

# Beyond Words: Inarticulable Reasons And Reasonable Commitments

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We often come to value someone or something through experience of that person or thing. Call such an experience *direct appreciation*. When you appreciate something directly you may come to embrace a value that you did not previously grasp. Moreover, in a large and important subset of cases it seems you *could not have* fully appreciated that value, absent some such experience, merely by considering a report of the reasons or arguments that purport to justify your attitude. It follows that you will remain incapable of fully communicating the reasons for your valuing attitude to someone who lacks any such experience. Despite its ubiquity, this phenomenon goes missing in a great deal of contemporary work in ethics and political philosophy. To make sense of it we need an account of the standards governing our normative commitments that explains how we can have reasons for them without requiring articulacy about these reasons.

We often come to value someone or something through experience of that person or thing. Call such an experience *direct appreciation* of the person or thing.<sup>1</sup> When you appreciate something directly, you may come to embrace a value that you did not grasp prior to the experience in question. Moreover, it seems that in a large and important subset of cases you *could not have* fully appreciated that value absent some such experience.<sup>2</sup> In these cases you could not have come to value the thing as you do merely by considering a report of the reasons or arguments that purport to justify your attitude. It follows that, even in the wake of the experience, you will remain incapable of fully communicating to someone who lacks the experience the reasons grounding your own affirmation of value.

Your valuing of the thing constitutes a normative commitment—an attitude that involves or entails the affirmation of reasons or values—and frequently grounds further normative commitments, for example decisions to act in particular ways, or to regard certain considerations as reasons to act. It is not only possible, but common, both to form normative commitments on the basis of direct appreciation and to be warranted in doing so. In fact it seems to me that *most*, if not all, of the central commitments around which a good human life is organized are standardly like this.<sup>3</sup>

But, despite its ubiquity, this phenomenon goes missing in a great deal of contemporary work in ethics and political philosophy. Acknowledging its existence is in tension with

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. (Brewer 2009), chapters 1-3, on desire and (Anderson 1993), chapter 1-2, on valuing.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. (Brewer 2009) on dialectical activities and (Macintyre 1981) on practices.

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, our grasp on or appreciation of any intrinsic value has to have the features in question. Thanks to Susan Bencomo for this point.

affirming a certain ideal that has captured the imaginations of many philosophers. On this ideal normative commitments should be based on reasons, and these reasons should be expressible as reportable claims that could figure in philosophical arguments. Our normative commitments should thus wait on the arguments supporting them, or should be abandoned, revised, or suspended if and when we realize that we lack such arguments.

Because it is presupposed in a great deal of practical philosophy, rejecting this ideal has far-reaching implications. For example, it requires revision in standard ways of thinking about interpersonal justification, moral education and development, and the norms governing political reasoning. I will not be able to explore these implications in any detail here, but I mention them to give a sense of what sorts of things are at stake.

In what follows, I limit myself to two aims. First, I further specify the phenomenon of interest and try to convince you of its pervasiveness in ordinary human life by developing a series of examples. Second, I support the claim that philosophers routinely overlook this phenomenon by surveying several significant philosophical positions that do so. If this much is right then direct appreciation is both commonplace and philosophically puzzling. To make sense of it we need an account of the standards governing our normative commitments that explains how we can have reasons for them without requiring articulacy about these reasons.

### **I. On the Ubiquity of Direct Appreciation**

It is quite possible, in fact absolutely ordinary, to have completely sufficient reasons for one's normative commitments while being fundamentally inarticulate about what these reasons are. Consider the difference between two students who come to think, correctly let us grant, that Shakespeare is a great writer. The first does so by memorizing a list of purportedly great writers on which Shakespeare's name appears. I think that we could fill in this case in a way that ensures that the resulting normative conviction is sufficiently justified, and even that it counts as knowledge. But contrast a student who arrives at the same normative conviction via a different route: he becomes convinced of Shakespeare's greatness by direct exposure to, and dawning appreciation of, Shakespeare's works. Such exposure is often helpfully guided by a teacher who herself understands what makes these works great and can say something about this. But this second student could not arrive at the appreciation that he has merely by accepting the teacher's report that the work is good or even her expert attempt to list its good-making features, no matter how detailed that description is. For the same reason, he can report no complete account of the grounds for his conviction.

This second way of coming to affirm that Shakespeare is a great writer seems to result in a commitment based on the best sort of reasons that one could have for embracing it: one experiences for one's self the value that one affirms. (If we want to use *autonomous* as an accolade that identifies the rational or responsible exercise of agency in forming commitments, we should apply it here.) But someone who comes to love Shakespearean drama in this way may nevertheless remain unable to *say* what it is that makes the work great. Maybe he can say something about what's so compelling about it, and maybe he can't, or can't yet. But generally appreciation of the value of the work both precedes and outstrips the ability to talk about this value.

Becoming articulate, or more articulate, about what it is that one appreciates is a further step. Even limited articulacy of this kind requires a fairly high level of sophistication and counts as a significant accomplishment. It is something into which we need to

be educated, and which takes a great deal of practice to the extent that it can be achieved at all. More to the point, however articulate we become, it must remain impossible *in principle* to capture fully the reasons for affirming the value of the works in reportable sentences. For if that were possible then the expert teacher could do it, and the distinction between the two ways of coming to affirm Shakespeare's greatness with which we started would not be so stark.

I suggest that many of the central commitments by which we rightly direct our lives are much more like this second case of coming to conviction than they are like the first, and appropriately so. Consider next what it is like to love a particular person.<sup>4</sup> One normally does not, and arguably could not, come to love someone merely by considering claims ascribing admirable qualities to him, or becoming convinced by an argument for the conclusion that one has sufficient reason to love him. Rather, one normally comes to love someone through experience of him, experience in which one appreciates directly the value that one affirms in loving him, that is *his* value, or perhaps better: *him*.<sup>5</sup> Such appreciation requires experience of the person himself. For this reason, one could neither bring another to share one's commitment to a person one loves through argument, nor fully express the reasons for one's own love through mere report.

Some philosophers want to conclude from this that love is arational, not the sort of state that is properly subject to any normative standards. It is simply a brute preference or attraction that comes upon you (or doesn't), something that happens to you and which you experience passively rather than something you do. On this view, love is not an attitude for which you could have reasons.<sup>6</sup> Asking why you love someone would be something like asking why you have a headache. The question makes sense only construed as a causal inquiry about how you came to be in this state. As a query about justification for the attitude it is out of place.

But treating love like a headache is woefully inadequate to both the particular phenomenon of interpersonal love and the very significant practical role that we allow love to play in our lives. To love someone is not merely have some unintelligible taste for him or be drawn to him as by a physical force. It is, in part, to be aware, and deeply convicted, of his value.<sup>7</sup> While the fact that we can be so sure of the beloved's value, yet inarticulate about its justifying grounds, has led some philosophers to regard interpersonal love as philosophically puzzling, it should instead cause us to question the philosophical ideal of justification that suggests that there is some puzzle here. The fact that we cannot *say* in any fully satisfactory way what the reasons for our conviction are does not impugn the conviction, but rather impugns the idea that justifying grounds for normative commitments must always take a form that can be uttered in a sentence.

As with Shakespeare, direct appreciation seems to provide grounds of exactly the right sort to warrant both the conviction of value and a range of further normative commitments or decisions that you might make on its basis. Commitments based on this sort of

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<sup>4</sup> For related treatments of love see (Murdoch 1997), (Velleman 2006), (Brewer 2009), and (Setiya 2014). For a contrasting view see (Frankfurt 1999). See also (Kolodny 2003). For my own views on love see (Ebels-Duggan forthcoming), and (Ebels-Duggan 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Arguably, this amounts to a conceptual truth about love, which seems plausibly understood as a species of the direct appreciation of another's value.

<sup>6</sup> For example (Frankfurt 1999). See also (Frankfurt 2004). Cf. (Noddings 1984) and (Baier 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. (Velleman 2006), and (Setiya 2014).

experience can seemingly be fully autonomous and above rational reproach. In fact, merely argument-based confidence in normatively significant commitments would often be more dubious. Someone could, for example, decide to marry a particular person based only on some purportedly sound argument for doing so, but we would rightly be suspicious of the wisdom of this approach. This is not to deny that the inarticulate lover may make an ill-advised marriage choice. The claim is, rather, that articulacy about one's reasons is neither necessary nor sufficient to justify the commitments in question, while direct appreciation—an experience of the beloved as valuable, the content of which outstrips propositional formulation—can be both.<sup>8</sup>

Because interpersonal relationships play a central role in many actual lives and many ideals of the good life, normative commitments based on direct appreciation would be important even if they were limited to this sort of case. But, having identified the relevant phenomenon we can now begin to spot commitments with this structure everywhere. We have already considered aesthetic appreciation of literature, and this extends in obvious ways both to other art forms and to natural beauty. To appreciate natural wonders such as the Rocky Mountains, or the Grand Canyon, or Lake Michigan directly is to experience them as valuable and so as warranting the normative commitments constitutive of valuing them. Even where such valuing has less far-reaching practical significance than interpersonal love, it shares important structural features. In fact, it is not uncommon to characterize this response, also, as *love*. As with love of a person, neither love of the natural wonder, nor further normative commitments or actions taken on the basis of it, seem to be well understood as mere whim or brute attraction. The experience of appreciation provides access to the reasons that justify such valuing, while nevertheless outstripping your—or anyone's—ability to say what these reasons are. We can give a similar account of a wide range of human endeavors. The love of mathematics that inspires the work of many mathematicians, but with the right guidance is accessible even to beginners in the subject, seems to belong here. Athletic or musical pursuits appear to share in this character as well. I think that most religious commitments, and more generally commitments that belong to Rawlsian conceptions of the good, are also best understood on this model.<sup>9</sup>

I hope to have convinced you that there are significant normative commitments for which we have reasons about which we are normally, and uncriticizably, inarticulate.

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<sup>8</sup> Though my argument here doesn't require it, I hold that the value of the person is always sufficient to justify loving her. Focusing on the case of loving one's children may help to bring out the plausibility of this claim. Most expectant parents stand ready to love the child who becomes their own prior to knowing anything about this child's particularities, and this seems to be the right attitude for them to take. (This is true of both biological and adoptive cases of parenthood.) Of course, there are (all too common) cases in which it is difficult to discern what actions to take given one's love, and here it is (all too easy) to go wrong. But many people think that it cannot, in any case, be wrong to love one's children, and to continue loving them, unconditionally. I believe that the best way to understand this is to think of love as direct appreciation of a person, or a person's value, and to affirm that every person has infinite or incomparable value. Thus, where its object is a person, love is always an apt response to its object. Cf. (Velleman 2006), (Setiya 2014), and (Gaita 1991).

<sup>9</sup> It is even worth considering whether more trivial appreciations, things that *are* standardly understood as mere tastes, might also fall into the family of phenomena of interest. These preferences are usually regarded as paradigmatic brute arational states. But even the love of coffee ice cream seems to share to some extent in the active, reason-responsive and reason-evaluable character of the other instances of direct appreciation surveyed here. Insofar as it does, it is not wholly assimilable to a merely passive experience, such as a headache, but apt for the distinctively justificatory query: why do you love it? Cf. (Scanlon 1998), pp 44–47.

Our inability to report the reasons for these commitments to disinterested third parties is not only uncriticizable, it provides no grounds at all for us to doubt or suspend the commitments that we have. Inarticulacy on the part of the agent in these cases is no failing in her, but instead due to the fundamental *inarticulability* of the appropriate grounds of her commitments. The best grounds we could have for these commitments are such that they cannot be fully captured in reportable form, and so cannot be grasped prior to or independent of direct experience of the valuable person or thing in question. To require articulacy about these reasons, even as an ideal, is thus to impose a misleading picture of what the grounds for our central normative commitments are ordinarily like.

## II. Failures to Appreciate Direct Appreciation

### A. Two Dichotomies

I hope to have convinced you that we commonly form normative commitments on the basis of direct appreciation and that we can have completely sufficient reasons for such commitments, while yet being unable to say what these reasons are. But, despite its ubiquity and practical importance, this phenomenon is often overlooked in practical philosophy. This is perhaps not so surprising, since its existence calls into question an influential philosophers' ideal, and with it a set of methodological presuppositions that underlies a wide range of philosophical positions. On this ideal, we should have reasons for our commitments that can be formulated propositionally, such that they could figure in a philosophical argument and could be fully communicated to third parties. The ideal generates a dichotomy between *those attitudes for which we can state the reasons* on the one hand and *those for which we do not have adequate reason* on the other. The dichotomy appears in two different guises, though these are compatible with one another and often affirmed together.

The first version of the dichotomy commits to the idea that *types* of attitudes can be exhaustively sorted into the two categories: On the one hand, there are intelligible attitudes, attitudes subject to rational assessment, a complete account of the reasons for which can, in principle, be reported. On the other, there are brute attitudes that it does not even make sense to query for reasons. For example, some ways of understanding the division between beliefs and desires treat the former as belonging to the first category and the latter as belonging to the second.

A related version of the dichotomy sorts tokens or instances of intelligible attitudes exhaustively into those for which the agent can report the reasons on the one hand, and those that are to some extent rationally deficient on the other. This dichotomy arises when we take on board the idea that what it is to have an adequate reason for some commitment just is to be in a position to report that reason. In addition to the language of rationality and irrationality, the language of autonomy and heteronomy is sometimes used to name the categories of attitudes that result.<sup>10</sup>

Normative commitments formed on the basis of direct appreciation do not fit into either category of either dichotomy. To take these commitments seriously as an important feature of our practical lives is to accept that there is a great deal of significance that falls between those attitudes that a person can, even in principle, defend with arguments and

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<sup>10</sup> The latter is prevalent in discussions of autonomy as a proper aim of education. See, e.g., (Ackerman 1980), chapter 5; (Nussbaum 1997), chapters 1-2; (Callan 1997), chapters 3 and 6.

those that merely grip her passively. The commitments in question appear to be intelligible, apt for rational assessment, and yet not such that we should expect a full report of the reasons supporting them. And to accept that these commitments can be above rational reproach is to reject articulacy about our reasons as the governing standard for rational assessment. The possibility of these sorts of commitments thus brings to light an important distinction between *having adequate reasons for one's commitments* and *being able to justify these commitments*, where that means being able to say what these reasons are.

### B. Rational Justification and Articulability

Let's consider, first, some ways that the token version of the dichotomy—the view that only those attitudes for which an agent can report the reasons are above rational reproach—shows up in philosophical discussion. This ideal of articulacy is closely related to the Kantian idea that reason seeks the unconditioned condition of its commitments.<sup>11</sup> A certain way of understanding this Kantian idea holds that if some commitment can be intelligibly challenged, or queried for justification, then a fully justified agent who holds that attitude would be capable of answering the challenge: Any such query amounts to the identification of a rational condition for the commitment in question. The agent herself can recognize this and when she does a justificatory gap opens. To close this gap she would have to show that it is rational to affirm the condition in question and failing this she cannot rationally maintain confidence in the original commitment. Moreover, if the condition is itself subject to further intelligible challenge, then the need for justification repeats. The only way to then be fully rationally secure in one's commitments is to trace such a line of reasoning back to commitments that are not subject to any intelligible challenge.<sup>12</sup> This is the unconditioned condition that reason requires.

This way of thinking of justification amounts to a demand for full articulacy about our reasons, at least in the ideal. We may also think of it as a certain demanding position about skepticism. On this view, that a skeptical challenge can be meaningfully formulated is a sufficient condition for it to demand reply. Moreover, the reply cannot depend on any commitments that the skeptical interlocutor lacks, but must address or engage him, such that it should move him from his own point of view. Only such a justification for one's commitments could put those commitments above rational reproach. That is to say, if one cannot report the reasons for one's commitments in a way that would communicate those reasons to anyone, it follows that one must lack adequate reasons for them. And the responsible thinker, when shown that she lacks reasons, would reject, revise or suspend these commitments.

Requiring an articulate answer to any intelligible skeptical question is undeniably an astonishingly high bar for rational entitlement to one's commitments. But the influence of this radical demand extends widely, reaching well beyond doctrinaire Kantians. Consider an interaction that will be familiar to most anyone who has taught moral philosophy at the introductory level. Inevitably, some student will question even the least controversial normative claims, for example that rape, torture, murder, and enslavement are serious wrongs. Withholding consent from such a claim absent argument for it seems to presuppose that the ability to give a fully articulate defense for a claim is the right standard of

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<sup>11</sup> (Kant 1998a, A322-323/B378-379), Cf. (Korsgaard 1996b), p 33.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. (Korsgaard 1996a), p 164.

rational evaluation. The kind of defense sought seems to be an argument that could move any sincere skeptic to adopt the position in question.

Of course it is dangerous to generalize from the reactions of philosophical beginners to claims about standard philosophical methodology, but the familiarity of this kind of classroom exchange is no accident. I don't believe that my students really doubt the impermissibility of recreational torture. If I did, I would be much more alarmed than I am at the prospect of entering the classrooms they populate. I think that they are instead reacting strategically to the norms we have established in the philosophy classroom. Consider how we standardly talk about our pedagogical task. Quoted in her campus newspaper, one professor of philosophy says that her job is to "challenge the assumptions and beliefs that students have when they arrived at [the university]." And she adds, "They may leave... endorsing the same beliefs they came here with, but if they do so reflectively and *for reasons they can articulate*, then I've done my job..."<sup>13</sup> Philosophy professors talk this way all the time, but taken seriously this attitude expresses the radical demand for full articulacy. It is not obvious that any commitments, let alone normative commitments, could really meet this standard. In fact, it's not even clear what it would mean to do so. We might well think that *any* substantive claim can be intelligibly questioned, and none is clearly less controversial than those that I list above.

Nor is this identification of rational commitments with those for which we can articulate the reasons limited to informal reflections on pedagogy. It also finds expression in philosophical literature concerning autonomy as an aim of education. In this discussion, the standard foil to the well-educated autonomous thinker is the student who holds his views unreflectively and so cannot say why they are true. It is widely accepted that "critical thinking," or reflection on the reasons for our commitments is the proper antidote, and necessary for autonomy, conceived as a goal of education. This popular thought leads naturally to the demand that students present arguments for any commitments that they affirm, and the related radical idea that only the ability to do so could place the rationality of these commitments above suspicion.<sup>14</sup>

Consider how normative commitments of love would fare by this measure. You are deeply convicted of the value of your beloved, and of your reasons for living in a way that is responsive to this value. Imagine a challenge to these convictions, voicing doubts that you have justifying reasons for loving a person that you love, or for taking him as an important source of reasons bearing on your life plans, or both.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps you can say

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<sup>13</sup> (Powell 2011), emphasis mine. The professor quoted is Alison Simmons.

<sup>14</sup> For an example of this rationalist talk see (Nussbaum 1997), pp 9, 33, 35ff. Though I am not sure how strong Nussbaum means her rationalism to be in the end, the things that she says here suggest that one should endorse only those positions for which one can offer, that is report, rational justification. For an alternative model of philosophical thought and dialog see (Wolterstorff 2008), p. xi. For my own views on this, along with many additional examples of apparent endorsements of the radical demand from discussions of philosophy of education, see (Ebels-Duggan 2015) and (Ebels-Duggan 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Again, love for one's children may be the most illuminating case. The skeptic could well be right about romantic attachments, if we take him to mean that this particular *relationship* is a bad idea. Even if I am right that the value of a person is always sufficient to justify loving him, there are further questions about the reasons for entering into particular kinds of relationships with him. Given the kind of relationship a parental relationship is it makes sense to take up this relationship independent of, even prior to knowledge of, the particular features of the child. The same is not true of romantic relationships. Their reciprocal mutual vulnerability and dependence places conditions on whom it makes sense to interact with this way, and the same is true of many other sorts of relationships.

something in response, something about what makes this person wonderful and worthy of the consideration you give him. But, whatever characteristics you mention, the skeptic may intelligibly doubt their value or their sufficiency for justifying the practical implications that you affirm.

What if you just blankly assert that your beloved is *valuable*, and that this provides sufficient reason for your love and loving actions? In my view, this assertion is true, and in a certain sense does count as a report that fully captures the reasons for your commitment. But it will not answer the skeptic's intelligible questions or meet the Kantian ideal of unconditioned justification. The skeptic may either continue to question this assertion, or profess ignorance as to what it could mean.<sup>16</sup> The insufficiency of the response for meeting the demanding standard of full articulacy is best brought out by imagining the skeptic as of good will, earnestly seeking to understand your reasons for living as you do, but genuinely failing to see what moves you. Such a sincere, but baffled, inquirer about normative commitments of love would be an unusual, and pitiable, person. But she appears to be asking a genuine, well-formulated question, one that challenges your assumptions and beliefs. The bare assertion of value does not answer this question, but only allows it to re-arise in a new form.

We've now moved into the domain of normative ethical theory and perhaps of metaethics. For the reflections in this last paragraph invoke the motivating thought behind an ambitious program of Kantian constructivism in ethics, most ably represented by Christine Korsgaard. Korsgaard refuses to shy away from any intelligible questions about our normative commitments, on the grounds that these could be, or could become, the agent's own questions. If doubt about some normative commitment is intelligible, that doubt could grip the agent herself, and even sincere, good-willed agents may be subject to such doubts when the practical going gets hard.<sup>17</sup> Admonishing a person not to raise such questions, or urging him to have confidence in his moral views would then seem to be beside the point, and an abdication of the philosopher's proper role. Thus we must take any intelligible skeptical question seriously.

From admirable motivations, the constructivist thus embraces a very strong version of the ideal of articulacy: having reasons for one's normative commitments entails being able to say what these reasons are, and indeed to do so in a very complete, thoroughgoing way. Notably, a successfully executed practical constructivism would meet the demanding standard of full articulacy. As far as I can see it is the only approach to normative theory that would do so.

A final, and related, place that one sees this ideal of articulacy at work in a normative view is among political liberals advocating for a public reason requirement.<sup>18</sup> A central claim of political liberalism is that citizens ought to limit their advocacy of political positions to only those that can be supported by appeal to reasons that any reasonable citizen should accept. It seems clear that in order to play this sort of role the reasons in question must, at a minimum, be articulable and reportable to third parties. The requirement that they be such that all relevant parties can accept them seems to impose still further standards.

All of these views—about pedagogy and philosophy of education, about normative and ethical theory, and about political philosophy—seem to take for granted the second

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. (Korsgaard 2008e).

<sup>17</sup> See (Korsgaard 1996b), Lecture 1.

<sup>18</sup> The *locus classicus* is (Rawls 1993).



version of the dichotomy introduced above. They look to sort rationally assessable commitments into those that can be justified by a philosophical argument on the one hand, and those that fail to meet the rational standard that properly applies to them on the other. They thus identify having justification for one's commitments with an ability to report the justification. But, as I have argued above, an inability to answer intelligible challenges to your commitments need not reveal some rational deficiency in them or in you. Rather there is something amiss in the standard of full articulacy that these commitments purportedly fail to meet.

### *C. Intelligibility and Articulacy*

So far I have been talking about how various philosophical positions presuppose the second version of the dichotomy, between those states for which we can give reasons and those that are insufficiently justified. The first version, between intelligible states for which we can give reasons and brute states for which we can have no reason, is on display in a range of views in moral psychology. To the extent that these views sort attitudes or mental states exhaustively into these two categories, they leave no conceptual space for the possibility of normative commitments for which we have reasons that are both satisfactory and inarticulable.

Perhaps the dichotomy shows up most sharply in a crude empiricist approach to action theory or the philosophy of mind, a view that sorts attitudes into cognitive states, centrally beliefs, and conative states, centrally desires, treating the two sorts of attitudes as sharply distinct in both kind and function.<sup>19</sup> The view that I have in mind regards the regulation of beliefs in ways that are responsive to the reasons supporting them as a demand of rationality. Agents can appropriately be queried for the reasons for their beliefs and criticized for holding a belief without adequate reason or failing to hold a belief that the reasons require. Moreover, this view often takes for granted that agents themselves can be responsive to the resolutions of these queries and the contents of these critiques. An agent who determines that she has adequate reason for a belief usually comes to accept it on the basis of those reasons, and similarly one who determines that she lacks adequate reason usually comes to reject it. Thus beliefs are attitudes that we can reason our way into.

The view treats desires as entirely different, on the model of forces that occur in an agent, attracting, prompting, moving or disposing her to action. While agents may often be *aware* of these forces, they are not active with respect to them. Desires are not

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<sup>19</sup> The view that I describe in the text deserves to be called a caricature of any serious view of this kind, but is useful for bringing out a challenge that faces any attempt to develop it. (Hume 1975) is one historical source for this sort of view. (Hobbes 1994) is another. Modern classics include (Davidson 1980) and (Williams 1981a). See also (Smith 1987). (Markovitz 2014) seems also to rely on this conception, despite developing a view that is in some ways more Kantian.

Advocates of this sort of view usually embrace the contrast between the direction-of-fit of beliefs and desires. Belief aims to fit the mind to the world, accurately representing the world as it is. Desire, it is said, aims to fit the world to the mind, bringing about the desired states of affairs. But this apparently symmetrical account obscures an important difference in the meaning of "aim." In the case of belief, it is in a clear sense the agent who has and carries out the aim. She is the one who believes, and if she is responsive to the norms that properly govern this activity she does so in a way that is responsive to reasons or evidence about how the world is. But in the case of desire, the attitude is conceived as given, brute, a mere happening, and it is this attitude itself that is somehow "aimed" or "directed" at a certain outcome in the world.

responsive to reasoning, and it is a kind of category mistake to ask after an agent's reasons for wanting something. While beliefs are intelligible, or subject to rational assessment, desires are brute states, arational and subject to no normative standards.<sup>20</sup>

Philosophers dissatisfied with this crude empiricism often complicate the dichotomy it posits between the cognitive and the conative. But, surprisingly, the dichotomy between states for which we can report the reasons, and those for which we have no reason, frequently survives these revisions. Think, for example, of Thomas Nagel's distinction between motivated and unmotivated desires.<sup>21</sup> The distinction has become standard fare in many discussions of action theory and moral psychology. But there is a persistent, and I think pernicious, ambiguity about how, exactly, to understand the two categories. Many uses of the term, arguably including Nagel's own, treat a desire as unmotivated if one *has no reason* for it. So conceived, unmotivated desires are brute attractions, mere urges, whims or unintelligible dispositions. They are states that happen in and to an agent, experiences that she undergoes rather than something that she does. It would be out of place to ask an agent to justify these states in something like the same way that it would be out of place to demand reasons for a headache. In short, they seem to be just like the crude empiricist desires considered above: passive arational states for which we could have no reason.

But, notably, Nagel introduces the idea quite differently, calling a desire unmotivated if one *does not reason to it*, that is does not engage in explicit practical reasoning that terminates in the motivation to act.<sup>22</sup> Such explicit reasoning is rare, so this characterization makes unmotivated desires a large and interesting category. Understood as encompassing all motivations that do not result from explicit reasoning, unmotivated desires play an important role in human life and action. On the other hand, attractions that seize us unaccountably, the justification for which it does not even make sense to query, are unusual. If we understand unmotivated desires in *that* way, then their occurrence—while perhaps curious—is of little normative interest. Maybe Nagel is right to think that you could simply become captivated with the idea of placing a sprig of parsley on the moon, gripped by the thought in an entirely whimsical way. But, if this odd thing were to happen to you it would not seem to provide or indicate a reason to do anything in particular.<sup>23</sup>

This difference between the two ways of understanding unmotivated desires is often overlooked, and that, in turn, opens a gap through which the phenomenon of direct appreciation and normative commitments formed on its basis falls.<sup>24</sup> It creates the possibility of toggling between the two ways of drawing the distinction, thinking of *motivated*

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<sup>20</sup> (Korsgaard 2008f) provides a characterization of this view, which she calls “the combat model.” This model contains the further idea that Reason could be an additional force that enters into this combat. Korsgaard discusses related ideas in (Korsgaard 1997, 2008d).

<sup>21</sup> (Nagel 1970), pp 29-30, and 38.

<sup>22</sup> (Nagel 1970), p 29. This differs somewhat from what he says in the very next paragraph: “But if the desire is a motivated one, the explanation of it will be the same as the explanation of his pursuit [of the goal that he desires], and it is by no means obvious that a desire must enter in to this further explanation.”

<sup>23</sup> Cf. (Scanlon 1998), pp 1-55.

<sup>24</sup> (Scanlon 1998) and (Brewer 2009) understand unmotivated desires as brute attractions or mere urges. (Schapiro 2014), by contrast, understands them in accord with Nagel's official definition, as motivational states to which we do not reason explicitly.

desires as those to which we reason explicitly and *unmotivated* desires as normatively unevaluable urges.<sup>25</sup> This renders the two categories a clear instance of the dichotomy in question: motivated desires are states for which the agent can give the reasons, since she arrives at them by thinking through the relevant line of reasoning. Unmotivated desires are not the kind of thing for which one could have reasons. But by restricting attention to these two categories we manage to overlook nearly all of those motivational states that figure in real human action and practical thinking. For while we rarely reason explicitly to the attractions on which we act, neither do these attractions normally intrude on our consciousness unintelligibly or unaccountably, as the Nagelian desire for herbs in space.

But we could modify this characterization of motivated desires to make that category more capacious, and doing so would likely get us closer to Nagel's intent. We could count a desire as motivated not just when the agent actually thinks through an explicit line of reasoning that yields the desire, but instead whenever some reconstruction of this reasoning would accurately or fairly represent what may have been only implicit in the agent's consideration. Despite Nagel's official definition of motivated desires, this seems to be the right way to understand his central example of the vending machine and tracks his own presentation of this example.<sup>26</sup> Someone who is familiar with vending machines does not normally explicitly have the thoughts: *I want something to drink; Putting this coin in this slot is a way of getting something to drink*, and thereby arrive at a desire to put this coin in this slot as a sort of conclusion. Nevertheless, this does seem to be an accurate reconstruction of the instrumental reasoning that normally occurs implicitly.

This modification allows us to capture a much wider range of motivational states. But, notably, even so understood Nagel's categories fail to allow for recognition of the phenomenon of direct appreciation. For motivations arising from direct appreciation are not only attitudes to which we do not reason explicitly, they are attitudes the reasons for which cannot, in principle, be fully captured in propositional terms. Unlike the desire to put the coin in the vending machine, states of direct appreciation are not states to which one *could* explicitly reason. No reconstruction of an explicit line of reasoning could fully represent the thinking that yields the direct appreciation of Shakespeare's works or love for an individual person. So attitudes of direct appreciation are not candidates for motivated desires, even on the more capacious interpretation of that category. If we were to force them into Nagel's categories we would thus have to assimilate them to unmotivated desires, regarding them as brute or passive dispositions or attractions. And this, I have argued, we should not do.

Many Kantian accounts of moral psychology likewise seem to be committed to the idea that Nagel's categories, or something like them, exhaust the possibilities for our motivational states. In fact, Nagel's motivated desires can be understood as a generalization of Kant's incentive of pure practical reason, while his unmotivated desires play the role of Kantian inclinations.<sup>27</sup> On a standard reading of Kant's view the latter arise in us passively on account of our sensible nature.<sup>28</sup> Because we are sensible and physical beings we are part of the order of causes, and inclinations are among the things that

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Nagel himself seems to be guilty of this toggling in the paragraph in which he introduces the distinction. (Nagel 1970), p 29.

<sup>26</sup> (Nagel 1970), pp 33-34.

<sup>27</sup> See (Kant 1998b), 4:413n, on inclinations and (Kant 1997), 5:71-5:89, on the incentive of pure practical reason. Cf. (Kant 1998b), 4:399-4:403, on the motive of duty.

<sup>28</sup> But contrast (Herman 1993) and (Wilson 2016).

occur in this order. They are susceptible to causal explanation rather than normative justification. They are not expressions of our agency, but merely part of the context in which we act. As Kant puts it, they are *incentives that precede reasoning*; in particular they precede practical reasoning. Like other features of our situation they are inputs on which practical reason operates.

The Kantian agent reasons instrumentally about how best to realize the ends of inclination. This is hypothetical reasoning, about what she should do on the condition that she has some end, or taking some end as given. But she also reasons morally, or as Kant says categorically, in a way that does not depend on any prior adoption of an end. Such reasoning can give rise to the second sort of incentive, the incentive of pure practical reason, the motive of duty or respect. This incentive is called the incentive of pure practical reason because it is the manifestation of a possible conclusion of categorical practical reasoning: the conviction that a certain way of acting is *necessary* or *required*, no matter what I want. The incentive of duty that accompanies or expresses this conviction thus follows on, rather than preceding, practical reasoning. It is the termination of a line of reasoning about what to do that makes no reference to some prior desire, the very paradigm of a motivated desire.

So understood, the two Kantian categories manifest the dichotomy between those attitudes for which we are able to give some reason on the one hand, and those for which we could have no reason on the other. We reason to the moral motive, while the inclinations are such that we could have no reason for them. To treat them as together exhaustive of what Kant calls incentives to action is thus to commit to the idea that all motivational states can be understood in one or the other of these ways.

We see an illuminating illustration in Kant's own treatment of love.<sup>29</sup> He takes the term to be ambiguous between two phenomena, which he calls *pathological love*, on the one hand, and *practical love*, on the other. These two map neatly on to the two types of incentives. Pathological love is a sensible incentive, a passively experienced liking of or attraction to a person, or to being with or doing things for her. Kant does not mean to denigrate the incentive, or criticize the agent, with the label *pathological*, but rather to flag the occurrence of such an incentive as something that happens to the agent, an event in the order of causes to which she is susceptible as a sensible being, and not in itself an expression of her agency or freedom. From the agent's point of view, pathological love is a given or brute occurrence and it is not apt to inquire after the reasons for it, but only about what to do in the face of it.

Practical love, by contrast, is active, an expression of a person's agency. To have practical love for someone is a matter of making her happiness my end, or—as I prefer to say—making her ends my own.<sup>30</sup> To set an end is to regard and treat it as a source of reasons for action, and this is a normative commitment that I make, can make for reasons, and can be asked to justify. I should make such a commitment only if it can be rationally sustained, that is only if I can give sufficient reasons for it. Kant believes that practical love *can* be rationally sustained; in fact, others' happiness is, on his view, an obligatory end. He provides an argument for this conclusion, an argument that, if successful, provides categorical reasons for practical love.<sup>31</sup> What is important for our

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<sup>29</sup> See (Kant 1996), 4:448-452. Cf. (Ebels-Duggan forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> (Ebels-Duggan 2008).

<sup>31</sup> See (Kant 1998b), 4:423, 4:430; (Kant 1997), 5:34-36; and (Kant 1996), 6:393-394.

purposes is that, if Kant is right that practical love is a duty then there must, by his lights, be some such argument. That is, there must be a line of reasoning that could, in principle, be made explicit and that concludes that we must adopt the happiness or ends of others as our end.

Suppose that these were the only two things to which talk of love might refer. When I say that I love someone, I could only mean either that I am attracted towards him by inclination, passively and in a way that I could not query or be asked to justify, *or* that I am committed to regarding him as a source of reasons for action, where that commitment is one at which I could arrive through a line of practical reasoning that can be made fully explicit. The first case of love would be an arational force occurring in me. The second would be a rational decision, the reasons for which I could, in principle, relate in full to a third party. But the phenomenon that we call love, along with the other examples of direct appreciation discussed in section I, is a third thing, not assimilable to either of Kant's two categories.

Contemporary Kantian theories of practical agency inherit the dichotomy. Consider Christine Korsgaard's *double aspect theory* of motivation and action.<sup>32</sup> Korsgaard recognizes two kinds of motivation, each of which plays a distinctive role in the agent's moral psychology. She treats the first, inclination, as something that happens to and in the agent, something that "confronts" her, like an empiricist desire.<sup>33</sup> Inclination prompts us to act in a certain way.<sup>34</sup> Our distinctive activity appears in the second moment of motivation, Reason's determination of the principle of action. Inclination just occurs in us, but whether we act as it suggests is up to us, a matter for reasoning and choice.

There are essentially two ways that this can go: Reason—that is the reasoning agent—can determine that acting as the incentive suggests would be impermissible, and thus "strike it down," or can determine that so acting would be permissible, and thus adopt the maxim of acting as the inclination prompts, incorporating the inclination into a maxim of action.<sup>35</sup> But neither of these possibilities captures the structure of action from

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<sup>32</sup> (Korsgaard 1996b) 242-243. Cf. (Korsgaard 2008c), p 87, and (Korsgaard 2008f).

<sup>33</sup> In several places, Korsgaard endorses a more complex notion of desire that complicates this picture. See, e.g., (Korsgaard 2008b, a). Perhaps her most developed statement of the more complex view occurs in (Korsgaard 2009), chapter 6. (But compare chapter 7, where the phrase "along comes an inclination" occurs in the description of the constitution model.) Korsgaard appears to be torn between interpreting inclinations as forces that act on the agent or as first personal attitudes of the agent. Ambivalence makes sense because there is a real tension here: the tension between whether to think of ourselves as active or passive with respect to our desires. (Schapiro 2009) articulates this problem clearly. Much of the discussion about how to understand desire, especially among broadly rationalist philosophers who reject the crude empiricist model, can be seen as an attempt to mediate between these two aspects of desire. I think that this has yet to be accomplished in a satisfying way, completely for helpful discussions and attempts see, in addition to the works just cited, (Schapiro 2014, 2012, 2011, Scanlon 1998 and Brewer 2009). For some discussion of the way that these issues play out with respect to love see (Ebels-Duggan forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> Part of the experience of these incentives is the temptation to regard them as authoritative sources of reasons, the temptation to what Kant calls *self conceit*. But since an inclination is, all by itself, just an arational urge, an agent who yields to this temptation in fact acts without reason. She allows a contingent feature of her circumstances, the force of an incentive that precedes reasoning, to determine her actions; she thus acts heteronomously. This seems to be how Kant understands the action of the sympathetic man of *Groundwork I* (Kant 1998b). Kant's assimilation of the man's sympathy to inclination, which in turn is nothing more than an arational urge, explains his controversial position that the man's beneficent action is without moral worth.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. (Allison 1990).

direct appreciation. The first is an instance of acting for reasons that are in principle articulable. And, though this is more controversial, the second is an instance of acting without reasons.

Kantian autonomy is most clearly manifest in cases in which the agent acts against or without inclination. This happens when she reasons that acting as she is inclined to act is impermissible. Kant holds that an agent can straightaway act on the conclusion of this reasoning, and that the ability to do this, thereby resisting the force of inclination, is the manifestation of the motive of duty. Kant's famous example of the lying promise illustrates this structure. A man is tempted to lie to secure a loan, though he knows that he will not pay it back. But he reasons that doing so would be impermissible; he is required not to. (In particular, he reasons that he could not will such an action while at the same time willing his principle of action as a universal law.) Having determined this, he has settled the practical question that faced him, the question about whether to lie, in the negative.

Kantians are certainly correct that instances of practical reasoning can go in this way: we can want to act in some way, yet reason that it would be impermissible to do so. When we do, we require no further justification to refrain from acting, nor is any further explanation of why we refrain needed to make that intelligible. But the agent's determination of her maxim is here represented as following from an explicit line of practical reasoning. The man tempted to lie to secure a loan must have reasons not to do so that can be captured in propositional terms, so that these reasons can figure in an argument that is, or could be made, explicit. So the double aspect view treats Kantian cases of acting from duty—against or in the absence of inclination—as cases in which one has sufficient reasons of the sort that one can in principle report.<sup>36</sup>

Discretionary actions, those that are permissible but not obligatory, present a more complicated case. The double aspect view represents these as cases in which the proposal made by inclination is considered and accepted by reason, which is to say that the agent can reason to the conclusion that it is permissible to do what she wants to do. This requires demonstrating that one can act as one is inclined to act while at the same time willing the principle of one's action as a universal law.

Now it might be thought that an agent who acts from inclination in light of this conclusion makes exactly the sort of normative commitment that we are after when she adopts her maxim: She treats her inclination as sufficient reason for acting. But an inclination is neither a proposition nor something that could be translated into a proposition; it is just an attraction. Thus while the reasons for thinking *that it is permissible* to act as

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<sup>36</sup> Since the challenge voiced by (Williams 1981b), many contemporary Kantians have been concerned to deny that Kant's view requires that the reasoning in question be carried out consciously or explicitly. They are right to insist that this would foist on Kant an implausible view that he did not endorse. But, like the similar move with respect to Nagel's motivated desires, allowing that the reasoning may be implicit does not really help. While this allowance obscures the Kantian commitment to the dichotomy under discussion, it does not eliminate it. For such views almost always fall back on the position that by acting you implicitly commit to the availability of such reasoning. It is apt to challenge the justification of an action, and *an agent meets this challenge just in case she is able to produce the relevant reasoning* after the fact. To have sufficient reason for one's decision is thus still understood as being in a position to report the reasons, and no space is left for the idea that the reasons might outstrip what *can* be reported. Relevant here is (Korsgaard 2008b), pp 176-187. Her discussion of the sympathetic person comes at least very close to affirming that *actual* reflection on and articulation of the reasons is the real standard or ideal for practical agency such that *any* lack of reflection falls somewhat short of autonomy.

she does can be communicated, her *reason for so acting* cannot be stated or communicated, even in principle.

In the end, some amended version of a Kantian view along these lines might capture the phenomenon of direct appreciation and the actions that we reasonably take in light of it. But this account will not work just as things stand. In particular, so long as we think of Kantian inclinations as arational states, brute forces or dispositions for which we can have no reason, they cannot also play the role of providing reasons for acting that this model assigns to them. To see this, consider a well-known rationalist line of criticism against the empiricist action theory with which we began, traceable to cases posed by Elizabeth Anscombe and later Warren Quinn.<sup>37</sup> These cases present someone engaging in puzzling behavior. In Anscombe's case, a person gathers saucers of mud and in Quinn's a man switches on any radio he sees, to no further end. These philosophers argue that no desire conceived on the empiricist model of a force or disposition would rationalize the behavior in question. That is to say, no such desire could serve as a reason for doing what these agents do.

We can perhaps see this most clearly by taking the agent's own point of view. Someone who is trying to determine whether to take one of these actions could not take the mere fact that she is disposed to do so as reason to do so. An observed tendency in herself to act in a certain way will generally have no bearing on whether it makes sense to act in that way. To put that another way, a desire conceived as a mere disposition cannot function as a reason. It does not make what the agent is doing intelligible, either to others or to herself. To the extent that the empiricist treats citing an arational desire-as-force as sufficient to answer the question *why are you doing this?*, he renders action a mere happening, the sort of thing it is inapt to query for reasons, subject only to causal explanation and not to justification.

Above I observed that the Kantian's understanding of inclination looks very like its precursor in empiricist desire. So long as she allows this empiricist view into her picture the Kantian will face a version of the Anscombe/Quinn problem. Even if we grant that Reason—or reasoning—can be practical, having a motive force of its own, discretionary, permissible actions in which an agent acts from inclination remain essentially empiricist in structure.<sup>38</sup> A virtuous Kantian agent will act from inclination only if she knows that it is permissible to do so. But reflection on *this* question does not address the problem. The problem with the actions of Anscombe's and Quinn's characters is not that they are morally objectionable, but that they make no sense. But there is not a way to capture this thought in the double aspect view, at least as we've conceived it so far. Checking whether it is permissible to act in the way that a desire-as-force disposes you to act, or concluding that it is, does not contribute to the sense of so acting. It may rule out a reason not to, but it provides no positive consideration in favor of doing so. If inclinations are forces, then they are not reasons. But neither are they candidate, provisional or presumptive reasons.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> (Anscombe 1963, Quinn 1993). For other developments of this point see (Scanlon 1998) and (Brewer 2009). And compare (Nagel 1970).

<sup>38</sup> I believe that the puzzle that (Korsgaard 2008b), p 184 identifies about how to move from obligatory maxims (those that must be willed as law) to permissible maxims (those that can be willed as law) is a version of the same problem, but in a very different guise.

<sup>39</sup> (Korsgaard 1996a, b, 2008f) uses this language.

On the Kantian picture as we have it so far, inclination is not the sort of thing for which one can have reasons. And what I have just argued is that, surprisingly, neither then is action on inclination. As on the empiricist picture such action is a mere happening, not the sort of thing that can properly be queried for reasons. The best we can do, on this view, is to make intelligible the agent's decision to allow this event to occur. This we may be able to explain by reference to the reasons that led her to conclude that it would be permissible to do so. But those reasons must be reportable considerations that could figure in some explicit line of reasoning. So, on the standard Kantian story, decisions to act in discretionary ways are not normative commitments for which one can have, but cannot report, adequate reasons. They are events for which one can have no reasons, paired with decisions to allow the events to occur, the reasons for which one can report. The dichotomy persists.<sup>40</sup>

What might solve this problem is the addition of a new member to the category of Kantian incentives, or a reinterpretation of Kantian inclinations. Anscombe and Quinn argue that if we are to understand the movements of these, or any, agents as actions, then we must have some insight into what value they see in what they are doing. And this insight is also what we need from the first person to make sense of, or provide some reason for, acting in some particular way. A new category or interpretation of Kantian incentives, one that took these incentives to have the features of direct appreciation, would be fit to play this role. Such a view would not treat inclinations as passive states or forces that happen in us, but rather as instances of normative commitments on the part of the agent, commitments about what is valuable. So conceived, inclinations would be something that agents do, and so—like actions and unlike headaches—something that they can aptly be asked, or ask themselves, why they do. However, neither those inquiring nor the agents who are the targets of this inquiry should expect that a full answer to this question can be given in propositional form. It follows that, unlike the incentive of pure practical reason, these would be incentives we cannot reason our way into.

Figuring out how to work out the details of such a view is a large project, but I do not think that there is any reason to suppose in advance that Kantians could not accept this sort of revision. In fact, this way of thinking of motivational states—inclinations, desires or loves—is a more natural fit in the Kantian action theory than the empiricist competitor. Moreover, there are moves in this direction both in Kant's own writings and in the work of contemporary Kantians.<sup>41</sup> It is important to recognize, though, that it is a revision, one that may require jettisoning some other elements of a certain standard Kantian story.

## Conclusion

I've been arguing that direct appreciation is a ubiquitous and important phenomenon, but one that seems to be denied by a common philosophical methodology and overlooked in

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<sup>40</sup> Kantians might try to resist the Anscombe/Quinn argument by opposing the claim that the actions they cite are permissible. But as presented so far, such opposition would require an argument that shows that these actions cannot be universalized, thereby reverting to a case in which the reasons for (not) acting can be captured propositionally. So we see again the dichotomy to which this Kantian view is committed. Moreover, unless the Kantian wants to deny that there are any discretionary actions, making this move with respect the particular examples does not help.

<sup>41</sup> Later Kantian texts exhibit this tendency. See, especially (Kant 1998c), 6:26-28, on the predispositions to the good, (Kant 1971) and (Kant 2006). For some contemporary developments see (Korsgaard 2008b) and (Schapiro 2009).



a variety of accounts of moral psychology. The philosophical methodology in question identifies the having of reasons with the in principle ability to report them. The positions on moral psychology in question sort attitudes into unintelligible urges or dispositions for which we could have no reason on the one hand, and intelligible attitudes for which we can give the reasons on the other. Intelligible attitudes of direct appreciation, the reasons for which cannot be fully captured in propositional terms, and further normative commitments based on them, can find no place here.

Of course, in recognizing the normal limits of our articulacy about our reasons, we don't want to swing too far in the other direction. It's not as though there is no role for the kind of reflection on, and attempt to speak about, the reasons for our normative commitments that is characteristic of philosophy. Nor do we want an account that would render completely opaque from the agent's point of view whether her experience of appreciation warrants normative commitment or not. Nevertheless, to make sense of the phenomena, and how it figures in our practical lives, we need some way of understanding the normative standards governing value commitments that explains how we can have reasons for these commitments without requiring articulacy about them.<sup>42</sup>

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