

# Norms of Mind

## Summary

The fact that we do - and should - rely on reasons, or try to conform to corresponding norms, when forming beliefs or intentions is commonly explained either in terms of our access to the appropriateness of such a reliance and to the authority of the respective reasons or norms (cf. the internalist view), or in terms of the nature or function of the mental states concerned and the proper rational working of our minds (cf. the externalist view). This sub-project is meant to present and assess a third approach (i.e., the experiential view), according to which our reliance on reasons is rather a matter of our being phenomenally aware of the normative dimension and standing of the conscious states involved. # Our aim is to defend as much as possible the idea that this third view is best equipped to account for our reliance on reasons, as well as to pay justice to certain related phenomenological observations.

## Introduction

Our proposed research - which is meant to be conducted by one PhD student - is concerned with the nature and the application of the norms that govern the ways in which we, or similarly rational beings, form beliefs and intentions (and, consequently, act). In particular, we aim to investigate why we actually follow such norms when making up our minds, and under which conditions we can count as satisfying them.

The norms in question may be epistemic or practical in nature (cf. Audi (2001) for a detailed discussion of the structural similarities between the two normative realms). They may oblige us to do something - for instance, when they demand from us to intend to help a person in need, or to give up a prejudice. They may allow us to do something - for instance, when they permit us to pursue our hobbies, or to believe what we see. Or they may proscribe us to hurt do something - for instance, when they prohibit hurting other people, or believing the words of the clairvoyant. More abstract examples are the obligation to form only true beliefs, or the demand to intend to do what morality - or, alternatively, prudence - requires.

The norms which govern our formation of beliefs and intentions are intimately linked to reasons. This is basically due to the fact this formation is essentially rational: we normally form beliefs and intentions on the basis of, and in response to, respective reasons available to us. Therefore, by governing our formation of these states, the norms in question govern automatically our responses to the kinds of reason concerned. That we are allowed or obliged to form a particular belief or intention thus means that the appropriate (i.e., permitted or demanded) response to the relevant reasons is precisely to form the state in question. In other words, when we are making up our minds about theoretical or practical matters, we conform to the respective norms by relying on the right reasons.

## State of research

**Two issues: appropriateness and reliance:** Now, in view of the fact that our reliance on reasons in making up our minds is inseparably linked to certain governing norms, many important questions have been posed - prominently among them (cf. sub-project A above): whether the reasons derive their normative power from norms, or whether they instead actually establish them (Scanlon (1998)); or whether what we usually take to be the norms governing our responses to reasons are really all genuinely normative legitimations and obligations, or whether some of them are instead mere descriptive claims about what it means, say, to be rational (cf. Broome (2000), and Kolodny (2005)). Our own focus will be on two other important questions that are concerned with the actual occurrence and adequacy of our reliance on reasons.

The first - the *question of appropriateness* - addresses the issue of which conditions there are on the adequacy of our rational formations of beliefs and intentions: when do we actually count as appropriately relying on epistemic or practical reasons, or as conforming to the corresponding norms? What is at issue here is therefore the legitimacy of our formations of beliefs and intentions (and thus also of any subsequent performance of actions).

The second question - the *question of reliance* - deals with the issue of why reasons and norms indeed play their central role in how we acquire our beliefs and intentions: why do we actually rely on epistemic and practical reasons, and try to satisfy the corresponding norms - at least under normal conditions? What is at issue here is, accordingly, the psychological impact which reasons and norms normally have on our formation of beliefs and intentions (and thus also on our performance of actions).

**Two approaches to appropriateness: internalism and externalism:** The rich amount of theories and controversies regarding the question of appropriateness cannot properly be captured in a research project like this. Therefore, we have decided to focus on two particular approaches which have figured very prominently both in epistemology and in practical philosophy - namely what we will call the internalist and the externalist views on appropriateness. (Note that the notions 'internalism' and 'externalism' are often used in other and sometimes unrelated ways, notably in practical philosophy and in relation to how reasons or, alternatively, normative judgements are linked to motivation).

Although it is possible to be internalist with respect to one type of reasons and norms, and externalist with respect to another (cf. Burge (2003) on such a differentiation between forming beliefs on the basis of other beliefs, and forming them on the basis of perceptions), the two views are usually taken to be central elements of opposing accounts of normativity.

**Internalism:** The *internalist view* endorses the idea that what is central to our appropriate reliance on epistemic or practical reasons and our conformity to the corresponding norms is that the respective reasons and norms are, at least partly and in principle, accessible to us. More precisely, this accessibility is understood as a condition on the appropriateness of belief- or intention-formation. That we are permitted or required to believe or intend something is thus said to depend partly on our capacity to grasp (part of) the respective right or obligation. This grasp should thereby go beyond the mere recognition of the reasons and norms in question. It does not suffice that we simply realize that there is a reason - or even a good reason - to believe or intend something. We also have to be able to recognize that it is a good reason *for us*, and we have to be able to make this fact clear to ourselves and to others. Therefore, internalists maintain that the appropriateness of a formation of a belief or an intention requires possible access to the fact that this formation is appropriate from our own perspective (cf. Williams (1981), Korsgaard (1996), Velleman (2000), and Wright (2004)). And this again requires a special form of access to the reasons or norms in question - namely a form of access which is somehow reflective in nature and goes beyond the mere recognition of reasons in the form of perceptions, desires, descriptive and normative judgements, and so on.

According to some versions of the internalist view, this accessibility condition requires the possibility of full conceptual grasp of the appropriateness of the belief- or intention-formation and, hence, of the relevant reasons or norms. This may mean the ability to point to the reasons and their normative power (cf. Chisholm (1977) and Lehrer (1997); cf. also Bonjour in Bonjour & Sosa (2003)); or the capacity to access those mental factors responsible for the appropriateness of one's belief- or intention-formations (cf. Conee & Feldman (2004)); or the ability to grasp - and perhaps even determine - the nature and status of the norms that we are following and which may even explicitly guide us (cf. Korsgaard (1996); cf. also Soldati (2002) for discussion); or the capacity to recognize that certain reasons would survive fully informed and rational deliberation (cf. Williams (1981)); or some other reflective capacity or set of ancillary beliefs of a similar kind (cf. Wright (2004), or traditional foundationalists in epistemology; cf. also Burge (2003) for discussion).

Moreover, at least in the moral case, internalists often assume a necessary link between grasping that we are obliged - or perhaps even only allowed - to rely on certain reasons and actually ending up intending - or otherwise being motivated - to act accordingly (cf. Williams (1981) and Korsgaard (1996)). Hence, the access required for appropriateness might also have to show such motivational consequences. And it is not implausible - though rather uncommon - to assume that something similar might be true in the epistemic or in other practical cases.

Less demanding versions of the internalist view may weaken the accessibility condition by allowing that the grasp of the normative status of the belief- or intention-formation need not be complete (and perhaps not even entirely conceptual) in its reflective grasp of the normative force and standing of the respective reasons and norms. For instance, Wright (2004) argues that the Cartesian sceptical challenge to, say, our perceptual knowledge of the external world can be answered only if we are able to rationally claim warrant for our perceptual beliefs; and that this again requires implicitly accepting or trusting that the respective sceptical scenarios do not obtain (e.g., that the external world does exist). Hence, the form of access required for the appropriate formation of perceptual - and possibly other - beliefs may concern only part of the normative status of the respective reasons, namely their intactness in the face of scepticism.

**Externalism:** The externalist view, on the other hand, maintains that what matters for appropriateness is mainly the fact that the states involved in the formation - notably those providing us with access to the reasons concerned (e.g., perceptions, desires, normative or other judgements, etc.) - are of the right kind. Accordingly, it is claimed that being in those states already suffices for our resulting formations of beliefs or intentions to be appropriate, or to satisfy the respective permissions or demands - at least under normal conditions, when our minds are working properly and we are unaware of any potential defeating circumstances.

Externalism is compatible with the idea that relying on reasons involves recognizing them as (what seems to be good) reason, as well as with the idea that it is essential to reasons that they can be recognized by us as (seemingly good) reasons - as long it is not made a condition on the appropriateness of such a reliance that we have (partial) access to the fact that the reasons in questions are really good. For the sufficiency claim implies that the normative appropriateness at issue does not depend on the availability of a further reflective capacity or form of access, over and above our basic awareness of the reasons by means of perceptions, judgements, and so on.

Most versions of the externalist view agree on which states are of the right kind, namely those being in and relying on which is conducive to attaining the epistemic or practical values in question. But they differ in how they account for this conduciveness. Perceptions, for instance, are often understood as having the evolved function to lead to true or knowledge-constituting beliefs (cf. Dretske (2000)). But alternatively, their intimate link to truth or knowledge may also be seen as a constitutive (and possibly non-naturalisable) part of their nature as representational states (cf. Burge (2003)). On the other hand, certain kinds of desire (in conjunction with respective beliefs) have been said to be likely to lead to intentions to perform moral actions in virtue of being of the right type - such as desires of benevolence (cf. Hume (1998), though he may be more internalist than not), or desires to act morally (cf. Parfit (1984)), or desires which

otherwise reflect moral worth (cf. Nagel (1986); Smith (1994) and Pettit & Smith (2006) for discussion).

**Deontic vs. evaluative norms:** The fact that the internalist view stresses our access to reasons and norms, while the externalist view highlights the conduciveness of the mental states concerned to the attainment of values, correlates with another important difference in emphasis. Proponents of the internalist view often assert that the satisfaction of norms should be understood as a matter of our own responsibility, investment and achievement (cf. Chisholm (1977), Korsgaard (1996), Lehrer (1997), Pollock & Cruz (1999), Velleman (2000), and Wright (2004)). Their externalist opponents, by contrast, maintain that what counts instead is the fact that we actually succeed in acquiring knowledge, or intending what is rational or good (cf. Parfit (1984), Nagel (1986), Dretske (2000), Kornblith (2002), Sosa in Bonjour & Sosa (2003), and Burge (2003)); while it hardly matters whether this is simply a consequence of the nature and normal functioning of our minds, as well as, possibly, luck (cf. Williams (1981) and Pritchard (2005) for discussion of the latter topic), or whether we are involved in a more active or reflective way. Hence, what internalists seem to be concerned mainly with deontic norms, conformity to which requires some explicit grasp of them and presumably also letting oneself being guided by them; and externalists mainly with evaluative norms, conformity to which requires primarily the attainment of the values concerned.

**Internalism and externalism on reliance:** Now, the question of reliance has not very often been addressed by proponents of either the internalist or the externalist view. But the natural answer for the internalist would seem to be something like the following: we actually rely on reasons because we take this practice to be appropriate (i.e., permitted or demanded), at least as long as we are unaware of any potentially defeating circumstance; and we normally take reliance on reasons to be appropriate because we have some access - which we presumably exercise from time to time - to the kind of appropriateness at issue. What seems to become especially important here is the issue of authority: of why we take, from our own subjective perspective, good reasons and norms as making legitimate claims on us (cf. Korsgaard (1996)). Most internalists locate the source of this legitimacy in our own rational or human nature. Accordingly, our access to the appropriateness of relying on reasons consists either in our own conferral of this appropriateness onto that rational practice (e.g., in virtue of our autonomous will; cf. Korsgaard (1996)), or in the reflective insight that, given our human nature, this rational practice is, in one sense or another, good for us (cf. Williams (1981), Velleman (2000), and Wright (2004)).

By contrast, an externalist will presumably answer the question of reliance as follows: we actually rely on reasons when forming beliefs or intentions simply because such reliance is part of being in the respective reason-providing states; and it is part of being in these states because of certain aspects of their nature or function. Moreover, our resulting practice of reliance will make sense in the wider picture of life and survival since it will be, by and large, successful - even though we need not have access to this fact for it to obtain (cf. Dretske (2000), Kornblith (2002), and Burge (2003)). Nonetheless, externalists may still resist the naturalisation of reasons and norms (e.g., Nagel (1986), and Burge (2003)) - although it is not always clear what would be gained by such resistance, given that some of the main obstacles to naturalisation, such as subjective accessibility or even subjective responsibility, are taken to be far less important than often thought. In any case, reliance is understood by the externalists, not as a form of personal trust, but as part of the proper working of the rational mind. Consequently, the issue of authority turns out to be unconnected to the issue of reliance.

## Proposed research

The main aim of our research project is to put forward a further and so far undeservedly neglected alternative to the internalist and externalist views on the occurrence and appropriateness of rational formations of beliefs and intentions - namely what we would like to call the experiential view. The need for such a third view arises mainly from two sources: first, the seeming failure of the internalist and externalist theories to provide fully satisfactory accounts of our reliance of reasons, especially in respect to its psychological explanation (cf. the question of reliance); and second, certain phenomenological observations concerning our awareness of the normativity of our own mental states. The experiential view is thereby meant to constitute a compromise position trying to incorporate some of the virtues of the other two views, while avoiding most of their vices.

The project consists of three parts: (i) the discussion of some of the main weaknesses of the internalist and externalist views; (ii) the formulation and elaboration of the experiential view as a viable third alternative; and (iii) the investigation of the defensibility of the experiential view in the light of its advantages, as well as various important objections. But again, this research project is intended to leave room for the prospective PhD student to choose his or her own focal points and hypotheses.

**First part: weaknesses of the internalist and externalist views:** Internalists and externalists (as understood here) have faced numerous objections both within epistemology and within practical philosophy; and many of these criticisms have been put forward by proponents of the respective opposing view. The relevant debates concern, for instance, the link between moral reasons and motivation (cf. Williams (1981), Smith (1994), and McDowell (1998)), or the regress problem of justification and the need for, and availability of, a refutation of scepticism (cf. Bonjour & Sosa (2003), and Wright (2004)).

However, since this project does not allow an adequate consideration of all these objections, it is intended to concentrate

on challenges concerning the two central ideas of the views under consideration - namely the internalist idea that appropriateness requires some form of access over and above the mere recognition of reasons, and the externalist idea that being in the right reason-providing states suffices for appropriateness.

One of the main relevant problems for the internalist view is that it seems to be too intellectualistic, notably in its approach to the question of reliance, but also in its approach to the question of appropriateness. For instance, small children or certain animals appear to be able to engage in various forms of reasoning, and moreover in appropriate ways, without possessing or using the reflective or conceptual capacities required by internalists, and without being able to answer - and perhaps even to pose - the question of authority (cf. Burge (2003) and Papineau (1999)).

The externalist view, on the other hand, seems unable to explain the apparent link to the subject - after all, *we* do the reasoning and are held responsible for it, and not our minds - and hence the distinctively normative character of the reasons and norms concerned (cf. Korsgaard (1996) and Wright (2004)). And a further problem for the externalist is to accommodate the fact that it appears to be the absence of an *awareness* of defeating circumstances - rather than merely the absence of such circumstances - which matters for the appropriateness at issue.

Our hope is to make plausible that these are indeed serious objections to the two views under discussion, and that this fact provides strong motivation for the search for an alternative approach to our reliance on reasons - such as it is embodied by the experiential view.

**Interlude: the experiential view:** One of the key ideas of this new view is that we experience the normative power or status of the mental states concerned (or their manifestations in consciousness). That is, it is part of the phenomenal character (i.e., the what-it-is-like aspect) of the states which bring us into contact with reasons (e.g., perceptions or evaluations) that they are phenomenally marked as providing us with good reasons; and it is part of the phenomenal character of the states which we form on the basis of the reasons (e.g., judgements or intentions) that they are phenomenally marked as being supported by, or responding to, good reasons. Indeed, the idea is, more generally, that it is essential to our experience of rational states that we experience their normative force and standing: this is just what it means to recognize them as providing or being supported by reasons (cf. Soldati (2000) and (2002), and Dorsch (2007b)).

Another essential ingredient to the experiential view is that these experiences of normative appropriateness reflect the respective aspects of the nature or function of the states involved - for instance, their constitutive link to, or their characteristic role in the achievement of, epistemic or practical values. For example, the idea that perceptions are experienced as providing good reasons for belief is taken to indicate the fact that perceptions normally lead to true and justified beliefs (cf. Dorsch (2007b); cf. Martin (2002) for a similar idea).

The answer of the experiential view to the question of reliance is fairly straightforward: we rely on reasons when forming beliefs or intentions because we experience them as allowing or obliging us to do just this, and because we take this experiential awareness - just as perceptual or other forms of awareness - at face value (unless we are aware of defeating circumstances). The story of why we take our experience of normative appropriateness at face value will therefore be very similar to that one told with respect to perceptual consciousness - for instance, because the normative force of the recognized reasons becomes directly manifest as a genuine aspect of the world or our lives, and as open to our rational sensitivities (cf. McDowell (1998); cf. Martin (2002) for perceptions and their experiential rational dimension).

With respect to the issue of appropriateness, however, the answer of the experiential view is presumably largely identical with that of the externalist one. Given that the experience of normative appropriateness is taken to reflect the substantial and stable links of the respective reason-giving states to epistemic or practical values, the appropriateness concerned is naturally understood in terms of the factors establishing these links, such as the nature or function of the states involved. Importantly, although the experiential view claims that the experiential form of access is necessary to explain our reliance on reasons, it would not seem very plausible for the theory to interpret this form of awareness as a condition on appropriateness as well (although it may still turn out that how we experience the respective states is necessarily linked to what is said to be responsible for their normative power, namely their nature and function).

Accordingly, while the experiential view agrees with the internalist one on the idea that access to the appropriateness of our reliance on reasons plays an essential part in this rational practice, the former does not treat it as necessary for the practice to be appropriated, but only as distinctive of its occurrence. And while the experiential view shares with the externalist one the idea that this appropriateness is primarily a matter of being in the right kind of state, it stresses also that we have some access to this kind of appropriateness. The experiential view therefore tries to find a middle-way between its two more extreme alternatives and thereby to preserve the significance of their central ideas: that accessibility is needed, and that being in the right type of state suffices. Of course, it manages to do this mainly because it understands the experiential access to normativity as an integral part of the states concerned.

**Second part: the elaboration of the experiential view:** The second part of the research project aims at a proper formulation of the experiential view. Among the things to be achieved are, first of all, a clearer specification of the notion of experiential (or phenomenal) awareness, and a better understanding of the central claims of the view. This will involve research into two topics which have been extensively discussed within the philosophy of mind: the nature of phenomenal consciousness (cf., e.g., Siewert (1998) and Martin (2002)), as well as phenomenal concepts (cf. the MR of

Prof. Nida-Rümelin), and the nature and function of the mental states concerned (cf., e.g., Dretske (2000) and Burge (2003)). Relevant issues are: whether the relationship between the normative power or standing of states and our phenomenal experience of it is one of constitution, resemblance, counterfactual dependence, or something else (cf. Martin (2002) for some discussion); and to which extent this experience is laden with concepts (cf. McDowell (1994)).

As already suggested, the experiential view shares important elements with the two other positions. This raises the question of how exactly it is related to them. To answer this, it needs to be asked, among other things, to which extent the experiential view presents a real alternative to, and not merely a modification of, either the internalist or the externalist view.

It will also be helpful to take a comparative look at other recent debates in philosophy in which positions very similar to the experiential view have been put forward - such as theories which treat our self-knowledge of mental states or actions as based on experiences of them (cf. Dorsch (2007b); or theories which take our basic awareness of ourselves to be experiential (cf. Kriegel, U. & Williford, K. (eds.) (2006)).

For further support - and likewise for inspiration - the experiential view should also consider the phenomenological accounts offered by Brentano, Lipps, the early Husserl, and their followers Ach, Pfänder and Scheler (cf. especially Ach (1935) and Pfänder (1963)). Since they were all concerned with normative issues and with our formation of beliefs and intentions and have come forward with many detailed and valuable insights, it will be worthwhile to study the respective phenomenological writings and connect them to the proposed account of our basic awareness of normativity, as well as to some of the related contemporary debates and issues.

**Third part: the defensibility of the experiential view:** The aim of the third and last part of our research is to assess the experiential view, and to investigate to which extent it can be defended.

This will, first of all, involve elucidating in more detail how it can answer the question of reliance without falling victim to the problems facing the internalist and externalist views (cf. the discussion above). While internalism seems to over-intellectualize our rational formations of beliefs and intentions by demanding a sophisticated form of access to the respective reasons and norms, externalism seems to fail in the opposite way by denying us, understood as responsible subjects, a prominent role in those formations. The experiential view appears to do neither: experiences of normativity can be had (though not conceptualized) by subjects lacking the respective concepts or reflective capacities; and the respective experiential awareness, or lack thereof, enables us to make our formations of beliefs and intentions our own and take responsibility for them - for instance, by letting ourselves be guided by what we experience as reasons (cf. Soldati (2002) for a similar approach to the issue of rule-following).

Then, the experiential view seems to get support from certain phenomenological observations (cf. Ach (1935) and Pfänder (1963)). We normally take our beliefs and intuitions to be appropriate, that is, supported by good reasons (if not, we tend to revise them or give them up). But our respective kind of awareness usually does not seem to be due to an inference based on (introspective) judgements or beliefs, given that it appears to be much more immediate than such a form of reasoning. And it should not be understood as being due to a spontaneous intuition, given that there is no good reason to postulate the existence of the required (causal or constitutive) reliable mechanism between forming a belief or intention in an appropriate way and immediately judging, when considering the issue, that this formation is indeed appropriate. Hence, the best explanation of why we take our beliefs and intentions to be appropriate responses to the reasons available to us may be that we *experience* this appropriateness (cf. Dorsch (2007b); cf. also O'Brien (2003) for similar arguments concerning our awareness of agency). The aim will be to evaluate and, if possible, to defend this understanding of the observation that we often take our beliefs and intentions to be appropriate. We will thereby fall back on the results of the work on phenomenal reflection done within the MR on phenomenal concepts conducted by Prof. Nida-Rümelin.

But when assessing the experiential view, it also needs to be considered how this approach to our reliance on reasons can deal with important objections. For instance, since the experiential view sides with the externalist one with respect to the issue of appropriateness, a defence of the former requires a satisfactory response to the internalist challenges to the externalist understanding of appropriateness. There is some hope that the issue of authority may be resolved by reference to the fact that our experiential awareness of the normative power of reasons presents itself to us as to be taken at face value (cf. McDowell (1998)). And any potential sceptical challenge to our recognition of reasons as appropriate may perhaps be addressed - so as to avoid the need for something like an internalist notion of trust - in terms of an impossibility of widespread failure, when the attainment of the respective values is concerned (cf. Davidson (1983)).

In addition, there are other likely objections which need to be addressed and, if possible, answered. In particular, it has been doubted that intellectual reason-giving or reason-supported conscious states (e.g., conscious beliefs or intentions) really possess a distinctive phenomenal character (cf. Siewert (1998) for a discussion)). However, most of the related doubts concern the issue of whether differences in phenomenal character can be as fine-grained as differences in conceptual content; while the experience of normativity assumed by the experiential view is independent of differences in content, and even in mental kind, given that it pertains equally to all conscious beliefs and intentions (cf. Dorsch (2007b); cf. also Dorsch & Soldati (2005) and Soldati (2005a) for a more thorough defence of the idea that conscious

beliefs possess a distinctive phenomenal character).

### **Institutional framework**

The research for this PhD-project will be accompanied and supervised by Prof. Gianfranco Soldati and Dr. Fabian Dorsch, both from the philosophy department of University of Fribourg.

Prof. Soldati has published a book and many articles on issues surrounding phenomenology, phenomenal consciousness, self-awareness, and the normativity of the mental (cf., e.g., Soldati (2000), (2002), (2005a) and (2005b)).

Dr. Dorsch has done extensive research on moral motivation and normativity, our knowledge and awareness of our own mental actions, and has written on the role of emotions in evaluations (Dorsch (2007a)), and on the normativity of judgements and beliefs, as well as our experience of epistemic and practical reasons (Dorsch (2007b)). He will also be a member of the SNF-funded, Geneva-based research project on properties and relations closely linked to the research module on the (meta-)metaphysics of properties and relations (cf. Mulligan, Correia, et al. \*\*\*).

Together, they have defended the idea that judgements and other conscious intellectual states possess a phenomenal character (Dorsch & Soldati (2005); cf. also Soldati (2005a)). Besides, they have organized - as well as presented their own work at - several international conferences at the University of Fribourg, among them one on the normativity of reasons (with Davor Bodrozic, Mark Kalderon, Niko Kolodny, Alex Miller, David Owens, Andrew Reisner and Nishi Shah as the other speakers), and one on the phenomenology of agency (with Michael Schmitz, A. D. Smith and Stephen White as the other speakers).

### **Timetable (to be modified in accordance with the candidate's interests)**

*Months 1-12:* First part: Critical assessment of the internalist and externalist views (in close collaboration with sub-project A)

*Months 12-24:* Second part: Formulation of the experiential view (in close collaboration with the MR of Prof. Nida-Rümelin on phenomenal concepts)

*Months 25-36:* Third part: Critical assessment of the experiential view

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