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Perspectivism and the Possibility of De Re Response to Normative Reasons

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Abstract

Perspectivism about ought-statements, or claims about decisive normative reasons, imposes an epistemic constraint on the decisive reasons an agent can have for acting. This paper explores how the distinction between de re and de dicto responses to normative reasons bears on the normative debates over perspectivism about decisive reasons. It begins by clarifying the distinction between two interpretations of perspectivism. According to de re perspectivism, a fact can provide an agent with a decisive reason to act only if the agent has sufficient evidence that that fact obtains. By contrast, de dicto perspectivism holds that an agent can have a decisive reason to act only if she has sufficient evidence to believe that she has a decisive reason to act. The paper then advances two main claims. First, it argues that the metaphysical possibility of de re response to normative reasons provides strong evidence against de dicto perspectivism. If an agent can respond to her decisive normative reasons without deliberating about whether she has those reasons, then there can be cases in which she has decisive reasons to act in a certain way but lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has such decisive reasons. Second, it responds to a parallel argument for de dicto perspectivism advanced by Kiesewetter (2016). Kiesewetter argues that the metaphysical possibility of de dicto response to normative reasons is incompatible with rejecting de dicto perspectivism. I show that the argument relies on an implausibly synchronic notion of responding to normative reasons. In particular, it overlooks the fact that responding de dicto to a normative reason is a mental process that unfolds over time. This diachronic dimension of responding to normative reasons explains why the possibility of de dicto response to reasons is compatible with rejecting de dicto perspectivism.

1. Introduction

Perspectivism about decisive normative reasons imposes an epistemic constraint on truths about whether an agent has decisive reasons to perform an action or adopt an attitude. There are two interpretations of this epistemic constraint on reasons. De Re Perspectivism holds that the consideration R cannot provide an agent with a decisive reason to F (where F may be either an action or an attitude), unless the agent has sufficient evidence to believe that R obtains. De Dicto Perspectivism, by contrast, maintains that if an agent has decisive reasons to F, then she must have sufficient evidence to believe the normative proposition that she has decisive reasons to F.

The primary aim of this paper is to argue against de dicto perspectivism about decisive reasons. The argument turns on the possibility of de re response to normative reasons. As I argue, normative reasons can guide an agent's actions without being recognized as normative reasons. An agent may therefore act in response to her decisive reasons without believing that she has those decisive reasons. The possibility of de re response to reasons, in turn, opens up the possibility of cases in which an agent responds appropriately to her decisive reasons to act in a particular way while rationally believing that she has decisive reasons *not* to act in that way. Such cases show that having decisive normative reasons to act does not require having sufficient evidence to believe that one has those reasons. More generally, the possibility of de re responses to normative reasons reveals a potential gap between an

agent's evidence for believing that certain reason-giving facts obtain and her evidence for believing that those facts provide the relevant normative reasons to act. It is this gap that undermines de dicto perspectivism.

However, in a recent paper, Kiesewetter (2016) provides an argument in defense of de dicto perspectivism that hinges on the possibility of de dicto response to one's decisive reasons. The claim is that whenever an agent has decisive reasons to perform an action, it must be at least metaphysically possible for her to correctly respond de dicto to her decisive reasons; that is, one's compliance must be guided by a belief that one has those reasons. Now if having decisive normative reasons requires the metaphysical possibility of de dicto response to them then, Kiesewetter argues, we can show that de dicto perspectivism must hold. The rough idea is that an agent cannot respond de dicto to her decisive reasons to act, if she lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has those decisive reasons. Therefore, rejecting de dicto perspectivism is incompatible with the possibility of de dicto response to normative reasons.

The second aim of this paper is to strengthen the case against de dicto perspectivism by identifying two problems with Kiesewetter's argument for the view (for relevant discussion, see Dutant and Littlejohn 2018; Fassio 2019). As I argue, one problem with Kiesewetter's argument is that it presupposes an implausibly synchronic conception of de dicto response to normative reasons. On this conception, de dicto response to normative reasons requires the agent to retain her belief about her normative reasons throughout the process of complying with them. However, this view overlooks the fact that responding de dicto to a normative reason is a mental process that unfolds over time. An agent's compliance with her normative reasons may be initiated and guided by her belief about those reasons, even if she no longer retains that belief by the time her compliance is complete.

By pursuing these two aims, the paper explores the relationship between two distinctions: the distinction between de re and de dicto responses to normative reasons, and the distinction between de re and de dicto perspectivism about decisive reasons. In doing so, it shows how a distinction in the theory of action can have significant implications for our theorizing about the normative domain.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces Kiesewetter's argument for de dicto perspectivism about decisive normative reasons. Section 3 develops an argument against de dicto perspectivism. The argument relies on intuitive cases in which an agent correctly responds de re to her decisive reasons to act in a certain way, while rationally believing that she lacks decisive reasons to act in that way. Having established this case against de dicto perspectivism, section 4 returns to Kiesewetter's argument to explain why it fails to provide adequate support for de dicto perspectivism.

2. Kiesewetter's Argument for De Dicto Perspectivism

This section presents Kiesewetter's case in defense of de dicto perspectivism. But let's first review some important preliminary remarks about normative reasons.

First, perspectivism is concerned with normative reasons that are typically regarded as facts or true propositions that support one's responses (Scanlon 1998; Dancy 2000; Parfit 2011). A normative reason carries a weight or significance, and if the reasons for a particular response outweigh those against it, there is decisive reason to respond in that way. Similarly, if the reasons for an action or attitude are equally strong as the reasons against it, there is sufficient reason to perform the action or hold the attitude (Schroeder 2015).

Second, to avoid unnecessary complications, I interpret the phrase 'one has decisive reason to F' as equivalent to 'there is decisive reason to F' or simply 'one ought to F.' In this sense, I do not treat the term 'having' as implying that the agent has epistemic access to the reasons. Perspectivism regarding decisive reasons argues for but doesn't presuppose the view that for a claim about decisive reasons to be true, the agent must have epistemic access to the fact that she has that decisive reason.

Why, then, should we believe that facts about decisive reasons are transparent to agents and accessible through their evidence? The standard argument for perspectivism appeals to what are known as *three-option cases* (Jackson 1991: 462 – 63, see also Regan 1980: 265; Parfit 2011: 159). Jill who is a physician and has to decide on the correct treatment for her patient is given a choice between three drugs: drug A, drug B, and drug C. Jill knows for certain that A is very likely to relieve the condition but will not completely cure it. She also knows that one of drugs B and C will completely cure the condition; the other though will kill the patient, and there is no way that she can tell which of the two is the perfect cure and which is the killer drug. Objectivism about decisive reasons contends that Jill ought to prescribe the drug that completely cures the condition. However, the intuition is that Jill has decisive reason to prescribe A, since she lacks sufficient evidence to tell which of B and C is the perfect cure. Cases of this kind lend support to perspectivism about decisive reasons by suggesting that the existence of decisive reasons depends, at least in part, on the evidence available to the agent. Their primary function, however, is to challenge the standard objectivist view. It is less clear whether they provide sufficient support for both de re and de dicto perspectivism. In particular, the intuition that Jill has a decisive reason to prescribe A may support the de re claim that a consideration cannot provide an agent with a decisive reason unless she has sufficient evidence that it obtains. But it is not obvious that this intuition also supports the de dicto claim that an agent must have sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reasons to act as she ought. The former claim does not obviously entail the latter. Consequently, proponents of de dicto perspectivism need to offer independent support for the stronger thesis that facts about which decisive reasons an agent has depend on the agent's evidence that she has those reasons.

In his recent paper, Kiesewetter (2016) aims to fill this lacuna and provide an independent argument for de dicto perspectivism. Kiesewetter's case for de dicto perspectivism begins by highlighting a fundamental characteristic feature of normative reasons (Kiesewetter 2016: 4–5). While normative reasons are given by considerations that *count in favor of* responses, this counting-in-favor-of property is not their unique defining feature (cf. Hieronymi 2004). Normative reasons are comprised of those considerations that can effectively guide us in our deliberations about what to do. We must be able to

reason with normative reasons; that is, when we are reasoning well, the things for which we act are the same things that make our actions right (Schroeder 2021: 204–208). In other words, considerations that cannot guide our reasoning cannot do what reasons are supposed to do.

One way to spell out this 'guiding-role' idea is through the following principle (*cf.* Way and Whiting 2016):

(1) *The Possibility of Responding to a Single Decisive Reason (PRR-S)*: Necessarily, if A has decisive reason to F, then it is metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to F, and A responds to her decisive reason.

The basic idea is that being guided by a reason involves correctly responding to that reason. It is important to note that this possibility is a weak metaphysical one. Having a decisive reason implies the existence of a metaphysically possible situation where one has that decisive reason, and responds to it. This principle does not require that one always responds to one's reasons, or has the ability to respond to decisive reasons in every possible situation (*cf.* Kolodny 2005: 548–549; Way and Whiting 2016; 2017).

Now, based on PRR-S and a highly plausible claim to the effect that, necessarily, if A has decisive reason to F, and A has decisive reason to G, then A has decisive reason to [F and G], Kiesewetter argues for the following general principle about the possibility of responding to *all* decisive reasons that one has:

(2) *The Possibility of Responding to all decisive Reasons (PRR)*: Necessarily, if A has decisive reason to F_1, and A has decisive reason to F_2…, and A has decisive reason to F_n, then it is metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to F_1, …, and A has decisive reason to F_n, and A responds correctly to all her decisive reasons.

This is very plausible that if the truth of a single decisive reason claim requires the possibility of having that reason and responding to it, then the truth of two or more decisive reasons claims also require the metaphysical possibility of having all those decisive reasons and responding to them. But what does 'responding to decisive reasons' consist in?

It is generally agreed upon that responding to decisive normative reason requires that one *conforms* to that reason. This is what The Conformity Condition requires:

(3) *The Conformity Condition*: Necessarily, if A has decisive reason to

F, and A responds correctly to her decisive reason, then A F-s.

However, intuitively, responding to a reason requires more than conforming to that reason. As is well-known, accidentally conforming to a reason cannot be counted as responding to that reason (Sliwa 2016; Johnson King 2020). To exclude such accidentality, one needs to be sensitive to the normative significance of the relevant reason-giving consideration, and furthermore, her conformation with that reason should be a manifestation of that sensitivity (Lord 2018: 133–134; Cunningham 2022). In a nutshell, A's conformity with her decisive reason to F is a correct response to that reason only if A's

conformity is appropriately based on a *recognition* of the decisive normative significance of that reason (Kolodny 2005; more on this issue at section 3). As Kiesewetter suggests, one way to cash out this sensitivity condition is to appeal to the de dicto notion of responding to reasons (ibid.: 7):

(4) *The Normative Belief Condition*: Necessarily, if A has decisive reasons to F, and A responds correctly to her decisive reasons, then A believes that she herself has decisive reasons to F.

It is noticeable that Kiesewetter acknowledges the existence of other, more automatic ways of responding to reasons that do not necessitate having a belief about such reasons (Ibid, 8). However, he argues that one cannot have decisive reason to □ unless it is at least *metaphysically possible* that one conforms to one's decisive reason on the basis of the normative belief that one has that decisive reason. To support this, Kiesewetter draws on a Scanlonian idea about the nature of the responses that we can have reason for: "[I]f reasons are, as T.M. Scanlon (1998, 20), among others, points out, essentially related to responses that are sensitive to *judgments* about reasons, then it would be very astonishing if we could have decisive reasons that we could not possibly respond to in the way that normative belief condition requires" (ibid, 9).

Having these premises at hand, Kiesewetter's argument for perspectivism about decisive reasons runs as follows:

(5) Let us assume for *reductio* that perspectivism about decisive reasons is false; that is, there is a situation where A has decisive reason to φ, but she lacks sufficient reason to believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ.

(6) According to a highly plausible epistemological principle whenever A lacks sufficient reason to believe that p, then A has decisive reason not to believe that p.

(7) Thus, it follows from (5) and (6) that there is a situation where A has decisive reason to φ, and A has decisive reason not to believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ.

(8) Assuming PRR, we have it that it is possible that A has decisive reason to φ, and A has decisive reason not to believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ, and A responds to all her decisive reasons.

(9) By conformity and normative belief condition it follows that it is possible that A has decisive reason to φ, and A has decisive reason not to believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ, and A φ-s, and A does not believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ, and A believes that she herself has decisive reason to φ, and A believes that she herself has decisive reason not to believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ.

(10) It follows from (9) that it is possible that A does not believe that she herself has decisive reason to φ, and A believes that she herself has decisive reason to φ.

However, (10) is a logical contradiction. One cannot at the same time believe a proposition and does not believe that proposition. Thus, the reductio assumption is false; that is, whenever one has decisive reason to □, one has sufficient reason to believe that one has decisive reason to □; facts about one's decisive reasons always fall within one's perspective.

3. Perspectivism and the Possibility of De Re Response to Normative Reasons

I pursue two aims in this section. First, I argue for the possibility of de re response to normative reasons. This conception of responding to reasons highlights the role of competences in recognizing the normative significance of reason-giving considerations, as well as in explaining how those considerations can determine which decisive reasons agents have. Second, I draw on the possibility of de re responses to normative reasons to argue against de dicto perspectivism about decisive normative reasons. As I explain, the possibility of responding de re gives rise to cases in which an agent has a decisive reason to act in a particular way but lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has that reason.

3.1. The possibility of de re response to normative reasons

As noted above, responding to a normative reason is incompatible with merely conforming to it. To count as responding to a *normative reason*, an agent must somehow manifest sensitivity to the normative significances of the relevant reason-giving consideration. But what, exactly, does this sensitivity consist in?

The contemporary literature on reasons and rationality distinguishes between two forms of sensitivity to reasons, corresponding to two ways of responding to them (Jones 2003; Döring 2007; Sylvan 2015; Mantel 2018). According to the *de dicto* conception, responding to a normative reason requires the agent to believe that she has a normative reason to perform the relevant action or adopt the relevant attitude. On this view, the agent's response must be guided by the belief that the relevant consideration *counts in favor of* that action or attitude.

By contrast, an agent can respond to a normative reason *de re*, without believing that she has that reason. The absence of a belief about which normative reasons she has does not preclude her action from being robustly sensitive to the normative significance of those reasons. Let us examine these two forms of responding to normative reasons in more detail.

The key to distinguishing between merely conforming to a normative reason and responding to it lies in the requirement that there be an appropriate connection between the agent's action and the reason she has for performing it. More specifically, responding to a normative reason requires an explanatory connection between the action and the normative significance of the relevant reason-giving fact (Lord 2018: 135–140). Merely being motivated by a reason-giving fact is not enough for responding to it as a

normative reason. The fact must explain the action in virtue of its normative significance. If responding to a normative reason requires this kind of explanatory connection, it is plausible that the agent must, in some way, be aware of or sensitive to the normative significance of the relevant fact (Sliwa 2016; Johnson King 2020).

Although responding to a consideration as a normative reason requires some form of sensitivity to its normative significance, this need not involve knowing or believing that one has the relevant reason. For one thing, not everyone can form beliefs about normative reasons. Some adults, and presumably most children, can respond to their reasons and be credited with doing the right thing for the right reasons, even though they lack the concept of a normative reason and therefore cannot form beliefs about their reasons as such. Requiring a doxastic condition of this kind would over-intellectualize reason-responsiveness, excluding those who lack the relevant concept from being credited with doing the right thing for the right reasons (Lord 2018: 103–105; Sylvan 2015). Moreover, even among agents who possess the concept of a normative reason, responding correctly to a reason does not require them to believe, either explicitly or implicitly, that they have it. In many ordinary situations, we perform the required actions for the relevant reasons automatically, without giving any explicit or implicit any thought about what we ought to do (Howard 2021; cf. Moritz Müller 2023).

In light of these considerations, some philosophers have proposed that an agent's action counts as a response to a normative reason if it manifests her competence or know-how in using (i.e. reasoning with) that reason (Lord 2018: 116–123; Sylvan 2015; Sylvan and Lord 2019; see also Cunningham 2022). As Lord emphasizes, the know-how or competence to use a reason and respond to it does not require that the agent believes that she has that reason. Rather, it merely requires that he agent possesses a disposition to perform the relevant action whenever that reason support it (Lord 2018: 117). When an action manifests this kind of competence in recognizing and responding to reasons, its alignment with the reasons at hand is not merely accidental (cf. Mantel 2018; Isserow 2019; Howard 2021). On this account, an agent responds to a normative reason *de re* when her action manifests the competence to respond appropriately to reasons, even in the absence of a belief that she has the relevant reason.

Now, I argue below that the possibility of de re response to normative reasons provides the basis for an argument against de dicto perspectivism about decisive reasons.

3.2. The Argument against De Dicto Perspectivism

This section argues that the possibility of de re response to normative reasons gives rise to intuitive cases in which the agent has decisive reason to perform an action and successfully responds to that reason, while she lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason for that action. If there are any such cases, they constitute counterexamples to de dicto perspectivism about decisive normative reasons.

Consider the following example:

Apt Emotions

Jane is a morally good person. The especial thing about Jane is that, unbeknownst to her, whenever she becomes aware of the morally relevant facts of her situation, her emotions force her to do what those facts support, such that she had a perfect track record of successfully doing what is morally required of her. Unfortunately, she decides to choose philosophy as her career. In her first year, she attends a course in morality and her professor convinces her with a bunch of sophisticated philosophical arguments that one never is permitted to break one's promise; that is, facts about one's promises are always normatively overriding. One day, Jane finds herself in a situation where there is a fact of the matter, say, someone being in urgent need, that provides her with a strong reason to break her promise. Jane is aware of all the relevant facts about her situation, and as always, her competent emotions irresistibly push her toward doing the right thing; in this case, helping that agent. Nonetheless, when she begins to reflect on the relevant features weighing them against each other, she concludes that she has decisive reason to keep her promise and to refrain from helping the person. Fortunately, Jane shows weakness of will and fails to act as she herself believes she ought to.

Does Jane's action constitute a correct response to the normative reasons she has? It seems that it does, and there are two reasons to think so. First, we are inclined to praise Jane for her action, despite her doxastic failure to form the correct belief about her reasons. If Jane is morally praiseworthy for what she does, it seems that she must have responded correctly to her decisive normative reasons. Second, consider how Jane would have acted in a similar situation before attending the ethics course. Her competent emotional responses would have guided her toward doing what is morally right: helping the agent. In that case, we would readily regard Jane's action as a correct de re response to her reasons, since her motivation to help would manifest her normative competence to act in accordance with her decisive reasons. The fact that Jane correctly responds to her decisive reason to help the agent is grounded in the fact that her action manifests this competence. One feature of the grounding relation, however, is that the ground necessitates what it grounds: whenever the ground obtains, so does the fact grounded in it. In the present case, Jane's action is likewise a genuine manifestation of her normative competence. If the fact that grounds her correct de re response is present, then the fact grounded in it must also obtain. We should therefore conclude that Jane's action is a correct de re response to the normative reasons she has. Her emotional sensitivity enables her to recognize the normative significance of the relevant facts in her actual circumstance.

Other things being equal, this normative recognition, provided by her emotional competence, would also constitute sufficient evidence for Jane to believe that her reasons decisively support doing the beneficent thing. However, as to the details of the example, other things aren't equal. Jane has strong, albeit misleading evidence, provided by those spurious philosophical arguments, that she is never permitted to break her promise. As long as Jane is not theoretically competent enough to find the flaw in those sophisticated arguments, she cannot rely on her emotional reaction to *judge* that she ought to help the person. From her deliberative viewpoint, whatever reason she has to break her promise is defeated by the relevant philosophical arguments. Therefore, Jane's epistemic reasons, taken together, require her to believe that she lacks decisive reason to help the agent. In a nutshell, Jane's different practical and theoretical competences lead her to act against her belief about her decisive reasons. Jane has decisive

reason to break the promise and help the agent, and thanks to her emotional competencies, she is in a position to recognize and respond this normative fact. On the other hand, from her deliberative point of view, Jane does not have the required theoretical competencies to recognize that the evidence for the overriding force of promissory reasons is misleading. Thus, Jane lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to break the promise and help the agent. The possibility of de re response to normative reasons gives rise to cases such as Apt Emotions in which an agent has decisive reasons to act in a certain way but lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has those decisive reasons. This suggests that de dicto perspectivism is false. De dicto perspectivism holds that if Jane has decisive reason to break the promise, she must have sufficient evidence to believe this.

We can summarize the argument against de dicto perspectivism along the following lines:

P1. If it is possible to respond de re to normative reasons by manifesting one's competences, then there are possible cases in which an agent possesses the competence to act correctly in response to the known normatively significant features of her situation but fails to possess the competence to correctly deliberate about the normative significance of the relevant features and thereby bases her belief about what she ought to do on those relevant features. Apt Emotions is a case of this kind.

P2. Regarding those possible cases in which the known normatively significant features of the agent's situation decisively support performing a particular action, and the agent possesses and manifests her competence to act correctly in response to those features, we must conclude that the agent has decisive reason to perform that action.

P3. Regarding those possible cases in which the known normatively significant features of the agent's situation decisively support performing a particular action, yet the agent fails to possess the competence to correctly deliberate about those features and form the belief that she has decisive reason to perform that action on the basis of those features, we must conclude that she cannot rationally believe that she has decisive reason to perform that action action on the basis of the relevant normatively significant features of her situation.

P4. If an agent cannot rationally believe that she has decisive reason to perform an action on the basis of the relevant normatively significant features of her situation, it is because she lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to perform that action.

C1. From P2, P3, and P4 it follows that in those possible cases in which the known normatively significant features of the agent's situation decisively support performing a particular action, and the agent possesses the competence to act correctly in response to those features but fails to possess the competence to correctly deliberate about the relevant features, the agent has decisive reason to perform that action but lacks sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to perform it.

C2. From P1 and C1 it follows that there are possible cases in which an agent has decisive reason to act in a particular way, but fails to have sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to

perform that action.

C3. This implies that de dicto perspectivism is false, because de dicto perspectivism requires that there are no possible cases in which an agent has decisive reason to act in a particular way but fails to have sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reasons to perform that action.

The first premise of this argument is supported by our earlier discussion of the possibility of de re response to normative reasons and the role an agent's competences play in enabling her to respond appropriately to those reasons. Cases such as Apt Emotions provide compelling support for this premise. They illustrate how an agent's practical competence to correctly act on the basis of her reasons might diverge from her theoretical competence to determine what she has reason to do.

The second premise is also highly plausible. The agent's competence to correctly act on the basis of the normatively significant features involves an appropriate sensitivity to what those features support to do. Thus, if an agent possesses and manifests such a competence in response to features of her situation that decisively support acting in a certain way, then those features must be capable of grounding the fact that the agent has decisive reason to act accordingly. The thought is that an action performed through manifesting this competence constitutes a rational response to the agent's circumstances. And if no other rational course of action is available to her, then she must have decisive reason to act in that way.

The third premise suggests that an agent who lacks the theoretical competence to correctly assess the normative significance of the known features of her situation may be unable to rationally believe that she has a decisive reason to act in a particular way, even when those features decisively support that action. Consider the following mathematical example. If Goldbach's conjecture—that every even natural number greater than 2 is the sum of two prime numbers—is true, then the axioms and fundamental definitions of number theory provide sufficient support for its truth. Nevertheless, even if we know all those axioms and definitions, we cannot thereby rationally believe that Goldbach's conjecture is true. The reason is that we lack the theoretical competence required to deliberate correctly from those axioms and definitions to the conclusion that the conjecture is true. The same explanation applies to cases in which an agent knows a set of normatively significant facts that support performing a particular action or adopting a particular attitude but lacks the theoretical competence to correctly deliberate about their normative implications. In such cases, the agent may be unable to rationally form a belief about what those facts support, despite being aware of the facts themselves. The crucial point is that knowing the relevant facts does not, by itself, put an agent in a position to rationally figure out in her deliberation what those facts support.

The argument for P4 is straightforward. If an agent cannot rationally believe that the known features of her situation decisively support performing a particular action because she lacks the competence to deliberate correctly about those features and their normative significance, then those features cannot provide her with sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reasons to perform that action. After all, if knowing the normatively significant features of her situation does not put an agent in a position to

rationally believe that those features give her decisive reasons to act, how could that knowledge provide her with sufficient evidence to believe that she has such reasons?

Finally, C1 follows validly from P2, P3, and P4. The divergence between an agent's practical and theoretical reason-responsive competences can thus give rise to a corresponding divergence between her reasons for action and her reasons for belief. If this is correct, the existence of decisive reasons to act is not always epistemically transparent to the agent: an agent may have decisive reasons to act in a particular way while lacking sufficient evidence to believe that she has those reasons. This possibility undermines de dicto perspectivism about decisive reasons. This completes the argument against de dicto perspectivism based on the possibility of responding de re to normative reasons. In the remainder of this section, I consider and respond to two objections that might be raised against this argument.

One line of objection to this argument and our analysis of Apt Emotions is that, insofar as Jane is not able to find the flaw in those misleading philosophical arguments, her action cannot be considered as a correct response to a decisive reason to break the promise. This suggests that P2 is false. An agent cannot be able to respond de re to her decisive reasons for acting in a certain way if she lacks the competence to rationally believe that she has those decisive reasons to act in that way.

However, this objection has an implausible consequence. If Jane's theoretical inability to find the flaw in the misleading philosophical arguments precludes her from being in a position to correctly respond to her practical reason to break the promise, then the point would generalize to many other situations where we cannot find the flaws in those skeptical arguments against our intuitive ordinary convictions. For instance, we could never be in a position to know anything unless we can find what is wrong with all those skeptical arguments that target our everyday claims of knowledge. However, the fact that I cannot rule out the possibility that I'm a brain in a vat does not make me unable to know that I have hands. The whole point of introducing the notion of *de re* response to reasons was to do justice to our externalist intuitions about what we can know and correctly respond to as normative reasons (For illuminating discussion see Srinivasan 2020).

Alternatively, one might be inclined to resist Apt Emotions by arguing that, despite her theoretical incompetency, Jane has sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to break her promise since otherwise she would be required to act against what she believes about her decisive reasons. But one's reasons cannot demand such akratic irrationality. Thus, if Jane has decisive reason to break the promise, on pain of akratic irrationality, she must have sufficient evidence to believe that she has decisive reason to break the promise. Rationality rules out a particular mismatch between one's practical and epistemic reasons.

In reply, we must notice that this reasoning relies on a substantive claim about the nature of rationality. The objection assumes that all rational requirements are fundamentally determined by one's normative reasons, such that the balance of reasons cannot require one to act against the enkratic requirement of rationality. If rationality is a matter of responding to reasons, then either Jane lacks decisive reason to break her promise, or she has sufficient reason to believe that she has decisive reason to break the

promise. But, first, not everyone agrees that rationality is only a matter of responding to reasons. Many authors have argued for the existence of *structural* requirements of rationality that are independent from the demands of one's normative reasons (Broome 2013; Brunero 2020; Worsnip 2021; Fogal and Worsnip 2021). According to the structuralist account, the irrationality of Jane's response lies in the fact that she has failed to follow the enkratic requirement of rationality, and it has nothing to do with any kind of failure to correctly respond to normative reasons. The general point is that we cannot always reason from an instance of structural irrationality to the conclusion that one has failed to correctly respond to reasons. Sometimes, the irrationality of one's responses is grounded on an independent fact about one's failure to comply with a structural requirement of rationality.

Second, and more importantly, most proponents of reasons-responsiveness account of rationality, including Kiesewetter (2017: Ch. 8) and Lord (2018: Ch. 8), aim to use perspectivism about decisive reason as a ground to argue for the reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality, and thus they cannot rely on that very account in their arguments for perspectivism. Therefore, I conclude that *Apt Emotions* is an effective argument against perspectivism about decisive reasons, at least until one can provide a powerful, and independent argument in defense of reasons-responsiveness theory of rationality.

In this section, I have argued that the possibility of responding de re to normative reasons suggests that an agent can have decisive reasons to act in a particular way without having sufficient evidence to believe that she has those reasons. This provides an argument against de dicto perspectivism. However, as discussed in Section 2, Kiesewetter argues that the metaphysical possibility of de dicto response to normative reasons provides conclusive support for de dicto perspectivism. To defend my argument against this view, I must therefore identify what is wrong with Kiesewetter's reasoning. I turn to this task in the next section.

4. Perspectivism and the Possibility of De Dicto Response to Reasons

In the previous section, I argued that the possibility of de re response to normative reasons undermines de dicto perspectivism. As we saw in Section 2, however, Kiesewetter offers a parallel argument for de dicto perspectivism based on the possibility of de dicto response to normative reasons. The aim of this section is to show why Kiesewetter's argument fails to establish the view and, in doing so, to strengthen the case against de dicto perspectivism developed in the previous section. As I argue below, Kiesewetter's argument faces two difficulties. First, it assumes that an agent can respond de dicto to her decisive reasons only if she forms distinct beliefs about each of those reasons. This assumption, I argue, is too strong: an agent may respond de dicto to her decisive reasons by forming a single belief that encompasses all of her decisive reasons. Second, Kiesewetter's argument overlooks the diachronic nature of responding to normative reasons. Responding to a reason is a mental process that unfolds over time, rather than an instantaneous event. Once we take this temporal dimension into account, we can see how an agent may respond de dicto to her decisive reasons to act while also responding de dicto to her decisive reasons not to believe that she has those reasons.

4.1. The possibility of de dicto response to all decisive reasons

As noted in section 2, Kiesewetter's argument for perspectivism about decisive reasons relies on the claim that having decisive reasons requires the possibility of responding to all those reasons (PRR). According to PRR, if an agent has decisive reason to F, and decisive reason to G, there must be a possible world where she has decisive reason to F and decisive reason to G, and she responds to both her decisive reasons. Moreover, Kiesewetter holds that responding to reasons involves not only conforming to reasons, but also believing that one has those reasons. Thus, the interpretation of PRR along the Conformity and the Normative Belief conditions seem to imply the following principle:

The De Dicto Response to decisive Reasons (DRR): Necessarily, if A has decisive reason to F and A has decisive reason to G, then it is metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to F and A has decisive reason to G, and A believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G, and A F-s and G-s.

However, one might object that even if having decisive reason to F requires the possibility of conforming to that reason guided by the belief that one has that reason, it is not clear why having decisive reason to F also requires the possibility of responding to *all* one's decisive reasons at the same time, as DRR suggests?

In response, Kiesewetter argues that this principle follows from the conjunction of the possibility of responding to a *single* decisive reason claim (PRR-S) and the agglomeration of decisive reason claims. According to the agglomeration principle, whenever A has decisive reason to F and A has decisive reason to G, then A has decisive reason to [F and G]. Although the agglomeration principle is highly plausible, as I argue below, the suggested reasoning from PRR-S and agglomeration to DRR rests on a dubious claim about the distribution of normative beliefs.

To illustrate, let's see how the purported argument from PRR-S and agglomeration to DRR runs:

(1) Suppose that A has decisive reason to F, and A has decisive reason to G.

(2) By the agglomeration of decisive reasons, it follows that A has decisive reason to [F and G].

(3) From the possibility of responding to a single decisive reason claim (PRR-S), we can infer that it is metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A responds to her decisive reason to [F and G].

(4) Assuming the conformity condition and the de dicto conception of responding to reasons, it follows that it is possible that A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, and A believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G].

However, to argue for DRR, we must be able to reason from (4) to (5) below:

(5) It is possible that A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, and A believes that she has decisive reason to F, and A believes that she has decisive reason to G.

But this move presupposes a distribution principle of normative beliefs about one's decisive reasons:

(5) *Belief Distribution (BD)*: Necessarily, if it is metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, and A believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G], then it is also metaphysically possible that A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, and A believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G.

Put simply, Kiesewetter cannot show that rejecting de dicto perspectivism is incompatible with the possibility of responding de dicto to normative reasons unless he can justify the Belief Distribution (BD) Principle introduced above. But what could motivate acceptance of BD? In what follows, I consider and reject two possible justifications for the principle. I then present independent arguments suggesting that BD is false.

The first suggestion is to invoke the ensuing strong principle concerning the distribution of normative judgments:

Strong Belief Distribution (BD-Strong)

Necessarily, if A believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G], then she also believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G.

BD follows from BD-Strong. If, by metaphysical necessity, whenever A believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G], she also believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G, then in the very possible situation where A has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, and believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G], A also believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G, and Kiesewetter's argument for de dicto perspectivism would go through.

However, BD-Strong is not much of a plausible thesis about the distribution of beliefs, as one might have a belief that she has decisive reason to [F and G] while either fails to believe that she has decisive reason to F, or fails to believe that she has decisive reason to G. Even if the normative claim that A has decisive reason to [F and G] entails the conjunctive claim that A has decisive reason to F and A has decisive reason to G, it doesn't follow that whenever an agent believes the former, she also has the latter beliefs. Generally, from the fact that p logically entails q and r it doesn't follow that whoever believes that p also believes that q and believes that r; and this is true even if having the belief that p *rationality requires* having those two other beliefs. In other words, beliefs are not metaphysically closed under logical entailment. If they were, we would automatically count as believing every logical consequence of our beliefs. This is highly implausible, however, since our cognitive capacities are limited. We cannot be expected to believe, or even to consider, every logical consequence of what we believe. Thus, BD-Strong is untenable.

The second suggestion is to appeal to a weak belief distribution principle along the following lines:

Weak Belief Distribution (BD-Weak)

Necessarily, if it is possible that A believes that she has decisive reason to [F and G], then it is possible that she believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G.

Unlike Strong Belief Distribution, BD-Weak is endowed with a significantly greater degree of plausibility when it comes to the distributive structure of beliefs. However, the problem with BD-Weak is that it cannot provide sufficient support for BD.

To illustrate, suppose that if it is possible that p, then it is possible that q. Does it follow that for any arbitrary proposition, r, if (p and r) is possible, then (q and r) is possible? Certainly not! The arbitrary proposition, r, might be incompatible with q without being incompatible with p. For instance, if it is possible for an object, O, to be green, then it is possible that O is red. Now consider the proposition that O is not red. While O's being green and not red is a possible situation, the state of affairs of O's being red and not red is metaphysically impossible. Therefore, from the fact that [if it is possible that A believes that one has decisive reason to [F and G], then it is possible that A believes that she has decisive reason to F and A believes that she has decisive reason to G], it doesn't necessarily follow that [if it is possible that A has decisive reason to F and G, and A believes that one has decisive reason to [F and G], and A F-s and G-s, then it is possible that A has decisive reason to F and G, and A believes that she has decisive reason to F and believes that she has decisive reason to G, and A F-s and G-s]. The added conjuncts might be compatible with the possibility of A's believing that she has decisive reason to [F and G], but incompatible with the possibility of A's both believing that she has decisive reason to F and believing that she has decisive reason to G. Thus, the truth of BD-Weak does not provide sufficient support for accepting BD.

I believe there are good reasons to reject BD, since responding to some reasons may prevent us from forming beliefs about other reasons we have. Suppose, for example, that I have a decisive reason to make certain neurological changes to my brain (Act A), but that making these changes would, unbeknownst to me, prevent me from forming the belief that I have a decisive reason to perform another action, say to laugh (Act B). This combination of decisive reasons is clearly possible. Yet, in such a case, I cannot respond to both reasons by forming a distinct belief about each one. The only way for me to respond de dicto to both reasons is to form a single, more complex belief—that I have decisive reasons to perform both A and B—and to guide my actions on the basis of that belief. If I do so, we can agree that I have responded de dicto to both reasons. Whether I could also have responded to each reason by forming a distinct belief about it is irrelevant to whether my response counts as de dicto reason-responsiveness. This case therefore provides a direct argument against BD. And if BD is false, Kiesewetter's argument for de dicto perspectivism is unsound.

4.2. The diachronic nature of responding to normative reasons

Kiesewetter's argument for the metaphysical impossibility of responding de dicto to decisive normative reasons to act and decisive normative reasons not to believe that one has those decisive reasons to act relies on a conception of de dicto response to reasons which assumes that an agent must retain the relevant normative beliefs until she has completed her conformity with the relevant reasons in question. However, once we recognize that conforming to a reason takes time, the alleged metaphysical impossibility disappears. Let me explain.

The central point is that being guided by a normative belief about one's decisive reasons does not require retaining that belief throughout the process of conforming to those reasons. Suppose that, at t1, A learns that she has a decisive reason to F and forms the first-order normative belief that she has a decisive reason to F. This belief then guides her toward performing F. Assuming that guidance requires a causal connection, the process through which A's belief brings about her F-ing will naturally take some time. Let us suppose that the causal process initiated by her belief culminates in her F-ing at t2.

Now suppose that, at t1, A also believes that she has a decisive reason to refrain from believing that she has a decisive reason to F. This second-order normative belief likewise initiates a causal process, one that eventually leads her to abandon her first-order belief that she has a decisive reason to F. Let us suppose that this process, too, culminates at t2. At t1, then, A's two normative beliefs initiate distinct causal processes: one culminates in her F-ing at t2, while the other culminates in her abandoning her first-order normative belief at that same time.

Although the outcome of one causal process is the abandonment of the very attitude that initiates the other, there seems to be no metaphysical impossibility in the two processes being initiated simultaneously. At t2, A completes her conformity with both decisive reasons: she performs F and no longer believes that she has a decisive reason to F. Nevertheless, her F-ing can still be properly caused and guided by her earlier belief that she has a decisive reason to F. At t1, that belief initiates the causal process culminating in her F-ing at t2, while her second-order normative belief initiates at t1 the process culminating in her abandoning the first-order belief at t2.

The crucial point is that nothing prevents both causal processes from being initiated, since A need not retain her first-order normative belief at t2 to count as responding de dicto to her decisive reason to F. What matters is that, at t1, she holds the belief that she has a decisive reason to F and that this belief initiates the causal process through which she eventually performs F. The fact that a second causal process leads her to abandon that belief at t2 does not prevent her from having held it at t1 or from having initiated the relevant reason-responsive mechanism. Thus, the possibility of simultaneously responding de dicto to both kinds of decisive reasons cannot be ruled out merely on the grounds that the agent cannot retain her first-order normative belief while completing both processes of conformity.

This explains why responding de dicto to one's decisive reasons to perform an action is not metaphysically incompatible with responding de dicto to decisive reasons not to believe that one has those reasons to act. Therefore, *pace* Kiesewetter, the possibility of de dicto response to all one's decisive reasons is compatible with rejecting de dicto perspectivism about decisive reasons.

Nevertheless, as I argued in Section 3, the possibility of responding de re to decisive reasons provides sufficient grounds for rejecting de dicto perspectivism. Taken together, the arguments developed in Sections 3 and 4 complete my case against de dicto perspectivism about decisive normative reasons.

Declarations

Author Contribution

M. H. S. is the only author of the paper.

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