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Practical Sense and the Limits of Deliberation

Our thinking about reasons for action, our recognition and assessment of them as well as our reflecting about their reality, structure, and authority, confronts us with a familiar difficulty. On the one hand, when thinking of and about reasons for action, we take ourselves as coming in relation with certain facts, which give objective grounds for, and impart a certain kind of necessity to, a course of action. On the other hand, we take ourselves as the subjects who intend, and are responsible for, that course of action, and regard the relevant reasons as reflections of our (purged, well-pondered) agential identity, of our commitments as agents.

This problem has been at the centre of contemporary practical philosophy and has been widely discussed along its semantic, metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical dimensions. The approach I want to explore here addresses it in a metaphysical perspective, by interpreting the reality of reasons for action in terms of certain general, structural and normative conditions on the deliberative standpoint and activities of agents. Internalism about reasons, on this reading, is a form of realism: internal, first order, or pragmatic realism about reasons. This view says important and distinctive truths about reasons for action. But these truths are somewhat elusive. My task, here, is to locate them, and, with them, to assess the real significance and the limits of the deliberative approach.

I

Internalist Realism

(i) *Williams' Thesis*

To approach internalism we may recall some of the views advanced by Bernard Williams. In my opinion, his best formulation of internalism is the following:

A has a reason to ϕ only if there is a *sound deliberative route* from *A*'s subjective motivational set (which I label "*S*" [...]) to *A*'s ϕ -ing³

Without engaging in the exegesis of Williams' texts, I take this as his final answer to the question he had raised in 1979 about the "interpretation" of "sentences of the forms '*A* has a reason to ϕ ' or 'There is a reason for *A* to ϕ '", that is, about what the "truth" of such sentences implies or what it takes for something to be a reason. Reasons for action here

considered are pro tanto authoritative reasons, reasons that pro tanto justify, or require, acting in certain ways.⁴ Williams' account of internal reasons aims to provide a realist understanding of them, in the following steps. The starting point is an initial, and admittedly insufficient ("sub-humean") version of internalism:

- (i) An internal reason statement is falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from S ,⁵

This view would leave reasons exposed to the contingencies of the motivations of agents. The following constraints are then introduced:

- (ii) A member of S , D , will not give A reason for ϕ -ing if either the existence of D is dependent on false belief, or A 's belief on the relevance to the satisfaction of D is false.⁶

This constraint introduces, as a requirement, the truth of the beliefs that are relevant for the motivation to ϕ . This has an important epistemic consequence:

- (iii) a. A may falsely believe an internal reason statement about himself, and (we can add)
- b. A may not know some true internal reason statement about himself.⁷

This means that internalism (on the present account) is committed to the *epistemic objectivity* of reasons, that is, to the possibility of error and of ignorance about what internal reasons for action there are. But epistemic objectivity implies a further metaphysical commitment, that is, that the *reality-appearance* distinction applies to internal reasons, that there appearing to be internal reasons is not all there is to there being internal reasons. This is a fundamental tenet of realism that seems required by the concept of a reason; and that this form of internalism explicitly commits to it is a proof that it has realistic aims.

A further feature of realism about internal reasons is expressed by the following constraint:

- (iv) internal reason statements can be discovered in deliberative reasoning.⁸

The interpretation of this constraint is the crux of the debate on internal reasons. The constraint gives expression to the distinctive theoretical point of internalism (at least Williams' internalism): the objective standing that reasons have vis-a-vis of agents, which is implied by their authority on action, cannot be conceived apart from the how they figure in the essentially practical exercise of deliberation.⁹ This connection has two aspects. The first

one is that the concept of a reason for acting involve that a reason is a potential explanation for an action; that, if an agent has a reason to do something, then it must be possible that his doing that be explained by that reason.¹⁰ Reasons, therefore, are objective *and* internally related to actions as *explanantia* to *explananda*. The second one is that, if it is essential to reasons that they have authority on action, they should give normative grounds for it. Reasons, therefore, are objective and internally related to actions as justificatory considerations are to justified items. On both accounts, reasons count as objective, real (and thus as something that can be discovered) in that and for how they figure in deliberation, explaining and justifying action.¹¹

Satisfaction of these constraints (epistemic objectivity, reality-appearance distinction, explanatory and justificatory inherence to deliberation) amounts to internal, deliberative realism about reasons. That is, to be real (and not merely apparent) as a reason is a matter of explanatory and justificatory success in deliberation; reasons are real within well informed, consistent, conclusive deliberation and against a background of practical concerns. Deliberative internalism is also a claim to deliberative, internal realism.

(ii) *The Fundamental Insight*

The link between the deliberative standpoint and realism about reasons expresses the fundamental insight of deliberative internalism. This fundamental insight can be articulated and assessed (again following Williams) in terms of the difference between saying that an agent *has* an internal reason of action and that he *would have* an internal reason for action:

We can say that [A] has a reason to ϕ , though he does not know it. For it to be the case that he actually has such a reason [...] it seems that the relevance of the unknown fact to his actions has to be fairly close and immediate; otherwise one merely says that A would have a reason to ϕ if he knew the fact.¹⁴

Here we have an interesting modal point about internal reasons. (The point is made in epistemic terms; but it can and should be generalized.) Internal reasons can be reasons an agent has or reasons he would have; they can be actual or possible reasons. The reasons that one agent *has* (the actual reasons) are determined by certain facts about his circumstances, views and concerns and by the inferential relations between these facts and certain actions which he may know or not. But such facts and such relations are to be relevant for his acting

in a *close and immediate* way, are to be such as to make a clear and present difference about what he is to do (given what else is true about that agent and his concerns and circumstances). By contrast, an agent *would have* a reason for action, on the ground of certain facts (of the same general kind as above), if such facts are not closely and immediately relevant for his acting; so that they would only make a practical difference, if other features of the circumstances, views and concerns were to change. In either case the agent may not know that he has or would have a reason to act; actual or possible reasons for action can be ignored or mistaken. And in either case, given enough information, the agent could intelligibly reshape his deliberation and intentions. What makes the difference between actual and possible internal reasons are real differences in objective circumstances and in deliberative significance. This is why this modal view is not aptly put in epistemic terms: It is a point about the modal robustness of reasons and of the thought of them; not a point about access to them, even less about their dependence on recognition.

Modal robustness, the thesis that a certain item can intelligibly be regarded as actual or possible, is a hallmark of realism. (This has to do with its having robust conditions of identity.) If what has just been said is true, as I think it is, internal reasons are modally robust and there is support for a claim for their reality. But, just because of its grounds, the reality of reasons is essentially dependent on the contents and soundness of deliberative perspectives. What warrants the thought of the modal robustness of internal reasons is the way their actuality and possibility is affected by normative considerations of practical, deliberative significance. The modal difference hinges around the idea of close and immediate relevance to action. But close and immediate relevance, in its turn, can be factorized, first, in features of the circumstances of action and of the views and concerns of the agent, second, in the practical significance of these features, how they ought to be grasped and assessed in deliberation. Modal robustness, therefore, is sufficiently accounted for, in the case of reasons, by normative properties (by the normative success) of deliberation. This is a claim of sufficiency: I am not claiming that this is the only viable conception of the reality of reasons. To establish this conclusion is out of the scope of this paper. However, the fact that reasons can be internally related to the practical standpoint and still have reality, not being reducible to any subjective episode, gives support to the present conception. (We will also see that

there is a reading, or a layer, of internal realism that makes better sense of a central feature of reasons than the alternative, externalist conception.)

II

The Subjective Motivational Set Debate

I want now to discuss and dismiss two objections to internalism about reasons. Let us go back to Williams' formula of internalism: *A* has a reason to ϕ only if there is a sound deliberative route from *A*'s subjective motivational set to *A*'s ϕ -ing. Two notions are prominent in this formula, *sound deliberative route* and *subjective motivational set*. Both have been at the centre of the discussion about deliberative internalism. I will begin by saying something about the latter.

Internalism has been criticized on account of its presumed commitment to the Humean view of motivation: Action requiring the occurrence of belief-independent desires, which lack representational content and function as rationally non-defeasible determinants of intention. There is widespread dissent as to whether internalism is really committed to this; and I want to suggest that there are no grounds for saddling internalism with motivational Humeanism.¹⁶

(i) *Humean Desires?*

Williams' *S* is plausibly diverse, and in ways that make it clear that no strictly Humean conception of motivating states can be appropriate to it. *S* is rightly regarded by Williams as inclusive of all sorts of states that can plausibly figure in the intentional explanation of action. The theoretical role of *S* is to account for the reality of reasons (actual and possible) by determining whether the relation to action of certain facts (that might count as reasons) is close and immediate. But this role does not require, and therefore does not license, any restriction of its elements to beliefs and to Humean desires.

A weaker, or broader, form of Humeanism might still be defended, if the Sound Deliberative Route were restricted to instrumentally rational deliberation, to be accounted for in terms of the (best possible) satisfaction of desires that are ultimate for the agent. But why should internalism accept such a restriction? Rational deliberation can take all kinds of forms and starting points (some mentioned by Williams himself) that impose no constraint on the elements and structural features of *S*.¹⁷ The worry, again, may be that of losing the close and immediate relevance of what is to count as a reason for action with the standpoint of the agent

who purportedly has such a reason. However, such connection needs not to be forged by instrumental reasoning, and may even be deeper than deliberation (as I will try to suggest below). Therefore, it involves no (even weakly) Humean requirement about the nature of states that are the source of motivation, or about the way they are deliberatively related to intentional action.

(ii) *A Rationally Improved S?*

Internalism might be held to be Humean on a different ground. The idea that *S* is to be taken *as given*, that, for the sake of an account of reasons, is to be considered in its present configuration, may appear as a sort of Humean thought, and one that would bar deliberative internalism from gaining any robust understanding of reasons. The issue should be considered with some care, since there are two different ways in which the motivational set can be regarded as given, only one of them having Humean implications.

It makes sense to think that *S* should be individuated quite finely, and in a restrictive way (like it is usual with evidence), because a firm basis in assessing what reasons an agent has. Reasons are real (actual or possible), on the deliberative, internal understanding of their reality, only if the facts they seem to consist in *can* make some difference (close and immediate or not) for deliberation; and this cannot not be assessed, unless against a sufficiently well determined and fixed background of other practical views and concerns. But notice that this is not to favour Humeanism. Fixing the extension of the concept of an agent's *S* to a given configuration of it, in order to make place for account of internal reasons, is consistent with holding this configuration to be *defeasible*, and to be defeasible on perfectly rational grounds. By contrast, Humean motivation does *not* consist in rationally corrigible states of mind, is *not* rationally defeasible. It is rejection of rational defeasibility of *S*, not reference to the present configuration of them, which would impart a Humean modulation to internalism.²⁴

Thus, internalism can very well identify *S* with the set of *defeasible* general motivational concerns that are present in the mind of the agent. What finds deliberative support in his present *S* is what the agent *has* reason to do (even though he does not know this, or is mistaken about this, or fails to be moved by this). But *S*, just as epistemic evidence, can be defeated by further rational consideration, as well as by new discoveries, by new

experiences, or by our own shifting attitudes. About such a case, what can be said is that the agent *would have* the corresponding internal reasons, if his motivational set were to be reshaped, according to these further rational considerations, discoveries, experiences, attitudinal shifts, so as to turn out as undefeated (but obviously still defeasible). But also that he does *not* have them, since what reasons one has depends on what is closely and immediately related to the given configuration of his agency. Williams explicitly contemplates that *S* can be modified in consequence of rational deliberation, and seems to hold that this is a requirement on an agent's having an internal reason. This would be perhaps too quick. One could always advise the agent to improve her practical concerns. But she *has* a reason to follow this advice only if the present (unreformed) configuration of *S* gives support to her doing this; and there are no a priori requirements that this is so.

III

The Sound Deliberative Route Debate

Discussions about the notion of a sound deliberative route seem more on target and have focused mainly on whether the conception of rational deliberation that underlies internalism is in general sound and whether the theoretical role ascribed to the sound deliberative route can be consistently performed.

(i) Substantive and Procedural Rationality

Internalism has been criticized on account of its ignoring the distinction between procedural and substantive rationality.²⁵ Procedural rationality can be understood in the following way: It is rational to ϕ in *C*, because it is the result of the correct application to the case at hand of certain formally specified patterns of deliberation. In terms of substantive rationality, by contrast, we can hold that it is rational to ϕ in *C*, because this is what, in the case at hand and when all is considered, is required by principles of reason that are specified in their content. The objection is that deliberative internalism is committed only to procedural rationality but that it either inconsistently mixes up the two conceptions, or fails to establish plausible conclusions that would require the substantive conception.

Matters are more complicated than that. Deliberative internalism seems to require *both* conceptions of rationality and to allow for them, by assigning them different and consistent

theoretical roles. Internalism cannot do without a conception of substantive rationality, if it has to make intelligible the authority that reasons have on the conduct of agents. If it is a fact that so and so is, for an agent, an all-considered reason for ϕ -ing in C , then ϕ -ing in C is the substantively rational thing to do for that agent, period. That is, it is rational in view of the content of the action and on the ground of a principle, an internal reason, which says that that action is to be done. The agent would fail in point of substantive rationality, if he did not do it, since he would not do the action that he has most reason to do. This, internalism is happy to recognize, as we can see by considering the following.

But, of course, it cannot be in terms of substantive rationality that deliberative internalism could and should determine the kind of fact that something is a reason for action, what makes it true that there is any such reason. The substantive conception of rationality applies only if it is the case that something (specified in its content) is a reason for action, if it is already set that an agent has a reason for action. But in order to settle what is to be a reason for action, so that it can be a real matter whether an agent has a given reason for action, deliberative internalism must have recourse to some conception of procedurally rational deliberation. There can be no ultimate appeal to independently given, content-determined reason-generating principles, in the context of a constitutive, internalist account of reasons. Therefore, it is not true that internalism fails to make the distinction between procedural and substantive rationality; or that ignores that certain relevant and important conclusions require the substantive conception. (This is not to say that it can provide such a conception; I will come back to this presently.)

(ii) *Conditional Fallacy, Idealization, and Access*

I think that deepest difficulties for internalism arise if one combines the idea of soundness of deliberation with that of a rational improvement of S . I have denied that such improvement is required by the theoretical role of S ; but it might be a legitimate interpretation of the sound deliberative route. The internalist might want to say that reasons are individuated by how the agent would be motivated to act, were his S fully rationally improved. This, it is held, is the only conception of a deliberative route that might keep close to the criterion of close and immediate relevance, while still allowing reasons to be objective and real, and thus authoritative for agents. The problem is that, if a condition for there being a reason for an

agent to ϕ in C is identified with that agent's S being rationally improved, so as to include a rationally non defeated motivation to do that action, we may fail to account, in terms of deliberative internalism, for his having reasons for action that it is overwhelmingly plausible he *has*. (This is the so-called problem of the Conditional Fallacy.)²⁶ Any action that would make the agent more deliberatively rational (like: acquiring new information, revising his rational commitments, testing and improving his epistemic and decisional capacities) is *not* an action he would be motivated to do, if he were fully rational. It is because an agent is not fully rational that there is a reason for him to improve his rationality and that he can be motivated to do what would improve his rationality.²⁸ But, quite clearly, in many cases an agent *has* reasons to do actions that would make him deliberatively rational, since such actions would influence closely and immediately, in a normative way, his deliberation. (And quite clearly he *would have* almost in any case reasons of that sort.) Therefore, if we identify the deliberative route with an ideal rational improvement of the agents' S , we end by precluding them to have reasons that can certainly be ascribed to them.²⁹

I think we should reconsider the whole idealizing approach to deliberation. Idealizing approaches get into trouble because they conflate two completely different notions. One is what is for something to be a reason: that is, stand in a close and immediate normative relation to deliberation and action, given the present configuration of the agent's practical views and concerns; the other is that what counts as a reason for an agent should be effectively accessible to him, by means of a well-specified decision procedure. Internalism should not only make an existential claim, which (inter alia) has recourse to the concept of a deliberative route, but should outline a deliberative procedure that ensures that reasons are identified and accepted. But these are different concerns and should not be conflated. Internalism is committed to propose and defend an internal, constitutive thesis about what kinds of facts can be reasons. But it would be a mistake to equate this thesis with a thesis about what decision procedure that would ensure that agents recognize that so and so counts as a reason they have, or even with the thesis that there is any such procedure. This mistake leads to the idealizing approach: An idealized agent is well up to the task of recognizing and endorsing reasons; in a sense, he is a personified decision procedure. Now, it stands to reason that to accept the deliberative-internalist existential claim prepares us to expect that reasons will be

recognized, and that they will bear motivational weight. But neither recognitional nor motivational success is an a priori requirement for the reality of reasons.³⁴

In alternative, we should forgo talk of idealized counterparts of agents, and consider directly what is to count as a sound solution to a practical problem, as a sound answer to a deliberative question that arises for an agent.³⁵ Here is a proposal: There is, for an agent, reason to do what would be a sound solution to a deliberative question that is raised (in his actual circumstances) by his *S*. A deliberative question, or a deliberative problem, is such that it can only have solutions of the general form of an action. The point is that there are certain completely general constraints on what is to be a sound solution to a deliberative problem. One such constraint, very obviously, is that no pattern of action should count as such a solution if it would be inconsistent with the problem (it should be a solution to) even arising. Another, perhaps less obvious, constraint is that, in order to count as sound solution to a deliberative problem, an action should make some difference in regard of the alternatives that form the content of that problem.³⁶ The first constraint, if observed, ensures that the proposed solution-concept, and the corresponding reasons for action, stand in continuity with what, in the agent, raises a demand for action. The second constraint, if observed, ensures that what generates a reason for action (the deliberative problem that action best answers) is something that can figure, for the agent, as the content of an action (something the agent can make true by acting). The two constraints, together, converge in assuring the relevance to action of the facts that count as real reasons. There are some advantages to this approach (apart that of sidestepping the problems that idealization raises: but the Conditional Fallacy would require a closer examination). We seem to have a firmer grasp on what his to solve a problem rather than on what is to deliberate soundly. By conceiving of reasons in terms of the normative concept of a solution we may be better in position to make good of the idea that reasons reflect objective properties and facts and conditions of practical relevance, and not subjective stances. Lastly, because of what has just been said, even if reasons are cast in terms of deliberative routes, it is still possible to think of them as detachable conclusions of deliberation; as independent from the acceptance of the premises.

I would therefore defend deliberative internalism as the right realistic approach to reasons for action. The deliberative conception seems to give us everything we may

legitimately want from a theory of reasons. Only, it does not.

IV

Practical Sense

(i) *What Else?*

The fundamental insight of internalism is that we can grasp what is to count as a reason for action only from a practical standpoint. This insight can be developed into a realist conception of reasons, given the appropriate, normative understanding of deliberation, or of the solution to a deliberative problem, against the background of the circumstances and of the views and concerns of an agent. That of a real reason is the concept of success of a well determined exercise of normative practical thinking. The conditions that makes practical thought correct are also the conditions that make reasons real. There is only a notional, not an actual distinction between these conditions. But, then, there is a further question to be answered, a question about *what is for thought to count as practical and normative*, about *how practical thought can be objectively correct*, about *what is in practical normative thought that accounts for the reality of reasons*.

Deliberative internalism, seen in the light of these further questions, appears as a radically incomplete theory. If it is correct to identify and explain the reality of reasons in terms of roles and outcomes of sound practical deliberation, this can only be *part* of a metaphysical account of reasons, since the relevant roles and authority (and the relevant conditions of deliberative soundness and success) are already *assumed* to be practical, normative; and this, in a way that has bearing on issues of reality. For instance, we have done up to now with an intuitive understanding of the close and immediate relevance of a fact to acting. But we have not made any effort to clarify and vindicate the very idea of practical relevance, of what is for a fact to be significant in a practical way. *Of course* there are practically significant facts. We have daily encounters with them. And deliberative internalism may be well advised in giving this as the basis for an account of the reality of reasons. But this still does not explain how practical relevance, how practical thought are possible and intelligible. (This is a sort of transcendental question: A question about how some thought exercise, which is recognized as a fact, can be possible.)

(ii) *Practical Normative Facts?*

To begin, we may take into consideration the initially appealing, but ultimately inadequate, idea of explaining practical normative thought by practical normative facts. A practical normative fact is, very simply, what makes true a claim to the effect that an agent's ϕ -ing in C is what he ought to do. It is a *normative* fact, because it is a fact about what ought to take place. It is a *practical* fact, because what ought to take place are actions. It is a *fact*, because it is the absolute taking place, obtaining, of a state of affairs. The idea is that practical normative facts, just because of their being facts and the truth-makers of practical normative thoughts, ensure that thoughts of that kind have content. I have already suggested that in practical reflection and deliberation we are daily confronted with facts of this sort. What is to be considered is the further idea that facts of this sort are what makes possible and give content to practical normative thought.

This view might seem to be an appropriate answer to the above concerns about practical thought. Just as thought of physical objects, say, depends on what is physically real giving it its contents and conditions of correctness; so the contents and conditions of practical thoughts would be given by the corresponding, practical reality. (Possible thoughts depend on actual facts. Possible facts are facts thought of.) This view might then either complement, or (more likely) debunk the internal realist perspective on reasons. Reasons themselves might be fundamental practical normative facts. Reasons might thus come to be objects of thought as from outside - a position of externalism. This view has been forcefully put forward in the following way: reasons are normative practical facts and just that - *facts, what is the case*; they cannot be seen as contents, propositions, abstract objects, sets of possible worlds, and so on.⁴¹ What is striking in this view is what I would call its purely *referential character*. The conditions and the constituents of the thought of reasons can be identified and vindicated as a matter of what objects, properties, and relations are there that combine in facts and satisfy and make true those thoughts. Therefore, reasons, as what practical normative thought is about, belong to the realm of reference, of truth-value; and the thought of them is simply a reflection of this reality. This is why extensional accounts of propositions, or contents, come to be considered, and rejected, as relevant alternatives to this factual rendering of what a reason for action is. The mistake that comes to expression in these alternatives is that of looking at semantic roles rather than at semantic values, at reference (truth-aptness) rather

than at referents (truth-values). But it is in terms of the same conceptual area (the area of truth-value, of what is the case) that we are to account for what it is to be a reason.

This approach seems to me to be fundamentally flawed. To say only that practical normative thinking is made possible by its relation to facts that are practical and normative leaves unaccounted how the truth conditions of these thoughts are determined by their contents. And to identify the reality of reasons with the obtaining of facts misdescribes the sort of entity that reasons are. We should say that reasons for action *entail* the obtaining of facts, not that they are *identical*, or can be *reduced*, to them. (In effect, the very notion of a practical normative fact, understood simply in terms of what is the case, makes little sense.) To take the first point first. Two requirements can be legitimately made about the kind of thinking that essentially deals with a practical subject matter and that has normative import (with the kind of thinking that, in the deliberative realist perspective, can constitute the reality of reasons).⁴² The first is that, if thought is really to have practical normative force, it must be possible that things are as they are supposed to be, that is, that certain practical matters be the case. Practical normative thought is to be in general truth-apt, potentially referentially successful. This might be called the requirement of practical *truth*. The second is that the objects, properties, and facts that give truth-values to practical thought must be given in the appropriate *mode of presentation*; they must be so presented as to count as an appropriate ground of deliberation and decision. There is no other way thought can be meaningfully regarded as practical and normative. Practical and normative character consists in and is identified by relations of significance between thought contents and distinctive criteria of success, inferential potentials, and rational commitments. But these relations cannot be explained in terms simply of what makes true a certain thought, but only of what makes *that* making that thought true. The fundamental mistake of the referentialist conceptions of practical thinking is to ignore the theoretical priority of modes of presentations on reference and truth-values, in general and a fortiori in the practical case. (Intuitively, practical normative thought involves a more complex structure of modes of presentation than descriptive thought.) This priority cannot but remind us of the Fregean notion of sense. Thus, I would call the second requirement, the *practical sense* condition.

The mistake about the nature of practical thought is reflected in a corresponding mistake about the nature of its objects, of what it is about – practical normative facts, reasons.

It is a priori that reasons have practical relevance or significance, and that it is only under this description that they can be thought about and be real. If any fact is to count as a reason for action, it must be a fact *in whose light* agent could and should act; this must count as an aspect of its actuality. But if we try to identify reasons only in terms of what is the case, of actual states of affairs, we miss this important, a priori truth. Reasons, being real, or facts, certainly belong to the realm of reference, of what is simply and absolutely the case; but being *reasons* they can be what they are and can be identified only if they are facts, if they are the case, according to a conceptual nature; only if their obtaining in the real of reference is determined by sense-specifications. Reasons (practical normative facts in general) have a complex ontological standing, they are facts with essential aspectual, conceptual properties; they can *be* only because they are qualified in a practical and normative respect. If this requirement is kept well present, as part of what is for some fact to be a reason, we meet no difficulty in seeing how facts of this kind, consisting of conceptual specifications, can be the truth-conditions for normative practical thoughts.

Therefore, the purely referential view of reasons is deeply misguided, both as an account of the possibility of practical thinking (which also underlies the deliberative-internalist approach to them) and as a metaphysics of reasons. We must replace it with a theory of thought which is developed not only in terms of what is true, a fact, but also truths or facts being such only under a certain mode of presentation. Thought is practical and normative because of the way truth-values are presented; and it is only as entities constituted by conceptual specifications that the reality reasons for action is intelligible at all. From this last point of view, the deliberative-realist account, which assumes that reasons are real not outside, or abstracting from, but within the standpoint of deliberation, of practical thought, seems to be better placed to account for the reality of reasons.

(iii) *Practical Sense and Internalism*

Both truth-values and specifications of sense should be introduced as the fundamental dimensions of the possibility of practical normative thought. The relations between these two dimensions are those that hold, generally, between sense and reference. Sense determines reference. Normative, practical senses make facts be normative, practical truth-conditions and determine the corresponding thought contents. Reference does not determine sense. Truths

values do not determine alone practical senses, do not have per se practical relevance or significance, nor (by themselves) allow grasping the concept and the reality of a reason for action.

Recourse to the notion of sense gives us a different take on the fundamental insight of internalism. If the reality of reasons includes the appropriate, practical aspectual dimension, we can begin to see in different, non deliberative terms, their unique, constitutive link to action. (The deliberative-realist account remains valid, at its conceptual level.) Here the thought might be following. Actions have content, which consists in conditions of success, or execution, as well as in modes of presentation. Reasons and actions have contents with the same fundamental modes of presentation, which can determine the same sorts of semantic value and conditions of correctness. If this is so, it is not mysterious that the considerations that figure as the content of reasons can be closely and immediately relevant for actions, since they share the same kind of conceptual mode of presentation and have semantic values determined accordingly.

At the deepest level, the close and immediate relevance should be understood and vindicated in transcendental terms, so linking internalism with the conditions of practical thought. The same kind and structure of content which is constitutive of actions and of reasons for action, and which makes each of them appropriate, made for, the other, is also constitutive of practical normative thought. On the view of these matters licensed by the idea of practical sense, the truth of deliberative internalism and of internal realism about reasons springs from the conditions of practical normative thought, because it is involved in its very possibility. This may be going too far. What we can safely say is that the practical standpoint should be understood as a perspective in thought, in terms of sense, and that deliberative internalism can be really successful as an account of reasons only insofar as, and on the ground of, an appropriate conception of the kind of sense involved (one that underlies both reasons and actions).⁴⁴

This is not a position that can go to detriment of the objectivity and authority of reasons. Drawing attention to sense is making neither a psychological point, nor an epistemological one. It is not to lessen the objectivity of reasons, but to give appropriate recognition of the objective, and perspectival, mode in which actuality has to be determined

and come in view, if it is to constitute a reason. I think that it is only apparently that we have moved away from the practical standpoint of deliberative internalism. Deliberation, just as any other sort of pragmatic, first order standpoint, meets its limits when it comes to account for the possibility of practical thinking. Telegraphically: The practical domain is *wider* and *deeper* than the deliberative one. It is a domain of *thought*, and thought, which is neither merely subjective nor merely factual, has to be accounted for in the complex theoretical ways that are appropriate to it.

3.. B. Williams, “Some Further Notes on Internal and External Reasons”, in E.Millgram, *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, 2001 , p. 91.

4.. B. Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, 1979, in *Varieties of Practical Reasoning*, The MIT Press, 2001, p.77. Williams overall argument is articulated around two main questions: 1.What is for a reason for action to be internal? 2.Are there are only internal reasons for action? Being in quest of an interpretation of internalism, I will limit myself to discuss the first question.

5.. “Internal and External Reasons”, p.78.

6.. “Internal and External Reasons”, p.79.

7.. “Internal and External Reasons”, p.79.

8.. “Internal and External Reasons”, p.80.

9. A further connotation of Williams’ conception of reasons that should be kept present is its *normative pluralism*. Reasons for action are only one in a variety of grounds of assessment of agents and actions. As Williams memorably writes: “There are many things we can say to people who lack appropriate items in their *S* [for instance, a mean and callous husband] There are many things I can say about or to this man: that he is ungrateful, inconsiderate, hard, sexist, nasty, selfish, brutal, and many other disadvantageous things. I shall presumably say, whatever else I say, that it would be better if he were nicer to her. There is one specific thing the external reason theorist wants me to say, that the man has a reason to be nicer. [But] what is the difference supposed to be between saying that the agent has a reason to act more considerately, and saying one of the many other things we can say to people whose behaviour does not accord with what we think it should be? As, for instance, that it would be better if they acted otherwise”, B. Williams, “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, in *Making Sense of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press 1995, p. 39; see also “further Notes on Internal and External Reasons”, p. 96.

10.. “Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame”, p. 39.

11.. R. N. Johnson, “Internal Reasons and the Conditional Fallacy”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 49, 1999, p.54. This is also recognized by J. Dancy, neither a warm supporter, nor an outspoken fiend, of Internalism, who accepts an “explanatory constraint” on normative reasons: “any normative reason is capable of contributing to the explanation of an action that is done for that reason”, as well as a “normative constraint” on motivating reasons: “a motivating reason, that in the light of which one acts, must be the sort of thing that is capable of being among the reasons in favour of so acting”, J. Dancy,

Practical Reality, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 101,103.

14.. B. Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 79.

16.. E. Milgram, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons", *Nous*, 30, 2, 1996, and D. Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1997, hold that there is such commitment; J. Dancy, *Practical Reality*, rejects this view.

17.. Only on a very strained conception of instrumental reasoning can all these ways be considered instrumental, see Millgram, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons", p.218, n.23.

24.. Since Internalism is not committed to a view of reasons as issuing from rationally non-defeasible desires, it is not exposed to criticism simply on account of the distinction between (ostensible) desire-based reasons and value-based reasons for acting. It is in this spirit that J. Broome, "Reason and Motivation", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1997, p.141, n.6, individuates the core of the internalist position in the idea that only desires supply reasons for action, that has, as a consequence, that there are no reasons of action at all. This is clearly a complete misunderstanding, even of the letter of Williams' argument. What is more, there is an obvious issue of internalism about values. It is of no avail to move from a desire-based to a value-based view of reasons for acting, as a move out of, or against, internalism, if internalism could be true of value as well. This might be the case on a buck-passing conception of value combined with an internalist conception of reasons: values are essentially reason-giving properties and all reasons are internal.

25.. B. Hooker, "Williams' Argument against External Reasons", *Analysis*, 1987; D. Parfit, "Reasons and Motivation"; a somewhat similar objection is moved, but against Williams, not internalism as such, by C. Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1986; see also R. Wallace, forthcoming.

26.. The problem arises when, in offering an analysis of a concept or a property in terms of a conditional (on the pattern: A has reason for ϕ -ing in C entails that, if A were fully rational, he would be motivated to ϕ -ing in C), the truth of the conditional in the analysis is (fallaciously) restricted to the truth of the antecedent. In this way it is ignored that the entailment holds also in case the conditional is true on account of the antecedent being false, what is apt to disrupt the purported point of the analysis. See the careful discussion by R. N. Johnson, "Internal Reasons and the Conditional Fallacy", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 49, 1999.

28.. In this case, the entailment holds because the antecedent of the conditional

is false, as it is obviously possible. But in this way, the theoretical purpose of the analysis, which was to connect, positively and determinately, reasons for action and sound deliberation, is frustrated.

29.. The problem is completely general, since it may be seen to have to do with a non-monotonic feature of any improvement in deliberative rationality: if doing, or wanting to do so and so, are the deliberative conclusion that is reached on the ground of a certain body of true information and of certain rational procedures, adding more true information and more rational procedures will not in general leave such conclusion standing.

34.. The distinction between internalist existential claims and claims and procedures of accessibility has been drawn in epistemological internalism: “There is no basis for the premise that what is epistemically justified must be restricted to feasible doxastic alternatives. It can be a worthwhile thing to help people to choose among the epistemic alternatives open to them. But suppose that there were occasions when forming the attitude that best fits a person’s evidence was beyond normal cognitive limits. This would still be the attitude *justified* by the person’s evidence”, Conee, Feldman, *Evidentialism*, p. 87. It is also put forward in a recent discussion of practical internalism: “The most prominent subjectivist accounts of reasons for action are [...] best understood as accounts of the truth-makers in a certain domain. They are not in the first instance recommendations about the kind of reasoning that ought to be going on in people’s heads [...]subjectivist accounts of reasons are best understood as offering truth-makers for claims about what we have reason to do, rather than accounts of how to discover what we have reason to do”, See D. Sobel, “Subjective Accounts of Reasons for Action”, *Ethics*, 111, 2001, pp.462-3. As it is well known, the distinction between the account of what is for an action to be right and how should one proceed in telling what action is right is standardly drawn in the debates about consequentialist ethics.

35.. There are hints that Williams had this in mind, as when he identifies a reason for an agent to act with the “answer to a deliberative question” that is “formed in part” by some element of his *S.*), Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, p.79.

36.. This bars the way to purely symbolic actions. See T. Magri, “Consequentialism and Practical Constraint”, in *Filosofia Analitica*, 1997.

41.. “[A] class of worlds is hardly the right sort of thing to make an action sensible or right. And an abstract object with a structure that mirrors that of a sentence seems to be no better off “, *Practical Reality*, p.115.

42.. These requirement are implicitly accepted by Dancy, certainly no friend of the internal perspective; see *Practical Reality*, pp.136-7: “It seems, then, that the explanation of action, at least that of intentional action, can always be

achieved by laying the considerations in the light of which the agent saw the action as desirable, sensible, or required. If things were as the agent supposed, there is no bar against the agent's reasons being among the reasons in favour of doing what he actually did. That is to say, the reasons that motivated the agent can be among or even identical with the good reasons in the case, those that favour acting as he did. Equally, the good reasons can motivate him, since they can be the considerations in the light of which he acted."

44. All this is, of course, linked to the *conceptual dimension* of acting on reasons. To act on a reason is not merely to act on a certain ground, but to act by grasping *that* as a ground for action, that is, *in the light of it*. Acting on reasons is the exercise of a conceptual capacity. It is a conceptual capacity, because, on the one hand, it involves modes of identification and recognition of states of things and of features of states of things (as, for instance, allowing, promoting, requiring, forbidding action) that observe Evan's Generality Constraint, and, on the other hand, and because of this, it is continuous with the capacities that the agent displays in rational deliberation.