

Three Roles of Reasons

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1. Introduction

How do reasons determine moral requirements?

2. Background in the Literature

	moral reasons	non-moral reasons
can make actions morally required	✓	✗
can prevent moral reasons from making actions morally required	✓	✓

Non-moral reasons can be morally relevant.

Gert: requiring vs. justifying strength of reasons

Portmore: moral vs. non-moral reasons

(Muñoz: reasons vs. prerogatives)

3. Aims of the Talk

I argue that there is a third, and distinct, role that reasons can play in determining moral requirements.

Nonmoral reasons can contribute to making it the case that an action *is* morally required (even though they are not able to make actions morally required).

The view that reasons can play three (rather than two) roles in determining moral requirements gives rise to a novel explanation of moral requirements in terms of reasons.

[4. Preliminaries]

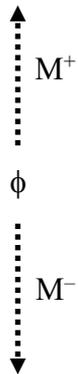
5. The Received View: two Roles of Reasons



Case I. Anna is on a hike and reaches a fork. She could take the upper path (ϕ) or the lower path. The upper path leads through a thorny thicket just behind the fork. Anna wears outdoor clothing that protects her from the thorns. From her point of view, both paths are equally attractive. Bert is stuck in the thicket. Freeing himself would cause him great pain. If Anna took the upper path, she could and would free Bert, and this would not cause her any pain.

M^+ moral reason for ϕ

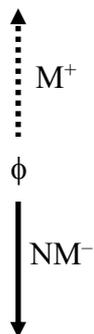
M^+ makes ϕ morally required.



Case II. As Case I, but now there is also Curt. Curt is waiting for Anna, because she has a medicine for him, getting which on time would save him from great pain. But this only works if Anna takes the lower path, because the upper one is longer.

M^- moral reason against ϕ

M^- prevents M^+ from making ϕ morally required.



Case III. As Case I, but now Anna does not wear outdoor clothing. Taking the upper path (and freeing Bert) would cause her as much pain as she would save Bert from.

NM^- non-moral reason against ϕ

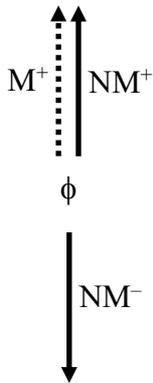
NM^- prevents M^+ from making ϕ morally required.

6. A Third Role of Reasons



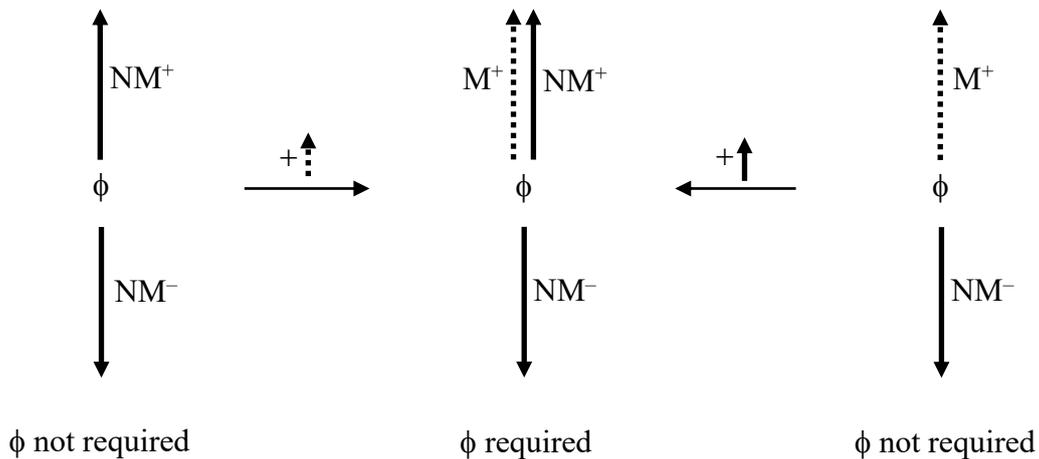
Case IV. Anna is on a hike and reaches a fork. She could take the upper path (ϕ) or the lower path. The upper path leads through a thorny thicket just behind the fork. Taking the upper path would cause her great pain right after having passed the fork. The lower path also leads through a thorny thicket, the crossing of which would cause Anna great pain – but later than on the upper path.

ϕ is not morally required.



Case V. As Case IV, but now Bert is stuck in the thicket on the upper path. Freeing himself would cause him great pain. If Anna took the upper path, she could and would free Bert.

ϕ is morally required.



Adding a non-moral reason for ϕ changes ϕ 's moral status from *not required* to *required*.

Non-moral reasons for an action ϕ can prevent non-moral reasons against ϕ from defusing moral reasons for ϕ (i.e. from preventing moral reasons for ϕ from making ϕ morally required).

	moral reasons	non-moral reasons
can make actions morally required	✓	✗
can defuse moral reasons	✓	✓
can prevent reasons from defusing moral reasons	✗	✓

7. Elaborating the View

Non-moral reasons for an action ϕ can prevent non-moral reasons against ϕ from defusing moral reasons for ϕ . They *cannot* prevent *moral* reasons against ϕ from defusing moral reasons for ϕ .

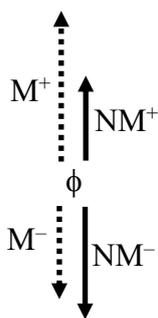
This is so since whether an action is morally required is, as far as the non-moral side of things is concerned, a matter of the overall non-moral costs.

Non-moral reasons for an action ϕ can prevent a combination of moral and non-moral reasons against ϕ from defusing moral reasons for ϕ .

8. How Reasons Determine Moral Requirements

An action ϕ is morally required if, and only if (and because), there is a moral reason M^+ for ϕ , and *one* of the following conditions is met:

1. There are no moral or non-moral reasons against ϕ that – individually or in combination – are able to defuse M^+ .
2. There are moral or non-moral reasons against ϕ that – individually or in combination – are able to defuse M^+ . But there is a non-moral reason for ϕ that prevents them from doing so.



M^+ makes ϕ morally required if, and only if, *each* of the following is the case:

1. There is no moral reason M^- against ϕ that is weighty enough to defuse M^+ .
2. There is no non-moral reason NM^- against ϕ that is weighty enough to defuse M^+ , or there is such a reason, but there is a non-moral reason NM^+ for ϕ that prevents NM^- from defusing M^+ .
3. There is no combination of moral and non-moral reasons M^- and NM^- against ϕ that is weighty enough to defuse M^+ , or there is such a combination, but there is a non-moral reason NM^+ for ϕ that prevents it from defusing M^+ .