snowing were due to crazed conviction, say, or wishful thinking. Irrationality cannot beget rationality! A subject's beliefs contribute to making it rational for her to act in certain ways only if those beliefs are themselves rational.<sup>6</sup>

Second, it would not be rational for Holly to put on winter clothes were she to believe, say, that she will be shot if she does so. In each case, the subject's beliefs make acting in a certain way rational only if she has no other beliefs that *defeat* the rationality of so acting.

Third, one needs to distinguish between its being rational to do something and doing that thing rationally. One's perspective might make it rational to perform some act and one might perform that act without acting rationally, if one does not act on the basis of or in response to the considerations that make so acting rational. Suppose that Holly believes that it is snowing and puts on winter clothes. However, she does so due, not to her belief, but to her obsessive attachment to garments that she wears irrespective of the weather. Though Holly does what is rational, she does not do it rationally. The focus in what follows is on what it is rational to do, rather than what it is to do something rationally.

To return to the issue at hand, factualism might seem problematic insofar as it predicts that one has reason to do things that it is not rational to do, and that it is rational to do things one has no reason to do. If reasons are things that in some sense tell us what to do, it would be surprising if they were to tell us to do stupid, crazy, daft, etc., things, as opposed to sensible, reasonable, smart, etc., things.

## 2. Subjective Reasons

In part in response to this kind of concern, several factualists distinguish two kinds of reasons: *objective, primary* or *real* reasons, which are given by the facts; and *subjective, secondary* or *apparent* reasons, which are given by one's perspective on the facts (cf. Alvarez 2010: 24; Hornsby 2008, § 1.2; Parfit 2011: 33-35; Schroeder 2007: 14-15; Vogelstein 2012; Way 2009: 3-4).<sup>7</sup>

The proposal is not the *dualist* one that there are two utterly distinct kinds of reasons. Rather, the idea is that subjective reasons are in some way *derived* from, *explained* by or a *consequence* of objective reasons. Very roughly, the subjective reasons are the objective reasons one's perspective suggests one has. Holly has subjective reason to put on winter clothes since it seems from her perspective that there is objective reason to do

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. n. 12, below.

<sup>7</sup> Different factualists use different terminology but the basic idea is common to all. In what follows, I use the objective/subjective labels.

so, since it seems from her perspective that it is snowing. Martha has subjective reason not to give Tom the pill, since it seems from her perspective that she has objective reason not to do so, since it seems from her perspective that the pill will kill him. As the examples show, one's objective reasons and one's subjective reasons can come apart, though they can also come together (when the facts and one's perspective on the facts correspond).

Subjective reasons do not determine what one objectively ought to do but one can use them to introduce a notion of what one subjectively ought to do in a straightforward fashion. One subjectively ought to do what one has most subjective reason to do. In turn, subjective reasons are connected to what it is *rational* to do:

(R) It is (*pro tanto*) rational for a subject to  $\phi$  if and only if she has subjective reason to  $\phi$ .

Once again, being rational here is to be understood as being smart, sensible, reasonable, intelligent, etc.

As noted above, one can distinguish what one has a *pro tanto* reason to do and what one has overall reason to do. In a similar fashion, one might distinguish what it is *pro tanto* rational to do and what it is overall rational to do. (R) does not claim that it is rational overall to act when one merely has a subjective reason for performing that action, only that so acting is in that respect rational. A natural suggestion is that what it is rational overall to do is what one has overall subjective reason to do. If there is only one action that one has overall subjective reason to perform, performing that action is *the* rational thing to do.

If Hayley does not have a subjective reason to go to the cinema, it follows from (R) that it is not rational for her to go to the cinema. Not being rational is not the same as being irrational – hair loss is not rational but it is not irrational. The variable in (R) ranges over intentional actions. Hair loss is not an intentional action, but going to the cinema is. If Hayley intentionally goes to the cinema, when going to the cinema is not rational, it seems safe to conclude that her going to the cinema is irrational.

By appeal to the distinction between objective and subjective reasons, the factualist can address the above concerns. Though what one has objective reason to do, according to factualism, is often not the rational thing to do, the factualist can offer an account of what the rational thing to do is by appeal to subjective reasons. Moreover, she can explain why, as noted above, “rationality” is a term of praise and “irrationality” a term of criticism. In short, a subject who does what she has subjective reason to do, hence what it is rational to do, is doing what, from her perspective, she has reason to do. Surely, there is little more one could ask of finite creatures like ourselves.

Some deny that rationality can be understood in terms of subjective reasons.<sup>8</sup> The force of this denial might depend on the conception of ra-

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<sup>8</sup> For critical discussion, see Broome (2013, ch. 6). I hope to address Broome's objections elsewhere.

tionality one is working with. In any event, the aim of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive defense of the idea that rationality is linked to subjective reasons but to address the somewhat neglected issue of what it is for someone to have a subjective reason. This, I take it, is the prior issue – one cannot assess the claim that what it is rational for a subject to do is determined by her subjective reasons in the absence of some account of such things.

### 3. Counterfactual Analyses of Subjective Reasons

The distinction between objective reasons, as determined by the facts, and subjective reasons, as determined by one's perspective on the facts, seems like a natural one to draw. But more needs to be said about how the two sorts of reason relate. What is it for a perspective to suggest that one has an objective reason? What is it for it to seem from one's perspective that one has such a reason?

One approach is to account for subjective reasons in terms of beliefs about objective reasons. Very roughly, the idea is that a subject has a subjective reason to  $\phi$  if and only if she believes that she has an objective reason to  $\phi$ .<sup>9</sup> This clashes with the plausible thought that it can be rational (or otherwise) for a subject to do something even if she happens not to have formed a belief about her reasons for doing it.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps there are ways of addressing this worry, or of developing the rough idea so as to avoid it, but I will not pursue such matters here. Instead, I will focus on an alternative proposal, according to which subjective reasons are to be understood in terms of the objective reasons a subject would have in *counterfactual* circumstances. Consider:

(C) A subject has a subjective reason to  $\phi$  if and only if, were what she believes true, it would give her an objective reason to  $\phi$ .<sup>11</sup>

One difficulty facing (C) was anticipated above. What a person believes makes it rational for her to do something, and hence gives her a subjective reason to do that thing, only if her belief is rational.<sup>12</sup> Resolving this issue is straightforward – one simply needs to add the requirement that

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<sup>9</sup> For a version of this view, see Thomson (2008, chs. 8-9); cf. Gregory (2012: 613-14). There are hints of it in Kolodny (2005, § 5). A related, and perhaps more common, suggestion is that what one is subjectively justified in doing, obliged to do or right to do, is what one believes one is objectively justified in doing, obliged to do or right to do (see Feldman 1988 and references therein).

<sup>10</sup> For this objection and others, see Broome (2013: 88ff); Parfit (2011: 118ff).

<sup>11</sup> Hornsby (2008, § 1.1), Parfit (2001: 25; 2011: 35), Schroeder (2007: 14-15; 2008: 67; 2009: 233) and Way (2009: 3-4) advance (C), or something very similar to it.

Some (e.g., Shope 1978) are suspicious of any analysis formulated using a subjunctive conditional. My case against (C) and its descendant might provide support for such suspicion. Note that I formulate the view I arrive at below using an *indicative* conditional.

<sup>12</sup> Parfit (2011, ch. 5) denies that only rational beliefs provide subjective reasons for action, though he insists that only rational beliefs provide subjective reasons for other beliefs, which Schroeder (2011) denies. I am not convinced by the arguments each provides in support of their (incompatible) claims but engaging with those arguments is beyond the scope of this paper.

the beliefs referred to on the right-hand side of (C) be rational. For the remainder, and for all alternative principles considered, I take this constraint as a given. Of course, adding it means that the account is no longer *reductive*, since it employs the notion of rationality, but I will not treat this as a problem. Note, first, that the rationality of the act in question is not explained in terms of *that* very act's being rational; rather, it is explained in part by appeal to something else that is rational. So, at the very least, (C) provides a noncircular account of when a particular act is rational, if not of rationality in general. Second, the "something else" in question is a belief, not an act. So, at the very least, (C) provides a noncircular account of the rationality of action, the present concern, if not of belief. In any event, one should not assume in advance that those advancing (C) have, or should have, reductive ambitions.

(C) faces a further problem. There appear to be cases in which it is rational for a subject to do something, her beliefs are true and rational, she has no defeating beliefs and yet she still does not have an objective reason to do that thing. In such cases, (C) delivers the verdict that she lacks subjective reason to do that thing, and so it is not rational for her to do it.

Consider: Keanu believes that there is a bomb on the bus with a timer counting down and that the only way to leave the bus is by jumping through the window, though he is aware that he will hurt himself in doing so. In this situation, it is rational for Keanu to jump. Keanu's beliefs are true and rational, and he has no defeating beliefs. However, the bomb is poorly wired and will not detonate. Given the facts, Keanu has no objective reason for jumping out the window; indeed, he has reason not to do so. According to (C), it follows that he has no subjective reason for doing so and hence, given (R), that it is not rational for him to do so, which seems wrong. The problem here is that there is a defeating consideration of which Keanu is ignorant.

One might reply that, in the above case, Keanu must believe, say, that the bomb will explode. In which case, he has a false belief. In which case, in turn, there is no counterexample to (C). But if one adds this belief to the stock of Keanu's (rational) beliefs, one can imagine a situation in which all his beliefs are true, and yet a defeating consideration obtains of which Keanu is ignorant. Perhaps, as would never have occurred to Keanu, he was earlier sprayed with anti-blast batpowder, which protects him from the explosion.<sup>13</sup>

There is a pattern emerging. For any (true, rational) belief one adds to Keanu's belief-set, it seems possible to add a consideration that defeats whatever objective reason he has for jumping, concerning which he has no belief. Suppose that Keanu truly, rationally believes that the bomb will kill him. Now add that the bomb is tied by unbreakable, invisible thread to his ankle. The pattern continues.

One might argue that, in the above cases, Keanu *does* have a reason to jump out the window, a reason that is *pro tanto* and outweighed by the

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<sup>13</sup> See "The Joke's on Catwoman" (1968), from the *Batman* television series.



defeating consideration.<sup>14</sup> Since his beliefs about the situation are true and rational, and since he has *pro tanto* objective reason to jump out the window, (C) rightly predicts that he also has *pro tanto* subjective reason to do so, and hence that it is *pro tanto* rational to do so.

However, in the cases as described, the defeating considerations are *undercutting*, not *outweighing*. The fact that Keanu has been sprayed with anti-blast batpowder does not give him *more* reason to do something other than jump or give him reason *not* to jump but rather undercuts the reason-providing force of the fact that the bomb is going to explode, and hence removes its status as a reason for jumping.

Alternatively, one might insist that the subject has an implicit belief, with respect to *each* defeating consideration, that it does not obtain. But this is psychologically implausible. After all, the possible defeating considerations are countless in number. And, for some such considerations, the subject might simply lack the relevant concepts (like that of anti-blast batpowder). Moreover, and most importantly, this insistence is unmotivated, as there is a way of revising (C) that avoids the problem:<sup>15</sup>

(C\*) A subject has a subjective reason to  $\phi$  if and only if, were the facts of the situation as they appear to her to be, those facts would give her an objective reason to  $\phi$ .

The thought behind (C\*) is that how the facts appear to a subject is determined, not only by what she believes, but also by what she does not believe. It seems from Keanu's perspective that the bomb will kill him, in part because of what beliefs he has, including that there is a bomb on the bus, but also because of what beliefs he lacks, including that he has been sprayed with anti-blast batpowder. Were he to have this belief, the facts would appear very differently to him.

Cases of testimony highlight a further advantage of spelling out what one has subjective reason to do in terms of how the facts appear, rather than in terms of what a subject believes. Suppose that Tom believes that Martha has told him that the pill will cure his illness, and that Martha is reliable about such matters. It is rational for Tom to take the pill; hence, he has subjective reason to do so. Tom's beliefs, if true, do not *give* him a reason to take the pill; what gives him the reason is the likelihood of its curing his illness.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, due to Martha's testimony, it appears to Tom that the pill will probably cure his illness. This (apparent) fact *does* provide a reason to take it.

Another advantage (C\*) has over (C) is that it allows that states other than beliefs might provide subjective reasons, for example, experiences. Suppose Keanu sees that a truck is about to collide with the bus. It is

<sup>14</sup> This seems to be Vogelstein's (2012: 246-48) position.

<sup>15</sup> Similar points count against the suggestion that, for any such case, the subject has the *deontic* belief that no defeating consideration obtains. Furthermore, I will suggest later (§ 7) that a subject's deontic beliefs play no part in determining what it is rational for her to do.

<sup>16</sup> Cases like this are often presented as counterexamples to the view that evidence that one ought to do something is a reason to do that thing. For discussion, see Kearns and Star (2009, § 3.1).

plausible that what Keanu perceives makes it rational for him to steer the bus out of the path of the truck. (C) does not capture this thought; (C\*) does.

Perhaps there are ways for a proponent of (C) to defend her principle in light of these considerations. And no doubt there are further ways of refining or developing (C) and (C\*).<sup>17</sup> I will not pursue such matters here. Instead, I will introduce an objection to (C\*) that undermines any attempt to unpack what a person has subjective reason to do, and hence what it is rational for her to do, in terms of what objective reason she would have in counterfactual circumstances.

#### 4. The Problem with Counterfactual Analyses

I assume that the semantics for subjunctive conditionals – like that embedded in the right-hand side of (C\*) – are to be understood in a Lewisian fashion (see Lewis 1973):

It is true that, if  $A$  were the case,  $C$  would be the case if and only if there is no metaphysically possible world in which  $A$  is the case and  $C$  is not closer to the actual world than any world in which both  $A$  and  $C$  are the case.

On this account, if the antecedent of a subjunctive is necessarily false, i.e., false in all possible worlds, then the conditional is trivially true. If there is no  $A$ -world, there is no  $A$ -world that is not a  $C$ -world.<sup>18</sup>

In light of this, consider the following. If a subject's beliefs are inconsistent, there is no possible world in which the facts are as they appear to her to be. It follows from (C\*) that she has subjective reason to do anything and everything and so, by (R), that it is rational for her to do *anything* and *everything*. This is a decisive strike against the account.

To deal with this, one might be tempted to add the following restriction. One's beliefs provide one with a subjective reason to do something only if those beliefs are *consistent*.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, this will not do. To see why, consider the following. Mary believes that Peter is Superman, that the world can be only saved by Superman, that Superman is fatally allergic to kryptonite and that Peter is wearing a kryptonite necklace. In this situation, it is rational for Mary to remove the necklace, and not rational for her to leave it on Peter. However, Peter is not Superman, and there is no metaphysically possible world in which he is.<sup>20</sup> Since there is no world in which the facts are as they appear to Mary to be, it follows trivially from (C\*) that Mary has

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<sup>17</sup> For various amendments, see Vogelstein (2012).

<sup>18</sup> There are, of course, alternatives to the Lewisian account of subjunctives. Consider a *strict implication* account (see von Fintel 2012), according to which:

It is true that, if  $A$  were the case,  $C$  would be the case if and only if  $C$  is the case in all the (relevant) metaphysically possible worlds in which  $A$  is the case.

The proponent of this account agrees with the Lewisian account that subjunctives with necessarily false antecedents are (trivially) true.

<sup>19</sup> Vogelstein (2012: 244) introduces such a restriction in response to a version of the above objection.

<sup>20</sup> I assume that identity claims formulated using terms that rigidly designate are, if true, necessarily true and, if false, necessarily false.

subjective reason to leave the necklace on Peter and, given (R), that it is rational for her to do so, which is wrong.

By the same token, (C\*) delivers the verdict that Mary has subjective reason to remove the necklace and so, given (R), that it is rational for her to do so. But it gets the right result for the wrong reason. What makes it rational for Mary to remove the necklace is not the impossibility of Peter's being Superman.

Note that the requirement that the beliefs that determine the subject's perspective be rational does not address this problem. Mary's belief that Peter is Superman might be entirely rational (perhaps she sees Peter run off whenever Superman is about to appear, knows that Peter has superhuman strength, etc.).

If the problem here is not obvious, recall the Parfit-style conception of rationality in play. According to (C\*), together with (R), it is smart (sensible, reasonable, etc.) for Mary to do everything and anything and at the same time stupid (daft, crazy, etc.) for Mary to do everything and anything. So, it is both smart for her to remove the necklace from Peter and stupid for her to do so. There need not be anything troubling in the idea that one and the same act is smart in one respect, that is, in light of certain considerations, and stupid in another, that is, in light of other considerations; but, in the case at hand, it is the very same considerations that, according to (C\*), make removing the necklace both smart and stupid. That is troubling.

Note how the case involving Mary differs from one in which a subject has logically inconsistent beliefs. Suppose that Pierre believes both that London is pretty and that London is not pretty. He believes the first proposition having read books (in French) that include reports such as, "Londres est joli." He believes the second proposition having visited (only) the grimier parts of London. Pierre does not realize that the city the books refer to is the city he visited. If it is possible for a subject to hold rational but logically inconsistent beliefs,<sup>21</sup> (C\*) delivers the verdict that Pierre has subjective reason to do anything and everything; hence, it delivers the verdict that it is rational for him both to take a tour of London and to refrain from doing so. Perhaps this is not troubling. From Pierre's perspective, one might think, there is a case to be made for seeing London (that it is pretty) and for not doing so (that it is not pretty).

The case of Mary is not like this. From Mary's perspective, there is no case to be made for leaving the necklace on Peter, only a case for removing it (that Peter is Superman, that only Superman can save the world, etc.). Hence, it counts against (C\*) that it delivers the verdict that it is rational for her to leave the necklace on Peter.

Cases like this – involving a posteriori identities – are a problem for (C\*), even when restricted to consistent perspectives or belief-sets. A subject, like Mary, can have (logically) consistent beliefs that are true in no metaphysically possible world.

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<sup>21</sup> That this is possible seems to be one of the lessons of Kripke (1979), from which I borrow the example of Pierre.

One might insist that a version of (C\*) restricted to consistent perspectives or belief-sets is not open to this counterexample, since Mary's beliefs *are* inconsistent – in the sense that it is not possible for them all to be true. Setting aside the issue of whether the space of logical possibilities is larger than the space of metaphysical possibilities, this claim does not help the proponent of (C\*). In the case at hand, it *is* rational for Mary to remove the necklace, and so she has subjective reason to do so. A restricted (C\*) would not deliver this verdict, or any other; it would simply be *silent* about such cases. Since subjects can have subjective reason *due* to beliefs that are inconsistent in the relevant sense, not merely despite such beliefs, the above account of subjective reasons is inadequate.

## 5. Diagnosis and Cure

I have argued that, in cases where it is metaphysically impossible for the facts to be as they appear to a subject, (C\*) plus (R) deliver the unacceptable verdict that it is rational for her to do anything and everything. This problem is not restricted to (C\*); it will arise for any account of subjective reasons in terms of the objective reasons a subject would have in counterfactual circumstances.

The original insight lying behind all accounts of subjective reasons is that what it is rational for a subject to do is tied to her perspective. But, as the above examples remind us, what would happen were certain conditions to obtain is *not* tied to a perspective. The truth or falsity of a subjunctive conditional can turn on matters outside or independent of a subject's point of view. It is for this reason that (C\*) and its kin deliver the wrong results.

To put the same point differently, the above accounts make whether one has subjective reason for doing something turn on what is going on in metaphysically possible worlds. But what is metaphysically possible, unlike what is rational, is not shaped or determined by a subject's perspective. In Chalmers' words (2011), a metaphysical possibility is *a way the world might be*. And the ways the world might be can be very different from the ways the world appears to be.

This suggests that we need to look for other ways to develop the original insight. Fortunately, the above diagnosis of where counterfactual analyses of subjective reasons go wrong points to an alternative. Consider again the case in which Mary believes that Peter is Superman. It is not metaphysically possible that Peter is Superman but there is clearly some sense in which for Mary it is possible that he is – it is *epistemically* possible. What it is rational for a subject to do, I suggest, turns not on what is metaphysically possible but on what is epistemically possible. What is metaphysically possible is independent of a subject's perspective but what is epistemically possible is not.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> What is the connection between epistemic and metaphysical possibilities? On some views, epistemic possibilities are a subset of metaphysical possibilities (perhaps metaphysical possibilities specified in qualitative, nonrigid terms). On other views, they are *sui generis*. For discussion, see Chalmers (2011).

In turn, this suggests that the relation between the facts, as they appear to the subject, and the objective reason that they provide should not be construed as one of metaphysical determination or necessitation but as one of *epistemic* determination or necessitation. How should one understand this? Following a proposal Chalmers (2011: 65) makes in a very different context, I propose to cash it out by appeal to the notion of *a priori-ity*. *A* epistemically necessitates *C* just in case *A* a priori entails *C*, or just in case it is a priori that, if *A*, then *C*.

This notion of epistemic necessity is coordinate with a notion of epistemic possibility (cf. Chalmers 2011: 66).<sup>23</sup> It is epistemically possible that *p* if and only if it is not epistemically necessary that not-*p*. So, an epistemic possibility, in the relevant sense, is a possibility which is not ruled out a priori.

In view of this, consider this *epistemic* account of subjective reasons:

(E) A subject has a subjective reason to  $\varphi$  if and only if it is a priori that, if the facts of the situation are as they appear to her to be, those facts give her an objective reason to  $\varphi$ .

The idea is as follows. Consider a world in which the facts are as they appear to the subject to be, which is to entertain an epistemic, not a metaphysical, possibility. Now consider whether it follows a priori that those facts give the relevant subject an objective reason to do something. If and only if it does, she has a subjective reason to do that thing and so, given (R), it is rational for her to do it.

Note that the subjunctive conditional, which appears on the right-hand sides of (C) and (C\*), has been replaced by an indicative conditional in (E). A widespread view in philosophy and linguistics is that, while the subjunctive is tied to metaphysical possibilities, the indicative is tied to epistemic possibilities.<sup>24</sup> A stock example (due to Adams 1970) will serve to illustrate this point:

- (1) If Oswald did not shoot Kennedy, someone else did.
- (2) If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, someone else would have done.

The indicative (1) is true, while the subjunctive (2) is false. (2) suggests (wrongly) that, given the facts (prior to the assassination), Kennedy had to be shot, which is to say that his shooting was somehow necessitated or determined by reality. (1) suggests (rightly) that, given what we take to have occurred in Dallas in 1963, someone must have shot Kennedy,

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<sup>23</sup> Note that I am not presenting this as an analysis of the notion of possibility expressed by the use of epistemic modals (for example, in sentences like, “She might be home by now”). The claim is only that this is a coherent notion of epistemic possibility, one that serves the explanatory purposes at hand. For an overview of different accounts of epistemic possibility, see Huemer (2007). Those accounts need not be in competition with that which I employ here.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Gillies (2004); Kratzer (1986); Weatherson (2001). Each offers a different account of the truth-conditions of indicatives in terms of epistemic possibilities. For present purposes, I do not need to endorse any particular account.

which is to say that his having been shot is somehow necessitated or determined by our perspective on reality.

(E) cashes out what it is for a subject to have a subjective reason in terms of the relevant conditional's being a priori. To say that it is a priori that  $p$ , is not to say that anyone *does* know that  $p$ , a priori or otherwise, only that it *can* be known a priori that  $p$ . Alternatively, if it is a priori that  $p$ , it does not follow that it is *known* that  $p$ , a priori or otherwise, but that that it is *knowable* a priori that  $p$ .

One might ask for *whom* the conditional on the right-hand side of (E) is a priori. For now, I will assume it is the subject referred to on the left-hand side. I return to this issue in the next section.

To return to a point made in the introduction, the account I am proposing is intended to be consistent with the view that a subject has a reason to  $\phi$  only if she has some desire that is served by  $\phi$ ing, or only if she is (or would be, or could be) suitably motivated to  $\phi$ . To accommodate such views, one need only add the relevant conative constraint to (E).

(E) is formulated in terms of its bring a priori that the (apparent) facts *give* objective reasons for acting, not merely in terms of its being a priori that there *exist* such reasons. This is well motivated. It is fundamental to the approach explored here that subjective reasons are modeled on objective reasons. Since objective reasons are given by facts, subjective reasons are given by apparent facts.<sup>25</sup>

To make all of this more concrete, suppose that Mary believes that Peter is Superman, that Superman is allergic to kryptonite, that only Superman can save the world and that Peter is wearing a kryptonite necklace. Mary is in a position to know a priori that, if the facts are as they appear to her to be, she has objective reason to remove the necklace. Hence, given (E), she has subjective reason to do so and, given (R), it is rational for her to do so. Since it is *not* a priori for Mary that, if the facts are as they appear to her to be, she has objective reason to leave the necklace on Peter, it follows that she lacks subjective reason to do this, and hence that it is not rational for her to do it.

## 6. For and Against the Proposal

The proposed account of subjective reasons, (E), emerges naturally from the diagnosis of the difficulties facing the counterfactual analyses. In addition, it delivers the appropriate verdicts in the cases so far considered. Finally, it respects the original insight that what it is rational to do is de-

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<sup>25</sup> One might wonder whether (E) captures the view that proponents of counterfactual analyses had in mind all along. If that were so, this paper would remain the first attempt I know of to develop and defend that view in detail. However, there is no evidence that the authors I cite intend their accounts to be understood along the lines of (E) – there is no mention whatsoever in their work of epistemic possibilities, let alone of epistemic determination or a prioricity, nor any suggestion that the subjunctive conditionals they employ are to be understood in anything other than the orthodox way; indeed, while there are epistemic readings of various modals (e.g., “might,” “must”), it is not clear that there is an epistemic reading of the *subjunctive*. Moreover, personal communication with Eric Vogelstein and Jonathan Way confirms that they did not intend their accounts to be understood along the lines of (E).

terminated, not by the facts, but by one's perspective on the facts. What else can be said in its favor?

First, the account dovetails straightforwardly with the plausible idea that knowledge of reason-relations is a priori.<sup>26</sup> That is, if a set of facts provides one with reason to do something, then one can know a priori that one has reason to do that thing, if one knows (a posteriori) that those facts obtain. If one does not know that those facts obtain, one can still know a priori that, if they do, one has the relevant reason.

Second, the account promises to deliver more fine-grained judgments of rationality than counterfactual analyses of subjective reasons. Arguably, what is a priori is a relative matter; specifically, it is relative to a subject's cognitive capacities. God knows a priori what the trillionth prime number is but (presumably) no human can know this a priori. And what one human can know a priori might differ from what another human can know a priori. To make this relativity explicit, one simply needs to include in (E) the subject for whom the relevant conditional is a priori. A natural candidate is the subject referred to on the left-hand side.

This is not mandatory. One could introduce different standards of rationality by making the relevant knowledge a priori for different subjects – for example, God or humans. However, if one is trying to capture the conception of rationality that I am taking for granted, it seems appropriate to insist that the conditional on the right-hand side of (E) be knowable a priori for the subject who has (or lacks) a subjective reason. After all, what it is smart (sensible, clever, etc.) for me to do might be very different from what it is smart (sensible, clever, etc.) for God to do.

In light of this, consider the following. Will knows that he will receive one billion dollars if he types the trillionth prime into a computer, and that, if he types any other number, the world will be destroyed. Whatever the trillionth prime is, call it *T*, Will has objective reason to type it into the computer. But, though Will understands what a prime is and can calculate the primes up to a point, he is not able to calculate a priori what *T* is due to typical cognitive limitations. According to (C), Will has some subjective reason to type *T* into the computer, and so it is to that extent rational for him to do so, which seems wrong. According to (E), understood in the way I propose, Will has no subjective reason to type *T* into the computer and it is not rational for him to do so, which seems right.<sup>27</sup>

Needless to say, there is more to be said about how to determine what is a priori for a given subject. That topic is too large for this paper.

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<sup>26</sup> For a recent expression of this view, see Skorupski (2010).

<sup>27</sup> The case is inspired by one that Vogelstein discusses (2012: 251-52). He suggests two responses. One suggestion is that, in this case, Will *does* have a subjective reason, though one that carries very little weight. I do not find this very compelling when put in terms of subjective reasons, but it is not at all compelling when put in terms of rationality. It is not even a little bit rational for Will to type *T* into the computer. Vogelstein's other suggestion is that one could add to the account of subjective reasons along the lines of (C\*) a requirement that the subject has "epistemic access" to the reason-providing considerations. This looks ad hoc. It is an advantage of the account I propose that such a requirement is built into it.

The point is only that, by placing an epistemic notion at the heart of the account of subjective reasons, one can accommodate the thought that what it is rational for a subject to do depends on the *range* of her cognitive capacities.<sup>28</sup>

There is an additional respect in which the account supports more fine-grained judgments of rationality than competing accounts. Rationality comes in degrees – it can be more or less rational to  $\phi$ . What, then, determines how rational  $\phi$ ing is? In part, this is determined by the weights of one’s subjective reasons (which presumably correspond to the weights of the corresponding objective reasons). The weightier the subjective reasons for  $\phi$ ing, the more rational it is to  $\phi$ , and the more irrational it is not to  $\phi$  (if one can). In addition, a proponent of (E) might suggest that the degree of rationality is determined in part by how easy it is to know a priori that, if the facts are as they appear, one has objective reason to  $\phi$ . If reasoning a priori from the (apparent) facts to the conclusion that one has most objective reason to  $\phi$  would be very difficult, a failure to  $\phi$  would be less irrational than it would be if that were the obvious conclusion to draw.

There is, of course, more to be said about what it is for knowing something a priori to be easy, and how this factor combines with the weight of the subjective reasons to determine an overall degree of rationality. These are tasks for another occasion. Details aside, I take the idea to be fairly intuitive. Adapting the above example, suppose that it seems to Will that he has been offered a certain amount of money to type a certain prime into the computer. Whether it would be irrational for Will not to do this depends on what that amount is and, hence on the strength of his subjective reasons (proportional, perhaps, to the amount of money). It also depends on whether the number is the third prime, say, or the thirtieth, since in a familiar sense it would be harder for Will to know a priori that he has objective reason to type the former than it would be for him to know a priori that he has objective reason to type the latter. The point here is that, by placing an epistemic notion at the heart of the account of subjective reasons, one can accommodate the thought that what it is rational for a subject to do depends on the *demands* made on her cognitive capacities.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Relativizing what it is rational for a subject to do to what *she* can know a priori raises the following issue. For a subject to have subjective reason to act, does she have to possess the concepts that the right-hand side of (E) expresses, e.g., that of an objective reason? This might seem too stringent a requirement. It is not clear to me that the requirement is too stringent, in part because it is not clear to me that such concepts are hard to come by. But, if the worry persists, one might understand the proposal as follows. It is rational for a subject to do something when, from the (apparent) facts, she can reason a priori to a judgment that she has reason to do that thing, where that judgment might be expressed simply in her *doing* that thing (in response to the (apparent) facts). Difficulties exist, of course, concerning what it is for a subject to take herself to have a reason, and to respond to that reason, but these are difficulties for everyone.

<sup>29</sup> There might be other factors that influence how rational it is for a subject to perform some act, e.g., whether and to what extent so acting would satisfy her preferences, or perhaps also how strong those preferences are (assuming, perhaps, that those prefer-



Despite its appeal, one might be concerned that the account is circular. One knows that  $p$ , a priori or otherwise, only if one rationally believes that  $p$ . Since the notion of rationality figures implicitly on its right-hand side, one cannot use (E) to provide a reductive account of rationality.

If that is right, it is not clear there is a problem. As stated earlier, the ambition is not (or need be) to provide a reductive account of rationality. That said, I am not sure it is right. No doubt knowledge *entails* rational belief but that does not show that the notion of rational belief is *explanatorily prior* to that of knowledge; the converse might be the case.<sup>30</sup> Compare: that being an unmarried man entails being a bachelor does not show that one cannot explain what bachelorhood is without circularity by appeal to gender and marital status. So, it remains to be shown that the appeal to a priority introduces any circularity into the account.<sup>31</sup>

A rather different concern is that I have not added to (E) the restriction that the beliefs that contribute to determining a subject's perspective must be consistent. Suppose I believe that it is raining and that it is not. Does it not follow from (E) that I have subjective reason to do anything, and hence from (R) that it is rational to do so, since it is a priori that anything follows from a contradiction?

Recall the constraint that the beliefs that determine the perspective be *rational*. It is not rational to believe a blatant contradiction; after all, it is a priori that both beliefs cannot be true. Though I have not here attempted to provide an account of rational belief, it is plausible that it is not rational to believe something that one can (easily) rule out a priori. So, given the above constraint, (E) does not deliver the verdict that, in the above case, I have subjective reason to do everything. This marks a significant difference between the case presently under consideration and those involving mistaken-identity beliefs. The latter might be rational, since one cannot know a priori that a mistake has been made.

This is not to deny that it can be rational for a subject to hold inconsistent beliefs.<sup>32</sup> It can be rational, so long as the subject cannot tell a priori that they are inconsistent. If a subject (like Pierre above) cannot know a priori that her beliefs are inconsistent, she cannot know a priori that, if the facts are as they appear, she has objective reason to do everything and anything. Hence, in cases where it is rational for a subject to hold inconsistent beliefs, (E) does not deliver the verdict that she has subjective reason to do everything and anything.

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ences are rational). Except to note that this suggestion is consistent with the view I advance, I will not discuss it further here – there is enough to be getting on with.

<sup>30</sup> This is one of the lessons of Williamson (2000).

<sup>31</sup> Another worry one might have is the appeal to the a priori. Some philosophers are suspicious of the very idea that there are things one might know a priori. This is not the place to attempt an explication and defense of that idea. For present purposes, I will take it for granted and consider less radical objections.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. n. 21, above.

## 7. The Three-Envelope Case

In this penultimate section, I consider how the account of subjective reasons I recommend bears on a kind of case widely discussed in the literature. A constraint on a theory of subjective reasons is that it deliver the right verdict concerning such cases. Consider:

Wynn has the opportunity to choose one of three envelopes set in front of her. Whatever it contains, she will be able to keep, and she will not get what is in the other two envelopes. She believes that [envelope<sub>1</sub>] contains 200 dollars, that one of the other envelopes contains [300] dollars, and that the other contains nothing. And she considers it equally likely that the 300 dollars are in [envelope<sub>2</sub>] as in [envelope<sub>3</sub>] (Schroeder 2009: 243, my labeling).<sup>33</sup>

Wynn subjectively ought to take envelope<sub>1</sub> – that is the rational (smart, sensible, etc.) thing to do. But she objectively ought to take one of the other envelopes – that is what she has most objective reason to do. This kind of case is thought to pose problems for accounts of subjective reasons along the lines of (C). Be that as it may, my account handles it easily.

It is a priori that, if there is \$200 in envelope<sub>1</sub>, that fact gives Wynn an objective reason to open it. So, given (E), she has subjective reason to do so. It is also a priori that, if there is \$300 in either envelope<sub>2</sub> or in envelope<sub>3</sub>, that fact gives Wynn an objective reason to open either envelope<sub>2</sub> or envelope<sub>3</sub>.<sup>34</sup> So, given (E), she has subjective reason to do one of these things. Plausibly, the reason to open envelope<sub>1</sub>, which the (apparent) certainty of \$200 provides, outweighs the reason to open envelope<sub>2</sub> or envelope<sub>3</sub>, which the (apparent) 50 percent chance of \$300 provides. So, Wynn has most subjective reason to open envelope<sub>1</sub>. Given (R), it is rational for her to do so.<sup>35</sup>

Note that, although it follows a priori from the facts as they appear to Wynn that there exists an objective reason to open either envelope<sub>2</sub> or envelope<sub>3</sub>, which is weightier than the objective reason not to open envelope<sub>1</sub>, none of the facts that appear from her perspective give her that reason.

So, the combination of (E) and (R) gives us the right result in the three-envelope case. To be clear, I am not claiming that one *must* appeal to the notion of a subjective reason to explain what is going on here; the claim is rather that one *can* appeal to that notion, understood in the way I recommend, in support of the verdict that the rational action for Wynn to perform is to open envelope<sub>1</sub>.

Consider, however, a variant on the case in which Wynn believes that she has most objective reason not to open envelope<sub>1</sub>. If things are as they appear, it is a fact that she has most objective reason not to open

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<sup>33</sup> Dancy (2000) and Schroeder (2009) attribute cases like this to Regan (1980). For variants, see Broome (2013: 36-39); Jackson (1991); Parfit (2011: 159-60).

<sup>34</sup> More carefully, since the relevant reasons are reasons for acting, and since an exclusive disjunction of actions is not action, the (apparent) fact gives Wynn reason to open envelope<sub>2</sub> *and* reason to open envelope<sub>3</sub>.

<sup>35</sup> This story is similar to Schroeder's (2009), though he is working with the kind of view that (C) captures.

envelope<sub>1</sub>. And, one might think, it follows a priori that *this* (deontic) fact gives her an objective reason not to open envelope<sub>1</sub>. Hence, by (E), she has subjective reason not to do so. If the weight of this subjective reason corresponds to the weight of the objective reason Wynn believes she has, then she does not have most subjective reason to open envelope<sub>1</sub> – whatever the weight of the subjective reasons she has to open envelope<sub>1</sub>, it is outweighed or matched by the subjective reason her deontic belief generates. However, since opening envelope<sub>1</sub> *is* the rational thing to do, (E) delivers the wrong verdict about the revised case.

One response to this is to deny that the weight of the subjective reason that results from Wynn's deontic belief corresponds to the weight of the objective reason Wynn believes she has. The proponent of this response owes an account of what, in that case, does determine the weight of the relevant subjective reason. One might try to account for it in terms of the weight of the subjective reason for Wynn's deontic belief. However, one then needs to explain how (subjective) epistemic reasons weigh against (subjective) practical reasons, or of how to convert, as it were, the former into the latter. Moreover, if the account is to deliver the right verdict in Wynn's case, it has to guarantee that the weight of the subjective reason that her deontic belief provides is *less than* the weight of the subjective reason she has for opening envelope<sub>1</sub>, which her non-deontic beliefs provide.

These remarks are not intended as knockdown objections to any particular proposal, but they highlight some serious difficulties. Rather than examine attempts to resolve those difficulties, I will develop an alternative response to the above line of thought, which avoids them. The view I arrive at is controversial; I advance it tentatively and in an exploratory spirit.

What one has objective reason to do is determined *only* by the non-deontic facts. This is not to deny that it can be a fact that one has reason to do something, only that this fact is itself a reason or reason-providing. Suppose Hayley asks me whether to go to the cinema this evening. If I tell her that it is half-price Wednesday, that a new Coen brothers film is showing, that her friends will be there, but that the cinema is two hours' drive, I cite some reasons for and against going. If I add that Hayley has most reason to go the cinema, or that she ought to do so, I do not cite *another* reason for going but deliver a verdict on how the reasons add up (cf. Dancy 2004: 16-17; Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: 292-93).<sup>36,37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> An alternative view is that the fact that Hayley has most reason to go the cinema *is* a reason for going, albeit one that adds no weight to that which the non-deontic facts provide. Setting aside concerns about weightless reasons, I can accept this view for present purposes. If deontic facts do not add weight to the balance of objective reasons, then apparent deontic facts do not add weight to the balance of subjective reasons, and hence do not make any difference to what it is rational to do.

<sup>37</sup> One might think that cases like the following count against this claim. If a demon offers Jean \$300 to jump when she has reason to water the plants, then the fact that she has reason to water the plants is a reason for Jean to jump. In view of this, one might make the more modest claim that the fact that one has a reason for  $\phi$ ing is never a reason for  $\phi$ ing, though it might be a reason for  $\psi$ ing. Alternatively, one might hold on to

As stressed above, subjective reasons are modeled on objective reasons. Since deontic facts do not provide objective reasons, apparent deontic facts (deontic beliefs) do not provide subjective reasons. (E) respects this point. If, as it appears to Wynn, it is a fact that she has objective reason not to open envelope<sub>1</sub>, it is not a priori that *that* fact gives her objective reason not to do so, since that fact is not reason-giving. Hence, Wynn's deontic belief in the revised case does not change the fact that it is most rational for her to open envelope<sub>1</sub>.<sup>38</sup>

So, denying that deontic beliefs generate subjective reasons, and hence that they make a difference to what it is rational to do, ensures that (E) delivers the right verdict in cases like Wynn's. That denial is not ad hoc but is independently motivated by reflection on the nature of objective reasons, which subjective reasons reflect.

This defense of (E) involves the rejection of the following principle: It is not rational, if one believes that one has most reason not to  $\phi$ , to  $\phi$ . One might think it is a serious strike against the view I propose if it involves rejecting this plausible principle.

However, *any* factulist response to the three-envelope case is going to have to reject the principle – it is precisely the point of that case that what it is rational to do is what, given the facts, the subject has most reason not to do, whether or not the subject thinks this. So, (E) does not face a special problem in this regard.

Be that as it may, further reflection on Wynn's case shows that denying the above principle is not as implausible as it might appear. First, recall that Wynn does not believe that she has *no* objective reason whatsoever to open envelope<sub>1</sub>; her belief is only that this is not what she has *most* reason to do. Second, while it appears to Wynn that she has most reason to open either envelope<sub>2</sub> or envelope<sub>3</sub>, it also appears to her that she has no way of determining which of those options she has most reason to take. If it were to appear to Wynn that she could find this out, it would no longer be most rational for her to open envelope<sub>1</sub> – it would be more rational for her to (try to) discover which envelope contains \$300. Given that it seems to Wynn that she cannot do this, it is unsurprising that securing the next best result is the rational option. Third, were Wynn to open envelope<sub>1</sub>, she might nonetheless be sorry or feel frustrated that she left the situation with less than \$300. That she takes there to have been more objective reason to open one of the remaining envelopes makes sense of such reactive attitudes. In view of this, it seems that there is

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the original claim and suggest that what gives Jean reason to jump is whatever gives her reason to water the plants (plus the offer). Though I am inclined to endorse the stronger claim, the weaker one would suffice for present purposes. The corresponding claim about subjective reasons would be that a belief about one's (objective) reason for  $\phi$ ing is never a (subjective) reason for  $\phi$ ing, though it might be a (subjective) reason for  $\psi$ ing.

<sup>38</sup> A variant on an earlier case raises a further concern. Suppose Tom believe that Martha has told him that he ought to take the pill, and that Martha is reliable. Surely that makes it rational to take the pill, and hence gives him subjective reason to do so. If that is right, a proponent of (E) might say the following. What makes it rational for Tom to take the pill is not the deontic belief, due to testimony, but the non-deontic belief that reliable Martha told him that he ought to take it.

something to be said in favor of the factualist's rejection of the claim that it is never rational to do what one believes one has most objective reason not to do.<sup>39</sup>

The aim of this section is not to offer the last word on the above issues. The view that deontic beliefs make a difference to what it is rational to do is widespread and deeply embedded in much of the recent literature. Engaging adequately with that view requires that I extend the account of subjective reasons that I have developed here to believing, since the issue concerns deontic *belief* and its link with action, and this is not the place to do that. The aim here has simply been to explain how the account as it stands copes with three-envelope cases, and to indicate one interesting, if controversial, consequence of that account.

## 8. Conclusion

What one has reason to do is determined by the facts. What it is rational to do is determined by one's perspective on the facts. In this paper, I developed an account of what it is rational to do in terms of what reasons one's perspective on the facts suggests one has. Others have advanced such accounts but go wrong in presenting the relation between the facts as they appear from a perspective and the reasons those facts provide as one of metaphysical determination; it is, rather, one of epistemic determination. This makes what it is rational to do *doubly subjective* – it depends both on a subject's perspective and on what she is able to see from it, so to speak. The account that results, (E), delivers the right verdicts.

No doubt, further issues exist concerning the account, which I have not addressed. In closing, I note two. First, one might ask, what is the *normative* force of rationality, as I have presented it? Alternatively, in what sense are subjective reasons *reasons*?

Second, in responding to a couple of objections, I touched upon issues concerning the rationality of *belief*, as opposed to action. Though I think that the little I have said about this is sufficiently clear and intuitive for present purposes, one might want to see a more worked-out account of what it is for a belief to be rational.

These are legitimate concerns and I plan to address them elsewhere. My main aim in the present paper was to introduce and motivate a novel account of what it is for an act to be rational. In a nutshell, it is rational to do something just in case it seems that there is reason to do it. That might seem hard to deny. I hope that things are as they seem.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Considerations exist independent of the issues this paper concerns that support rejecting such principles (see, for example, Arpaly 2000).

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