SYNTHESIS

Journal for Philosophy

ISSUE 4

This page intentionally left blank

SYNTHESIS
Journal for Philosophy

4

Having Experience in View

On the Conceptual and Non-Conceptual Conditions for Viewing the World

Edited by
Anselmo Aportone, Erminia Di Iulio
& Pierluigi D'Agostino

December 2024
ISSN: 2785-3942

List of contributions

Frank Hofmann
(Université du Luxembourg)

Rationality and Reflection

Abstract: The paper discusses considerations that bear on the claim that rationality requires reflection, i.e., self-conscious higher-order mental states that represent the normative status of one's first-order attitudes. Rationality is the capacity to properly respond to normative reasons. The traditional 'reflexionist' view – paradigmatically held by John McDowell – makes (potential) reflection a necessary condition of rationality. Critical examination of this view leads to a rejection, however. Not only would animals and small children be excluded from rationality. It would also make rationality too demanding for mature human beings with ordinary capacities. Apart from some further difficulties, the main problem is exposed in a new argument – the 'argument from entanglement' – which turns on the epistemic dependence of conscious reasoning on unconscious reasoning. A two-layered view of rationality is sketched as an alternative. Interestingly, the link between rationality and reasons can be preserved. It is only the demand for reflection which is problematic. Reflection can still play an important role, even if it is not a necessary ingredient in rationality.

Keywords: Rationality; Reasoning; Reflection; Self-Consciousness; Epistemic Dependence

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to take a closer look at an important traditional epistemological claim, namely, the claim that *rationality requires reflection*. It requires some care to fully characterize this doctrine. This will be done in the next section. As a first approximation, we can say that 'reflection' means a higher-order mental state that self-consciously represents the normative status of one's own first-order attitude of believing or intending something. And 'rationality' means properly responding to normative reasons. (We will not be concerned with so-called structural rationality, i.e., coherence

requirements.) So the traditional view under investigation has it that one can only hold an attitude in response to (normative) reasons if one is capable of self-consciously reflecting on the normative status of this attitude. In nuce, one must be capable of recognizing one's reasons as reasons, as John McDowell - who will be taken as the paradigm contemporary proponent of the traditional view here - puts it. If a subject holds an attitude for a reason, she is capable of recognizing her reason as a reason. The reflective requirement that the traditional view imposes on rationality is a requirement of knowledge about one's reasons. Just to further clarify the notion of a reason: throughout this paper, 'reasons' will always be *normative* reasons, not motivating reasons or explanatory reasons. This does not restrict the traditional view in any problematic way since, after all, the traditional view is strongly influenced by Wilfrid Sellars, and his idea of the 'space of reasons' is of course meant to concern normative reasons, not mere motivations or explanations. The things that determine the normative standing of belief or action are at stake. It should be noted that pieces of evidence can very well be seen as normative reasons in this sense (in the theoretical domain.)[1]

This claim is often combined with other (more or less) traditional views, such as the rejection of non-conceptual representational contents and/or states, or the idea that there is a significant amount of apriori knowledge.[2] But it need not be combined with any of these views. It is an interesting claim in itself. Thinking of rationality (responding to reasons) as something that requires an awareness of reasons as reasons is quite natural and initially plausible. For how could one properly respond to a normative reason without being able to identify it as a reason? It is surely

[1] I have argued elsewhere – in Hofmann (2021) – that pieces of evidence are normative reasons. I see no reason why a traditionalist like McDowell should disagree with this point.

[2] There are further claims in the vicinity that might be part of a traditional cluster of epistemological claims. The idea of rational causation might be part of it, and also the idea of our being responsible for our attitudes. Strictly speaking, then, the paper can be taken as focusing on some central claims of McDowell's view, leaving it somewhat open who else might subscribe to these or sufficiently similar claims.

a reasonable thought to suppose that there is a necessary connection between properly responding to reasons and some self-conscious reflection on one's reasons.[3] The main goal of this paper is to argue that, on reflection, the view is untenable. There must be a way of properly responding to reasons that does not require (the ability of) reflection on one's own reasons. If this is right, we can open the door to acknowledging that, in principle at least, non-human animals are also capable of rationality even if they lack a reflective perspective on their reasons. The traditional view, in contrast, would have to deny any such rationality in non-human animals. Here it becomes clear that the view under investigation has important consequences as to how we conceive of ourselves in relation to other animals. Not the smallest significance.

As I characterized the claim above, it has to do with reflection on the normative status of one's own first-order attitudes (beliefs and intentions, most importantly). A background assumption here is that the normative status of justification is the relevant one, and that reasons and justification are intimately linked to each other. We can state this assumption as follows:

(RJ) The *reasons-justification link*: justification and normative reasons are constitutively linked; justification is grounded in (or constitutively explained by) rationality understood as properly responding to normative reasons.

In effect, the reasons-justification link identifies rationality and justification. A justified attitude is one which is formed or sustained by properly responding to the normative reasons one has. Therefore, to

[3] As already mentioned, John McDowell will be my main proponent of the traditional view. Among the works that I have in mind are McDowell (2011, 2009), and, in particular (2006). While it may not be easy to pin down exactly who else is subscribing to it, there are very good candidates: Matthew Boyle, Andrea Kern, Eric Marcus, Ram Neta, Ernest Sosa (in a qualified sense, at least), for example. For lack of space I will refrain from providing extensive quotes and will not go into (difficult) exegetical questions.

assess one's own first-order attitudes as to their normative status – i.e., justification – amounts to assessing whether these attitudes are proper responses to normative reasons. This makes it possible to state things in the way McDowell does: one must be capable of reflecting on one's normative reasons and of recognizing these reasons as reasons.

I will not question the reasons-justification link. Quite the contrary, I will assume that it is correct. I think it is very plausible and not much in need of independent argument.[4] What I will put into doubt is the reflective requirement. The connection between reasons and justification can be accepted, but not the reflective requirement. This requirement can be put as follows:

(U1) Properly responding to normative reasons requires the presence of self-conscious reflection.

And the way in which self-conscious reflection is supposed to be present can be stated as follows:

(U2) Self-conscious reflection on one's own reasons is the role in which selfconscious reflection is necessary for rationality.

Taken together we get:

(U3) Properly responding to normative reasons requires self-conscious reflection on one's own reasons.

This means that *all* justified attitudes involve self-conscious thinking of some consideration as one's normative reason for the attitude. Together, (U1) – (U3) make up the '*reflective unity thesis*', as we can call it.

[4] Since there are several concepts of justification, it is rather a matter of focusing on one of them – justification as well-foundedness (being held for a normative reasons). It is fairly obvious that this normative status is very important, I take it.

And let us call the proponents of (U1) – (U3) '*reflexionists*'. (Soon we will see that this self-conscious thinking could be actual or merely potential.)

An alternative to the unity view is a *two-layered view* of rationality. This view accepts the reasons-justification link. And it holds that rational responses come in two forms, a reflective and a non-reflective form. Only *sometimes* do we (self-consciously) reflect on our reasons; at other times we treat some consideration as a reason without any (potential or actual) reflection on its status as a reason. Arguably, the non-reflective form is the more basic, more ordinary case. We perceive some facts (states of affairs), and on that basis we treat these facts as reasons for taking an umbrella, deciding to go to the grocery store, or believing that the neighbor is at home, for example. We do not have to recognize – and often we do not recognize – that these facts are reasons for these actions and attitudes. Nevertheless we treat them as reasons for these responses, and we form rational attitudes on their basis. As long as these facts *are* reasons for these responses, and we are aware of them, we can properly respond to them in a *non*-reflective way. As we will see, to demand that we always be in a position to recognize that these facts are reasons is too much to ask for.

Here is the plan for the rest of the paper. I will argue against the unity view and for the two-layered view. Section 2 will prepare the ground by providing suitable conceptual clarifications. In section 3, I will present some preliminary considerations that point at potential difficulties of the reflexionist view. These arguments, however, will not yet amount to a serious counterargument. The real argument against reflexionism will be presented in section 4. This will be the 'argument from entanglement', which turns on the epistemic dependence of conscious reasoning on unconscious inference. Section 5 will consider a possible solution for the reflexionist, but it will also argue that this way out is not tenable. Section 6, finally, will provide a short sketch of the alternative view, the two-layered view of rationality. It will contain a brief discussion of which role can remain for reflective awareness within the two-layered view.

2. Clarifications

Let us now clarify the relevant concepts in more detail. A natural starting point is the distinction between those mental states or attitudes that are *reasons-susceptible* and those that are not. Beliefs, desires, and intentions are the paradigms of reasons-susceptible states. They are states for which there can be normative reasons, and they can be held or sustained for such normative reasons. Correspondingly, they can be evaluated as to their rationality. (Due to the intimate relation between intention and intentional action, action can also be taken to be included, though it is of course not a state.) If these attitudes are properly formed on the basis of normative reasons, they are rational; otherwise they are not rational. This is why Ram Neta calls them 'rationally determinable conditions'.[5] Many mental states, such as perceptual states or pains, are not states for which there are normative reasons; they cannot be held for normative reasons – they are not reasons-susceptible.[6]

Next consider *inference*. There are lots of inferences. An inference might be a step in the early visual system, from one stage in the perceptual hierarchy to the next one, where things are entirely inaccessible to consciousness; or it might be some highly self-conscious reasoning involving the conscious application of rules of inference. The variety of inferences is huge. We can take the term 'inference' as our umbrella term covering all kinds of transitions (or linkings) between premises and a conclusion that are not merely associations. And then we can talk about sub-kinds of inference by specifying the relevant states or attitudes involved. Most importantly, we can consider the case in which a conclusion is a reasons-susceptible attitude. Then we would expect the reasoner to form this attitude on the basis of (normative) reasons.

[5] Cf. Neta (2018), for example.

[6] For the present purposes, it can be left open whether all propositional attitudes are reasons-susceptible. It would depend on whether there are perceptual propositional attitudes.

Therefore, this kind of inference can properly be called '*reasoning*'. So reasoning is the special kind of inference that leads to a reasons-susceptible attitude as its conclusion. And it is at least initially plausible to think that reasoning involves responding to reasons, when things go well. That's the relevant standard or norm of reasoning, it seems: reasoning is fully successful if the conclusion is held or sustained for (sufficiently strong) reasons. Whatever one thinks about other inferences, the phenomenon of forming reasons-susceptible attitudes by treating some consideration as a reason for the attitude is surely a very significant one that is worthwhile being studied. The traditional view is on board with this taxonomy, I take it. The main interest is not in subconscious inferences but in reasoning, understood in this way. As John McDowell would likely put it: reasoning takes place in the space of reasons. The two-layered view can agree with this idea.

When making the distinction between reasoning and inference that is not reasoning ('mere inference') we rely on the notion of a reasons-susceptible attitude: an inference is reasoning just in case its conclusion is a reasons-susceptible attitude. According to an alternative non-normative approach to the notion of a reason, there might be reasons even for perceptual states (non-normative reasons but still reasons). Such an alternative approach, however, would lose the ability to mark the very significant distinction, which pre-theoretically exists, between the way in which a belief or intention or action can be held for a reason that justifies the attitude or action on the one hand, and the way in which a perceptual state might be generated from 'reasons' on the other hand (which are not really normative reasons). That strongly speaks against such an alternative non-normative approach to the notion of a reason. In any case, it is not an alternative that I would like to propose.[7]

For the present purposes we can also focus on the case where the premise attitudes are conscious. This might be called '*conscious reasoning*'. It is the case of inference from some attitude that is (at least

[7] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this issue.

normally) accessible to consciousness to a reasons-susceptible attitude as the conclusion. Forming a belief, desire, or intention on the basis of some other beliefs and some desire or intention is the paradigm of such conscious reasoning, since normally beliefs, desires, and intentions are accessible to consciousness. (That they are accessible to consciousness does not mean that there always is actual consciousness of these attitudes. It merely means that the subject could fairly easily become (immediately) conscious of her attitudes, at least normally.) Conscious reasoning is then distinguished from non-conscious reasoning which has premises that are not accessible to consciousness. We can call this '*intuitive reasoning*'. This terminology is (intentionally) close to the distinction that cognitive scientists have made since many years: the distinction between non-conscious inference on the one hand, which is called 'system 1' thinking, and conscious thinking or reasoning on the other hand, which is so-called 'system 2' thinking.[8]

It is important to note that intuitive reasoning, understood in this way, still counts as *reasoning* since it leads to a reasons-susceptible attitude as its conclusion (a belief, desire, or intention, most importantly). Indeed, this is what we want to say. For a belief that is formed on the basis of premises that are not conscious can still be assessed as to whether it was properly formed on the basis of reasons. These reasons might not be possessed consciously (i.e., in the form of a conscious state). But that does not mean, nor does it entail, that no reasons were possessed and employed. In other words, intuitive reasoning could still be fully successful, proper reasoning that leads to a justified conclusion. There is no reason to exclude this possibility from the very beginning. (And if psychologists like Kahnemann are right, intuitive reasoning is fairly widespread and often - at least in favorable conditions - very successful.)

On the other side of the spectrum, so to speak, we find reasoning that is *self-conscious*. It is self-conscious in that it involves a self-conscious (*de se*) belief or beliefs about this very reasoning, most

[8] Cf., for example, Kahnemann (2011).

importantly, about its premises. The self-conscious belief represents the premises. The subject thus is conscious of her reasons; she reflects on her reasons. However, it is important to note that such self-conscious reflection on one's reasons *need not be based on introspection*. It can also be formed on the basis of *testimony*. One might be told by a knowledgeable testifier that one's reasons are good or bad. Trusting such a testifier can lead to a justified belief or knowledge about one's reasons, i.e., the self-consciousness that is characteristic of self-conscious reasoning. No special commitment to introspection is needed here (though it is very plausible, I think, that in many cases we do have introspective self-consciousness of our reasons). What matters is *that* the subject is self-conscious of her reasons, the *source* of this self-conscious state is left open.

By now, we have made available all the concepts and distinction necessary for entering into the substantive arguments. Let us then take a look at some first arguments.

3. First Arguments

Let us start with an observation that even reflexionists are willing to accept. This is the following observation: It seems very plausible to think that mature humans sometimes form attitudes and act in the light of (conscious) reasons without actually reflecting on their reasons. If so, are they not responding to reasons? Do they not form rational responses in these cases? – Call this observation the '*observation of the missing reflection*'.

This observation is granted by all parties, both reflexionists and proponents of the two-layered view. It needs to be distinguished from a 'partner observation' concerning small children and animals: small children (and some non-human animals) form attitudes and act in the light of reasons (pretty much like humans that have reflection) but, again, without actually reflecting on their reasons. Do they never rationally respond to reasons? Do they lack rationality entirely?

The observation of the missing reflection is endorsed by John McDowell. His response is to go *modal*. This '*modal move*', as we can call it, consists in the following claim: the presence of reflection, in the sense in which rationality requires reflection, is the *potential* to reflect on one's reasons. This potential need not be actualized in all cases, but it has to be there (has to be present).

> Let me stress that what matters is the *capacity* to step back and assess whether putative reasons warrant action or belief. … if the capacity is present without being exercized, we have in view someone who can respond to reasons as the reasons they are. (McDowell 2006: 129; emphasis in original)

Therefore, the observation, as stated so far, does not cause any problem for reflexionism. Reflection is not 'missing' altogether. It is present as a capacity, merely not actualized in some cases (perhaps in many). So to call it an observation of 'missing reflection' is a misnomer. We should rather call it the 'observation of the missing actual reflection'.

Now, we can of course grant that the observation stated above concerns actual reflection. Nothing has been claimed about the potential for reflection yet. But it is equally clear that we will now have to investigate whether the proposed version of reflexionism – call it 'modal reflexionism' – is really tenable. In the end, as I will try to show, it will turn out to be untenable. To anticipate a little, the main reason will be that we are not even able to recognize our reasons as reasons in the relevant kind of cases; we often lack this potential. And so to put up the requirement of reflection even in this modal form is still too much to ask for.[9]

[9] How about liberalizing the reflective requirement by allowing for a time shift? Could it not be sufficient that the subject was able to recognize her reason as a reason *in the past only*? This weakens the reflective requirement even more. A major difficulty, however, is that new reasons come into existence fairly often, and in such a case the relevant fact which is the new reason could not have been recognized as such a reason in the past – simply because it was not any such reason in the past. So the proposal cannot deal with all cases and, therefore, fails. – Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this idea.

To begin, we can ask why having the potential for reflective recognition of reasons as reasons should be important at all. What *difference does it make* whether the potential is present or not? For, in general, a potential might sometimes make a difference, but sometimes not. It depends. It needs to be argued that having a potential for reflection makes a significant difference. For example, a potential to carry a lot of weight makes a difference to whether a bridge is safe. Safety is a modal notion (in this case). But whether a team has won the football match is a matter of actually scoring goals, not of potentials to score goals. Unfortunately, however, McDowell does not offer any considerations or explanations to this effect, to the best of my knowledge. So it remains entirely open whether the modal move is really helpful. If one responds to a reason by forming an attitude or performing an action, and the only way in which reflection is 'present' is the form of a mere unactualized potential, what does this mere potential contribute to the normative status of being rational? What difference does it make? It is far from obvious what the answer to this question could be. So far, then, we lack sufficient explication or information in order to assess the modal move. Further arguments are needed.

A further question arises at this point. If it is the case that the potential for reflection matters, *how* does it matter? John McDowell is quite clear on this point. In his view, one must respond to a reason as a reason (or respond to a reason 'as such') in order to rationally respond to it at all. And responding to a reason as a reason requires the ability to recognize it as a reason. As McDowell puts it:

> The notion of rationality I mean to invoke here is the notion exploited in a traditional line of thought to make a special place in the animal kingdom for rational animals. It is a notion of responsiveness to reasons *as such*. (McDowell 2006: 128)

Or as he puts it elsewhere: perception as a capacity for knowledge is

> a capacity to get into positions in which one knows that it is through one's perceptual state that one knows something about the environment – and so knows that one's perceptual state conclusively warrants one in the belief in question. (McDowell 2011: 42)

The problem with this answer, however, is that there is an *alternative* that McDowell does not consider and that he does not show inferior to his proposal. The alternative is that reflection (actual or potential) might just play the role of a *special kind of possession* of reasons. Why not think that being able to recognize one's reason as a reason is a special way of possessing this reason – the 'reflective way of possessing a reason'- rather than a necessary condition of following the reason. This reflective way of possessing a reason is a self-conscious way, a way that involves self-conscious knowledge that one's reason is a reason for one's response. And having a reason in this special, reflective way might be relevant to further phenomena, such as responsibility for one's attitudes. (This is far from obvious, but surely something that would deserve further investigation.) So the reflection that allegedly is necessary for responding to reasons might not be necessary for responding rationally, but perhaps for responding in a way that makes one responsible (accountable) for the response. Just responding to a reason can be understood as the exercise of a normative competence for holding attitudes that are supported by one's reasons, where the normative competence is constituted by a (cluster of) dispositions. And possession of a reason could simply consist in knowledge or awareness of the fact that is the reason. Since one can know a reason without knowing that it is a reason, no reflective knowledge is necessary for possessing reasons (on this alternative view). (More on this alternative, non-reflective way of responding to reasons will be said below in section 6.)

As a supplementary thought, we can add that the mere *potential* for recognition of one's reason as a reason might be good enough for *being responsible* for the response since often, we can be responsible for something we do by being in a position to know what we are doing, even when there is no actual knowledge of what we are doing. We are in a

position to know it (i.e., we satisfy what is sometimes called the 'epistemic condition' on responsibility), and arguably, that is sufficient for having responsibility (in the sense of accountability).[10] At least, this is an idea that does have some initial plausibility and deserves a further hearing. Nothing in what McDowell has said excludes this alternative view. So concerning the question of *how* reflection is relevant to responding to reasons we end up in an impasse. (Another suggestion as to the role that recognizing one's reason as a reason might play will be discussed later, in section 6.)

If we think further about what role reflection might play, we could note that reflection, as conceived so far, is a *state*, the state of recognizing one's reason as a reason (or the state of being able to recognize it). However, responding to a reason seems to involve some *skill or know-how*. One is competently treating some consideration (that is a reason) as a reason, one transits from premises to a conclusion. This sound very much like the exercise of a skill or know-how, and not like a further state. (Remember the Lewis Carroll problem: adding further states to some states that constitute the premises of one's reasoning would not suffice for making one move on to the conclusion; something else and of a different kind than a state is needed – a skill or know-how.) Although this additional thought does not directly concern the question of whether reflection is necessary for rationality, it does seem to put some pressure on the idea that reflection, understood as a state, is what we need to look at to understand rationality. (In principle, one can say that both are needed, the state of reflection and the skill or know-how. But if the skill or know-how is needed anyway, why is the state needed in addition?)

In any case, we can conclude that the modal move is not immediately successful. So far, then, it remains open whether rationality requires

[10] For a general overview of the epistemic condition of responsibility, see Talbert (2019), sc. 3.3.4. One of the best recent discussions of the epistemic condition in relation to responsibility for attitudes can be found in Malmgren (2019). The kind of responsibility that I have in mind here is not just attributability but rather accountability. – The distinction between these two kinds of responsibility (and a third kind, answerability) has been made by David Shoemaker and Angela Smith. Cf. Shoemaker (2011), Smith (2012).

reflection. We will now move on to a further argument that aims to show that the reflective requirement cannot be upheld since it asks for too much.

4. The counterargument: entanglement

The *argument from entanglement* hinges on the fact that conscious reasoning and non-conscious inference, as characterized above, can be entangled in a way that has serious consequences for the possibility of recognizing one's reason as a reason. We come across this possibility when the premises of conscious reasoning are themselves the conclusions of some non-conscious inferences. The main example is given by perceptual beliefs that are formed on the basis of perceptual states. These perceptual states are not reasons-susceptible states, so an inference that has such a perceptual state as its conclusion does *not count as reasoning* but as inference. This is the case that I will focus on in the following – obviously a very important case since perceptual beliefs are abundant in our human lives. The relevant perceptual states are *conscious* states, let us suppose. Plausibly, we often have epistemic access to the perceptual states that we undergo. There might be non-conscious perceptual states. But we can focus on the important cases in which one's perceptual state is conscious. Then, however, the perceptual state is the conclusion of some non-conscious inference. The perceptual system – let us say the visual system – is involved in the formation of perception, and most plausibly it consists of a hierarchy of inferences that lead from early visual states (with content that is one-dimensional or two-dimensional, perhaps, if David Marr is right) to further visual states and finally to the conscious perceptual state on the basis of which the perceptual belief is then formed. All of the non-conscious inference comprising the earliest visual representational states in the perceptual hierarchy up to the conscious perception is inaccessible to consciousness. So it counts as non-conscious inference; the subject does not have epistemic access to the visual representational states that are the premises of the perceptual

inference. – All of these claims are surely not definitely proven, but they are very plausible and widely accepted, I take it. From now on, we will suppose that they are true, and the rest of the argument can unfold as follows.[11]

We can simply note that whether a reasoning from some *perceptual state* to a perceptual belief will lead to perceptual knowledge depends on whether the perceptual state itself is a genuine perception (the good case) or an illusion or hallucination (the bad case). Suppose that the relevant part or aspect of the perceptual state – say the color that it represents of an object – is non-veridical. Our subject perceives an object to be grey even though it is in fact blue, for example. Then she will form the belief that there is a grey object in front of her, not a blue object. This will of course not be perceptual knowledge, since it is a false belief. If, in contrast, the object is in fact grey and the perceptual state is a genuine perception of the color of the object, i.e., represents the object to be grey, the subject will form the belief that there is a grey object in front of her, and this might very well be perceptual knowledge. The process that leads from the perceptual state to the perceptual belief is of the very same kind in both cases, the good and the bad case. It is just the status of the premise – the perceptual state – which is different. In the bad case, it is an illusion; in the good case, it is a genuine perception. So it follows that we have an epistemic dependence, an *entanglement*. The success of the conscious reasoning *depends* on the success of the non-conscious inference that leads to the premise of the conscious reasoning.[12]

[11] Here, and throughout this paper, I assume that perceptual states are representational states with contents. This is common ground shared with McDowell and other traditionalists who also reject other views of perception, like the sense-date view, adverbialism, or relationalism. – Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this assumption.

[12] One might think of the possibility that even perceptual illusions provide justification for perceptual beliefs, or that they provide even the very same justification as genuine perceptions. This kind of 'dogmatism' is not what McDowell would endorse, however. He is an epistemological disjunctivist, and so he fully accepts that the illusion does not provide

Now we have to look at the consequences of the fact of epistemic dependence. It is not hard to see that the consequences are rather unfortunate for the reflexionist. For whether the subject undergoes an illusion or a genuine perception is not introspectively accessible to her consciousness. The inference in the visual system that she is undergoing is not introspectively accessible. Normally, the subject would just form the very same perceptual belief and, thus, treat her perceptual state as a genuine perception even if, in fact, it is an illusion. In the bad case, she would simply get it wrong. Therefore she is unable to recognize her perceptual reason as a reason in the good case. How could she recognize that she is having a genuine perception in the good case merely on the basis of introspection? (We will come back to testimony as an alternative source soon. Let us consider introspective access first.) Her perceptual state represents the object to be grey. In fact, the object is grey, in the good case. But she cannot access the non-conscious inference that led her to have this perception, and she cannot recognize that it is a genuine perception rather than an illusion. So she is not in a position to recognize her reason as a reason.

Suppose we say that the subject is basing her belief that she is genuinely perceiving the object to be grey on her introspectively formed belief that she is undergoing a perceptual *appearance* as of a grey object. This perceptual appearance (known by introspection, let us grant) cannot be the reason underpinning recognition of one's reason as a reason. Recognizing that one is having a perceptual appearance falls short of recognizing that one is genuinely perceiving. But the reason that the subject is supposed to recognize as a reason is the fact that she is genuinely perceiving the object to be a certain way. Knowledge of one's

---

the same justification as the genuine perception. The argument does therefore not rest on assumptions that McDowell would reject. Needless to say that dogmatism has its own problems, and one of them is exactly that the genesis of the perceptual state seems to matter as to its justificatory force. Cf., for example, the discussion of this problem in Tucker (2013).

perceptual appearance is not good enough for that. Thus, appeal to knowledge of one's appearance provides no solution to the reflexionist.

It should be noted that according to reflexionism, justification requires reasons – that is the reasons-justification link that we are supposing here. We also rely on the widely accepted assumption that knowledge requires justification. To recognize that the subject is undergoing genuine perception requires the subject to have a *reason* for believing so. But *introspectively* she is not able to come into possession of any such reason. So either she is in a position to get such a reason from some other source, or she simply is not at all in a position to get it. Introspection is not a suitable source since the non-conscious inference that leads to the perception is not conscious. (Please note that all of this is true of the typical and normal case of genuine perception; nothing extraordinary or abnormal is going on.)

If we consider alternative source of reasons, we can think of testimony. That, however, immediately leads to a problem. Perception is generally held to be a *foundational* source of justification and knowledge, i.e., perception is supposed to provide justification independently of other sources. If we need testimony in order to properly respond to a perceptual reason (since testimony provides the searched-for reason for believing that one's reason is a reason), the *independence* of perception as a source of knowledge is given up. Perception would become *epistemically dependent* on testimony. That would be a highly counterintuitive consequence of the reflexionist view. I take it to be a decisive reason for rejecting this alternative.

The second alternative is background knowledge. The subject might know that she is in circumstance C (good lighting, no impediments to the exercise of perceptual capacities, no hallucinogen drug taken, and the like), and she might know that in circumstances C, her perceptual state is likely an instance of genuine perception. That she is undergoing a perceptual state that represents the object to be grey, finally, is something she could know through introspection. (Though, again, there is a question about which reason one would have for this introspectively formed belief.)

So take together, she might have a good reason to believe that she is in the good case, i.e., that she is genuinely perceiving the object to be grey. So far, so good. However, a closer look soon reveals the fatal shortcoming of this idea. It leads into a vicious regress. For how is she to know that she is in circumstances C? To know about the lighting conditions, for example, is possible only on the basis of perception or of testimony. (Or of background knowledge, but this must end after finitely many steps. Without loss of generality, we can suppose that we are already at the end of this chain.) Again, to appeal to testimony prevents perception from being an independent source. And to appeal to perceptual knowledge just shifts the problem to this other instance of knowledge on the basis of some perceptual state. It can be granted that it is possible to know that one is undergoing a genuine perception on the basis of the just described background knowledge. But the acquisition of this background knowledge is again subject to the reflective requirement, according to reflexionists. This, however, is the very same situation that we began with, just with other contents. The solution is only a solution for the first instance if it is presupposed that there is a solution for the second instance. Thus, the problem is merely shifted from one place to the next one, and so on.

5. A solution: reasons as perceived facts rather than perceptions?

There is one loophole in the argument given so far. We have silently assumed that the supposed reason that the subject has to recognize as a reason is *the perception* (in the good case, where there is a genuine perception). But this is just one option. We could also think that the supposed reason is *the perceived fact*, not the perception of it. The perceived fact is a non-psychological fact: that the object is grey, for example. In contrast, the perception of this fact is of course a

psychological fact. Accordingly, we have two options: psychologism and anti-psychologism about (normative) reasons.[13]

In his writings, John McDowell seems to endorse psychologism about perceptual reasons. He writes as if the *perception* is the reason to which the subject responds by forming her perceptual belief.

> […] [I]t is a perceptual state itself that warrants one in a belief that counts as knowledgeable by virtue of having such warrant." (McDowell 2011: 33)[14]

Psychologism in this sense might be rejected and replaced by anti-psychologism. The reflective requirement itself does not require that we embrace psychologism about (normative) reasons. So for the present purposes, we have to take the anti-psychologistic alternative seriously. And perhaps it will be more promising. Let us see.

Suppose then, as anti-psychologists want to have it, that the reason that the subject is supposed to recognize as a reason is *the perceived fact* (that the object is grey, e.g.). Then she is under no requirement to be able to recognize that she is genuinely perceiving. That was a requirement only on the assumption of psychologism about perceptual reasons. To opt for anti-psychologism, thus, frees us from the unfortunate problem that was stated above. But it does of course lead to another question: how is the subject supposed to be able to recognize her reason – the perceived fact – as a reason for her perceptual belief? Her reason is the perceived fact that the object is grey, for example. How can she recognize that this fact is a reason for believing that the object is grey? (Or that the object has no chromatic color?) – The answer is quite easy to find, it seems. Of course, the fact that the object is grey is a reason for believing that the object is

[13] The distinction is widely acknowledged. See, for example, Alvarez (2016) for the case of reasons for action.

[14] This is just one passage where it becomes clear that the *perception* (*perceptual state*) is the reason, according to McDowell. Throughout the entire text one can find McDowell taking that position.

grey. It is an excellent reason, indeed. And everyone knows this, or at least is in a position to know this. This kind of background knowledge does not seem to be problematic or hard to get at. Let us grant that. (That the object is grey is also an excellent reason for believing that the object has no chromatic color. This can also be granted.) So we seem to get everything we wanted to have. The subject is aware of the fact which is the reason. And she is in a position to know that this fact is an excellent reason for believing what she comes to believe (i.e., that the object is grey). Mission accomplished.

But wait a second. We have been a bit sloppy. In fact, to recognize that the perceived fact (that the object is grey) is a reason for believing p (that the object is grey, e.g.) one has to know *that there is this fact* (that the object is grey) in the first place. So far, however, all we have granted is the background knowledge that, *if it is a fact that the object is grey* then that fact is an excellent reason for believing that the object is grey. This (the known conditional) does not yet settle the question whether it is a fact that the object is grey. So we can ask whether the subject in a position to know the perceived fact (that the object is grey). In other words, we can ask: is there an accessible scenario in which the subject knows this fact? In this scenario, the following is supposed to be the case: the subject knows the perceived fact. So she must have a reason for believing that this fact obtains. Which reason? The perceived fact could only be this reason if she possesses it, and that requires her to know it. (No other fact could help out as a reason here, since nothing in the actual world guarantees that there is such any such further fact.) And indeed, she knows it (in the scenario), as we have supposed. But the problem is that she cannot believe the perceived fact *on the basis of* this reason (the perceived fact), since she would already have to believe (and even know) it in order to believe it (in order to have it as a reason). So it is not possible (in the scenario) that the subject knows the perceived fact on the basis of the perceived fact. (And it is also not possible (in the scenario) that the subject knows the perceived fact on the basis of some other reason, since no such other reason needs to be present.) Thus, there simply is no such

(accessible) scenario in which the subject knows the perceived fact. That is, in the actual world, the subject is not in a position to recognize her reason as a reason.[15]

We can conclude that turning towards non-psychologism about reasons does not help the reflexionist. In ordinary situations where we think we have perceptual knowledge, the reflective requirement makes such perceptual knowledge impossible. That is a decisive reason to reject reflexionism.

6. Sketch of an alternative two-layered view

So far, our results have been 'merely negative' in that we have argued that reflexionism fails to account for perceptual knowledge (in many ordinary cases in which we are very confident to have perceptual knowledge). How about something 'positive'? - Here is a short sketch of the alternative two-layered view that rejects the reflective unity thesis.

[15] Williamson claims that what one knows is one's body of evidence. Cf. Williamson (2000: ch. 9). So if one knows that p, the fact that p is part of one's evidence and, thus, could serve as a reason for some beliefs. We may grant that. But that does mean that the subject is able to use this piece of evidence as a reason for believing p. Arguably not. Knowing requires believing. So one must already believe that p in order to have it as one's evidence. Therefore, one cannot use the fact that p as a reason for which one believes that p (though one could use it as evidence for some other belief). But according to a reflexionist like McDowell, knowledge does require some reason for belief (since knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons, as it were). Therefore, the Williamsonian idea is of no help to the reflexionist. Please keep in mind that according to the – antipsychologistic – approach that we are currently considering, it is the perceived fact – the fact that p – and not the perception of it that is supposed to be the reason for believing p. The problem only arises for *this* candidate reason (the fact that p). To put it in a nutshell, the proposal involves a vicious circularity: a fact that one knows cannot be the reason for which one believes that this very fact obtains (even if it might be part of one's body of evidence by being known). – In his discussion with Anthony Brueckner, it becomes clear that Williamson would deal with the issue by simply giving up the idea that knowledge requires a reason for which one believes. So, in a sense, Williamson pleads for 'immediate perceptual knowledge'. Cf. Williamson (2009).

To be able to reflect on one's reasons when one is relying on them in one's reasoning is a special case, and an especially good case. When self-aware of one's reason's being a reason one knows (or justifiably believes) that it is a reason for one's conclusion. To use it as a reason one need not be self-aware of it in this way. Responding to reasons is not a matter of meta-cognition. Rational attitudes can be formed without such meta-cognition. Rather, what is required is the exercise of a (first-order) *competence* (or know-how or skill). Such a competence can be thought of as a *rational* competence (a normative competence), since it comprises a disposition to respond to facts by forming the attitude that these facts are reasons for. It is a disposition to bring one's attitudes in accordance with these reasons (i.e., the reasons one possesses).[16] Possession of a reason is awareness of it, i.e., knowledge of the fact that is the reason (or genuine perception of this fact).[17] It does not require knowing that it is a reason (for the relevant attitude). Otherwise, as we have seen, we would make it too hard to respond to a reason.

A competence, constituted by a disposition or cluster of dispositions, to respond to a reason by forming an attitude that is in accordance with it explains why one's attitude is in accordance with the reason: it is not a mere accident, since it is the manifestation of a competence. (This is similar to the idea of virtue epistemologists like Ernest Sosa, who think that knowledge is the case where one's true belief is the manifestation of a competence to form true beliefs. The most important difference is that

[16] More on such rational dispositions can be found in Hofmann (2022). Detailed views of such rational, normative dispositions have been worked out by Mantel (2018) and Lord/Sylvan (2019), for example.

[17] Alternative accounts that require merely justified belief are not promising, since they allow for a Gettierized condition. In such a Gettierized condition, one merely truly and justfiedly believes that p - where p is the fact that is the reason in question – (or merely has a veridical hallucination that p). Intuitively, this is not sufficient for possessing the reason that p. One could acquire knowledge of some fact on the basis of mere justified true belief (or of veridical hallucination), which is quite counterintuitive. - That genuine perception (and even non-conceptual genuine perception) is sufficient for possessing a reason has been argued in Hofmann (2018).

here we appeal to accordance with reasons instead of correspondence with reality, i.e., truth.) Plausibly, such competences have to be acquired through experience. We learn to respond to various facts in their reasons roles, basically throughout our entire life. Which kinds of learning mechanisms there are is to some extent an empirical question, and it might be difficult to describe the details (and to avoid any overintellectualization). But it is plausible that we can acquire and have the dispositions that constitute such competences. They provide the ground floor level equipment for our capacity for perceptual knowledge (and perhaps they can be characterized as 'doxastic habits')[18]. When acquiring perceptual knowledge of the ordinary kind, we respond to what we perceive by exercizing perceptual competences that have beliefs in accordance with the perceived reasons as their manifestations (if things go well). We can reliably move from perceivable surface features to non-perceivable, 'theoretical' kinds. Perhaps, we are not responsible for these beliefs (since responsibility, as pointed out above, may require some kind of knowledge of what one is doing, i.e., knowledge of a reflective kind). But this does not mean that we do not believe for reasons. In addition, the problem that the modal move of the reflexionist had to face (cf. section 3) does not recur. The reason is simply that treating a fact as a reason does *not require* being in a position to recognize that it is a reason. Sometimes people have this further feature, but it is not necessary to have it. How often this is the case can be left open. Suffice it say that, in principle at least, testimony could always provide the required knowledge. So it seems that we will have at least some cases in which subjects are able to recognize that their reasons are reasons. Importantly, appeal to testimony would be fine for the proposed non-reflexionist account since the perceptual knowledge does not require reflective knowledge and, thus, perception can be an independent, foundational source of justification. The important point is that the problem that the reflexionist's modal move has to face only arises if one makes reflection a necessary condition

[18] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this suggestion.

of responding to reasons. The proposed dispositionalist account is free of such a commitment, as it should be.[19]

However, one *can* reflectively possess a reason when responding to it. This amounts to reflective reasoning. Such reasoning is not just conscious. We need to distinguish between conscious reasoning and reflective reasoning. *Conscious* reasoning, please recall, is reasoning whose premises are (states of a kind that is) accessible to consciousness (at least normally or typically). Reasoning from perceptual knowledge to some further, more 'theoretical' belief is a paradigm example of such conscious reasoning. *Reflective* reasoning involves a higher-order state, a reflective state, which has one's reasoning or some (normative) aspect of it as its object. In reflective reasoning, the subject knows (or genuinely perceives) a fact f, she treats it as a reason for forming the attitude A (by exercising a rational competence), and she knows that the fact f is a reason for holding attitude A. Epistemically, this is an especially good situation. In such a case, one not only holds a justified attitude A. One also knows that the consideration that one treats as a reason is a reason for one's attitude. Thus, it seems that one is in a position to justifiably self-ascribe the justified attitude. That is, one arrives at a justified belief that one is having a justified attitude A. This amounts to self-knowledge or justified self-belief that one knows or holds a justified attitude. The especially good case of reflectively possessing a reason, therefore, could lead to knowledge that one knows, roughly speaking.[20]

Such higher-order knowledge is not a requirement of having first-order knowledge. It is an optional, special condition that might or might not accompany first-order knowledge. When it is present, the subject can have a justified higher-order belief about the justificatory status of her

[19] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

[20] I acknowledge that this line of thought is merely a sketch of an argument. I intend to spell it out more fully in future work. Let me just point out, however, that it is not the same argument as the one given in Gibbons (2019).

first-order attitude.[21] This is a normatively rich situation, indeed. It is extraordinary in that many instances of first-order knowledge are not of this kind. The two-layered view can acknowledge the existence of the extraordinarily rich situation without having to say that it is present in all cases. That is a desirable result, I take it. Reflection is a further rational achievement, but nothing that pervades all cases of rationality.

The two-layered view can thus allow for a special place for reflection without making it constitutive of rationality tout court. The ground-level phenomenon of holding rational attitudes does not require reflection. One need not be able to recognize one's reasons as reasons. Once liberated from the reflective requirement, rationality can in principle be had by non-human animals and small children, too. This is a further advantage accorded to the two-layered view. So, in sum, we can conclude that the two-layered view is quite promising and deserves to be developed further.

[21] This is similar to what Ernest Sosa calls 'reflective knowledge', though there is some unclarity about what Sosa's 'reflective knowledge' exactly amounts to. One difference it that Sosa thinks that the meta-knowledge somehow makes the first-order knowledge better (Cf. Sosa (2019), for example.) I do not see that this has to be the case. Unless some kind of re-basing takes place, the first-order knowledge (or justified attitude) remains just as good as it is, it seems to me. And what such a re-basing could be, is rather unclear. – For discussion of Sosa's view see Kornblith (2004) and Carter/McKenna (2019), for example.

References

Alvarez, M., (2016) 'Reasons for action: justification, motivation, explanation', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Online], URL: Reasons for action

Carter, A./McKenna, R., (2019) 'Kornblith versus Sosa on grades of knowledge', *Synthese*, 196, 4989-5007

Gibbons, J., (2019) 'Introspective knowledge', *Philosophical Studies* 176, 2, 559-79

Hofmann, F., (2018) 'E=K and non-epistemic perception', *Logos & Episteme*, 9, 3, 307-31

Hofmann, F., (2021) 'Is evidence normative?', *Philosophia*, 49, 667-84.

Hofmann, F., (2022) 'Explaining free will by rational abilities', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 25, 2, 283-297

Kahnemann, D., (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, London, Penguin Books

Kornblith, H., (2004) 'Sosa on human and animal knowledge', in Greco, J., (ed.), *Ernest Sosa and His Critics*, Malden (MA), Wiley-Blackwell, 126-134

Lord, E./Sylvan, K., (2019) 'Prime time (for the basing relation)', in Carter, A./Bondy, P., (eds.), *Well-Founded Belief: New Essays on the Epistemic Basing Relation*, New York, Routledge, 141-173

Malmgren, A., (2019) 'On fundamental responsibility', *Philosophical Issues*, 29, 198-213

Mantel, S., (2018) *Determined by Reasons: A Competence Account of Acting for a Normative Reason*, New York, Routledge

McDowell, J., (2006) 'Conceptual capacities in perception', first published in Abel, G., (ed.) *Kreativität*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 1065-1079, here cited according to McDowell, J., (2009) *Having the World in View*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 127-44

McDowell, J., (2009) *Having the World in View*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press

McDowell, J., (2011) *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge* (The Aquinas Lecture), Milwaukee, Marquette University Press

Neta, R., (2018) 'Rationally determinable conditions', *Philosophical Issues*, 29, 289-99

Parfit, D., (2011) *On What Matters*, Vol. 1, New York, Oxford University Press

Shoemaker, D., (2011) 'Attributability, answerability, and accountability: toward a wider theory of moral responsibility', *Ethics*, 121, 3, 602–32

Smith, A., (2012) 'Attributability, answerability, and accountability: in defense of a unified account', *Ethics*, 122, 3, 575–589

Sosa, E., (2019) 'Reflective knowledge', in Fitelsen, B./Borges, R./Braden, C., (eds.), *Themes from Klein: Knowledge, Scepticism, and Justification*, Cham, Springer, 15-23

Talbert, M., (2019) 'Moral responsibility', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Online], URL: Moral responsibility

Tucker, C., (2013) 'Seemings and justification: an introduction', in Tucker, C., (ed.), *Seemings and Justification*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1-29

Williamson, T., (2000) *Knowledge and Its Limits*, New York, Oxford University Press

Williamson, T., (2009) 'Reply to Anthony Brueckner', in Greenough, P./Pritchard, D., (eds.), *Williamson on Knowledge*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, 282-84