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The Question of the Existence of Moral Reasons and Two Kinds of Scepticisms

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1 Is There Something That Backs Morality?

Andy is exiting a burning building and he can pull the fire alarm in order to save the lives of others, but has no desire, interest or concern for doing so (Bedke 2008: 102). Andy knows he can fail to help without anyone ever finding out or having to face any material consequences. Moreover, he may be a disinterested misanthrope, but Andy has some interests of his own; he is actually in a hurry to catch his favourite TV show, and by leaving the building as soon as possible, he may do so. By Andy's reckoning, leaving the building as soon as possible is what he ought to be doing.

Ordinary thought seems to favour the view that despite Andy's unusual indifference towards the suffering of others, he is still in some important sense wrong and unjustified in failing to pull the fire alarm in order to save the lives of others (cf. Garner 1990: 139). But on what grounds, exactly, may we be licensed to infer this?

A first answer may be that Andy should pull the fire alarm because *morality demands* that he do so. In other words, there is a system of rules out there saying what one must do in case she finds herself under certain facts and circumstances (cf. Korsgaard 1997: 240). In Andy's case, the rules seem to prescribe that when one finds oneself in a situation where he can perform an action that promises to save the lives of others at minimal personal cost, one must do so irrespective of what happens to be one's ends and interests. *In itself*, however, the present answer seems inadequate, and the possibility of there being system of rules that – sensibly and intuitively – no one should care about indicates this. Consider the game I invented five minutes ago, according to which one has to touch one's nose every hour after noon, and one's ears every half an hour after one has touched one's nose in order to receive three points. If anything, it seems that Andy had better ignore these rules right now – as the last thing we would want him to do is becoming preoccupied with keeping track of time instead of helping those people!

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A second answer builds on the first while adding that morality is a system of rules that agents in general – including Andy – *accept* or *subscribe to* (cf. Finlay 2008: 354). The plausibility of the proposal may be improved further by adding that accepting (or subscribing to) a system of rules is not necessarily to want to comply with every instance thereof. Rather, accepting a system of rules need only involve a general desire to comply with the system, while it may be possible that particular instances of it displease the subscriber. Consider a footballer who, even though accepts footballing rules as such, is not particularly happy with the fact that the rules dictate that he be now sent off on account of a bad foul he has committed. Thus, as an attempt to justify the application of moral rules to Andy – and moral indifferentists at large – the current proposal may seem plausible even on the assumption that Andy is likely to feel displeased with that particular instance of a moral rule prescribing him to pull the fire alarm.

On closer look, however, the above proposal proves inadequate for at least two reasons. First, the assumption that an agent may not even have a general desire to comply with moral rules seems neither unintelligible nor far-fetched. Second, even if agents invariably accepted moral rules, it would still be unintuitive to think that the relevant acceptance is what makes it the case that agents should comply with moral rules. To put it differently, it seems intuitive to think that agents should comply with moral rules even on the assumption that they do not accept them in the sense of having a general desire to comply with them. Hence if there is anything underwriting our notion of moral justification, it must be something else.

On a reasonable, third answer, Andy should pull the fire alarm because he has *reason* to do so irrespective of his contingent desires, interests and concerns. This is the view of the moralist, who thinks that moral norms or considerations (at least the ones representing alleged moral requirements) are backed by *reasons*: *practical* reasons, or reasons *for action*. On the face of it, the moralist's answer seems sufficient towards underwriting the common view that no matter how indifferent or atrocious an agent may be, it still makes perfect sense to think that she should comply with moral requirements. Plausibly, the function of a reason for action is to introduce, when needed, critical distance between the agent's existing motives, on the one hand, and what the agent simply *should* do, on the other (cf. Sinclair 2017). The problem, however, is not whether *on the assumption* of the moralist's proposal it makes sense to think that agents should comply with moral rules. Rather, the question philosophers tend to be occupied with is whether the moralist's proposal can be safely assumed: whether it is true that there are such reasons. So, they naturally raise *the question of the existence of moral reasons*.

In this paper, I do three things. First, I present and clarify the question of the existence of moral reasons – which in the absence of careful elucidation stands rather obscure (sections 2 and 3). Second, I consider two distinct ways that one may be sceptical about the existence of moral reasons (sections 4 and 5). Third, from the two scepticisms, I raise the interesting question of whether *radical* scepticism about reasons really does address the question that many (if not most) sceptics about moral reasons are actually interested in – and argue that it does not (section 6).

2 What is The Question of the Existence of Moral Reasons?

The question of the existence of moral reasons asks whether it is true that every time an agent is morally *required* to perform some action, she necessarily has *sufficient normative* reason to do so. At least four elements of the formulation require elucidation. First, the question is concerned with moral requirements – which may be thought of as comprising only a subset of moral norms. Compare: Andy may be required to pull the fire alarm in order to save the lives of others, but he may not be required – though it would be *morally great* of him – to directly try and save others at risk of his own life. Before we concern ourselves with whether we have adequate reason to perform (so called) *supererogatory* acts[1] such as the latter, a more elementary question seems to be whether we even have adequate reasons to perform those actions that we are (allegedly) morally required to perform.

Second, the question is specifically about a particular kind of reasons: normative reasons for action. Normative reasons (for action) contrast with explanatory and motivating reasons: reasons why agents act as they do, and reasons for which agents act as they do, respectively (Audi 2002: 237). A normative reason for action is a reason there *is* for doing something: a consideration that counts in favour of a prospective course of action (Scanlon 1998:17).

Third, the question is concerned with whether moral requirements are backed by *sufficient* normative reasons – or are *sufficiently* backed by normative reasons. Whereas a *defeasible* normative reason may count in favour of an action only to a certain extent, a *sufficient* normative reason is thought to justify an action *sufficiently*, in the sense that it cannot be overruled by any conflicting considerations. Compare: it may be true that I have *a* reason to call my boss a nasty name during a meeting, in virtue of the fact that doing so would result in humiliating a generally rude person, and perhaps another in virtue of the fact that doing so would make me appear bold to my peers, but these reasons do not seem to outweigh the much stronger reason that I have not to do it, grounded in the incomparable value of just being nice to people. Granted, in any given situation, we may have some (lightweight) reasons to do all kinds of things, but the real question is: are they weighty or *sufficient* reasons?

Fourth, the question of the existence of moral reasons seems to be about a stronger sense of entailment than *mere* entailment: it seems to be about *invariable suppliance*. To see this, observe that the question is not *just* whether agents invariably happen to have adequate reason to do as moral requirements say; rather, it is whether they invariably have such reason *because* they are morally required – or in virtue of the moral requirements (or considerations) that are at play. For one thing, even if we miraculously happened to have sufficient reason to do as moral requirements say in virtue of some non-moral consideration that is at play – say, because doing so means that some deity would credit our bank accounts – that reason could not be accurately described as *moral*. And had the deity withdrawn the offer, such (non-moral) reason would evaporate.

[1] It may be disputable where we draw the line between morally required and morally supererogatory actions when it comes to particular cases. For a discussion, see (Singer 1972).

We thus arrive at a clarified version of the question of the existence of moral reasons: Do agents invariably have sufficient normative reasons for action for complying with those moral norms representing (alleged) moral requirements, and which reasons are supplied by the (mere) presence of those (alleged) moral requirements? In short: do moral requirements invariably supply agents with sufficient normative reasons for action?

3 The Question of Normative Importance

The question of the existence of moral reasons is: are there sufficient normative reasons supplied by moral norms? Closer inspection, however, reveals that what the question amounts to is – what we may call – *the question of normative importance*. To arrive at the latter, observe that the question of the existence of moral reasons features a relation of invariable *suppliance* – as opposed to one of invariable *entailment*. Recall that in asking the question of the existence of moral reasons, one does not merely ask whether moral norms invariably *entail* reasons: whether it is true that each and every time a moral norm prescribes an action, the agent (to whom it applies) has sufficient reason to act accordingly. Rather, in asking it, one also asks whether moral norms invariably *supply* reasons: whether it is true that each and every time a moral norm prescribes an action the agent has sufficient reason to act accordingly *and in virtue of* that norm. It seems that the question of whether moral norms invariably *supply* reasons implicates a further question: the question of normative importance (cf. Williams 1985: 203-204).

To see this, begin by observing that for moral norms – or for that matter, any set of norms – to *invariably supply* reasons, they must be such that as to invariably *outweigh* any conflicting considerations that may be at play in a given situation of normative conflict. Take, for example, the person exiting a burning building who can save the lives of others by pulling the fire alarm but who has no desire, interest or concern for the lives of others. Moreover, suppose that this person even has a conflicting desire – conflicting as to what moral norms would have her do – to leave the building as soon as possible in order to catch her favourite TV show. For this person to have adequate reason to pull the fire alarm – i.e., for moral norms on this occasion to be able to make it the case that such a person has adequate reason to pull the fire alarm (and not adequate reason to leave the building as soon as possible) – something like the following must hold. Practical considerations meriting the characterisation moral – such as the consideration that by pulling the fire alarm one would save the lives of others – must be *normatively more important* (or relevant, appropriate and the like) than conflicting non-moral ones – such as the consideration that by leaving the burning building early one could catch her favourite TV show. For how else could moral considerations be able to outweigh their competitors – let alone *invariably* – if not by being normatively more important (or relevant, appropriate, and the like)?

There thus seems to be an inseparable connection between the question of the existence of moral reasons, on the one hand, and the question of normative importance, on the other. Whereas the former asks whether moral norms invariably

supply agents with sufficient reasons for action, the latter asks: Are moral considerations (or norms) normatively more important than non-moral ones? As I have suggested, the question of normative importance may be considered the *final* sense or understanding of the question of the existence of moral reasons in the sense that an answer to the former is *ultimately* what informs an answer to the latter.

4 Scepticism About Moral Reasons

Why may some people be inclined to think that there are no moral reasons: that moral norms do *not* supply (nor entail) sufficient normative reasons for action? (Of course, those same people may think a better question would be why may some people think that there *are* moral reasons). The first thing to say here is that, *intuitively*, it *seems* that we always have good reason to comply with moral norms (at least the ones expressing alleged moral requirements). Reflecting on a concrete case may serve to remind the reader of this, so let us consider Andy:

> … who as he exits a burning building, does not feel the slightest inclination to pull the fire alarm. He sees no reason to save others when it does not benefit him, and he is unmotivated to pull the fire alarm when doing so would save dozens from dying in the fire (Bedke 2008: 102).

Given what we know about Andy and his situation, we are inclined to think that Andy has adequate reason to pull the fire alarm. Moreover, we are inclined to think that Andy has *moral* reason to do so: *supplied* by moral considerations alone, not just reason that Andy happens to have and which miraculously coincides with what moral norms require Andy to do. Putting these thoughts together, we are inclined to treat the natural fact that by pulling the fire alarm Andy will likely save the lives of others as reason-supplying. In being so inclined, we seem to possess a certain disposition towards inferring the thought that Andy has a reason to pull the fire alarm from the fact that by doing so he will likely save the lives of others – perhaps in a similar way that we are inclined to infer the thought that the weather outside is not very good from the observation that outside is windy and rainy. In general, it is intuitive to think that there is reason supplied by moral considerations alone; not just reason that is merely entailed by moral norms. And such inferences concerning what agents have adequate reason to do seem to follow from mere consideration of facts such as the aforementioned.

However, those sceptical about morality's alleged reason-supplying force (or the existence of moral reasons) are keen to notice that common intuitions pertaining to the alleged reason-supplying force of moral considerations seem to clash with common intuitions pertaining to the role and function of normative frameworks in general. (A normative framework is understood here as a set of norms that hang together). In general, it seems intuitive to think that the questions of what a normative framework requires of me, on the one hand, and what I have reason to

do, on the other, seem independent[2]. That is, it is at least conceivable to think that we may sometimes be required by a normative framework to perform an action for which we lack adequate reason; as when I need to talk with my mouth full, thereby violating the demands of etiquette, in order to warn you that the food you are about to eat contains allergens. Those who are conservative as to the intuition on the role and function of normative frameworks may wish to question the grounds for thinking that morality, a normative framework, enjoys such a privilege of supplying (invariably) those to whom it applies with adequate reason for action. Sceptics are inclined to think that insofar as morality is thought to possess such reason-supplying function, it is an objectionably 'peculiar' or 'queer' institution, and that the thought that morality really does possess such a reason-supplying force may well amount to a myth (cf. Mackie 1977; Williams 1985; Garner 1990; Joyce 2001).

Now, the observation that morality seems (intuitively) an exception to a certain way of thinking cannot be sufficient grounds for decisive scepticism about moral reasons, any more than the mere fact that something is unique in certain respects means that it is objectionable in any interesting way (cf. Shepski 2008). Sceptics about moral reasons may treat the above observation as indicative, rather than vindicatory, of scepticism[3] – and they typically support their scepticism via independent substantive argumentation. A standard way of doing so is by arguing for a certain theory of reasons, practical instrumentalism, on which there are only reasons favouring actions that are instrumental to the agent's (for whom they are reasons) ends (cf. Schroeder 2007: 108). If instrumentalism is true and given a sound understanding of the content of moral requirements on which they need not prescribe actions that are fulfilling to the agent's (to whom they apply) ends, there are no moral reasons: reasons *supplied* by moral considerations *alone*. (For it may be possible that we are sometimes required by moral norms to perform some action which serves no end of ours, and even if we miraculously and invariably had end-related reasons to comply with moral norms, it would still not be true that we had such reasons because we were morally required). To return to the initial question: the reason why some people are inclined to think that there are no moral reasons is because they have prior convictions on what reasons are, or what kinds of considerations could count as reasons.

In his book 'The Myth of Morality', Richard Joyce argues extensively that reasons can only be understood as means to the agent's (for whom they are reasons) ends, and that as a result there is no sense to be made of reasons supplied by alleged moral requirements (2001: 77). And in his important paper, 'Humean Doubts', James Dreier puts forward a long and careful argument to the effect that

[2] Of course, there are normative frameworks, such as self-interest, that may appear to supply or entail reasons for action. However, one can still imagine cases where what self-interest requires might not align with what one has good reason to do. For instance, self-interest may require that I do not give money to famine relief, but for all I know, moralists may be right that I have good reason to do so. The key observation here is that the question of what a normative framework requires and the question of what reasons one has seem to be, at least initially, independent. Thus, it does not seem plausible to assume an automatic or necessary link between a normative framework and its capacity to entail or supply reasons.

[3] This is the sense one gets while reading chapter 2 of Joyce's 'Myth of Morality' (2001).

instrumental reasons enjoy a 'ground-level normative status': that the question of whether something constitutes a reason for action ultimately depends on whether it relates appropriately to the ends of the agent (for whom it may be a reason) (1997: 96). Both writers are sceptics about moral reasons insofar as they offer arguments specifically directed against thinking that a particular kind of reasons exist, namely non-end-related reasons, while positively defending the plausibility of some kind of reasons, namely end-related reasons.

5 A Distinct Branch of Scepticism About Moral Reasons

Following the above, standard way of being sceptical about moral reasons, we may now consider a distinct, alternative way of doing so (Lofitis 2020: 42-44). Rather than arguing that there can only be reasons favouring actions that are instrumental to the agent's (for whom they are reasons) ends, the alternative sceptic argues that there are no reasons supplied by moral norms because there cannot be any reasons *to begin with* (Lofitis 2020: 42-44). Given the extensive scope of this scepticism, we may call it *radical*. Logically, the emerging theory seems to be a valid way of denying the existence of moral reasons insofar as it is analogous to the following reasoning: there are no *pink* unicorns, because there are no unicorns to begin with.

This distinct way of being sceptical about moral reasons requires denying a premise that is implicit in the argument of the standard route, which we may write as follows:

(P1) Moral requirements are supposed to apply to agents irrespective of their ends.
(P2) Moral requirements are supposed to invariably supply agents with sufficient normative reasons.
(P3) There are only instrumental reasons (pro tanto or sufficient).
(P3implicit) There are at least some sufficient normative reasons (for agents to perform actions).
(C) Moral norms—which express alleged moral requirements—do not invariably supply agents with sufficient normative reasons (for action).

By denying that there are at least some reasons, which is to reject (P3implicit), it follows that there are no reasons supplied by moral norms – just as there are no instrumental reasons. We may write the resulting reasoning as follows:

(P1*) Moral requirements are supposed to apply to agents irrespective of their ends.
(P2*) Moral requirements are supposed to invariably supply agents with sufficient normative reasons.
(P3*) There are no sufficient normative reasons (for agents to perform actions).
(C*) Moral norms—which express alleged moral requirements—do not invariably supply agents with sufficient normative reasons.

The reasoning above can serve as an argument for alternative scepticism about moral reasons, assuming independent support for the crucial premise (P3*). But why think that such a radical view, expressed by (P3*), is true? Namely, that the very thought of there being occasionally reasons justifying actions is mistaken?

Defenders begin by reflecting on a particular feature of reasons which appears to be conceptual: an indispensable part of what it means for there to be reasons, and hence constitutive of competence with matters relating to reasons (cf. Zangwill 1994: 211, Blackburn 1984: 65-66). They observe that if there are normative reasons (for agents to do things), they must obtain in virtue of natural features of the world (of which those agents are part of). Moreover, reasons must be somehow tied to the natural world such that two situations which are identical in their natural features cannot differ with respect to their reason-providing propensities (cf. Olson 2014: 89; Streumer 2017: 10). To see this, suppose that Andy has a reason to pull the fire alarm to save the lives of others in circumstances C, and that Mary finds herself in identical circumstances C* and that she can also pull the fire alarm to save the lives of others. Does it not follow trivially that if Andy has a reason to pull the fire alarm, so does Mary? For the answer to be 'yes', the normative must be tied to the natural in precisely the way defenders contemplate.

At this point, defenders accept (as we may do) the above conceptual feature linking reasons to the natural world – but wonder at the same time how such necessary connections between reasons and natural features can be said to exist: be part of the 'fabric' or 'furniture' of the world – or perhaps less metaphorically, be ways that worldly objects can be (cf. Mackie 1977; Scanlon 1998; Streumer 2017). Being themselves unable to explain such connections, they invite those who believe in the existence of normative reasons to account for them (Olson 2014: 92, 172; Streumer 2017: 24). As far as defenders are concerned, the world contains no such things: there are no reasons for agents to do *anything*. As a result, there are no *moral* reasons (either).

In his book 'Unbelievable Errors', Bart Streumer (2017) argues extensively for radical scepticism about reasons (and also normative properties more widely). In defending this view, Streumer clearly qualifies for an alternative sceptic about moral reasons insofar as his negative existential thesis about moral reasons is based on a negative existential thesis about reasons at large.

6 Are Radical Sceptics Really Sceptical About Moral Reasons?

Recall that whereas standard sceptics deny that there are (or can be) any moral reasons as a result of there only being reasons favouring the ends of the agent (for whom they are reasons), radical sceptics base their negative existential thesis about moral reasons on the claim that there are no reasons to begin with. But do radical sceptics have an answer to the question that many (if not most) sceptics about moral reasons are actually interested in? In what follows, I shall argue that they do not.

Of course, it must be conceded to the radical sceptic that if reasons at large do not exist, as she claims, then moral reasons – being a subset of reasons – do not exist either. There is, therefore, an obvious sense in which the question of whether moral

reasons exist is not independent of the question of whether reasons at large exist: a negative answer to the latter question entails a negative answer to the former. In general, a question can be said to be independent of another in case the answer to the latter does not affect or inform the answer to the former. A notable example involves the question of the existence of God, on the one hand, and the question of the existence of objective moral values, on the other. To think that the question of the existence of objective moral values is independent of the question of the existence of God is to think that there may well be objective moral values without assuming God's existence (cf. Taylor 2020).

However, the question that many (if not most) sceptics about moral reasons, and generally those interested in the question of the existence of moral reasons, are interested in, seems to be a different one. For even if reasons in general do not exist, it still makes sense to ask the following question: If reasons *did* exist, *would* morality invariably supply reasons that outweigh other kinds of reasons? In other words, *even if* reasons in general do not exist, *could* moral reasons (or considerations) be deemed normatively more important than other kinds of reasons? Notice that this question *does* seem independent of the question of whether reasons at large exist. Importantly, if I am right in thinking that many (if not most) sceptics about moral reasons are interested in the aforementioned conditional question, then they must be indifferent to the radical sceptic's position, even if the latter turns out to be true. This seems to be an interesting result. But why think that I am right in identifying the aforementioned question as the one that sceptics (and inquirers) about moral reasons are really interested in? In what follows, I submit three reasons for thinking so.

First, as it has already been suggested, the question of the existence of moral reasons *makes sense* independently or *despite* the truth of radical scepticism. For there can be moral reasons *in a sense*, without there being any reasons to begin with. The sense in which there can be moral reasons relates to the question of normative importance. Observe: Even if reasons at large do not exist, it still makes perfect sense to ask: had reasons existed (or had the world contained normative reasons), would moral considerations be normatively more important than non-moral ones (and as a result, be able to supply agents with reasons)? For we can reasonably speculate on the kinds of natural features or considerations that would be relevant towards answering the question of normative importance *even if* the world does not contain – among its numerous particles of energy and matter – any reasons (or other normative properties) (cf. Dworkin 1996). This seems so because the kinds of considerations informing our answers to purely normative questions such as the question of normative importance seem independent of the kinds of arguments in support of radical scepticism about reasons (see section 5).

To see this, consider: why might a *standard* sceptic about moral reasons think that the consideration that by leaving the burning building early Andy could catch his favourite TV show is normatively more important than the consideration that by pulling the fire alarm Andy may save the lives of others? Speculatively, because – on the sceptic's view – a consideration that is about the advancement of the agent's own ends, or is in alignment with the agent's 'subjective motivational set', may just be what a normatively important consideration is supposed to be like (cf. Williams 1981). What is important here is the observation that even if normative features are

not part of the fabric of the world, we may still engage in meaningful discourse on the question of normative importance. The question seems, intuitively, unaffected by any kinds of considerations pertaining to how the world (of existence) is like. Had the world contained normative reasons, considerations such as the above mentioned may well have sufficed to supply agents with reasons for action in virtue of being normatively more important than their competitors. The discussion on the question of normative importance seems to make perfect sense. Insofar as the question of normative importance remains unaffected by arguments in favour of wholesale scepticism about reasons, so it seems possible for moral reasons to exist *in a certain sense* despite the truth of radical scepticism.

Second, those interested in the question of the existence of moral reasons may be interested solely in the question of normative importance as a result of subscribing to a metaphysical view about normative reasons (and entities more widely) which takes itself to be immune to prominent arguments for radical scepticism. Notably, they could maintain a realist yet 'quietist' approach to normative discourse (cf. Dworkin 1996; McPherson 2011). On this approach, normative discourse may be committed to thinking that some reasons *exist*, yet it is in no need of explaining to what exactly the relevant notion of existence amounts to – let alone confronting seemingly embarrassing arguments such as the one considered in section 5. As a result, the radical sceptic's primary concern that there may not be any reasons to begin with, and hence the implication that the question of normative importance never gets raised, seems to them unappealing from the start.

Third, they may be interested solely in the question of normative importance as a result of their inquiry being driven by a *background concern*: to resist or affirm the thought that non-moral considerations – notably, ones relating to self-interest – may be in principle normatively more important than moral ones (cf. Lofitis 2020: 44). Indeed, an interpretation of the question of the existence of moral reasons on which it merely amounts to a question of whether moral norms or considerations *could be* normatively more important than non-moral ones such as to suffice to supply agents with reasons *provided that the world (at large) can be said to house such things as reasons*, seems sensible and far from far-fetched. In support of this, consider an analogy with the quest of someone interested in particle physics and who still asks: Do unobservable entities such as quarks actually exist? Suppose that our friend becomes persuaded by arguments in support of an evil demon scenario on which all supposed external reality is merely an illusion fed to us by an evil demon. Plausibly, even on the assumption that the evil demon scenario holds, our friend may still be interested solely in the question of whether quarks exist *relative to* things like chairs and tables (rather than relative to the evil demon itself). For sensibly construed, *that* seemed to be the question that interested him from the start.

In an analogous way, even on the assumption that radical scepticism holds, and the world contains no reasons to begin with, it may still seem interesting whether moral reasons exist *relative to other kinds of reasons*. That is, in the sense that moral considerations, supposed to ground moral reasons, could be said to be normatively more important than rival considerations. Those interested in the question of the existence of moral reasons may be interested in something like the question of normative importance insofar as it promises to shed light on whether moral reasons

can be said to exist (in virtue of moral considerations being normatively more important than their competitors) *as opposed to other kinds of reasons* – rather than *as opposed to things like chairs and tables*. For what do things like chairs and tables, they may sensibly wonder, have to do with reasons and normativity to begin with?

Lastly, it is worth noting that Bart Streumer, an advocate of radical scepticism, considers his view to be *literally unbelievable*, even if it turns out to be true[4]. Interestingly, Streumer's admission implies that the conditional question identified here can still arise for him. For if radical sceptics are unable to believe their own view, even if it is true, then the truth of it (i.e., the alleged fact that reasons at large do not exist) cannot prevent them from engaging with the conditional question about moral reasons described above. The conditional question is something they may not be able to avoid. This result aligns with the argument presented above – namely, that even if radical scepticism about reasons is true, and those interested in the question of the existence of moral reasons acknowledge its truth, they can still meaningfully engage with the question about moral reasons identified here.

To sum up, while there is an obvious sense in which radical scepticism about reasons entails an answer to the question of the existence of moral reasons, it nevertheless fails to address the question that sceptics (and inquirers) about moral reasons may actually be interested in.

7 Conclusion

In understanding what exactly the question of the existence of moral reasons amounts to, we can see why people who thought that all reasons must be somehow connected to the ends of the agent (for whom they are reasons) became sceptical about the existence of moral reasons. But it seems to be a further, interesting question whether those who have no prior, positive convictions on what reasons are and can be, but instead reject the existence of reasons at large, can be said to be sceptical about moral reasons *in the same way that many (if not most) sceptics about moral reasons are*. I have argued that they cannot. The sense in which many sceptics question the existence of moral reasons appears to be distinct and independent from the sense in which radical sceptics deny their existence. As a result, the moral sceptics I have described may be indifferent to the position of radical scepticism and the arguments in its support – just as their philosophical curiosity may be unaffected by the considerations underwriting the radical sceptic's stance. Yet if radical scepticism about reasons fails to satisfy the curiosity of many of those inquiring about moral reasons, what does it really imply about morality?

[4] First, according to Streumer, to believe a theory, one must believe all the implications that logically follow from that theory. Second, one must believe that there are reasons to believe in the theory. But since radical scepticism claims that there are no reasons to begin with (including reasons for belief), it necessarily implies that there are no reasons to believe any theory, including radical scepticism itself. Therefore, to believe in radical scepticism, one would paradoxically have to believe that there are no reasons to believe in it. The self-defeating nature of this process is what makes it psychologically impossible, Streumer thinks, to truly believe in radical scepticism (2017: 137-138).

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