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The Idea of a Normative Reason

Abstract 

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Common sense ethical discourse is committed to the claim that agents have good reasons to act in some ways rather than others. This commitment further entails two apparently conflicting claims. On the one hand, (a) agents have good reasons obtaining in virtue of the nature of the options that confront them. On the other hand, (b) there is a non-trivial connection between the grounds of these reasons and the upshots of sound practical reasoning. These further claims conflict because the connection between the upshots of sound practical reasoning and the endorsement of options of a given substantive kind is at best contingent. While this conflict is avoidable on a *response dependent* account of good reasons on which (a) is construed as a substantial constraint on sound practical reasoning, there are grounds to think that no account of good reasons to act can be purely *response dependent*. This paper explores whether a theory of good reasons to act can accommodate both (a) and (b) while taking (a) at face value, or whether the common sense concept of good reasons to act is internally inconsistent.