

## RATIONALITY, APPEARANCES, AND APPARENT FACTS

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ASCRPTIONS OF IRRATIONALITY typically constitute a form of criticism, while ascriptions of rationality are a form of praise.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, charges of irrationality involve personal criticism, in which the agent is negatively evaluated for having responded in certain ways.<sup>2</sup> It is often thought that being criticizable is evidence that one has done something one ought not to do—something one had decisive normative reasons not to do.<sup>3</sup> Assuming that this is so, the fact that charges of irrationality constitute a form of criticism suggests that there is a close connection between rationality and what we have reasons to do. This provides motivation for a normative, reasons-based account of rationality.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 Broome, “Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?” 336; Southwood, “Vindicating the Normativity of Rationality,” 12; Way, “Two Accounts of the Normativity of Rationality,” 1, and “Reasons and Rationality”; Parfit, *On What Matters*, 33; Wedgwood, “Rationality as a Virtue”; Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 38–42; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 3, 222.
- 2 Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 26–27. We can think of acts of criticizing and praising as typically expressing attitudes of blaming and crediting, respectively. However, if we do this, we should not understand these attitudes as necessarily having a moral dimension. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the evaluations associated with acts of rational criticism and praising. For discussion on the relations between blaming, evaluation, and reactive emotions, see among others Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”; Hieronymi, “The Force and Fairness of Blame”; Zimmerman, “Moral Responsibility and Quality of Will.”
- 3 Greenspan, “Asymmetrical Practical Reasons”; Lackey, “Norms of Assertion,” 594–95; Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 26–38; Madison, “On Justifications and Excuses.”
- 4 Kieseewetter offers a detailed discussion of how a normative account of rationality is motivated by the relation between criticism and ascriptions of irrationality (*The Normativity of Rationality*, ch. 2). See also Way, “Two Accounts of the Normativity of Rationality,” 1; Southwood, “Vindicating the Normativity of Rationality,” 12. Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” and Broome, “Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?” and “Is Rationality Normative?” have famously cast doubt on the idea that rationality is normative. It should be noted, however, that when Broome reaches his skeptical conclusion about the normativity of rationality, he immediately goes on to try to explain the connection between charges of irrationality and criticism (“Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?” 336, and “Is Rationality Normative?”

According to this type of account, being rational is a matter of doing what one has most normative reasons to do.<sup>5</sup>

Reasons-based accounts of rationality face, however, an immediate problem. It seems that an agent can behave rationally despite relying on false considerations (for example, in situations in which the agent is guided by convincing but ultimately misleading evidence). Yet, plausibly, only facts, and not false beliefs, can be objective normative reasons—this sort of view finds widespread support in the literature.<sup>6</sup> So, on the face of it, there are cases in which rationality does not amount to responding to factual normative reasons, but rather to merely apparent reasons. In this way, several authors have developed theories of rationality as sensitivity to those considerations that *appear* as normative reasons to the agent.<sup>7</sup> Given that merely apparent reasons have no normative force, these theories fail to make rationality a genuinely normative notion.<sup>8</sup>

Recent proposals seem to offer a way out for factualist reasons-based accounts of rationality, in the face of the challenge posed by rational actions relying on false beliefs.<sup>9</sup> The way out would be to argue that there are always factual, normative reasons to which the behavior of a rational agent is sensitive and that rationalize such behavior. In particular, in cases in which a rational agent seems to be guided by false beliefs, the reasons that rationalize her behavior would be

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177–78). This shows that, also for Broome, this connection provides *prima facie* motivation for a normative account of rationality.

- 5 Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*; Lord, “What You’re Rationally Required to Do and What You Ought to Do (Are the Same Thing!)” and *The Importance of Being Rational*.
- 6 Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*; Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*; Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*. Gibbons, “Things that Make Things Reasonable,” appeals to the connection between reasons and rationality to argue against the view that reasons are facts. In this paper, I assume a factualist conception of normative reasons, and I try to defend a conception of rationality compatible with such a conception.
- 7 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Way, “Two Accounts of the Normativity of Rationality”; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Vogelstein, “Subjective Reasons”; Whiting, “Keep Things in Perspective”; Sylvan, “What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be”; Alvarez, “Reasons for Action, Acting for Reasons, and Rationality.”

As I explain in section 6, in order for a consideration to appear as a reason to an agent, she does not need to *represent* it as such—it may be enough if the agent is in a position to *treat* the relevant consideration as a reason (Sylvan, “What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be”).

- 8 Kiesewetter, “A Dilemma for Parfit’s Conception of Normativity.”
- 9 Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*; Lord, “What You’re Rationally Required to Do and What You Ought to Do (Are the Same Thing!),” *The Importance of Being Rational*, and “Defeating the Externalist’s Demons”; see also Ichikawa, “Internalism, Factivity, and Sufficient Reason.”

constituted by facts about how things appear to her—that is, by reasons about appearances, rather than by apparent reasons.

This paper has two main goals, one critical and one constructive. The critical goal is to show that these sophisticated reasons-based accounts of rationality are still unsatisfactory, at least when combined with a factualist conception of normative reasons. The constructive goal of the paper is to argue that theories of rationality as responding to apparent reasons manage to do justice to the main intuitions seemingly supporting reasons-based accounts of rationality, in particular the connection between ascriptions of rationality and criticism and praise. The key move will be to abandon the view that being criticizable requires acting against one's reasons, while being praiseworthy involves doing what one's reasons actually recommend.

#### 1. THE REASONS-BASED ACCOUNT OF RATIONALITY

An intuitively attractive idea is that being rational is a matter of being properly sensitive to the reasons one has.<sup>10</sup> This idea leads to an account of rationality along the following lines:

*Reasons-Based Account (RB)*: A response  $\phi$  by an agent  $S$  is rational if and only if  $\phi$  is, on balance, sufficiently supported by the reasons possessed by  $S$ .<sup>11</sup>

The response  $\phi$  may be the performance of an intentional action or the adoption of some reason-sensitive attitude, such as believing or intending. Moreover, the reasons relevant for RB are normative reasons—that is, considerations that count in favor of the response in question. I will take it that such normative rea-

10 Comesaña and McGrath, "Having False Reasons," 61; Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 2, 220; Ichikawa, "Internalism, Factivity, and Sufficient Reason."

11 See Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 2, 10–11, 220. Kiesewetter (*The Normativity of Rationality*, 162) explicitly proposes principles concerning rational belief and rational intention that capture something close to the left-to-right direction of the biconditional RB, even if presented in terms of support by decisive rather than sufficient reasons (this difference will not affect the essence of the arguments below). I will consider rational responses more generally, and I will be interested in discussing whether correctly responding to reasons is both necessary and sufficient for rationality. Lord does not only endorse the biconditional RB; he goes further and defines what it is to be rational in terms of responding to reasons: "Rationality consists in correctly responding to the objective reasons one possesses" (*The Importance of Being Rational*, 220).

sons are facts. These assumptions are shared by the advocates of RB I will be concerned with.<sup>12</sup>

I will further assume that reason possession is a perspective-sensitive relation involving some form of epistemic access to the fact constituting the reason, although I will not specify whether this access amounts to knowing, being in a position to know, believing, or something else. All the defenders of RB I am going to discuss agree that only *possessed* reasons determine what is rational for an agent to do (and also what she ought to do). One way of motivating this restriction is by offering an attractive account of three envelope cases, and of structurally analogous examples such as Parfit's mine-shaft scenario or Jackson's doctor cases.<sup>13</sup> In these examples, it is rational for the agent to  $\phi$  despite her being aware that there exist facts beyond her epistemic ken that constitute decisive reasons to do something else instead. The type of view I am considering here deals with these cases easily, insofar as the relevant facts beyond the agent's epistemic ken do not figure among her possessed reasons, and thereby do not contribute to fixing what is rational for her to do.<sup>14</sup>

I will take it that the reasons possessed by an agent sufficiently support a certain response when the combined possessed reasons in favor of that response are at least as strong as the combined possessed reasons against it. Finally, if one wanted to specify what it is for an agent *S* to be rational in producing a response  $\phi$ , it would be necessary to add the further condition that *S*'s response is properly based on the sufficiently supporting possessed reasons. This condition sees to it that *S* produces her response for the reasons that rationalize producing it.

On the face of it, RB plus the standard assumption that normative reasons are facts leads to bad results in cases in which seemingly rational agents are guid-

- 12 Kiesewetter (*The Normativity of Rationality*, 6–8) agrees that normative reasons are typically facts, and argues against the thesis that normative reasons are generally mental states, although he leaves open the possibility that in certain particular cases there might be nonfactual normative reasons (e.g., perceptual seemings). Anyway, my aim is to discuss whether Kiesewetter's proposal can be made to work within the framework of a factualist conception of normative reasons.
- 13 Jackson, "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection"; Parfit, *On What Matters*; also Kolodny and MacFarlane, "Ifs and Oughts"; Kiesewetter, "Ought and the Perspective of the Agent"; Schroeder, "Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons." A further way of motivating the restriction to possessed reasons is by appeal to guidance considerations (Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 206–11; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 194–202; and, for discussion, Way and Whiting, "Perspectivism and the Argument from Guidance").
- 14 Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, ch. 8; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 188–94; Zimmerman, *Living with Uncertainty*. For a perspective-sensitive proposal in an expressivist spirit, see Schroeder, "Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons."

ed by false considerations.<sup>15</sup> There is the strong intuition that an agent can be rational despite relying on false beliefs, as long as from her point of view there appeared to be good reasons to behave as she did.<sup>16</sup> If one has extremely convincing evidence that  $p$ , then it seems rational to take  $p$  as a reason to produce a certain response, even if, unbeknownst to one, the evidence happens to be misleading and the belief that  $p$  is false. Think, for instance, of the agent who drinks from a glass of petrol, thinking that it contains gin and tonic.<sup>17</sup> More radically, it is very plausible that an agent deceived by a Cartesian demon, or a brain in a vat, can be as rational as her lucky counterpart in an ordinary environment.<sup>18</sup> In general, it seems that an agent will be rational if she takes proper heed of the considerations that, from her perspective, appear as good reasons, regardless of whether such considerations turn out not to be normative reasons after all. A deceived agent that is internally identical to her rational counterpart should also be regarded as rational (the deceived agent seems to be as blameless and as competent as her non-deceived counterpart).

Cases of deceived rational agents (I will call them “bad cases”) put pressure on RB, since in these cases the agents’ responses do not seem to be supported by normative, factual reasons and, nonetheless, they count as rational. Recent proposals by Kiesewetter and Lord suggest a reply to this problem on behalf of RB.<sup>19</sup> I will call this reply the *appearance reasons* view of rationality. According to this view, whenever an agent behaves rationally, there will be factual, normative

15 Probabilistic reasoning can also be seen to be problematic for factualist versions of RB. On the face of it, rational responses are often based on probabilistic considerations (e.g., given that it is likely to rain, it is rational for me to bring an umbrella). However, some may doubt that there are facts that correspond to these probabilistic rationalizers. (This problem is pressed by Wodak, “Can Objectivists Account for Subjective Reasons?”) Although I do not have space to go into details here, I think that (factualist) RB can overcome this worry. One option is to think of the relevant probabilistic rationalizers as facts about probabilities on the agent’s evidence (e.g., the fact that my evidence makes it likely that it will rain). Otherwise, one can resort to expressivist understandings of probabilistic facts (as recently proposed by Schroeder, “Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons”). Moreover, I think that it is plausible that such probabilistic facts constitute normative reasons counting in favor or against responses. (See Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 177–78.) For instance, the fact that rain is likely on my evidence makes it risky for me not to take an umbrella, and arguably being risky detracts from the choice-worthiness of an option. Anyway, I will focus here on the problem posed to RB by rational behavior based on false beliefs, and I will leave aside the discussion of probabilistic rationalizers.

16 I will consider that how things appear from the agent’s perspective is characterized by her nonfactive mental states, including non-doxastic seemings.

17 Williams, “Internal and External Reasons.”

18 Cohen, “Justification and Truth.”

19 Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational* and “De-

reasons that rationalize her behavior. In the bad cases in which the agent relies on false beliefs, the facts that make her response rational will be, in general, facts about appearances—the fact that things appear to be to the agent as she believes them to be, or more broadly, facts that appear to support the agent's belief.<sup>20</sup> On this view, if  $p$  is a reason for a response in a good case, then the fact that it appears to the agent that  $p$  is a reason in the corresponding bad case. Thus, the central thesis of the appearance reasons view is that appearance facts can be normative reasons for the agent's response: such facts count in favor of the response; they recommend it.<sup>21</sup>

*Appearance Reasons View:* If  $p$  is a reason to  $\phi$  possessed by an agent  $S$ , then the fact that it appears that  $p$  is a reason to  $\phi$  possessed by an agent  $S^*$  in a situation subjectively indistinguishable from that of  $S$ .

So, in the case of the glass with petrol, the fact that the glass appears to contain gin and tonic (the agent is in a bar and has ordered a gin and tonic) is a normative reason for the agent to drink from it, given that she is thirsty and fancies a gin and tonic.<sup>22</sup>

At this juncture, one may ask whether appearance reasons in the bad case are as strong as the reasons given by the appeared fact  $p$  in the good case. Kieseewetter thinks that they are, whereas Lord takes them to be weaker. These answers lead to different versions of the appearance reasons view of rationality. I will argue that both versions of the view are problematic.

## 2. DO WEAKER APPEARANCE REASONS RATIONALIZE?

Let us examine first views that assume that in bad cases the reasons favoring the

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feating the Externalist's Demons." See also Ichikawa, "Internalism, Factivity, and Sufficient Reason."

20 Kieseewetter claims more generally that in bad cases appearances provide normative reasons, leaving open whether these reasons are constituted by the appearance state or by facts about appearances (*The Normativity of Rationality*, 174). I will interpret his proposal in the latter way, since I am interested in evaluating whether his account of rationality can be satisfactorily combined with a factalist conception of normative reasons.

21 Lord, "What You're Rationally Required to Do and What You Ought to Do (Are the Same Thing!)" and *The Importance of Being Rational*, 190–93.

22 Lord does not claim that agents have occurrent beliefs about facts about how things appear to them, but only that agents can be said to have such beliefs tacitly (*The Importance of Being Rational*, 191–92). According to Lord, this is enough for the agent to count as possessing, in the relevant sense, the reasons constituted by appearance facts. I will not press Lord on these issues.

response (call them *pro-reasons*) are weaker than in good cases. This assumption seems plausible. After all, these reasons are constituted by facts about appearances that *p* (where *p* is a reason in favor of the response), rather than by the fact that *p*, and, on the face of it, if these appearance facts give reasons for the response, it is only to the extent that they reliably indicate that *p* is the case.<sup>23</sup> I further discuss this issue in section 3; for the time being I will just grant that the assumption is right.

Lord concedes that appearance reasons are weaker than the reasons that would be given by the appeared facts. However, he suggests that, on balance, the reasons possessed by the agent in a bad case support her response *as strongly* as in the corresponding good case, at least in an important sense.<sup>24</sup> This is so because it is not only the pro-reasons that are weaker in the bad case. According to Lord, the reasons against the response (call them *con-reasons*) will also be equally weak, since they will be constituted as well by facts about appearances.<sup>25</sup> So on the view advanced by Lord, in bad cases the weights of the pro-reasons and the con-reasons are weakened by the same measure. As a result, the agent's response in a bad case will be as rational (i.e., as strongly supported, on balance, by possessed reasons) as in the corresponding good case. In this way, the agent's response in the bad case is as rational as her lucky counterpart's in the good case.

Lord's proposal is problematic in hybrid bad cases in which the pro-reasons are appearance facts but the con-reasons are the same as in the good case (and therefore are as weighty as in the good case). It may well be that, in a hybrid case, only the agent's pro-reasons are downgraded to appearance reasons due to the deceiving environment, while the con-reasons are left untouched.<sup>26</sup> Think of a situation in which the agent suffers visual illusions but her hearing remains reliable. If the agent's pro-reasons are acquired visually but the con-reasons are

23 See Comesaña and McGrath, "Having False Reasons."

24 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 193–98.

25 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 195.

26 Comesaña and McGrath present this sort of argument against the view that possessed reasons are facts about mental states ("Having False Reasons"). These hybrid scenarios are also discussed by Littlejohn ("Being More Realistic about Reasons") and Dutant ("Knowledge-First Evidentialism about Rationality"). Dutant argues that hybrid cases are problematic for a knowledge-first approach in which the only input to rational decision-making processes is the agent's knowledge, including knowledge about appearance facts. Dutant proposes instead that the input to decision-making is given by *what is supported* by the agent's knowledge (where the considerations supported for an agent in a bad case are a counterpart of what the agent in the corresponding good case knows). I take Dutant's positive proposal to be a knowledge-first version of apparent reasons accounts of rationality—note that what is supported may include false considerations. In the second part of the paper I explain why responses to apparent reasons (to what is supported) are linked to criticism and praise.

acquired via her hearing, then it seems that the pro-reasons but not the con-reasons will lose weight. Consequently, the weight of the agent's possessed reasons, on balance, will be different than in the corresponding good case (where her vision is also reliable).

Lord acknowledges that, in these hybrid scenarios, in which deception affects only the pro-reasons but not the con-reasons, his account does not predict that the agent in the bad case is as rational as her lucky counterpart in the good case.<sup>27</sup> However, Lord does not seem to recognize the undermining consequences that these cases have for his proposal. He claims that the agent's response in these hybrid cases is still rational, even if less defensible than the corresponding response of her counterpart in the good case—in the sense that, on balance, the reasons to produce the response are less strong in the hybrid case.<sup>28</sup> But, contrary to what Lord seems to think, there is no guarantee that, according to his account, the agent's action will continue to count as rational in the hybrid case. Indeed, it could be that, in the hybrid case, the con-reasons (shared with the good case) actually outweigh the downgraded appearance pro-reasons, so that producing the response stops being supported by sufficient reasons and therefore, according to RB, stops counting as rational.

The problem, thus, is not just that RB fails to account for the intuition that the agent in a hybrid case is as rational as her lucky counterpart in the good case. Furthermore, there can be hybrid cases in which RB predicts that the agent's response is irrational—even after one takes into account the relevant appearance reasons. However, it seems that the agent in the hybrid case can be rational (this is the intuition that the advocates of RB were trying to accommodate). At any rate, it seems weird to say that the agent in a completely deceiving scenario is rational while the agent in a partially deceiving environment (e.g., an environment in which her visual evidence is misleading but her hearing is reliable) is not. After all, from the agent's point of view both situations are indistinguishable. I take hybrid cases to pose a decisive objection to Lord's proposal. There is not much appeal in a position that holds that a partially deceived agent is irrational whereas her counterpart's in a systematically deceiving environment is not.

### 3. ARE APPEARANCE REASONS AS STRONG AS REASONS CONSTITUTED BY APPEARED FACTS?

It seems that the only way out for the defender of RB is to endorse the following view:

27 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 199–200.

28 Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 199.

*Equal Weight*: The reason provided by the mere fact that it appears that  $p$  is, in the bad case, as strong as the reason provided by the fact that  $p$ , in the good case (at least insofar as the agent has no further reasons to suspect that  $p$  is false).<sup>29</sup>

I take this sort of view to follow naturally from factualism about reasons plus what Kieseewetter calls the Backup View:

*Backup View*: If  $A$ 's total phenomenal state supports  $p$ , and  $p$  would—if true—be an available reason for (or against) attitude  $\alpha$ , then  $A$ 's appearances provide an equally strong available reason for (or against) attitude  $\alpha$ .<sup>30</sup>

Note that the relevant backup reason cannot be constituted by the fact that, given the agent's evidence, it is likely that  $p$ . This reason is clearly weaker than the corresponding reason given by the fact that  $p$  in the good case, and therefore will lead to problems in hybrid scenarios, as discussed above.<sup>31</sup> Thus, I will take it that the sort of fact that can generally act as the agent's reason in bad cases is the fact that it appears to her that  $p$ .

I argue that Equal Weight is in tension with the core motivations for factualism about reasons. Thus, Equal Weight should be unappealing for those who want to combine an account for rationality as responding to reasons with a conception of reasons as facts that favor some response.

I take it as *prima facie* plausible that when the fact that  $p$  is a reason favoring  $\phi$ -ing, the fact that it appears to the agent that  $p$  is a reason for  $\phi$ -ing only to the extent that there is some reliable connection between the appearance and  $p$ . This idea becomes particularly natural when we note that appearance reasons are dependent on worldly reasons, in the sense that it is only because we take  $p$  to be a reason for  $\phi$ -ing that we would also be inclined to take the fact that it appears

29 Littlejohn discusses critically a similar principle, which he calls *Exchangeability*. "Exchangeability: if the fact that  $p$  constitutes a potent normative reason for  $A$  to  $f$  that has weight  $W$ , the fact that it seems to  $A$  that  $p$  constitutes a potent normative reason for  $A$  to  $f$  that also has  $W$ " ("Being More Realistic about Reasons," 10). Note that, taken literally, *Exchangeability* applies just to good cases in which the worldly fact  $p$  is a reason available to the agent. Equal Weight, by contrast, applies as well to bad cases, in which  $p$  is not a fact. I am sympathetic to most of Littlejohn's objections to Exchangeability, although the arguments I present here are in general different.

30 Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 174. See also Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism."

31 So, when deciding whether to drink from a glass of milk, one's rational behavior will be different on the assumption that the milk is not poisoned and on the assumption that it is likely that it is not poisoned.

that  $p$  as a reason for it. Below I will say more about how factualist conceptions of reasons motivate this idea, but for the moment let us assume that it is on the right track.

Now, in general the connection between the bare fact that it appears that  $p$  and the obtaining of  $p$  will not be perfectly reliable (appearances are sometimes misleading). Moreover, note that in the bad case the appearance reason cannot be bolstered by the further auxiliary consideration that the appearance is accurate or very reliable in the context the agent is in: this consideration would be false in the bad case, so it cannot be part of a normative, factual reason in favor of the response. Without the support of the assumption that appearances are reliable in the context at hand, the (evidential) probability of  $p$  given the fact that it appears that  $p$  will be generally lower than its probability given the fact that  $p$ . The difference is easier to appreciate from a third-person perspective. If you are not assuming that Jane's appearances are reliable, then you will in general assign more probability to  $p$  on the basis of your knowing that  $p$  than on the basis of the bare fact that it appears to Jane that  $p$ . In this way, we will feel more inclined to choose a response  $\phi$  that would be recommended by  $p$  if we rely on the fact that  $p$  than if we merely rely on the fact that it appears that  $p$ . This suggests that the reason in favor of  $\phi$  given by the fact that  $p$  is stronger than the reason given by the mere fact that it appears that  $p$ .<sup>32</sup>

It is true that, in the bad case, the agent will be as confident that  $p$  as her lucky counterpart who, in the good case, knows that  $p$ . But, arguably, this is so because the subject in the bad case forms such confidence on the basis of the nonfactual consideration that  $p$  (which she takes to be a fact), and not merely on the basis of *the fact that it appears to her that  $p$*  (that is, not on the basis of the consideration that it appears to her that  $p$ ). The deceived agent will mistakenly take herself to know that  $p$ , so she will see herself as being in a position to rely on the (apparent) fact that  $p$ , and accordingly she will have high confidence that  $p$ . Yet, plausibly, if she had relied merely on the fact that it appears to her that  $p$ , her confidence in  $p$  would have been lower. We do not always form beliefs on the basis of facts; sometimes we rely on appearances that turn out not to be factual. In other words, if reasons are facts about which we are fallible, then it will be possible that an agent is mistaken about what reasons she actually has. In particular, it may be that the agent's actual factual reasons to believe  $p$  are weaker than she takes them to be, so that her degree of confidence in  $p$  does not match what is actually warranted by her possessed, factual reasons.<sup>33</sup>

32 See Littlejohn, "Being More Realistic about Reasons," for considerations in a similar spirit.

33 In a similar way, Williamson insists that, if evidence is taken to be constituted by known facts, then agents may be mistaken about what evidence they have (*Knowledge and Its Limits*).

Actually, in deceiving contexts, it may well be that the connection between appearances that  $p$  and the fact that  $p$  is largely severed, so that appearances that  $p$  are extremely unreliable. In a brain-in-a-vat case, appearances never match the facts. In such scenarios, therefore, the fact that it appears to the deceived subject that  $p$  is not related at all to the obtaining of  $p$ —such an appearance fact would not actually be reliably linked with the truth of  $p$  (even if the deceived agent mistakenly thinks that it does). In this sort of radically deceiving scenario, the putative reasons provided by appearance considerations are undercut (or at least, such reasons are greatly attenuated).<sup>34</sup> This is so because, in such scenarios, the fact that it appears that  $p$  may be completely disconnected from the sort of features that contribute toward the fittingness of the response  $\phi$  (where  $\phi$  is the response that would be recommended by the fact that  $p$ ). And, arguably, some fact favors  $\phi$ -ing only if there is some suitable link between such a fact and features of  $\phi$ -ing that contribute toward its fittingness or rightness. I am not assuming that the response is always made fitting by the reason-constituting fact itself. But, at least, the reason must reliably indicate that some feature in the response contributes to its fittingness. In other words, there must be some relevant, reliable connection between the fact that constitutes the reason- and fitting-making features of the response. Otherwise, it would not be clear in what sense the putative reason actually favors the response.<sup>35</sup>

Assume, for instance, that the fact that this glass contains gin and tonic is a reason for Theresa to drink from it because it will quench her thirst—and this makes (or at least contributes to making) drinking from the glass a fitting thing to do. In other words, quenching Theresa's thirst is the feature of drinking from the glass that favors doing so. In a radically deceiving scenario, the fact that it appears that the glass contains gin and tonic does not count at all in favor of drinking from it, since such an appearance fact is disconnected from the proper-

34 For the notion of reason attenuation, see Dancy, *Ethics without Principles*, and Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*.

35 I remain neutral about whether the favoring relation can be accounted for in terms of the notions of fittingness or rightness, perhaps in combination with other notions such as evidence or explanation (Schroeder and Schroeder, "Reasons as Right-Makers"; Chappell, "Fittingness"; McHugh and Way, "Fittingness First"; Whiting, "Right in Some Respects"; Howard, "The Fundamentality of Fit"), or whether favoring is instead a primitive normative relation that explains which attitudes are fitting (for instance, Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*; Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Parfit, *On What Matters*). I am only assuming that there is some connection between reasons and fittingness, without taking a stand on their relative primacy. I will use interchangeably terms like "fitting," "right," "appropriate," and "recommendable." Although there may be differences of detail in the usage of these terms, I take it that they all point toward the sort of notion I am interested in. For further discussion, see McHugh and Way, "Fittingness First."

ties that would make drinking from the glass fitting (i.e., the property of quenching thirst). In other words, in radically deceiving contexts the putative reasons provided by appearance considerations are weakened or even undercut, because the favoring relation connecting them with the relevant response becomes undermined.

If one wants to insist that radically deceiving appearance facts provide non-attenuated (normative) reasons for the relevant responses, one would have to postulate that, whenever a fact  $p$  favors the response  $\phi$ , the fact that it appears that  $p$  also favors that response with the same intensity—even in deceiving contexts in which appearances that  $p$  are completely disconnected from the actual presence of  $p$ . While this is a possible position, I think it is not particularly attractive for those sharing the externalist intuitions associated with factualism about reasons (it would fit more naturally with an internalist view such as Huemer's).<sup>36</sup> Anyway, this discussion points toward the more general question of whether rational subjects can be reasonably mistaken in taking some fact to favor a given response. It is this more general issue that I address in the next section. I shall argue that it puts a great strain on the view that appearance facts generally provide non-attenuated reasons.

#### 4. REASONABLE MISTAKES ABOUT THE FAVORING RELATION

On the factualist approach I am considering, a normative reason is a fact that actually favors some response. In general, it seems that one can be mistaken about whether a consideration favors a given response, and about the strength of that favoring relation.<sup>37</sup> For instance, Alice may mistakenly (even if perhaps reasonably) treat the fact that there is an electrical fire in the kitchen as giving her decisive reasons to pour water on it. Nevertheless, pouring water on an electrical fire is not actually a fitting thing for Alice to do: it can be extremely dangerous. The presence of an electrical fire does not actually favor pouring water.

In the same way that one can be rational when guided by false considerations, one can also be rational when mistakenly taking some fact to favor a certain response—perhaps it reasonably appeared to the agent that there was such a favoring connection between the fact and the response. I am not assuming that in

36 Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism." Granted, it may be that Kieseewetter's proposal has additional theoretical benefits that justify abandoning the externalist views associated with factualism about reasons. My aim here is to see whether we can satisfactorily account for rationality while preserving factualism and the externalist intuitions that motivate it.

37 See Littlejohn, "The Unity of Reason."

order for it to appear to an agent that  $p$  favors  $\phi$ -ing she needs to form an explicit belief that this is so. Arguably, she just needs to treat  $p$  as favoring  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the sorts of mistakes I want to discuss are mistakes in treating  $p$  as favoring  $\phi$ -ing, which need not involve mistaken explicit beliefs about such a favoring relation.

Now, it is not clear what could be said about these cases by those who want to make rationality a matter of responding to normative reasons (i.e., by advocates of RB). Again, note that in these situations the agent is not relying on considerations that favor  $\phi$ -ing; rather, she would be relying on considerations that she *mistakenly treats as favoring*  $\phi$ -ing. But these considerations would not be real normative reasons for  $\phi$ -ing, insofar as the factualist is understanding normative reasons as facts that (actually) favor a response. Therefore, the defender of RB will not be able to say that the agent's response is made rational by such considerations. Moreover, if the fact that  $p$  does not favor  $\phi$ -ing, in general the fact that it appears that  $p$  will not favor  $\phi$ -ing either, so appealing to this further appearance fact does not seem to help.

So, if proponents of RB want to be able to say that the agent's response in the cases I am considering is rational, they seem committed to denying that an agent can be reasonably mistaken about whether some response is favored by the considerations available to her: if it reasonably appears to the agent that some consideration favors  $\phi$ -ing, then it would actually favor  $\phi$ -ing (or at least, there would be some backup consideration available to her that would actually favor  $\phi$ -ing). I find this position unappealing. I do not see why we should attribute such infallibility to our rational dispositions to treat some consideration as favoring a response. At any rate, this commitment puts a heavy burden on those defending RB.

At this point, one option is to abandon the view that normative reasons are facts that *actually* favor a response. More specifically, one could say that normative reasons are facts that *appear* to favor the response. Yet merely apparent normative support is not actual support. Moreover, once this step is taken, I see no principled reason not to go further and claim that normative reasons are considerations that *appear to be facts* that (appear to) favor the response. If the important thing is not whether the reason actually favors the response but rather whether it appears to do so, why should one demand that the reason is a fact, and not just a consideration appearing to the agent as a fact? Since I am assuming the thesis that reasons are actually facts counting in favor of a response, I will leave aside this possibility.

An alternative strategy would be to suggest that, in good cases, the subject has as one of her possessed reasons the fact that the considerations she is relying

38 Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be."

on actually favor  $\phi$ -ing. The idea would be to argue that the fact that the favoring relation obtains should be included as an additional available reason. Then, in deceiving scenarios one could replicate Lord's and Kieseewetter's strategy: in bad cases, the further reason would be provided by the fact that it *appears to the agent* that the considerations she is relying on actually favor  $\phi$ -ing.

This proposal, however, is not very promising. As I have been arguing, it is doubtful that in general a response  $\phi$  is favored by  $p$  just because of the mere fact that it appears to the agent that  $\phi$ -ing is favored by  $p$ . Perhaps the agent was reasonable in treating  $p$  as favoring  $\phi$ -ing, but this does not mean that  $\phi$ -ing was actually favored. In certain contexts, our normative judgments about the favoring relation can be widely unreliable. In this way, the presence of an electrical fire does not favor pouring water just because of the fact that it appears so to Alice. Likewise, making decisions with the guidance of tea-leaf reading does not become a fitting thing to do just because of the fact that it appears to be so in the community of Joe the Fortune Teller. At least for those of us committed to fallibilism about our epistemic capacities, it seems unmotivated to think that rational agents are always reliable about whether some response is favored by certain aspects of a situation.

Moreover, this proposal faces the charge of overintellectualizing rationality. Arguably, in order for considerations about the favoring relation to be part of one's *possessed* reasons, one needs to be able to form beliefs about such considerations. However, beliefs about the favoring relation are rather sophisticated, and it is controversial that all rational agents need to be able to form beliefs with such contents.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is problematic to require that rational agents always have among their possessed reasons considerations about the favoring relation.

A final line of resistance for the defender of RB would be to bite the bullet and maintain that in the examples I am discussing  $\phi$ -ing is not actually supported by reasons and therefore is not rational, even if it may be rational for the agent to take  $\phi$ -ing to be sufficiently supported by reasons (and, accordingly, it may also be rational for her to believe that  $\phi$ -ing is rational).<sup>40</sup> Several authors have recently argued that, when agents have misleading higher-order evidence about what attitudes are rational, there can be mismatches or incoherences between the actual rationality of first-order attitudes and the rationality of higher-order beliefs about what first-order attitudes are rational.<sup>41</sup> According to these types of views, it may be rational for agents with misleading higher-order evidence to

39 See McHugh and Way, "Against the Taking Condition."

40 I thank an anonymous referee for bringing this possibility to my attention.

41 See, for instance, Coates, "Rational Epistemic Akrasia"; Wedgwood, "Justified Inference"; Lasonen-Aarnio, "Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat"; Christensen, "Dis-

believe (falsely) that  $\phi$ -ing is rational and supported by reasons in cases where  $\phi$ -ing is actually irrational and not supported by reasons (these proposals tend to focus on doxastic attitudes, but the arguments motivating them can be generalized to other attitudes and responses).

It should be noted that it is far from uncontroversial whether this type of mismatch between rational first-order and higher-order attitudes can actually take place.<sup>42</sup> Anyway, even if there could be such rational mismatches, I do not think that proponents of RB would be in a position to appeal to them in order to provide an attractive response to the worries discussed in this section. Remember that the advocates of RB I am engaging with are interested in a notion of rationality that captures the intuitive connection between rationality and criticizability and praiseworthiness—this was the main motivation for developing a normative characterization of rationality in terms of reasons.<sup>43</sup> However, authors who defend the possibility of rational mismatches between higher-order and first-order attitudes typically concede that, when it is reasonable for the agent to believe that  $\phi$ -ing is rational, so that she is not criticizable for having such a higher-order belief, she is not criticizable for  $\phi$ -ing either, even if  $\phi$ -ing happens to be actually irrational.<sup>44</sup> In this way, criticizability and irrationality (understood in this sense) would come apart. So, proposals that allow for rational mismatches between higher-order and first-order attitudes seem to rely on an externalist notion of rationality that swings free from criticizability and praiseworthiness. This is not the notion of rationality I am concerned with in this paper, since I am working under the assumption that there is an intimate relation between rationality and criticizability.<sup>45</sup>

To sum up, the possibility of rational mistakes about the favoring relation creates problems for RB. It seems that agents can be rational not just when relying on false beliefs, but also when mistakenly taking some consideration to favor a certain response.<sup>46</sup> More generally, it is not clear why we should think that ratio-

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agreement, Drugs, etc.”; Worsnip, “The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence”; Weatherson, “Do Judgments Screen Evidence?”

42 For objections, see among others Horowitz, “Epistemic Akrasia”; Littlejohn, “Stop Making Sense?”

43 Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, ch. 2.

44 Lasonen-Aarnio, “Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat,” 343.

45 Note, moreover, that Kiesewetter (“You Ought to  $\phi$  Only if You May Believe that You Ought to  $\phi$ ”) explicitly argues that agents have decisive reasons to  $\phi$  only if they have sufficient reasons to believe that they have decisive reasons to  $\phi$ . Thus, he does not seem to be willing to allow for the kind of rational incoherence between higher-order and first-order attitudes discussed above.

46 It is worth observing that such mistakes are compatible with the view that whenever an

nal agents are always infallible about what responses are actually favored by the reasons available to them.

### 5. APPEARANCE FACTS AND JUSTIFICATION

Before moving forward, I will consider a further awkward consequence of Equal Weight. If this view were right, then subjects would be wise to cite appearance facts as their reasons when asked to justify themselves. After all, reasons constituted by appearance facts would be safer. In good cases, in which the belief that  $p$  is true, the fact that  $p$  and the fact that it appears to the subject that  $p$  would provide the subject with equally weighty reasons, so there is no loss in relying on the latter. Moreover, in a deceiving situation in which the subject falsely believes that  $p$ , the fact that it appears to her that  $p$  would still constitute a normative reason. Why should one recklessly appeal to the riskier putative reason (i.e., the consideration that  $p$ ), if there is nothing to gain from it? When two putative reasons are equally strong, it is a sound argumentative strategy to rely on the safest one (i.e., the one that is less likely to be false), in order to limit the chances of error. By doing this, one does not always implicate that the more insecure consideration is false: it is just that one does not need to run the risk of relying on it. Thus, when writing a paper, it is common to announce that, in order to defend some thesis, one is going to focus on an argument for it that involves as few unnecessary commitments as possible (even if there exist further, more controversial arguments). In this way, one avoids unnecessary exposure to objections.

Thus, according to Equal Weight, when asked about one's reasons for  $\phi$ -ing, one should cite the fact that it appears to one that  $p$ , rather than directly appealing to the (less safe) consideration that  $p$ . However, this is not how we generally proceed. In most cases, we justify ourselves by referring to those worldly considerations that support our responses, instead of appealing to facts about appearances.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps there are situations in which one is not sure enough and retreats to the fact that things appear to be in a certain way. But, precisely, these are cases in which I will be seen as recoiling to a weaker reason.<sup>48</sup> For instance,

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agent actually has reasons to  $\phi$ , she has sufficient reasons to believe that she has reasons to  $\phi$  (Kiesewetter, "You Ought to  $\phi$  Only if You May Believe that You Ought to  $\phi$ "). I am only claiming that one can be reasonably mistaken in believing that one has certain reasons to  $\phi$ . In particular, one may actually *lack* reasons to  $\phi$  despite not having sufficient reasons to believe that this is so.

47 Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*.

48 Actually, it can be argued that sometimes in such cases I will be giving an excuse rather than a justification. (See the discussion in section 6, below.)

if you ask me why I am taking an umbrella, I may reply that my reason is the fact that it is raining. If I say instead that my reason is the fact that it appears to me that it is raining, you will probably take me not to be in a position to undertake the commitments associated with citing the stronger but riskier putative reason that it is actually raining. According to Equal Weight, by contrast, appealing to appearance facts should be our justificatory policy across the board, and not just in special cases. This, I think, is a distorted picture of our practices of giving and asking for reasons. At any rate, it seems that such a picture should be unappealing for those moved by the arguments supporting the thesis that normative reasons are facts and not mental states—in particular, the argument that, when justifying ourselves, we tend to refer to external facts rather than to features of our mental states.<sup>49</sup>

To be sure, one may try to find ways to resist this line of argument. A possible option is to offer some pragmatic explanation for our tendency to appeal to worldly facts rather than to facts about appearances when justifying ourselves. For instance, it may be argued that, in most situations, our conversational aims are not only justificatory but also informative, and in general citing the fact that *p* is more informative than merely referring to the fact that it appears that *p*. It is not clear, however, that in justificatory contexts (which are often noncooperative) speakers generally have the additional goal to communicate worldly information, even at the expense of the strength of their justificatory position: it may well be that the speaker's only aim is to offer the safest justification possible for her behavior. Anyway, this sort of pragmatic explanation, if successful, would undermine the motivations for factualism about reasons, since a similar story would be available to mentalists in order to explain why speakers typically justify themselves by citing worldly facts rather than mental states.

A second option is to endorse some form of error theory and claim that ordinary speakers are usually unaware that Equal Weight holds. Again, this proposal would diminish the appeal of factualism about reasons, given that mentalists could appeal to an analogous type of error theory. Moreover, it would have the costs generally associated with error theories; in particular, it would be necessary to offer an explanation of why ordinary speakers are systematically mistaken about their justificatory practices.

49 Dancy, *Practical Reality*; Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Hornsby, "A Disjunctive Theory of Acting for Reasons"; Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*; Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 7–8. Gibbons suggests that proposals along the lines of Lord's and Kiesewetter's are mere "notational variants" of a nonfactualist, mentalist conception of normative reasons, according to which reasons are given by features of the agent's psychological states ("Things That Make Things Reasonable," 358–59).

As I see it, the considerations I have been discussing put a great deal of pressure on Equal Weight. The underlying problem is that if we admit (equally weighty) reasons given by appearance facts, then the reasons given by worldly facts become in a sense normatively superfluous: the former, on their own, would be enough to figure out what we ought to do and to justify ourselves. I take it that this conclusion will not satisfy those with sympathies for factualism about reasons. Perhaps there is some way of defending Equal Weight, but it would be *prima facie* desirable to have a satisfactory account of rationality that does not undertake its weighty commitments. I conclude the paper by showing how an account of rationality in terms of apparent reasons manages to do so, while accommodating our intuitions about the normative implications of being rational.

## 6. RATIONALITY AND APPARENT REASONS

Apparent reasons are considerations that appear as reasons to the agent, perhaps mistakenly.<sup>50</sup> A *merely apparent* reason would not actually be a reason, in the same way that a fake Picasso is not actually a Picasso (even if it may appear to be one). The contents of false beliefs can be apparent reasons for agents that take them to be true. Thus, if rationality is seen as a matter of responding to apparent reasons, we can account for the possibility of being rationally guided by false considerations.<sup>51</sup> This sort of view can be sketched as follows:

*Apparent Reasons Account (AR)*: A response  $\phi$  by an agent  $S$  is rational if and only if  $\phi$ -ing is, on balance, sufficiently supported by  $S$ 's apparent possessed reasons.

We do not need to assume that an agent must believe that  $p$  is a possessed reason for  $\phi$ -ing in order for  $p$  to appear to her as such a reason. It may be enough if the agent treats (or is in a position to treat)  $p$  as a possessed reason for  $\phi$ -ing, for instance in her reasoning and as a guide for action.<sup>52</sup> In this way,  $p$  can appear

50 Way, "Two Accounts of the Normativity of Rationality"; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Vogelstein, "Subjective Reasons"; Whiting, "Keep Things in Perspective"; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Alvarez, "Reasons for Action, Acting for Reasons, and Rationality."

51 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Way, "Two Accounts of the Normativity of Rationality"; Parfit, *On What Matters*; Vogelstein, "Subjective Reasons"; Whiting, "Keep Things in Perspective"; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be."

52 See Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Lord, *The Importance of Being Rational*, 171–75.

as a reason to agents that do not have the conceptual resources to form explicit beliefs about reasons, thereby avoiding charges of overintellectualization.

One may think that a problem with AR is that it does not capture the normative dimension of rationality.<sup>53</sup> Arguably, merely apparent reasons do not have genuine normative force. Therefore, it would not always be the case that being rational is a matter of responding to actual reasons, of doing what one ought to or may do. Although I will grant that this last claim is right, I will argue that it does not undermine AR. It is possible for defenders of AR to do justice to the considerations that seem to support a normative account of rationality.

As discussed at the beginning of the paper, I take it that the main motivation for thinking that there is something normative in rationality is that ascriptions of rationality are directly connected with criticism and praise. Thus, ascriptions of rationality have a *hypological* dimension, i.e., they have to do with blame, credit, criticizing, and praising.<sup>54</sup>

Now, it could be that hypological and deontic judgments sometimes come apart. Some views hold that the hypological and the deontic may diverge in several ways.<sup>55</sup> According to these types of views, doing something wrong or impermissible does not always make one deserve criticism. Conversely, one may think that agents can be criticizable without doing something wrong or impermissible. Similarly, it can be argued that being praiseworthy does not always go hand in hand with doing what is right or what one ought to do. If this is on the right track, then the fact that being rational is generally praiseworthy (and being irrational, criticizable) does not entail that rationality amounts to doing what there are most reasons to do. Let me present some examples that motivate the sorts of divergences between hypological and deontological appraisals that I have in mind.

Excuses provide examples of situations in which one does something wrong or inappropriate but is not criticizable for it.<sup>56</sup> Imagine that you accidentally step on someone's toe. You may excuse yourself by claiming that it was an accident. Blameless ignorance can also serve as an excuse. If you offer your friend a glass of milk that, unbeknownst to you, is poisoned, you may excuse your action by

53 Kiesewetter, "A Dilemma for Parfit's Conception of Normativity."

54 For the notion of hypological judgment, see Zimmerman, "Taking Luck Seriously"; also Littlejohn, *Justification and the Truth-Connection*.

55 See Austin, "A Plea for Excuses"; Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"; Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*; Baron, "Justifications and Excuses"; Gardner, *Offences and Defences*; Capes, "Blameworthiness without Wrongdoing"; Littlejohn, *Justification and the Truth-Connection*, "The Unity of Reason," and "A Plea for Epistemic Excuses"; Srinivasan, "Normativity without Cartesian Privilege"; Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*.

56 Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*; Gardner, *Offences and Defences*; Littlejohn, "A Plea for Epistemic Excuses."

claiming that you had no way of knowing that the milk was unsafe. In these sorts of cases, by giving an excuse you try to exonerate yourself from blame, while acknowledging what you did is not something that should be done (you are not trying to justify yourself, to claim that you actually had reasons to do what you did).

There are also cases in which the behavior of agents that fail to do what is right seems to be praiseworthy, not merely excusable. More generally, one's performance can be praiseworthy despite not achieving its fitting aim. As long as one behaves competently and does what is in one's power to act appropriately, one can be worthy of praise, regardless of the ultimate success of one's performance. Think of the archer who performs masterfully a difficult shot, but who fails to hit the mark due to the unforeseeable, last moment interference of a hidden magnet. Surely this archer deserves praise, given the skills she has revealed.

Promise-keeping offers another example. An agent who goes far beyond what most people would in order to honor her promise may be praiseworthy as a promise-keeper, despite failing to do as promised. This can be seen as a situation in which an agent is praiseworthy while failing to do what she ought to. By contrast, it can happen that an agent who fulfils her promise merely out of luck is criticizable as a poor promise-keeper if she showed no care for her promise and made no effort whatsoever to keep it. This reckless promise-keeper would be criticizable despite having done what she had most reasons to do. More generally, agents may be criticizable for doing something that is actually permissible (i.e., it is sufficiently supported by the reasons available to the agent) if they do it for the wrong reasons—analogously, an archer may hit the target out of luck despite shooting in an incompetent way that deserves criticism.

The examples I have examined only illustrate some relevant ways in which deontological and hypological statuses may come apart, without covering all possible combinations of such statuses.<sup>57</sup> I do not intend these examples to offer decisive evidence for the view I want to consider but rather to motivate it. To be sure, one could always try to interpret some of the examples as cases in which the agent fails to do what is right to do, but nevertheless is praiseworthy for something else she has done (e.g., the agent was praiseworthy for doing her best to keep her promise). Ultimately, one could retreat to arguing that agents have reasons to *try* to do what they ought to do, or more generally to do their best to pursue their fitting aims. However, I take it that these examples can also be naturally interpreted as revealing a divergence between deontological and hy-

57 For instance, one could also imagine an agent who does what she ought to do for the wrong reasons, but who is nonetheless non-criticizable (maybe even praiseworthy) because such reasons appeared to her as sufficiently good.

pological appraisals of the agent's behavior: they would be cases in which agents are praiseworthy for doing something that was actually not right, or in which agents are criticizable for doing something that was the right thing to do. More to the point, this interpretation of the cases would suggest that agents may be praiseworthy while failing to do what they had most reasons to do, and criticizable despite doing what they had most reasons to do. In what follows, I sketch a plausible theoretical framework that makes this interpretation attractive and explains why agents are worthy of praise or criticism in these types of cases. This framework allows for an account of rationality as responding to apparent reasons that does justice to our practices of rational criticism and praise while avoiding the difficulties and problematic commitments of RB.

The ideas I want to explore can be perspicuously expressed from the perspective of virtue theory.<sup>58</sup> Appealing to virtue-theoretical language, praise and criticism could be said to be primarily related to evaluations of the agent's *competence*, rather to evaluations of the success or aptness of her performance (where an apt performance is a performance that is successful or correct due to the exercise of the agent's competence). Competences are a type of reliable disposition to perform well or fittingly, at least in favorable circumstances.<sup>59</sup> No matter how competently an agent behaves, it can always happen that she is unlucky and, due to external interferences and factors out of her control, her performance turns out not to be successful (it fails to achieve its aim). So, someone extremely careful may (blamelessly) end up doing something actually dangerous, despite behaving in a way that manifests a careful disposition. In these cases, the agent's display of competence can still be praiseworthy, as the example of the archer shows.

We can follow Sylvan in thinking of guidance by reasons from such a virtue-theoretical perspective.<sup>60</sup> Rational agents aim to be guided by normative reasons, so that they produce fitting responses. Behaving rationally would

58 See Sosa, "How Competence Matters in Epistemology" and *Judgment and Agency*; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Boulton, "Epistemic Normativity and the Justification-Excuse Distinction"; Miracchi, "Competent Perspectives and the New Evil Demon Problem."

59 Sosa, "How Competence Matters in Epistemology" and *Judgment and Agency*; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be." Kelp regards competences as aim-directed dispositions characterized by their etiology, in particular by the selective conditions under which they are formed or sustained ("How to Be a Reliabilist"). By contrast, Sosa takes the notion of competence to be a normative primitive (*Judgment and Agency*, 195–206). We could also conceive of competences as the sorts of dispositions displayed by virtuous agents. For instance, competences could be seen as those dispositions shared with an internally indistinguishable virtuous agent who succeeds in behaving aptly.

60 Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be." See also Boulton, "Epistemic Normativity and the Justification-Excuse Distinction."

amount to behaving in a way that reveals one's competence in responding only to reasons. Competent agents, however, will not always succeed in answering only to normative reasons. A response that is not actually supported by the agent's possessed reasons may still display the agent's (fallible) competence in being guided only by normative reasons. For instance, in deceiving scenarios, the most competent reasoner may end up relying on considerations that are not actually normative reasons for her response. Nonetheless, this does not need to be seen as tarnishing her rational competence.<sup>61</sup> If by relying on such considerations the agent displays her competence in responding to reasons, she may be praiseworthy. Competently responding to one's possessed reasons is in general something praiseworthy, insofar as exercising such a competence demonstrates one's sensitivity to the fitting-making features of one's choices. It could be said the manifestation of this competence reveals a virtuous character trait.<sup>62</sup> Another way of putting it is to say that exercising this competence reflects positively on one's quality of will or mind.<sup>63</sup>

Identifying rationality with mere blamelessness is problematic because being rational is a positive status, rather than just an exculpatory one.<sup>64</sup> However, as we have seen, manifestations of competences aiming at fitting targets deserve positive appraisals, not just exculpatory ones. Arguably, there is derivative (albeit noninstrumental) value in properly valuing and respecting something that is itself valuable.<sup>65</sup> Manifesting competence in being guided only by reasons is a way of showing proper concern for the fitting-making features of one's responses. So, if fitting responses are valuable, then the manifestation of rational dispositions will (derivatively) deserve positive evaluations.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, behaviors that involve a poor exercise of one's competence as a follower of reasons may be subject to criticism, to the extent that such behaviors show a lack of concern for

61 See Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Boulton, "Epistemic Normativity and the Justification-Excuse Distinction"; Littlejohn, "A Plea for Epistemic Excuses."

62 Svavarsdóttir, "Evaluations of Rationality"; Wedgwood, "Rationality as a Virtue"; Boulton, "Epistemic Normativity and the Justification-Excuse Distinction."

63 Littlejohn, "The Unity of Reason." For the relation between criticism and the quality of will, see Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"; Hieronymi, "The Force and Fairness of Blame"; Zimmerman, "Moral Responsibility and Quality of Will."

64 Baron, "Justifications and Excuses"; Gerken, "Warrant and Action"; Boulton, "Epistemic Normativity and the Justification-Excuse Distinction"; Littlejohn, "A Plea for Epistemic Excuses"; Madison, "On Justifications and Excuses."

65 Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*; Sylvan, "Veritism Unswamped."

66 Miracchi, "Competent Perspectives and the New Evil Demon Problem"; Sylvan, "Veritism Unswamped."

what is fitting. It is important to note that an agent can engage in such criticizable behaviors without stopping to be responsible for the exercise of her rational faculties (that is, without being excluded from the realm of rational beings). In the same way, an agent that breaks a promise in a criticizable way may keep having promise-keeping capacities, even if she exercises them poorly in relation to that particular promise. Thus, the idea is not that the agent is criticizable for lacking some virtuous trait, but rather that she is criticizable for failing to manifest a competence she possesses and is in a position to exercise (say, the failure may be due to the interference of some vicious disposition that reflects lack of concern for the fitting-making features of one's choices).<sup>67</sup>

Thus, if AR is spelled out in terms of competences, the picture we get is that rational responses manifest the agent's competence in being guided only by reasons, a competence that involves being sensitive to those considerations that appear to one as possessed reasons.<sup>68</sup> One way to go here is to offer an independent analysis of what apparent reasons are, and then appeal to it in order to further illuminate the notion of rational competence. To a first approximation, an apparent reason could be seen as a consideration believed by the agent and that would be a normative reason if things were as the agent takes them to be.<sup>69</sup> This approach, however, is problematic in cases in which the agent has crazy beliefs that go wildly against the evidence available. One may want to say that such an agent is irrational, even if she behaves as would be rational if things were as she takes them to be.<sup>70</sup> Whiting avoids this problem by requiring that the relevant

67 When the agent lacks the relevant competence, her responses are not rational or irrational but rather arational (e.g., compulsive behaviors). Kieseewetter (*The Normativity of Rationality*, 37–38) discusses cases in which an agent who lacks some virtuous trait is not criticizable for failing to do what a virtuous person in her position would do (for instance because she knows that doing so would trigger an uncontrollable response with undesirable consequences). These cases, however, are not problematic for the competence-based approach I am sketching. Insofar as the agent in such cases is not in a position to manifest the relevant competences, she is not criticizable for failing to do so. To be sure, the agent is perhaps criticizable for not having cultivated the sort of faculty that would have conferred her rational control over those responses, or for not avoiding situations in which such responses are to be produced. In general, I think that the competence-based view I am presenting avoids Kieseewetter's objections to virtue-theoretical accounts of criticizability and rationality, although I do not have space to develop this issue in detail here.

68 Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be."

69 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; Parfit, *On What Matters*. For more sophisticated accounts, see Vogelstein, "Subjective Reasons"; Whiting, "Keep Things in Perspective." This type of account of apparent reasons in terms of normative reasons has been recently criticized by Wodak, "Can Objectivists Account for Subjective Reasons?" For a possible reply to some of these worries, see Schroeder, "Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons."

70 For this line of criticism, see Kieseewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality*, 31–33.

beliefs are themselves rational (of course, this makes the view unsatisfactory as a reductive account of rationality, but this is not Whiting's goal).<sup>71</sup>

An alternative strategy is to characterize the idea of apparent reason in terms of the notion of competence, which would be taken as more basic. On Sylvan's view, some consideration is an apparent reason for an agent if she is in a position to competently treat it as a reason.<sup>72</sup> In turn, competence in treating considerations as reasons can be understood as a reliable disposition to be guided only by normative reasons, or by reference to the way in which some virtuous or ideal agent would be disposed to respond.<sup>73</sup> An agent that recklessly holds the belief that *p* against all available evidence will not be competently treating *p* as a reason (her holding that belief would manifest a very unreliable disposition to be guided only by reasons), so *p* would not be among her apparent reasons and would not make the agent's behavior rational. Indeed, insofar as the agent is in a position to treat competently her available evidence as providing reasons for some response, such evidence would be included among the agent's apparent reasons (even if she happens to disregard it). Thus, this approach is not affected by the problem mentioned in the previous paragraph.

I will not commit myself to any specific understanding of the notions of apparent reasons and competence. For my purposes here, it is enough that these notions make room for the distinction between being praiseworthy and doing what one has most reasons to do. More specifically, the framework I have sketched allows for the possibility of inappropriate responses that are not only blameless, but perhaps also deserve praise. In this way, one can capture the intuition that "rational" is used as a term of praise, without having to assume that being rational is a matter of conforming to one's reasons.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Let us take stock. Ascriptions of rationality typically involve a form of praise (and attribution of irrationality a form of criticism). This seems to motivate a normative account of rationality, according to which behaving rationally is something one has reasons to do. This account, however, is problematic. In particular, when combined with a factualist theory of reasons, it has difficulties with cases in which rational agents are guided by false considerations.

In the last section, I have suggested that we do not need such reasons-based

<sup>71</sup> Whiting, "Keep Things in Perspective," 6–7.

<sup>72</sup> Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be."

<sup>73</sup> See Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Williamson, "Justifications, Excuses, and Sceptical Scenarios."

accounts of rationality in order to explain the connection between ascriptions of rationality and praising and criticizing. One may deserve praise as a follower of reasons in doing something there was actually no good reasons to do, as long as one's performance manifests one's competence in responding to reasons. Relying on this idea, I have recommended a view of rationality according to which there is no reason to be rational, but you are rational if you try competently to follow your reasons. You are rational when you do your best to do what you ought to do.<sup>74</sup>

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