

If one considers equality to be at the heart of a theory of justice, and if the metric of equality should be, as I have argued, human flourishing (Christine Sypnowich, *Equality Renewed: Justice, Flourishing and the Egalitarian Ideal* [London: Routledge, 2017]), then “edificatory” perfectionism does have a role to play in ensuring that a society is just. When we seek to make people equal, what we care about, after all, is not merely their salaries or property, but whether they are living well. Kramer’s (and Rawls’s) favored criterion, warranted self-respect, captures some of what’s at stake, but the edificatory perfectionist will be concerned that individuals partake in that which warrants the self-respect, not just the feeling that results.

Kramer relates that for the purpose of this book he is “noncommittal among sundry theories of justice,” but that the forthcoming sequel will detail a “stoical theory” which replaces and supplements Rawlsian principles (340). Perhaps a more radical egalitarian perfectionism will get a better shake in that future project (although given its emphasis on stoicism, that seems unlikely). Certainly, it is unfortunate that, thus far, in this impressive argument for the place of excellence in liberal theory, Kramer so quickly dismisses the potential for a robust perfectionism to inform and enhance our understanding of justice.

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Mantel, Susanne. *Determined by Reasons: A Competence Account of Acting for a Normative Reason*.

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Susanne Mantel presents a welcome new account of what it is to act for a normative reason. In her words, “an action that is performed for a normative reason manifests the agent’s normative competence with respect to that reason” (42). Acting for a normative reason is to be distinguished from acting merely in accordance with a normative reason. For example, “Suppose Finn should turn off the horror movie because a child is entering the room who will otherwise be scared. Finn turns off the movie, but he is doing this only for the fun of annoying Lisa” (1). The consideration “that a child is entering the room” is a normative reason for Finn to turn off the horror movie, and although he does turn off the horror movie, he does not do so for the normative reason, even though he acts in accordance with the normative reason. This matters for appraising Finn’s action. We might think that doing the right thing deserves praise, but once we learn that Finn only did the right thing because he wanted to annoy Lisa, he does not seem to deserve praise after all. Determining whether an agent acts for or merely in accordance with a normative reason requires an account of this distinction. Mantel does an excellent job of providing such an account.

Mantel’s Normative Competence Account is broadly Aristotelian: the agent’s character and dispositions play a central role. It thus occupies some interesting and important conceptual space between existing neo-Humean and neo-Kantian accounts, managing to avoid difficulties faced by both. Reasons determine our actions “via our agency, by determining our minds and motivations and, thereby,

our actions. When we manifest our competence to conform to them, *we* make normative reasons determine what we do. The agent's character enables this determination. This is important: not only do we want our actions to match normative reasons, we want to *make* them match. This is what we do when we *act for normative reasons*" (1).

The central chapters of the book (chaps. 3 and 4) are devoted to the positive account. Normative competence in acting for reasons consists of the following three subcompetencies:

1. *Epistemic Competence*: the competence to represent the normative reasons of that family with descriptive beliefs.
2. *Volitional Competence*: the competence to be motivated by those descriptive beliefs to do what is favored by the represented reasons.
3. *Executorial Competence*: the competence to execute those motivations.

When this competence is manifested, through the manifestation of all three of these subcompetencies, we can ensure that the agent's action is a nonaccidental performance of the action recommended by the normative reason, and hence a case of acting for rather than merely in accordance with normative reasons.

Normative Competence is a complex disposition. Specifically, it is the disposition to perform actions that match normative reasons of a certain kind. Analyzing Normative Competence in terms of dispositions allows Mantel to avoid familiar struggles with deviant causation faced by nearby causal accounts, as well as further underappreciated problems of accidental connection in motivation by reasons.

Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to distinguishing the Normative Competence Account from causal accounts of acting for reasons. Mantel shows that giving an account of what it is to act for a normative reason requires a basing relation between the agent's beliefs and motivations that is content-specific and that reflects the normative force of the reason, in the sense of reflecting the favoring relation that the reason has to the action favored (28). This basing relation must be content-specific to ensure that the agent is motivated by the right kinds of considerations (sec. 2.2), ruling out cases in which the agent has a normative reason, believes that he has a normative reason, or is caused by that belief to do what the normative reason favors, but in such a way that his doing what the reason favors is inappropriately based on the belief. Consider the following example:

Angry Bob. Due to an earthquake, Bob is buried alive under the debris of his house and the only way to save his life is for him to scream. This is a normative reason for Bob to scream. If he screams, someone will rescue him. Bob holds a descriptive belief representing that normative reason. But instead of causing him to scream directly, or in the normal way, as it were, his belief that he is buried alive and that the only way to save his life is for him to scream causes Bob to deliberate on whether his life is worth saving. By that process of deliberation, the belief causes him to remember that he, embarrassingly, recently failed an important job interview, and that, instead of him, an amateur got the job. Remembering this failure makes him so angry that he wants to scream out loud, and so he does. (20)

The problem here is that although Bob's belief about the normative reason causes Bob's motivation, it does so in such a way that it does not involve the content of the belief. So, the basing relation must be content-specific.

Additionally, an appropriate basing relation must reflect the normative force of the reason, ruling out cases in which the agent is motivated by normative reasons in the wrong kind of way, despite manifesting a content-specific disposition. Consider the following example:

Bicycle. Today is Bill's birthday. This is a normative reason for his friend Anna to give him a present. Anna believes that today is Bill's birthday. However, this belief, as such, does not motivate her to give him a present. Today she is totally consumed with figuring out how to get money for a new bicycle. Then she has an idea: Bill could lend her some money! Well, Bill is quite stingy. She needs to put him into his generous mood in order to persuade him to lend her money. Only on his birthday is Bill generous, and even then only towards those people who give him a present. Because today is his birthday, giving him a present today will bring about that he will be generous to Anna. Now Anna exercises instrumental rationality and forms the desire to give Bill a present today. So, she gives Bill a present. (29)

Although Anna is motivated by the right content ("that today is Bill's birthday") and she does what that consideration favors—giving Bill a present—her motivation is of the wrong kind to count as acting for a normative reason. It is a selfish, instrumental motivation, rather than a moral or friendship-related motivation. The problem is that Anna is unresponsive to the normative force of the reason. Mantel rightly points out that this puts pressure on the Identity Thesis—the view that normative reasons must be identical to motivating reasons. Rejecting the Identity Thesis is also the focus of the entire second half of the book. The first two chapters of the book show us that the mere ontological identity of our motivating reasons and the normative reasons would not be sufficient to rule out problematic accidental connections between normative reasons and the agent's action. Merely being motivated by a normative reason to do the action that it favors is not sufficient to act for that normative reason, because "one can be motivated by the consideration that *p* in 'bad' ways, even if it happens to motivate one to do the right thing" (30).

Part 2 of the book establishes the ontological liberality of the account. Here Mantel rejects the increasingly orthodox view that normative reasons must be identical to motivating reasons. Mantel marshals an impressive battery of arguments against this necessary connection, concluding that although motivating and normative reasons might sometimes be identical, they need not be. As she puts it, "the normative reason the agent acts for need not be identical with a motivating reason—instead, it corresponds to a motivating reason" (175). While normative reasons are worldly items, motivating reasons are of the mind, and their contents are usually more fine-grained than the worldly items that compose normative reasons. The core of the argument is that claims about the ontology of reasons must be made on ontological grounds, rather than, as they so often have been, on theoretical grounds. For example, neither the fact that normative and

motivating reasons are both called “reasons” (sec. 6.1) nor the fact that they often coexist (sec. 6.2) can provide a convincing basis for the Identity Thesis. Mantel goes on to provide some helpful distinctions between three different things that might be meant by the Identity Thesis. Motivating reasons can play the role of favoring things, functioning as part of deliberation, and explaining why agents do what they do. These three different roles would generate three different versions of the Identity Thesis, if it were true that normative reasons were identical to motivating reasons:

Normative Identity Thesis: When an agent acts (i.e., performs action X) for a normative reason N, there is a normative reason N* (for action X) that motivates the agent to do X such that N is identical with N*. (97)

Deliberative Identity Thesis: When an agent acts for the normative reason N, there is a consideration C (that the agent believes and that motivates the agent) such that N is identical with C. (101)

Explanatory Identity Thesis: When an agent acts for a normative reason N, there is an explanans E of the action (which explains it in a way that distinguishes actions from other kinds of events) such that N is identical with E. (106)

Mantel convincingly establishes that there is very little ground to think that any of these are true, and therefore that there is any kind of necessary ontological connection between normative and motivating reasons.

A major virtue of Mantel’s account is its refreshing liberality. In addition to its liberality about the ontology of reasons, it is also liberal about how, exactly, an agent can manifest her competence to do what the normative reasons favor. Mantel rightly observes that “people act for normative reasons in many different ways” (70). She does an excellent job of accommodating this diversity in a way that avoids privileging any particular way of acting for a normative reason. There is the more reflective, broadly Kantian, way in which an agent “explicitly reflects on normative features of a situation and comes to represent the normative reason . . . as a normative reason to perform an action” (71). The Kantian agent forms a normative belief about what she ought to do and then acts enkratically from this normative belief. There is also the less reflective, broadly Humean, way. The Humean agent acts on the basis of inclinations that track normative reasons but need not think of herself as acting for normative reasons and need not represent the normative reasons as normative reasons. Both of these are legitimate ways to act for normative reasons, and neither the desires involved in the less reflective way nor the enkratic action involved in the more reflective way are necessary or sufficient for acting for a normative reason. This liberality allows Mantel to sidestep various disputes, for example, over whether moral worth involves motivation by moral rightness “de re” or “de dicto”—according to Mantel, either of these kinds of motivation can be involved in normatively competent action. Mantel shows us how it is possible to act for reasons by using either the heart or the head, without privileging or denigrating either of these ways of responding to reasons.

A third aspect of refreshing liberality is in what can trigger the epistemic component of Normative Competence. The representation involved in epistemic competence can be based on either normative reasons themselves or indications of normative reasons. Importantly, one can have indications of normative reasons without there in fact being any normative reasons, but one can still “competently deduce a reason’s presence by taking mere indicators of that reason into account” (46). Mantel rightly points out that one can rationally form beliefs on the basis of indicators, and action on the basis of rational belief should surely count as a manifestation of Normative Competence. This is helpful in capturing the observation that we can manifest competence in responding to reasons just as well by responding to evidence of reasons as by responding to the reasons themselves. Although Mantel does not discuss this issue in detail, this liberality in the epistemic component would allow Mantel to avoid some of the difficulties traditionally associated with factive accounts of acting for reasons—namely, that it seems possible for agents to manifest normative competence when they act on the basis of rational but false belief. Mantel’s normative reasons are worldly items—facts—so one can only act for the normative reason when there really is a normative reason. However, it seems plausible that on Mantel’s account one could also manifest one’s Normative Competence even when there is only misleading indication of a normative reason, but no normative reason. This would seem to be a virtue of the account.

The Normative Competence Account gives us a convincing account of the distinction between acting for reasons and acting merely in accordance with them. The book does an excellent job of showing how the account does a better job of removing the threat of merely accidental connections between one’s actions and reasons than causal accounts and accounts that rely on the Identity Thesis. However, one might worry that the account risks doing its job too well. Mantel removes any possibility of accidental connections between what the agent does and the reasons for which she does it. In every instance in which an agent acts for a reason, her action is determined by her dispositions and her character. However, one might think that we sometimes act for reasons even when we do not have any kind of disposition or competence to do so. In other words, sometimes bad people do good things. Sometimes we experience sudden flashes of insight, in which we suddenly see considerations as reasons to perform actions. In other words, moral conversion experiences are possible, in which it is suddenly apparent to the agent that R is a reason to F, and so the agent F-s, for the reason that R. Perhaps you callously walk past a homeless person every day on the way home from work, and the consideration that he is homeless has never struck you as a reason to give him money. Then, one day, the sad look in his eyes causes you to suddenly realize your callousness and see things in a new light. Sudden conversion experiences like this would seem difficult to account for using an entirely dispositional account—it just does not seem true to say that you have the disposition to recognize, or to be motivated by the normative reason to give the homeless man money.

One might respond by appealing to Mantel’s discussion of how dispositions can be masked or otherwise obscured by extraneous factors (54–58). Perhaps the right thing to say is that you really did have the dispositions required to act for

the normative reason to give money to the homeless man, but these have been masked until now. However, it is not obvious that this correctly captures the case. If you always had the disposition to F for the reason that R, then even if you have never F-ed for the reason that R until now, it is not true to say that your sudden realization is a realization of anything new—it is not a learning experience. I do not think that this is a devastating objection to the account, and it could perhaps be avoided by the inclusion of a little space between acting for a normative reason and manifesting a disposition. Mantel may well be right that in the vast majority of cases in which an agent acts for a normative reason, she manifests her normative competence to do so. If this could also be made compatible with the possibility of agents who lack normative competence to occasionally, in unusual circumstances, act for reasons, then this potential problem could be avoided.

In summary, Mantel's account of acting for a normative reason is an insightful and welcome new addition to the literature and helpfully advances various distinct debates in normativity, moral psychology, and action theory.

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Mouk, Yascha. *The Age of Responsibility: Luck, Choice, and the Welfare State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. 288. \$29.95 (cloth).

The notion of responsibility has come to play a leading role in both political discourse and political philosophy. Yascha Mouk's *The Age of Responsibility* provides a wide-ranging exploration of this zeitgeist. As the author notes, "This book stands at an unusual methodological intersection. It contains elements of intellectual history, social theory, comparative politics, and normative political philosophy" (26). Philosophical theories of free will and moral luck battle for space with analyses of welfare conditionality and Obama's speeches. The author navigates this diverse terrain with skill, providing an authoritative survey of the recent history of an idea.

The book has five substantive chapters. Chapter 1 provides the historical backbone of the work, tracing the role of responsibility from the postwar era to the present across political rhetoric, philosophy, and social science. Mouk particularly emphasizes the shift over this period from "responsibility-as-duty" to "responsibility-as-accountability" (30). The welfare state, the real locus of the age of responsibility, is brought to the fore in chapter 2. Throughout the Western world unemployment benefits, pensions, and social housing have increasingly moved from responsibility buffering to responsibility tracking. Chapter 3 provides a sustained exploration of the "denial of responsibility" or "no responsibility view," which has come to be the left's primary response to the age of responsibility. Rather than challenging the claim that where the disadvantaged are responsible for their plight they lose their claim to social assistance, the most common political and philosophical response has been to argue that the poor are not in fact responsible. Maintaining that this has been an ineffectual tactic, Mouk goes on to develop, in chapters 4 and 5, a "positive conception of responsibility," which emphasizes