

CHAPTER IV.

PRACTICAL RESPONSIBILITY II: TWO CONCEPTS OF REASONABLENESS

In Chapter III, we have seen how to develop a concept of practical task-responsibility in terms of normative expectations. It is now necessary to take up the last most difficult task of developing the concept of reasonableness of normative expectations.

At first sight, the notion may appear to be hopelessly riddled with difficulties. For one, it seems to be thoroughly expector-relative. What may be reasonable to you may not be reasonable to me. What is reasonable to me once I have corrected my false beliefs would not have been reasonable to me before. Although I have insisted in the last chapter that the concept that will matter for us is not what it is reasonable *for a particular person* to expect of another but what *it is* reasonable to expect of another, one might object that this move merely covers up a deep problem.

In section 1, I begin to address the problem by distinguishing two concepts of reasonableness: agent reasonableness (reasonableness_A) and normative reasonableness (reasonableness_N). In section 2, I show that the concept of reasonableness_A can be construed in such a way as to avoid the difficulty. (This is an important result in view of the fact that only reasonableness_A will be fundamentally relevant to the account of action to be given in Chapter VI.) Section 3.A answers the question whether reasonable expectations can stand in conflict: could it be that it is both reasonable and unreasonable to expect of an agent that she perform an action? Section 3.B considers whether contrary expectations can be both reasonable: could it be that it is reasonable to expect of an agent that she ϕ and to expect of her that she not- ϕ ?

1. Two Concepts of Reasonableness

Normative expectations involve making demands, in the paradigmatic cases, on others. As such, the immediate concern that arises is that such demands be legitimate, appropriate or reasonable. There are at least two kinds of ways in which normative expectations may be inappropriate or unreasonable. In fact, we may speak of two senses of reasonableness.¹

One reason why an expectation of a person may be unreasonable is, as we intuitively say, that it is not “within her power”² to do what she is expected to do. For instance, it would be unreasonable to expect of an athlete who broke a leg that she take part in a race, of a blind person that he drive a car, or of a newly arrived foreigner that he speak like a native. In all such cases, we think that the agent “lacks the basic ability to do what we are demanding,”³ and thus we believe that it would be unreasonable to hold the agent to the expectation in such conditions.

Another reason why an expectation may be unreasonable is of a different nature. It may be that the person has the general power to do what we expect of her, but it may be nonetheless inappropriate for us to expect it of her. Let us suppose that you have a relatively ordinary relationship with your neighbors. You are polite to one another, occasionally help one another out in neighborly matters. But there are (many) expectations that it is simply inappropriate for you to hold them to, and not because it is not “within their power” to fulfill them. For instance, it would be inappropriate for you to expect them to regularly mow your lawn, to do your shopping, etc.

These two kinds of cases exemplify two different, though equally fundamental, concerns with the reasonableness of normative expectations. For want of better terminology, I shall speak of *reasonableness_A* (agent-reasonableness) to capture the first

¹ I do not have a conclusive way of showing that two distinct concepts are involved. So I do not want to deny that there may be a way of elucidating one unified concept of reasonableness. It is fruitful for my purposes to treat them as distinct concepts, and I produce some further evidence to this effect in the course of the section.

² It is not until Chapter V that we will have a better understanding of what it means to say that something is “within the agent’s power” to do. In order to signal that this notion functions as a metaphor and a theoretical place-holder, I consistently embrace it in scare-quotes.

sort of case, and of *reasonableness_N* (specifically normative-reasonableness) in the second kind of case.

We have already seen that it is possible for an expectation to be reasonable_A but unreasonable_N. Your expectation of your neighbors that they do your shopping would be reasonable_A (because it is “within their power” to do so) but it would be highly unreasonable_N for you to expect it of them. It is also possible for an expectation to be reasonable_N but unreasonable_A. A teacher may reasonably_N expect of his student that she turn the assigned paper on time, but the expectation may be unreasonable_A in view of the fact that the student has been taken to the hospital.

I will not offer any account of the concept of reasonableness_N. In section B, I will attempt to clarify this concept a little bit, but the remarks are far from being either complete or entirely satisfactory. In the end, I will simply have to appeal to the reader’s better judgment concerning particular cases. This will not obfuscate the account of action to be given, for the concept of reasonableness_N, as we shall see, plays a more modest role than that played by the concept of reasonableness_A. I will argue in Chapter V that the concept of reasonable_A normative expectations is sufficient to decide whether a performance is an action or not. Throughout the discussion, I shall emphasize certain reasons that give additional support to the supposition that reasonableness_N and reasonableness_A are distinct concepts.

A. Reasonableness_A

There are two kinds of conditions that comprise our understanding of reasonableness_A of expectations. First, there are conditions that can be classified under general competence. Usually, an agent’s competence increases with age until adulthood and then diminishes in old age. A generally competent agent is attentive, conscious, intelligent, motorically responsive, possesses certain general skills, etc. Other individuals may lack such basic skills and be considered more or less competent; accordingly certain normative expectations of them will be unreasonable_A. Such individuals will include

³ R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 161.

babies, infants, people with some forms of handicap (mental handicap, blindness), etc. Second, there are conditions that occur against the background of general competence locally, as it were, making the performance of some type of action in those circumstances not within “the agent’s power.” These are defeating conditions. They include various kinds of physical injury (illness, breaking a leg), physical force to which the agent is subject (being pushed by the wind, being pushed by somebody else).

There is a range of performances considered part of everyone’s general competence. Among them: walking, sweeping, throwing, catching, running, counting, remembering, etc. If an agent is not competent in some of these ways, he acquires a special treatment (is qualified as a minor or as incapacitated in various ways). But there are expectations which, while they may not be reasonable_A generally, may be appropriate in view of a person’s special ability. It may not be reasonable_A to expect of everyone to do the books with the skill of an accountant, but it is reasonable_A to expect it of accountants because of their special skills. It may not be reasonable_A to expect of just everyone to do a pirouette, but it may be reasonable_A to expect it of a skilled skater.

It is important to point out that all normative expectations, which include reflexive expectations (directed at oneself), are subject to such an appraisal. It is equally unreasonable_A to expect of a person who suffers regular muscle spasms that he become a surgeon as it would be to expect this of oneself if one suffered from such a condition. The concept of reasonableness_A is also indifferent with respect to who expects something of the agent. If it is unreasonable_A for John expect of Mary that she jump to the moon then it is unreasonable_A for Lori to expect it of Mary.

It should be pointed out that although the concept of reasonableness_A is related to the metaphor of a performance being “within the agent’s power,” there are important cases, where it is reasonable_A to expect something of an agent despite the fact that the agent cannot do what is expected of him. Save for very special circumstances (which include illness, e.g.), when a director of a firm is expected to be at a meeting at 9am (provided he knew about the meeting, etc.), this expectation is reasonable_A and continues

to be reasonable_A even if the agent is still asleep at 9am.⁴ In the next Chapter, we shall see how one can accommodate both the intuition that such an expectation is reasonable_A and the intuition that the case is a rather special one.

B. Reasonableness_N (Legitimacy) of Expectations

Normative expectations are subject to two kinds of appraisal. The need for one kind of appraisal (reasonableness_A) arises in view of a concern with “the agent’s very power” to do what is expected of him. The need for the second kind of appraisal (reasonableness_N) arises in view of the interpersonal nature of many expectations, and hence the need to justify the expectations in terms of reasons.

This last point is best seen by contrasting self-directed normative expectations with expectations directed at other people. It seems intuitive to think that as long as what I expect of myself is “within my power” to do, i.e. as long as what I expect of myself is reasonable_A, there is no limit to what I can legitimately (reasonably_N) expect of myself.

There are no practical expectations it would be unreasonable_N for an agent to hold herself to.

I can expect whatever I want from myself. None of such reasonable_A expectations will be unreasonable_N, though the expectations may vary in the degree to which they are reasonable_N. I can expect myself to fly to the Bahamas next month, to quit my job, to change my identity, to bake a cake for my neighbor, to write a novel. Were I to hold others to just such expectations, however, the matter would no longer be so clear. I can legitimately place demands on myself, any demands provided only they are not criticizable on the grounds of unreasonableness_A. But when it comes to my placing demands on others, or to others’ placing demands on me, the situation changes dramatically.

The judgment whether it is reasonable_N (legitimate) to expect something of another person will depend on achieving a delicate balance between the claims of the

⁴ It is important to be careful here. The point holds for normative not predictive expectations. The predictive expectation that the director will come to the meeting at 9am given that he is asleep at that time is surely false (“unreasonable”); but this is not to imply that the normative expectation is unreasonable_A.

person who expects something, the person of whom something is expected, other people involved, as well as the weight of the expectation and the difficulty of fulfilling it.⁵ It involves striking a balance between reasons. Let us consider some examples. When a person falls ill on a street, even among perfect strangers, it is reasonable_N for her to expect of others that they come to her help. This is a case where the judgment of reasonableness_N is dominated by the concern with the person who is in need of help and expects it from others, as well as by the weight of the expectation — it is possible that her well-being or even life is at stake. Suppose that an employee who is expected to deliver a presentation at the firm’s annual meeting is taking his spouse to the hospital. Prima facie, we will judge the firm’s expectation of the employee no longer reasonable_N in view of the circumstances. Here too the weight of the expectation balances the employee’s concern with his wife’s health. Suppose that the person whose wife is taken ill is not an employee of a firm expected to deliver a presentation, but the president of a nation expected to make a decision on which the nation’s survival may depend. In such a case, it seems that even an extreme state of his wife’s health would not defeat the reasonableness_N of the expectation to keep the professional appointment.⁶ In general, the greater the importance of the object of an expectation, the more justified we think ourselves in placing greater demands on others, the more reasonable_N the expectation. On the other hand, the greater the difficulty of fulfilling an expectation, the less justified do we think ourselves in placing a demand on another, although we might feel the more justified in holding ourselves to such an expectation.

⁵ “An agent’s freedom, and his responsibility ‘before-the-fact’ will ... depend on overlapping but nonidentical normative considerations. Both will vary with ‘the stakes’, conceived as the importance of an object of ‘reasonable expectation’, weighted against the difficulty of fulfilling it. However, the notion of responsibility apparently takes awareness of the reasons for action as a further object of reasonable expectation, with a further weighting — of the importance and the difficulty of *discerning* the reasons — imposed only hypothetically on freedom.” (Patricia Greenspan, “Unfreedom and Responsibility,” in (ed.) Ferdinand Schoeman, *Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], p. 76.) Greenspan’s aim is to capture the notion of unfreedom and so I believe that she focuses primarily on the notion of reasonableness_A, though many of her comments speak to the notion of reasonableness_N.

⁶ Note that this does not necessarily contradict the suggestion that it is also reasonable_N to expect him to be at the hospital. His self-expectation to be with his wife might still be reasonable_N. This would be a case (in this instance) of moral conflict.

The concept of reasonableness_N (unlike that of reasonableness_A) is related to reasons. We could perhaps also draw a distinction similar to the distinction between prima facie and all-out reasons. We might say that it is prima facie reasonable_N for Jenny to expect of herself that she go to the movie, as long as she has some (prima facie) reasons to go to the movie. It is all-out reasonable_N for Jenny to expect of herself that she go to the movie if the balance of all considerations suggests that she should go to the movie.

Unlike the concept of reasonableness_A, reasonableness_N does admit of an intermediate category. There may be performances that it is neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N to expect of the agent. When the agent actually acts in this way, we say that the agent acts spontaneously for no reason. For example, it is reasonable_N for me to expect of my mailman that he deliver the post every day; it is unreasonable_N for me to expect of my neighbor that she do my shopping; but it is neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N for me to expect of myself that I walk to and fro (when I have no reason for it).

As suggested earlier, it seems in general true that no expectations of oneself are unreasonable_N, so that any expectation of oneself may be either reasonable_N or neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N. Some of my expectations may be “unreasonable” in the sense that I may expect of myself what is beyond my power to do. But such expectations are unreasonable_A not unreasonable_N (illegitimate). In general, we leave it to the agent’s discretion to expect of herself whatever her fantasy dictates. Not so for expectations directed at others. Because an expectation involves placing a demand on another person, such a demand must be justified and weighed against various kinds of considerations. Expectations toward others may be reasonable_N and unreasonable_N. Can they be neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N? Perhaps this would be true for a case where I expect of you what you can easily do (perhaps more easily than I), where I have no particular reason for expecting it of you and you have no particular reason either to do it or not to do it. Let us suppose that we sit together in a garden under a tree on a hot day, conversing amicably, and then I notice a daisy growing next to your foot. “Give it to me,” I say, expressing my expectation of you that you pick it and forward it to me. Is my

expectation of you reasonable_N? Not in any clear sense, it is not really justified by any reasons. But there are no particular reasons to suppose that it is unreasonable_N either.

It follows from the above characterizations that

it is never unreasonable_N to expect of α that she ϕ as long as it is reasonable_A to expect of her that she ϕ (i.e. as long as it is within “her power” to ϕ)

This claim follows from two claims made above. First, we have suggested that the phrase ‘it is reasonable to expect of α that α ϕ ’ be understood in terms of there being someone such that if she expected of α that α ϕ her expectation would be reasonable. In view of the fact that it is never unreasonable_N for α to expect of herself that she ϕ , there will always be someone (viz. α herself) whose expectation of herself (provided that it is reasonable_A) will not be unreasonable_N. This means that *it is never* unreasonable_N to expect of α that she ϕ , although it may well be unreasonable_N for *somebody else* to expect of her that she ϕ . At the same time, in view of the fact that not all of the (reasonable_A) expectations that the agent has of herself are guaranteed to be reasonable_N (only those that the agent has reasons for):

It is not always reasonable_N to expect of α that she ϕ even if it is reasonable_A to expect of her that she ϕ .

The fact that these two platitudes follow from our considerations constitutes additional support for our analytic decisions and intuitions.

2. Reasonableness as an External Standard

The standard of reasonableness could be construed in external or internal terms. The distinction can be modeled on the distinction between an external and an internal reading of the notion of a reason.⁷ Consider an example. An agent wants some gin and tonic. What is in her glass is in fact petrol but she believes it is gin. Does she have a

⁷ Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-113. Williams argues that only internal reasons can motivate the agent to act. This is not an issue I am concerned with here.

reason to add tonic to her glass and drink it? The answer depends on whether we give an internal or an external reading to the concept of reason. On the external reading, she does not have a reason to drink what is in her glass — after all it is petrol. On the internal reading, she does have a reason to drink what is in her glass — she does not know it is petrol, she thinks it is gin.

For us the central question is whether it is reasonable for her to expect of herself that she pour tonic into the glass and drink it. To answer in the positive is to take it that the concept of reasonableness is internal, that it is responsive to internal reasons accessible to the agent. To answer in the negative is to take it that the concept of reasonableness is external, it is responsive to normative reasons not necessarily accessible to the agent at the time.

I will understand the concept of reasonableness in the *external* sense. If there is a disparity between the internal and the external concept, I will say that a person *believes that an expectation is reasonable while in fact it is unreasonable*.⁸

The choice to use the external reading is dictated by the purpose for which the concept is employed.⁹ The notion of reasonableness (in particular reasonableness_A) is to be used in elucidating the nature of action. The adoption of an internal reading of the concept of reasonableness_A would lead to a subjective (expector-relative) reading of the concept of action. Whether an agent has performed an action in this sense would depend on whether somebody else (β) had internal reasons to hold the agent practically

⁸ Unlike Williams, I am not concerned to investigate the question whether we can act on external reasons. And it is there that the question becomes controversial. See for example: Rachel Cohon, "Are External Reasons Impossible?," *Ethics* 96 (1986), 545-556; "Hume and Humeanism in Ethics," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1988), 99-116; Brad Hooker, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons," *Analysis* 47 (1987), 42-44; John McDowell, "Might There Be External Reasons?," in (eds.) J.E.J. Altham, Ross Harrison, *World, Mind, and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 68-85; Alfred Mele, "Motivational Internalism: The Powers and Limits of Practical Reasoning," *Philosophia* 19 (1989), 417-436; Michael Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987), 36-61; "Internal Reasons," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55 (1995), 109-131.

⁹ I should point out that the use of the idiom 'it is reasonable to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ ' is justified only on the external reading of reasonableness. I have declared that the idiom is a shorthand for 'it is reasonable for some ξ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ '. It follows that if it is reasonable for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ then it is reasonable to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$. If reasonableness were understood as an internal standard, this inference would be faulty. From the fact that β has internal reasons to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$, it does not follow that it is reasonable to hold α to such an expectation; perhaps β 's reasons are completely esoteric.

responsible (whether β had internal reasons to believe that it was “within the agent’s power” to fulfill an expectation). It is not immediately clear that the employment of such a concept would yield our concept of action (understood as: the agent actually doing something). It is more clear (providing our arguments in Chapter VI are sound) that the employment of the internal standard of reasonableness_A would yield a concept of it being appropriate for β to take the agent to have acted. Whether these concepts are identical, whether there is any priority in the order of their explanations is subject to debate, which is orthogonal to the task before us. What is clear is that if one adopted the internal standard of reasonableness_A, one would have to argue that one has thereby captured our concept of action.¹⁰ In deciding to use the external reading of reasonableness_A we make a jump over a big metaphysical issue of how norms are instituted, how they relate to the participants’ attitudes toward norms.¹¹ We will simply assume that these issues have been resolved.

The construal of reasonableness as an external standard should also answer the initial misgivings one may have had about the employment of the concept of reasonableness (see the introduction to the chapter, p. 79). Let us consider the suspicion that what may be reasonable for one person to expect of someone may not be reasonable for another.¹² Take the concept of reasonableness_A.

The objection is that it is possible that the following situation occur: it is reasonable_A for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$, but it is unreasonable_A for γ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$. Here is an alleged example of such a situation. Suppose that β and γ are to judge whether Smith should take part in a car race. According to β ’s sources, Smith is in an excellent form. So, one might want to conclude that it will be reasonable_A for β to expect of Smith that he take part in the race. According to γ ’s reconnaissance, Smith suffers

¹⁰ The shape for such an argument is given by Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). Brandom’s concern is much more general, concerning the very nature of norms as such. He argues that we should understand the nature of norms in terms of the normative attitudes of participants in normative practices. At the same time, he shows that such an understanding does not obliterate the objectivity of norms, leaving space for the possibility that everyone is wrong.

¹¹ This is the central problem tackled in Brandom’s *Making It Explicit*, *op. cit.*

¹² The second suspicion (what may be reasonable for a person to expect of another at one time may change when the person changes her false beliefs) can be treated in an identical fashion.

from a rare pulmonary disease which would cause him to lose consciousness in situations he is likely to encounter during the race. So, it will be unreasonable_A for γ to expect of Smith that he take part in the race. However, my insistence that reasonableness_A is to be used as an external standard prohibits the application of the concept in this way. Instead, we should say that β *believes* that it is reasonable_A to expect of Smith that he take part in the race, and that γ *believes* that it is unreasonable_A to expect of Smith that he take part in the race.¹³

3. Reasonableness, Conflict and Contrary Expectations

Could it be that it is both reasonable and unreasonable to expect of an agent that she perform an action? Could it be that it is reasonable to expect of an agent that she ϕ and to expect of her that she not- ϕ ? The answers to these questions depend on what concept of reasonableness is at stake.

A. Reasonableness_A, Reasonableness_N and Conflict

Assuming that we interpret the concepts of reasonableness in external terms, the question might arise whether there is a possibility of conflict. We may formulate the question more precisely as follows. Is it possible for the following situations to occur:

- (a) It is *reasonable*_A to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ and it is *unreasonable*_A to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ ($\text{reas}_A[\alpha \phi]$ & $\text{unreas}_A[\alpha \phi]$)?
- (b) It is *reasonable*_N to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ and it is *unreasonable*_N to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ ($\text{reas}_N[\alpha \phi]$ & $\text{unreas}_N[\alpha \phi]$)?

Given our understanding of what it means to say that it is reasonable to expect something of a person, we are not committed to saying that it must be reasonable for the same person to expect contrary things of another. Let us make this explicit:

¹³ The same will apply to the concept of reasonableness_N except where we are dealing with a possible conflict of values. In view of the less fundamental importance of the concept of reasonableness_N there is no reason to preclude the possibility that “what may be reasonable for you may not be reasonable for me” or to think it dangerous.

(a') It is reasonable_A for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ but it is unreasonable_A for γ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$,

(b') It is reasonable_N for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ but it is unreasonable_N for γ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$.

If one were to give an internal reading of reasonableness (a') and (b') would be satisfied trivially. It would be sufficient that β and γ held different (at least one of them erroneous) beliefs pertaining to the matter at hand. On the external reading of reasonableness (a') and (b') are not trivially satisfied.

Given the suggested intuitive meaning we have assigned to the concept of reasonableness_A, it is impossible for (a') to occur. Intuitively, it will be reasonable_A for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ only if it is "within α 's power" to ϕ . It will be unreasonable_A for γ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ only if it is not "within α 's power" to ϕ .¹⁴ It is not possible that ϕ ing both be "within α 's power" and not be "within α 's power." Hence, the expectation is either reasonable_A or unreasonable_A but not both. Indeed, in view of the role that we give to the concept of reasonableness_A, this guarantees the objectivity of our concept of action. In view of the fact that the concept of reasonableness_A will play a fundamental role in determining whether an action has been performed, if (a') were possible, it would be also possible for an agent's performance to be both an action and a mere happening (a non-action). This would violate a fundamental truth, which is a prerequisite of any theory of action:

No performance is both an action and a nonaction (a mere happening).

It is never the case that an agent's raising his arm (intentionally, say) is also a case of the agent's arm rising (uncontrollably, involuntarily). It is never the case that an agent's

¹⁴ On an internal reading of reasonableness_A: it is reasonable_A for β to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ if and only if β believes that it is "within α 's power" to ϕ ; it is unreasonable_A for γ to expect of α that $\alpha \phi$ if and only if γ believes that it is "within α 's power" to ϕ . It is certainly possible for β to believe that it is "within α 's power" to ϕ and for γ to believe that it is not.

bending his knee is also a case of the agent's knee curving in a spasm. A performance is either one or the other but never both.

But it is not clear that the concept of reasonableness_N is similarly restricted. The possibility of (b') would imply that there is an irresolvable conflict of values in support of and against the expectation. Since what makes normative expectations reasonable_N are not only moral values¹⁵ but also cultural ones, the possibility of such a conflict is quite plausible. At the same time, it is clear that this is a proper subject for axiology or ethics, not specifically for action theory. In fact, the concept of reasonableness_N will play a relatively minor role in the account of action we will develop. Its role will be limited to the interpretation we give of what an agent has done, once it is settled (by appeal to reasonableness_A) that the agent has done something. Given this role of the concept of reasonableness_N, conflict (b') (if possible) would amount to a dispute as to whether it is appropriate to interpret what the agent has done in a certain way or not. And that is a conflict the possibility of which would not undermine the very possibility of an account of action (in sharp contrast to possibility of the conflict generated by (a')).

In conclusion, it is impossible for an expectation to be both reasonable_A and unreasonable_A. The possibility of such a conflict would undermine the very viability of an account of action that appeals to reasonableness_A. It is not as clearly impossible for an expectation to be both reasonable_N and unreasonable_N. The possibility of such conflict depends on one's position on the possibility of conflicts of value more generally. I will remain uncommitted on this point.

B. Reasonableness_A, Reasonableness_N and Contrary Expectations

Abstracting from possible conflicts of value, if it is (all-out) reasonable_N (for β) to expect of an agent that she ϕ , then it is *not* (all-out) reasonable_N (for β) to expect of her

¹⁵ Though the topic is hotly disputed, there are views according to which even moral values are not absolute. See, e.g. Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *Philosophical Review* 84 (1975), 3-22; "Relativistic Ethics: Morality as Politics," in (eds.) Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, *Studies in Ethical Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 109-121; J.L. Mackie, *Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977); Bernard Williams, "Conflicts of Values," in *Moral Luck, op. cit.*, pp. 71-82. For a nice survey, see Robert M. Stewart, Lynn L. Thomas, "Recent Work on Ethical Relativism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1991), 85-100.

that she not- ϕ , and vice versa. If, all things considered, it is reasonable_N for me to expect of you that you keep your side of the desk tidy, then it is unreasonable_N for me to expect of you that you keep your side of the desk messy.

This is frequently not the case for reasonableness_A. Suppose that someone taking some (medical) drugs suffers from a temporary loss of control in his arms. Such a condition of his makes it unreasonable_A to expect of him both that he perform certain tasks involving his arms as well as that he not perform them. To clarify, let us take the example of pushing a ball off a table. His condition makes it unreasonable_A to expect of him that he push the ball off the table. It would be quite inappropriate for someone to complain that he failed to do so despite being asked, for instance. But it also makes it unreasonable_A to expect of him that he not push the ball off the table. It would equally be inappropriate for someone to complain that he did push the ball off the table despite being asked not to. In this case his condition renders two contrary expectations unreasonable_A. Frequently, when it is not within “the agent’s power” to fulfill an expectation, it is not in his power to fulfill the contrary expectation.



I have distinguished two senses in which normative expectations can be reasonable or unreasonable. Intuitively, a normative expectation is unreasonable_A if it is not “within an agent’s power” to fulfill it. It is reasonable_A otherwise. A normative expectation is unreasonable_N if it would be illegitimate for one person to hold another to the expectation (e.g. it is unreasonable_N for you to expect your neighbor to do your laundry on a regular basis in normal circumstances). A normative expectation is reasonable_N if there are reasons that justify or support the expectation (e.g. it may be reasonable_N for you to expect your neighbors to collect your mail while you are gone in view of the fact that you will not be able to do it yourself, that you have asked them politely, that you have collected their mail for them in the past). A normative expectation can also be neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N if there are no reasons that justify the expectation and no reasons that make the expectation illegitimate (e.g. it may be neither reasonable_N nor unreasonable_N for you to expect yourself to gently touch the leaves of the trees you pass by).

As we have seen, the concepts of reasonableness_A and reasonableness_N are independent of one another. It is possible for an expectation to be reasonable_A but not reasonable_N (e.g. your expectation of your neighbor to do your shopping may be illegitimate but what is expected would be within your neighbor's power to do), and it is possible for an expectation to be unreasonable_A but reasonable_N (e.g. an expectation of a student to turn in his paper may be legitimate but unreasonable_A in view of the fact that he lies incapacitated in the hospital).

It is the concept of reasonableness_A that will matter in the account of action offered in Chapter VI. I will give an account of reasonableness_A in Chapter V. In this chapter, we have seen that some of the initial worries about the concept of reasonableness can be allayed by appealing to the metaphor of a performance being "within the agent's power," which I proposed as an approximation of the meaning of reasonableness_A. In particular, in section 2, I have suggested that reasonableness_A ought to be construed as an external rather than an internal standard. Accordingly, the epistemic position of a particular person does not affect whether it is reasonable_A for her to hold another person to an expectation. She might have good reasons to falsely believe that it is reasonable_A to hold a person to an expectation, but her belief in no way affects the judgment that it is unreasonable_A to hold that person to the expectation.

With these preliminary issues settled, let us proceed to the account of reasonableness_A.