

**Razian Responsibility**  
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Joseph Raz's latest book, *From Normativity to Responsibility* (henceforth, *FNR*), is part of a recent wave of work that discusses responsibility in ways largely detached from concerns about free will. Instead, *FNR*'s focus is on presenting an integrated account of normativity, rationality, and responsibility.

The book is based upon nine articles published between 2004 and 2010, and complemented by four previously unpublished essays. *FNR* is divided into three parts comprised of varying numbers of chapters. Part One is concerned with normativity, Part Two with practical reasoning, and Part Three with responsibility. The individual chapters have been assembled and revised with the aim of providing a unified whole. The effort at unification has some worthwhile payoffs, throwing into sharp relief the systematic nature of the larger project of the book. In doing so *FNR* answers (and sometimes elicits) questions that might otherwise have been obscured in a more piecemeal presentation of Raz's thoughts. In the re-assembly of ideas, Raz is mostly successful. There are cases of overlap or repetition, but the book is largely successful at providing a novel account of normativity, rationality, and responsibility.

Raz's overarching interest is an account of "our Being in the World." Our Being in the World is a distinctive kind of engagement that we have, as persons, with the world. The bulk of *FNR* concerns the nature of normativity, primarily as it functions in the active, or action-characteristic elements of our Being In the World. The explanation of normativity is central because it is at the core of an explanation "about the way we are in the world" and in the way "our understanding of the world guides reactions to it in our emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and actions" (5).

For philosophers of action, and especially those interested in practical reason, the book is

extraordinarily rich. For example, Raz defends an attenuated version of the “Guise of the Good” thesis (chapter 4), he argues that what reasons one has are not affected by one’s beliefs about what reasons one has (chapter 6), provides a defense of the claim that Practical Reason is just Reason dealing with practical reasons and not some special form of reasoning (chapter 7 & 8), and the volume contains his already widely-discussed account of “The Myth of Instrumental Rationality” (chapter 8).

In what follows, I focus on both the foundation and the spire of the Razian edifice. That is, I concentrate on the methodological presumptions and the account of responsibility (Part Three). I start with the spire, arguing that Raz’s account of responsibility, especially the notion of a domain of secure competence, is intriguing but raises more puzzles than it solves. I conclude with thoughts about the foundation, arguing that Raz’s approach is ill-suited to generating the sort of theory he seeks.

### **Responsibility**

Raz’s account of responsibility is explicitly presented as an outgrowth of his reflections on our Being in the World. The degree to which the theory of responsibility turns on the particulars of his accounts of normativity and rationality is unclear, but some preliminary remarks about those earlier parts of *FNR* are in order.

Raz’s reflection on Being in the World starts with the case of intentional action. As Raz characterizes it, the explanation of intentional action consists in the explanation of two components: (A) “Those features of the world, as it appears to the agent, which make the action worth doing” and (B) “facts about the agent that made him respond to those, perceived, features of the world” (4). From these two features, a third arises: (C) the appropriateness of the agent’s reactions, in light of those features in the

world. As he puts it, “agents’ rational capacities enable them (fallibly) to identify some values in some options and to respond to them” (4) and those same features are what constitute reasons for action, given that the agents are rational.

The explanation of normativity turns out to be the explanation of those features (A-C) just mentioned. Raz is quick to note that this way of characterizing things threatens to overemphasize the role of rationality.<sup>1</sup> On his account, the primary significance of reasons—be they for emotions, beliefs, actions, or anything else—is to render some responses appropriate and not others. In his view, though, this typically underdetermines the actual emotion, belief, or action of the agent, which shows that the sources of our responses to the world include “much more than our rational capacities” (5).

Central to much of the book is the idea of a “normative/explanatory *nexus*” which holds that “every normative reason can feature in an explanation of the action for which it is a reason, as a fact that, being recognized for what it is, motivated the agent to perform the action, so that the agent guided its performance in light of that fact” (28). On the picture that emerges, *epistemic* reasons explain (or figure in explanations of) beliefs, and *practical* reasons play an analogous explanatory role for intentional actions (26). Important for Raz’s account is his refusal to treat reasons or the capacity to recognize reasons as more fundamental. For Raz, there is interdependence between reasons and Reason: normativity is explained in terms of reasons, but normative and explanatory reasons are reasons because they share a connection to

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<sup>1</sup> Raz joins the growing chorus of philosophers expressing concern about what can be characterized as the “over-intellectualization” of our understanding of action, where action is understood primarily in terms of conscious intentional action on the basis of explicitly held beliefs and desires. He makes it clear that he thinks that our emotional life, and the appropriateness of emotional reactions to ourselves and the world constitute important parts of our Being in the World. Nevertheless, such observations play a mostly peripheral role in the book. Emotions and their rationality receive no extended treatment and despite his apparent ambivalence about it, the familiar matter of intentional action mostly takes center stage (one place emotions are discussed is on pp. 91-2).

Reason.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Raz's approach to responsibility emerges when we consider what an agent's interest is in her own responsibility. It is something of a truism that moral responsibility has a social dimension, but there is comparatively little philosophical discussion of what *the agent's* interest is in being responsible. For example, a number of theorists have contended that being viewed as a responsible agent is part of full membership in the moral community (e.g., McKenna 2011, Smith 2012). Moreover, several argued that we should understand the distinctive normative structure of moral responsibility in terms of the social consequences of our responsibility practices (Smart 1961, Arneson 2003, Vargas 2013a). These accounts can give the impression that an agent's interest in his or her responsible agency is either merely instrumental to participation in shared life or simply a byproduct of internalizing socially beneficial norms. Raz's account, however, offers a suggestive alternative picture of the agent's principled interests in responsibility, one that purports to resolve the puzzle of negligence.<sup>3</sup>

For Raz, the animating thought of *FNR*—an interest in our “Being in the World”—takes center

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<sup>2</sup> He characterizes Reason as “the universal capacity to recognize reasons, one that in principle enables us to recognize any reason that applies to us, and to respond to it appropriately” (86) and “the general reflective capacity to recognize reasons” (90).

<sup>3</sup> My characterization of Raz's account is, at best, a reconstruction of Raz's sometimes opaque commitments. For example, Raz frames his discussion in terms of something he calls “responsibility<sub>2</sub>.” He never says what responsibility<sub>2</sub> is, beyond noting that it is neither the more basic capacity for rational agency (responsibility<sub>1</sub>) nor a more particular notion of responsibility as some particular duty (responsibility<sub>3</sub>). Unfortunately, there are a multitude of recognizable senses of responsibility (Cf., Fischer and Tognazzini 2011), so a positive characterization of the notion is, at this stage of the literature, something of a necessity. Raz's discussion suggests that he has in mind something that has been variously called “accountability” (Wallace 1994) or “responsible agency” (Vargas 2013a). For example, responsibility<sub>2</sub> is not supposed to be blameworthiness, but is a condition of it.

Perhaps the closest positive characterization we get is this: “Responsibility<sub>2</sub> is a condition of liability that is triggered by what the law takes to be failure to conform to a non-derivative reason. It is a condition of liability that arises in situations in which an action or a state of affairs is one that one should not have performed or allowed to exist and one is responsible<sub>2</sub> for the failure to conduct oneself as one should have done. Liability to punishment or to pay damages, etc. arising in such cases is responsibility-based” (256-7). At different points, Raz suggests that responsibility<sub>1</sub> is what Hart called “capacity responsibility” (256) and in another place he characterizes it as the “capacity for rational action” (227). We can be responsible<sub>2</sub> for non-intentional omissions, and for actions not under our control, including weakness of will and clumsiness while drunkenly going for a walk (231).

stage on just this question. His characterization of it is worth quoting at length:

*First*, our life, its successes, failures, and meaning, are bound up with our interaction with the world, impact on it, and its impact on us. *Second*, while in some of our activities we put ourselves at the mercy luck and sometimes that may be the point, the thrill of it, in others we rely on our skills, confident, to various degrees, that we know how to succeed given normal conditions. *Third*, our sense of who we are while in part determined independently of our activities (say by gender or ethnicity and their social meanings) is in part determined by our sense of our abilities and their limitations (against the background of the natural and social environment of our life), which (in ways dependent on our temperament and dispositions) fixes the limits of our ambitions and aspirations. *Fourth*, that sense of who we are is continuously being moulded through our understanding of our actions, which reinforces, extends or undermines our confidence in our abilities and skills. *Fifth*, the process of shaping who we are is normatively driven, that is we form views of who or what we want to be in light of view of what people like us should be. *Sixth*, our actions and their success both reveal who we are and make us who we are, in ways that are often difficult to disentangle (239).

For present purposes, two points are notable. First, there is Raz's idea that we have a particular interest in distinguishing between events we regard as skill-driven and those that we view as luck-riven (the

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distinction is Raz's, the terminology mine). The second idea is that within the scope of those events that are skill driven, we regard our actions and their successes (and I would add, their failures) as revealing something about us. This is an account on which agents have an independent interest in their own effective powers of action, and consequently an interest in identifying the domains in which the agent can be confident of his or her powers being effective or reliable.

As Raz sees it, our "permanently evolving sense of our mastery and its limits" establishes our sense of our *domain of secure competence* (244). We wish to be masters of our domains, as it were—or at least those domains in which our agency will be exercised. This not a peripheral concern for our form of agency. Rather, it is one of the most fundamental interests we have as agents, in that it distinguishes those parts of the world that are reliable subject to our agency, and those that are not.

This fact is at the heart of Raz's explanation for our otherwise surprising willingness to accept responsibility in cases as diverse as weakness of will, negligence, forgetfulness, and so on. That is, we care about being competent in those domains. The explanation has two elements. First, in cases of non-volitional culpability, the act (or omission) occurs in a domain where the agent's rational powers were operative, even action-mediating.<sup>4</sup> However, those powers failed to secure the desired result of non-culpable action. Nevertheless, the requisite rational power is still present. After all, reliable and secure competence does not ensure perfect reliability—only enough reliability to make successful exercises of agency in that domain a matter of skill, rather than luck.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On this view, competence is understood in terms of the reliable functioning of our rational powers, or what he calls "The Rational Functioning Principle." As he puts it, "Conduct for which we are (non-derivatively) responsible<sup>2</sup> is conduct that is the result of the functioning, successful or failed, of our powers of rational agency, provided those powers were not suspended in a way affecting the action" (231).

<sup>5</sup> Raz tends to characterize this in terms of a malfunctioning of rational agency. As he puts it, "Actions due to malfunction of our capacities of rational agency result from failure to perform acts of which we are masters" (268). This should not mislead,

If Raz's account works, it provides an original and powerful resolution of the problem of negligence, because it explains why agents can be responsible for actions and omissions, intentions and outcomes, even in the case of negligence.<sup>6</sup> In cases of non-volitional culpability, the agent's responsibility is grounded in the fact that the considered action fell within the agent's domain of secure competence. In such cases, we have a *prima facie* license to condemn the agent because the agent's successes or failures in that domain are matters of skill rather than luck.

In brief, an agent's interest in his or her domains of secure competence provides a reason for the agent to accept responsibility in those cases where competence fails. To disavow responsibility is to suggest that the agent does not have the kind of competence that we expect of mature agents in such domains. There seems to be two aspects to this. For Raz, the central piece is the agent's interests. However, there is plausibly a public face to this as well.

To signal incompetence in important actional domains comes at a steep price, especially where moral considerations are live. Failure signals that the agent is not competent in governing him or herself where those moral considerations are salient. More generally, though, it suggests that the agent may not meet a threshold for participation in shared, cooperative activity of the sort that relies on predictable, dependable exercises of agency. Although Raz does not quite put it this way, one might say that our concern for our domains of secure competence, and consequently, or willingness to own up to negligence, is propelled by our concern for the boundaries of our competence and the desire that others take seriously our agency, regarding it as a source of interests, values, and demands.

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however: Raz thinks that it is only in cases where the behavior bypasses one's rational agency (apparently, behavior occurring outside of the agent's domain of secure competence) that such an agential defect precludes responsibility (267).

<sup>6</sup> The implications are actually broader. As Raz is aware, the account provides a unified account of responsibility for standard cases of actions and omissions, but also weakness of will, negligence, agent-regret, and moral luck (i.e., it exists, but we accept it

This sketch of Raz's account of responsibility is necessarily partial, but it suffices to place us in a position to appreciate some serious concerns about the notion of secure competence at the core of his account of responsibility.

What determines whether an action is in the agent's domain of secure competence? Although there is some later ambiguity about the matter, Raz's explicit characterization of a domain of secure competence suggests that a domain is settled by the agent's own sense of when and where his powers are ordinarily reliable (244-5). Raz identifies the domain of secure competence as "a domain within which we are confident that if we set ourselves to do something we will" (244-5). However, what can Raz say about the possibility of agents having misplaced confidence in their own competence?

Consider the Dunning-Kruger effect, documented in experimental psychology. The Dunning-Kruger effect is the phenomenon of failing to recognize one's incompetence, both overestimating one's skill and failing to recognize genuine skill in others. It turns out to be notoriously common among U.S. undergraduates (and perhaps, their professors). What Dunning and Kruger found over a series of studies is that self-assessments of those performing badly in logical reasoning skills, grammatical competence, and humor are interestingly unreliable. Generally, those scoring in the bottom 12 percent of performers grossly overestimate their skills, typically self-assessing those skills as distinctly better than average (around the 62nd percentile).<sup>7</sup> Among the unskilled, the source of the defect appears to be both a lack of domain competence and a metacognitive failure, that is, a failure to recognize the absence of competence.

Not everyone seems vulnerable to this effect. In particular, those with the best performance on the

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when our conduct is the result of the functioning of our powers of agency in domains of secure competence).

<sup>7</sup> The classic study is reported in Kruger and Dunning (1999). For an example of the phenomenon among stock traders, see Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2003).



relevant measures tend to *underestimate* their relative competence.<sup>8</sup> However, this possibility suggests a potential problem for Raz's account in the other direction as well: there may be cases where agents have a domain of competence but fail to recognize it.

Raz—or a Razian—might insist that what is at stake is an account of our *sense* of our agency, and how that sense explains our willingness to take responsibility. However, inasmuch as Raz wants an account that vindicates claims of negligence (including the idea that people can merit responsibility or liability for it), the possibility of error about one's self-assessment of capacity seems to matter. In addition, standards of correctness are plausibly an aspect of our experience of agency. It would be strange, even morally objectionable, if we were to insist that agents are right to accept the charge of negligence when they are incorrect in supposing that the act was indeed in their domain of secure competence. Correlatively, it would be oddly bloodthirsty to hold agents culpable for failures that we know to be beyond their actual competence, but for which the agent self-assesses as competent.

It may help to consider matters from an agent-neutral conception of the social practice. In general, because of the costs involved in being culpable (being a target of blame and social estrangement) responsible agents have reason to care about other agent's actual competence, and not just the appearance of competence. We can only justify the imposition of blame and the like when there is good reason to suppose that the relevant agent had the relevant competence. Against the background of what we know about agents and their tendency towards imperfect self-assessments, it is a mistake to take as decisive a given agent's assessment of whether there is a relevant domain of secure competence, and if there is, what its scope proves to be.

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<sup>8</sup> In the Kruger and Dunning studies, competence tends to self-recognize, but then presumes that others have it, making atypical

At times, Raz seems to understand domains of secure competence in a way that is amenable to a non-subjective characterization of competence. He claims, for example, that young children and people with disabilities are not properly subject to expectations of competence and control because such expectations entail that the agents could have had such competence, and they do not (247). It is not obvious how this thought connects with the initial idea of the account—the agent’s sense of self, and the agent’s sense of when it is skill as opposed to luck that marks the boundary self and world—with an external assessment of the agent’s actual domain of competence. If the connection is merely contingent, then it seems that an agent’s concern for whether an action is culpable, volitional or not, takes on a rather different characterization that Raz’s remarks suggest, becoming potentially a matter of which an agent might have good reason to disavow a sense of competence and responsibility.

Consider the idea that agents do not always accept responsibility for negligence. What Raz says about this is that “[t]o disavow responsibility<sup>2</sup> for such actions is to be false to who we are,” (245). He goes on to quote (approvingly, it seems) Robert Adams’ remark that a refusal to “take responsibility for one’s emotions and motives is to be inappropriately alienated from one’s own emotional and appetitive faculties” (quoted on 245, n. 31). First, when we direct our reproach at others, it is not merely (or even at all) the criticism that the target has failed to be true to herself. Rather, the complaint is typically that she has failed to meet some norm we regard as justified. Second, an agent might well be prepared to accept that one is alienated and false to oneself. An agent might prefer that we regard him or her as incompetent in that domain when the agent won’t suffer any social cost for rejecting his or her responsibility for negligence. Teenagers may sometimes be this way, as well as anyone already stigmatized and fully

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competence seem normal.

accustomed to being regarded as a defective agent.

What we need is a bridge between a *sense* of competence and the widespread thought that responsibility ascriptions do not simply depend on self-assessments of competence. A good deal depends on being able to distinguish between secure competence and its absence in some non-subjective fashion.<sup>9</sup> However, what Raz writes about the possibility of erroneous self-assessment raises more puzzles than it solves.

Here's what he claims:

when people fail to do what they could be expected to have been competent to do, should have done, and tried to do, the question whether the failure was due to the fact that they were not as competent as they could have been expected to be, or whether they did not try hard enough, or whether their action just failed as some do, does not always have an answer. The boundaries between 'one's competence is not up to the required level', 'one did not try hard enough' and 'one just failed', are indeterminate. Often there is no fact of the matter as to which category an individual case belongs to, and where there is, it is rarely possible to be sure about it (247).

Raz's view is that these matter are mostly metaphysically indeterminate, and when they aren't, we can't be sure whether agents have the requisite competence.

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<sup>9</sup> This seems especially true against the backdrop of his rejection of control-focused or rational capacitarian theories of responsibility (228-9). The main complaint about these accounts just is that they cannot draw an adequate line between failures to exercise a capacity and the absence of a capacity. This leaves such accounts on delicate ground with respect to negligence, which looks like a case of responsibility *because* of an agent's capacity to respond to morally significance considerations went

That's one view, but it is an extraordinarily unsatisfying one for a theory of responsibility. At the very least, it forces us to abandon the hope that his theory will inform our real world assessments of responsibility, as it becomes useless in precisely those circumstances in which we most hope for guidance.<sup>10</sup> When considering the hard case of whether and how we determine whether a purportedly negligent agent has the crucial competence, Raz's account suggests that indeterminateness is to be expected, and we cannot be confident of securing any answer. So, the thing on which responsibility hinges—competence—is something that is neither first-personally nor third-personally accessible. In such cases, competence is fundamentally mysterious, and Raz's account merely leaves us with a label for competence, rather than a characterization of it.

One thing seems certain on any non-subjectivist account of secure competence: if agents must have true beliefs about their domain(s) of secure competence, responsibility will be rarer than we tend to suppose. There are, after all, many ways to have false beliefs about one's competence.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the frequency of our false beliefs may depend on another aspect of Raz's account that is left unclear, i.e., whether we have a single general domain of secure competence, or instead, more narrowly specified domains of competence. If Raz wishes to insist that we have a single general domain of secure competence, then the account faces the worry that such a capacity is flatly incredible given the wide variety of human behavioral, attitudinal, and deliberative dispositions evident across contexts. If Raz allows that there are

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unexercised.

<sup>10</sup> It also leaves Raz with no clear advantage of competitor accounts that invoke notions of control or unexercised rational capacities as the source of responsibility under negligence. Although I cannot make the case here, Raz's rejection of control-focused accounts is not persuasive, in part because his own account seems to be an instance of the kind. What is secure competence if not (the capacity for) control?

<sup>11</sup> We tend to suppose that we speak up because of our courage, that we select one object over another because it has the better qualities, and that our altruistic moral concern ranges evenly over a wide range of circumstances. Yet a large body of experimental data suggests that all of this is false, if not always, at least alarmingly frequently (Doris forthcoming, Vargas

multiple domains then an agent might be competent in some and not others.

What is attractive about Raz's picture of responsibility is that it explains what interest an agent might have in her own responsibility. Much else about the core of the account of responsibility, however, is frustrating because it is either unclear, the consequences left undeveloped or because it raises serious doubts about the tenability of the account. That we do not know whether an agent's domain of competence is determined by the agent's estimate or some independent metaphysical fact, or even whether it is a unitary or plural thing, suggests that a good deal more work needs to be done before the approach provides a serious alternative to more familiar accounts of responsibility.

In the next section, I consider one potential source of the difficulties: Raz's methodological foundation.

## Methodology

In the previous section I focused on some puzzles about Raz's particular account of responsibility. Here, I step back and consider some methodological questions about whether and how characterizing our sense of our Being in the World might afford us a philosophically significant theory. Raz has been producing influential work for more than four decades, and he is more alive to questions about aims and methods than many philosophers, but there are grounds to be concerned that his tools are not up to the task he sets for himself.

Raz opens *FNR* by declaring that his "purpose is to explain general and essential features of our experience" (3). He goes on to adopt what we might characterize as an anti-imperialist view about his

account, noting that his descriptions are not the only ones available, nor that the concepts he uses are the only ones that make thinking about them possible. He writes, “I claim only that I (aim to) describe and explain essential aspects of our experience, using concepts that we commonly use in thinking about them, when we do” (3). On this picture, he intends to characterize our Being in the World, a characteristic experience of activity, with its attendant but shifting boundaries. That is, he is concerned to account for some general and essential features of *experience*.

There is nothing in Raz’s account that suggests any interest in engaging with empirical work about our experience of the world, the mechanisms by which it operates, and the ways in which it is facilitated and frustrated by identifiable aspects of biological or social and cultural architecture.<sup>12</sup> So what, then, are the special tools of the philosophers for teaching us about experience, especially *essential* features of it?

The answer seems to be found in the philosopher’s skill with concepts. In Raz’s case, the concepts of interest are not the constructions of philosophers, but rather things purportedly evident in commonsense distinctions.<sup>13</sup> Although Raz is quick to reject any interest in the meanings of words, he also takes himself to be in the business of distinguishing the propositions people make “‘reasons’, ‘ought’, ‘justification’, and similar words and phrases . . . and to explain their interrelations, thus explaining the relations between what we have reason to do, what we are justified in doing, and the role of reasoning in both” (9).” As Raz sees it, once we have an account of the various propositions people make using normative terms, and we’ve

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to say there are no moments of contact with empirical issues. Raz notes that a theory of normativity will ultimately have to grapple with objections from causal irrelevance (7-8), and he also notes that coherence with evolutionary theory is a challenge for theories of normativity, but he dismisses this as “a largely scientific problem” (8).

<sup>13</sup> Raz notes that “[o]ur reason-related thought and discourse is supple and replete with distinctions” and that in introducing terminological distinctions his aim is “merely to draw attention to a few of those distinctions” (14). And, he allows that he discusses “these matters using the very concepts we aim to explain when explaining the features of our experience that the concepts are employed to describe in non-philosophical discourse” (3). On the matter of reasons, he writes “the concept we are trying to elucidate is a common concept, not a philosophical term of art, and while theoretical reflection involves making explicit

explained their interrelations, we have thereby explained “what we have reason to do, and what we are justified in doing.” Given Raz’s methodology, the possibility that some concept (like responsibility) might have important features at odds with ordinary thought seem ruled out from the start.

Putting aside the question of whether there are *any* approaches adequate to distilling essential features of experience from the armchair, it is at least a little mysterious how the analysis of concepts gives us an explanation of normativity, rationality, and responsibility as such, rather than an account of how we (Western, well-educated) people tend to think about such things. Recall that the project is to understand our experience in terms of particular concepts. On a conceptual analysis-style approach, something about those concepts is such that they reveal essential features of experience. Raz’s method seems to reintroduce one of the long-standing puzzles about any form of conceptual analysis that pretends to a metaphysics: on what grounds does one draw conclusions about agency, mind, or the world on the basis of our concepts?

One worry is whether the approach can accommodate notions of responsibility, normativity, and rationality not rooted in ordinary experience. A notion of rationality developed in decision theory might fail to fall out of the concepts required to make sense of our experience. Nevertheless, such accounts might earn their keep in other ways, figuring in predictive and explanatory accounts of human behavior, patterns of neural activity, or what have you. How such accounts square with Raz’s aspirations for providing an account of rationality, responsibility, and so on, remains unclear.

A second worry concerns the presumption that philosophers are well positioned to show essential truths about our experiences. One form of this worry focuses on whether the tools of philosophers are adequate to this task, especially in the hands of a single philosopher inevitably occupying a highly atypical

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much that is only implicit in the way the concept features in thought and discourse, it has no business reforming the concept, or reshaping it, except to the extent that this is inevitable” (15).

part of the spectrum of human experience. If one wants a picture of some essential feature of experience, why wouldn't we prefer large-scale, cross-cultural studies as part of our evidence base?<sup>14</sup> A second form of the worry, related to a point made above, concerns the malleability and contingency of our concepts. Unless we have some reason to think notions of rationality and normativity are immune to any potential transformation (in light of scientific practices, but maybe other cultural practices, too), we have no reason to think that careful investigation of our experience exclusively via our received concepts will reveal something essential about the nature of normativity, rationality, and their roles in our experiences of agency, as opposed to something historically and culturally contingent.

A potential response to these concerns is to scale back the ambitions of the account. Rather than attempting to extract essential truths of experience from armchair reflections, one might use the distinctions in familiar thoughts and practices as a basis for generating a provisional account of responsibility, subject to revision in light of considerations from various sources. These distinctions might not travel beyond some circumscribed "us," but that might be enough. The main worry with such a reply is that it might work for an account of responsibility, but it would be less successful for an account of normativity and rationality. Rationality and normativity, unlike responsibility (potentially) seem less suited to cultural or historically local indexing to some less-than-universal "we."

A different tack is to object that the aforementioned concerns falsely presume that there is a standpoint external to the framework Raz offers. Recall Raz's nexus, i.e., his view about the interdependence of Reasons and reason, and his anti-reductionism about normative phenomena that follows. Once we have his picture of that (anti-reductionist) interdependence, we might have special

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<sup>14</sup> Recently, Tamler Sommers has done interesting work putting pressure on the idea of the universality of supposedly



reasons for thinking our propositions or concepts of justification do tell us something essential about our experience of Being in the World. Such a view is suggested by Raz's insistence that "forthcoming explanations consist of articulating some of the necessary relations between concepts, or between the phenomena they apply to, such explanations are by their nature somewhat circular: there is no standpoint independent of, outside the phenomena explained, from which they can be explained. All that can be done is to clarify necessary connections, and remove misguided conceptions" (7).<sup>15</sup> So, one possibility is that we are meant to be skeptical that there is anything to responsibility, normativity, or rationality outside the sense of our Being in the World.

However, the methodological worries raised thus far should be understood as *prior* to the nexus proposal. Raz's account of the nexus is undercut if we think the general approach is not reliable. To be sure, we might allow that serious predictive or explanatory payoffs to a theory can give us reason to overlook our methodological concerns. Were Raz's account to give us that much, then we might have reason to overlook the methodological concerns mentioned here. But prediction is flatly beyond the bounds or aspirations of the account. Thus, there is only the matter of whether there is some other extraordinary explanatory payoff that should make us overlook serious concerns about methodology.

I have not focused on the particulars of the account of normativity and rationality, but the account of responsibility is one test case. There, the payoffs of the Razian approach seem insufficient to justify our overlooking methodological concerns. If anything, Raz's approach is an essentially problematic way to generate a theory of both essential features of experience and the nature of responsibility.

Despite my reservations, I have little doubt that *FNR* would be enough to secure Raz's reputation

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conceptual truths about responsibility. See Sommers (2011).

as a powerful and original philosopher, even if he had never written anything before. It challenges familiar assumptions about normativity, rationality, and responsibility and gives us a different set of tools for thinking about long-standing puzzles regarding each. However, its virtues are not the only things exceptional about the book. It is often cryptic, and the substance of Raz's views are too often elusive. Moreover, in places the work feels like a product of an era when methodological concerns could be more readily ignored and there was not already a well-developed literature on responsibility. Despite these reservations, it remains hard to shake the sense that there is something philosophically subtle and genuinely insightful about Raz's suggestive account of the relationship of our agency to the world.

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<sup>15</sup> One might also worry that what Raz characterizes as "somewhat circular" is, in fact, unvirtuously circular. Length precludes pursuing this thought here, however.

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