1. Introduction

I am writing a mediocre paper on a topic you are not particularly interested in. You don’t have, it seems safe to assume, a (normative) reason to read my draft. I then ask whether you would be willing to have a look and tell me what you think. Suddenly you do have a (normative) reason to read my draft. What exactly happened here? Your having the reason to read my draft — indeed, the very fact that there is such a reason — depends, it seems, on my having asked you to read it. By my asking, I managed to make it the case that you have such a reason, or to give you the reason to read the draft. What does such reason-giving consist in? And how is it that we can do it? Is it a kind of normative magic? Especially if reasons are in an important sense objective and autonomous, how is it that by sheer acts of will we can bring them into being, change their force, and perhaps even eliminate them? If, as seems likely, “reason must constrain and guide the will”, how is it that we can create reasons at will, for instance by making a request?

Requests do not exhaust, of course, the space of reason-giving. Something rather similar seems to be going on when, for instance, an authority issues a command, thereby giving the addressee a (perhaps special kind of) reason to act in a certain way, a reason that was not there before the command. And when I promise, one of the things I seem to be doing is give myself a reason (perhaps of a special kind) to act in a certain way, a reason that was not there before the promise. Now more controversially, perhaps by forming an intention I give myself a reason that was not there before to follow through on that intention. And there may be other cases as well. All of these seem — quite

1. For the locus classicus of thoughts on promises and magic, see Hume’s Trea-tise 3.2.5.
2. For this way of putting things in a closely related context, see Watson (2009, p. 158).
3. In the context of a discussion of promises, Watson (2009, p. 160) notices that they are a particular instance of a much wider phenomenon.
4. Perhaps, for instance, by apologizing, one gives reasons to forgive. (I thank
pre-theoretically — to have something in common to them. (In Section 3, I will argue that this pre-theoretical seeming is one we should accept at face value.) It is that thing that I try to understand — and demystify — in this paper. And if we make progress on the general phenomenon that all of these are instances of, this seems like a promising way to then make progress on philosophical accounts of authority, of promises, of intentions, and perhaps of other related phenomena (work that I will have to leave to future occasions).

In the next section, I distinguish between what I call purely epistemic reason-giving, merely triggering reason-giving, and the kind of reason-giving I will be primarily interested in, the kind presumably involved in requests, which I call robust reason-giving. Then, in Section 3, I try to characterize in some detail the intuitive or phenomenological data. I try, in other words, to clarify what it is we want an account of robust reason-giving to accommodate. But at the end of Section 3 it remains entirely open whether any possible account in fact satisfies these desiderata. In Section 4, I thus proceed to inquire whether such an account is there to be found. I argue that the only plausible way of making sense of robust reason-giving is as a unique particular instance of triggering reason-giving. I then characterize this unique particular instance in terms of the rather complicated intentions of the reason-giver and the normative background.

Before proceeding, though, two preliminaries are in order. First, the role of requests in this paper — as in the opening paragraph — is that of a paradigmatic example of reason-giving of the kind I am interested in, the kind I call robust reason-giving. Even though the phenomenon of robust reason-giving is — if I am right, at least — much broader than that of requests, still there are good methodological reasons to focus on requests in studying robust reason-giving. Thus, the case of authority and command is more complicated, in that (arguably, at least) the reason there given is of a special kind — it is a duty, perhaps, or obligation, or some such. And the case of promises is more complicated than that of requests both because the reason given there too is arguably a duty or an obligation, and because promises are cases of reflexive reason-giving and such reflexivity may result in yet more complications. So the case of requests is a simpler case of robust reason-giving than those two, and for this reason it seems methodologically advisable to start with requests. Furthermore, commands and promises are the topics of huge philosophical and other controversies. And for this reason too it seems like there’s better hope of progress if we start elsewhere, where political implications and previous philosophical commitments are less likely to bias the characterization of the phenomenological data. Requests seem ideally suited for this role. But — despite the central role of requests in what is to follow — this paper is primarily about robust reason-giving, not about requests. Thus, while much of the discussion will focus on requests, I will not be attempting to offer a full analysis of requests: I use requests only in order to highlight the crucial features of robust reason-giving. And I will have nothing at all to say on other questions that may be relevant to a fuller discussion of requests (like, for instance, when it is and when it is not appropriate to make a request).

Second, my discussion of giving reasons is obviously closely related — in spirit, at least — to Darwall’s recent emphasis on the second-person standpoint in the book by that name (2006), and indeed I am indebted to this work. But precisely because of the similarity between my discussion and Darwall’s, it may be worthwhile to highlight some important differences between the two already at this early stage. One difference has already been noted — obligations, which are central to Darwall’s discussion, are mostly irrelevant to mine. In the parts of the book closest to my topic here, though, Darwall discusses second-personal reasons, which he officially defines thus:

David Sosa for this suggestion.) And perhaps by taking responsibility one gives others reasons to hold one responsible. See my “Being Responsible, Taking Responsibility, and Penumbral Agency” (forthcoming).

5. For instance, this reflexivity gives rise to bootstrapping worries that do not seem to arise for robust reason-giving in general, or for requests in particular.

6. While this is the only official definition of second-personal reasons I could
A second-personal reason is one whose validity depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons, and, therefore, on the possibility of the reason being addressed person-to-person. [2006, p. 8]

While there are clear similarities between these second-personal reasons and what may be called given reasons (like the reason you have to read my draft), still there are important differences between them. Your reason to read my draft need not — for anything that has so far been said, at least — depend on authority and accountability relations (though it may depend on some analogue thereof, or on some generalized relation of which the authority relations Darwall is after is a particular instance). And possible address is irrelevant for given reasons. Rather, what matters here is that this reason was actually (rather than possibly) given (rather than addressed). So though there is, in an intuitive sense, something second-personal about given reasons (like those created by requests); still they are to be distinguished at least from Darwall’s second-personal reasons as officially characterized. Furthermore, I am not convinced that second-personal reasons (as officially defined by Darwall) exist, and while I think that given reasons do exist, I am not sure they comprise an interesting kind of reasons, a “normative kind” as it were. My focus here is not on given reasons, but rather on the giving of reasons. Also, while Darwall is interested in grounding morality in (his kind of) second-personal reasons, it is no part of my ambition here (except for a hint at this direction in the paragraph concluding this paper). I keep things much simpler. Keeping morality for another occasion, I focus on the rather undeniable intuitive data — often we give each other reasons for action — and try to give an account of this data. Whether anything of more general interest — for instance, to morality — will follow is not my main concern here.

These differences notwithstanding, it seems to me the discussion here is of relevance to an evaluation of Darwall’s project. For if no sense can be made of the phenomenon of giving reasons, then a fortiori Darwall’s second-personal reasons are in danger. Furthermore, if the phenomenon of giving reasons can be made sense of reductively — in a way that is not essentially and irreducibly second-personal in any interesting sense — then Darwall’s claim about the irreducibility of the circle of second-personal concepts (e.g., p. 11) is also cast into serious doubt. It is not completely clear to me whether the account of robust reason-giving I end up offering (in section 4.4) is sufficiently second-personal to satisfy Darwall.7

In these ways, then, it seems to me the discussion in this paper is more general than, and perhaps philosophically prior to, Darwall’s: even if Darwall’s project fails, still we need an account of reason-giving. And without the availability of such an account of reason-giving, and so also of given reasons, Darwall’s project cannot succeed.

2. Some Relevant Distinctions

Here as elsewhere, natural language is tricky. It is thus important to distinguish between several possible readings of such locutions as ‘giving someone a reason to Φ’. This will be helpful in closing in on the sense we are after, the sense I attempt to capture in following sections.

I have tentatively decided to tell a colleague exactly what I think of him, and it won’t make for a charming scene. You urge me not to. I can then say something like “Give me one reason not to do it!” Suppose you reply by noting the bad effects such a scene will have on the intellectual atmosphere in our department. It seems as if you succeeded in giving me a reason not to proceed with my ill-considered plan. And there’s nothing wrong with so describing the situation. But, of course, this is not what we are after here. What you’ve done — the thing naturally described in terms of giving me a reason to shut up — is to indicate to me, or show, a reason that was there all along, independently of your giving it to me. Perhaps, in my fury, I hadn’t paid attention to it, and so your intervention can make a difference. But it didn’t make

7. I get back to this point in a footnote in the concluding section.

find in Darwall’s book, at times I think Darwall uses this locution in a looser way.
a difference by way of creating a new reason, as my request that you read my draft did. We can call such reason-giving purely epistemic, for the role of the giving here has nothing to do with the reason’s existence, and everything to do with my knowing that it is there, appreciating it, and acting for it. Now, requests certainly have an epistemic dimension to them. Often, one of the things a request does is inform the addressee that the speaker has certain needs, or wants, or preferences, or that the desires the addressee already knew about are particularly strong, or some such. So I do not want to claim that requests do not involve epistemic reason-giving. Nevertheless, it does seem clear to me that the reason-giving involved in requests is not exhausted by such epistemic reason-giving. To see this, we must imagine cases that are epistemically “transparent”, so that both speaker and addressee know all there is to know about the speaker’s preferences and the like, and furthermore both know that both know these things, and so on (so that the relevant facts are a matter of common knowledge). But in such cases too the request seems to make a normative difference — the addressee seems to be given a reason by such a request, even though nothing purely epistemic changes. And this means that the kind of reason-giving involved in requests is not simply that of purely epistemic reason-giving. The same seems true — perhaps even more clearly so — of commands, so that their significance too is not exhausted by their epistemic value. And it is very hard to think of promises as giving reasons merely epistemically, seeing that with promises the reason-giver and the reason-receiver are one and the same. So it seems that the contrast with purely epistemic reason-giving is a feature of robust reason-giving in general (and not just of requests).

Now suppose your neighborhood grocer raised the price of milk. It is natural to say that she has thereby given you a reason to reduce your milk consumption. It is, after all, true that you didn’t have this reason before her relevant action, that you do after it, and furthermore that you have this reason because of her raising the price. In a perfectly ordinary sense, then, she has created this reason: she has given you a reason to buy less milk. But there is nothing mysterious — no normative magic here. The obvious thing to say about this case is that the giving here is a much less radical giving or creating than in cases of requests, commands, and promises. What the grocer did, it seems natural to say, is merely to manipulate the non-normative circumstances in such a way as to trigger a dormant reason that was there all along, independently of the grocer’s actions. Arguably, you have a general reason (roughly) to save money. This reason doesn’t depend on the grocer’s raising the price of milk. By raising the price of milk, the grocer triggered this general reason, thereby making it the case that you have a reason to reduce your milk consumption. Indeed, perhaps you even had all along the conditional reason to-buy-less-milk-if-the-price-goes-up. Again, this conditional reason doesn’t depend for its existence on the grocer’s actions. But the grocer can make the conditional reason into an unconditional one, simply by manipulating the relevant non-normative circumstances. And this is what she did by raising the price of milk.

Examples of this triggering case are all around us. By placing his foot on the road, a pedestrian can give a driver a reason to stop, but only because the driver had all along, and independently of the pedestrian’s actions, the conditional reason to-stop-should-a-pedestrian-start-crossing. By placing his foot on the road, the pedestrian thus triggers this pre-existing reason, thereby giving the driver a reason to stop. Perhaps all of us have a reason to do (some of) what we can to

---

8. It’s possible that while the reason was there independently of your intervention, my having it did depend on your intervention. (But see Schroeder [2008] for a criticism of the idea seemingly presupposed by this way of talking.) But I can safely bypass such difficulties here. For my purposes, it is sufficient that the existence of the reason is here independent of the giving.

9. For a similar distinction between purely epistemic reason-giving and the kind that is involved in requests, see Cupit (1994, p. 449). And Wallace (2007, p. 24) emphasizes that Darwall’s notion of second-personal reasons is not one grounded in epistemic considerations.

10. For pressing me on these and related points, I thank Hagit Benbaji, Yuval Eylon, David Heyd, and Adi Koplovitz.

11. See Estlund (2008, p. 143) for this example.
help the hungry. If so, by giving you a lot of money there is a sense in which I am giving you a reason to donate more to famine relief; for I am here manipulating the non-normative circumstances so that an enabling condition for the relevant reason which wasn’t satisfied is now satisfied, thereby making it the case that you have a reason to give more money to famine relief. And there may be other ways in which manipulating the non-normative circumstances could make it the case that a pre-existing reason applies, ways that need not involve the satisfaction of the condition a conditional reason is conditioned on, or the enabling condition for a reason (perhaps, for instance, it could defeat a defeater for that reason). I am going to call all of these cases, cases of reason-giving in the triggering sense, and I will use the triggering of conditional reasons as the paradigm of this more general phenomenon.12

But when I request that you read my draft, something else seems to be going on. True, I do here manipulate the non-normative circumstances, but it doesn’t seem that I merely do that. Rather, I seem to be giving you a reason in some more robust, yet-to-be-specified sense.13 This yet-to-be-specified sense is going to be my main topic for the remainder of the paper. For now, though, let me just emphasize the following: Requesting that you read my paper seems importantly different from, say, informing you that your reading my paper will cause me pleasure (a case of reason-giving in the purely epistemic sense) or from making non-collegiality a ground for denying tenure (a case of reason-giving in the triggering sense). And the same is true — at this stage, on a pre-theoretic, phenomenological level — for commands and promises. The cases of reason-giving I am interested in, like the request case, are not merely ones in which a reason is given in the purely epistemic or in the triggering sense. The reasons given in this way may not be all that unique (for instance, they need not be stronger than other, not-robustly-given reasons). But in the cases mentioned the giving is a distinct phenomenon, or — if it is a particular instance of one of the other kinds of reason-giving — it is an especially interesting particular instance, one with special features that make it worth a separate discussion. Without begging any questions, then, let us call this kind of reason-giving — the one presumably present in cases of requests, and the one I will be focusing on — robust reason-giving.

3. What More Could We Want?

With these distinctions in mind, then, what more do we want from robust reason-giving, beyond what can be accommodated by purely epistemic or by merely triggering reason-givings? In this section I highlight some of the pre-theoretic, phenomenological data, trying to carefully characterize some of the unique features of robust reason-giving. I will be primarily using the case of requests, but the phenomenological data I will be collecting here applies equally, it seems to me, to commands and promises. So we can be moderately confident that what I will in effect be characterizing is the phenomenon of robust reason-giving (rather than the more particular one of requests).

3.1 Threats

When we issue (conditional) threats we (purport to) give people reasons for action. But threats seem to me — pre-theoretically — to be a particular instance of the triggering sense of reason-giving. By threatening to vote against your getting tenure if you fail to read my paper, I am merely manipulating the non-normative circumstances so as to
trigger a pre-existing reason, namely, your reason to promote your chances of getting tenure. (I am also, of course, letting you know that I’ve so manipulated the circumstances.)

But threats are a particularly interesting particular instance of triggering reason-giving, because they are second-personal in a way many other of its instances are not. Compare the threat case and the raising-the-price-of-milk case. One of the distinctive features of the threat case is that in it the reason-giving is a major part of the point of the threat. There is a sense in which the threat too merely raises the price of something (namely, of not reading my paper). But it is a case of raising the price precisely in order to give you a reason to read the paper. Not so in the case of the price of milk, where it was not the grocer’s intention in raising the price, or her reason for so doing, to give you a reason to buy less milk. She knows how the market works, of course, and so she foresees that this will be a consequence of her action, but still, this is not what she is after in performing it. (Indeed, she may think of this as a reason counting against raising the price, a reason that is outweighed in the circumstances by stronger reasons for raising the price.)

This, I take it, is the sense in which threats are more second-personal: the reason-giving involved in them is a part of their point. But still, the reason-giving involved in my threatening you into reading my paper is very different from that involved in my asking that you read it. Though both are cases of reason-giving, and though some unpleasant consequences may be foreseeable in both cases (perhaps, for instance, you foresee that if you deny my request and fail to read my paper, I will fail to comment on your next draft), still a threat seems merely to trigger a conditional reason, and a request seems to do something else. An understanding of robust reason-giving should both explain why threats are closer than the price-of-milk case to robust reason-giving, and why threats nevertheless do not amount to robust reason-giving.

3.2 Personhood
In robust reason-giving, it seems like the relevant persons are involved in a much more, well, personal way compared to their involvement in purely epistemic and triggering cases of reason-giving.

Consider the reason-giver first. In a case of purely epistemic reason-giving, the role of the reason-giver is that of an indication, drawing attention to a reason that’s already there. And just about anything can play that role. That the barometer issues a certain reading can in this sense give you a reason to take your umbrella. In the purely epistemic sense of reason-giving, then, the reason-giver need not be a person at all. Similarly for reason-giving in the triggering sense: the imminent storm can give you a reason not to go out. But robust reason-giving, the kind of reason-giving involved in requests (and also, it seems clear, in the issuing of commands and in the making of promises) is different: such reasons can only be given by persons, or at least person-like agents. Perhaps, for instance, god can give reasons in this way. Perhaps so can the state, or maybe even (though I doubt it) your dog. But the barometer can’t, nor can the imminent storm.

14. Commands may be an interesting hybrid case: they certainly involve robust reason-giving, but there may be something threat-like about commands as well. I hope to discuss commands on another occasion.

15. Here is another consideration showing that this is so. (I thank Janice Dowell for drawing my attention to it.) Empty threats — threats where the receiver does not think of the content of the threat as something bad — do not succeed in giving reasons. This shows that threats get all their normative force by triggering reasons that are already there. There is no parallel phenomenon, as far as I can see, for requests.

16. In fact, threats combine also elements of the purely epistemic sense of reason-giving. Consider the Hollywood-style dialogue: ‘Is this a threat? No, it’s a warning’. A genuine warning is just an attempt to draw one’s attention to a pre-existing reason, one that is independent of the warning itself. A threat is an attempt to simultaneously create the reason (in the triggering case) and alert the addressee of the threat to its existence. (After all, a threat can’t succeed as a threat if the addressee doesn’t know about it.) For some initial discussion of the distinction between threats and warnings see Darwall (2006, pp. 50–2).

17. Perhaps there are some kinds of epistemic reason-giving that can only be done by persons. Perhaps — I am not sure — advice is of this nature. But epistemic reason-giving in general does not require personhood.
Moving on to the receiving end now, is there any comparable restriction on who can be robustly given a reason? Well, arguably, only persons can be given reasons, but for very general reasons that have nothing to do with our topic here. Perhaps, for instance, only persons (or only agents) can have reasons. And of course, you can’t give someone a reason who can’t have a reason. If so, only persons (or agents) can be given reasons, but this can’t teach us anything interesting about the giving of reasons.

The personhood of the reason-receiver will not help us, then, in focusing attention on robust reason-giving. But there is something more helpful in the vicinity here. In order to (intentionally) give someone a reason for action in the purely epistemic sense, it seems that I must believe that she is able to respond to the relevant pre-existing reason. In order to (intentionally) give someone a reason in the triggering sense, it seems that I must believe that she is able to respond to the relevant reason (and through it, to the general or conditional reason that was there all along). And in order to robustly give someone a reason, it seems like I must believe that she can respond to a reason thus given. This point applies to threats just as it does to requests: if I think that you can’t respond to threats, I can’t sincerely issue a threat addressed to you. Similarly, if I think you cannot respond to requests, I can’t sincerely ask that you read my paper, thereby attempting to give you a reason in the usual way requests do. (I may have other reasons for uttering the relevant words — a point I return to below — but this is irrelevant here.)

Thus, the ability of the reason-receiver to respond to the given reason seems to be assumed in some sense by the very act of the reason-giving. This ability seems to be a "normative felicity condition" of the relevant reason-giving, one in the absence of which the reason-giving fails, or misfires, or without the belief in which the request is insincere.


or some such. And different abilities may be needed in order to respond to the different kinds of reason-giving. In particular, it seems like there could be a fairly simple agent who could respond to purely epistemically given reasons, and to reasons given in the triggering sense, but not to requests or commands. I return to this point below.19

Because of the centrality of the persons to robust reason-giving, it is unsurprising that personal relations are also relevant here. Both purely epistemic reason-giving and triggering reason-giving can often be exhaustively understood in fairly thin terms: we don’t need to know anything about the relation between the grocer and the consumer in order to understand the way in which the former’s raising of the price of milk gives reasons to the latter. But with robust reason-giving we often need a thicker description of the relationship between the persons involved. After all, it is not as if all requests create (even weak) reasons for actions. And it is plausible to suppose that one of the factors determining whether a given request gives a reason for action (and certainly one of the factors determining the strength of such given reasons when they exist) is the nature of the relevant relationship. This is also true, of course, of commands, which are plausibly parasitic on some authority relation between the relevant two persons.20 Robust reason-giving, then, is, in a sense, backed up by the nature of the relevant relationship in a way that purely epistemic and triggering reason-givings usually aren’t.21

19. I believe it is this intuition that underlies Darwall’s talk of the standing to issue second-personal reasons, and of the assumptions that are normative felicity conditions here about the ability of both reason-giver and reason-receiver to see the relevant reason as a reason.

20. Promises are harder here, because of the reflexive nature of the reason-giving they involve. But it is hard to deny that people do often stand in a normatively significant relation to themselves.

21. The point in the text is consistent with the observation (for which I thank Hagit Benbaji and Yuval Eylon) that in the context of close personal relationships requests may sometimes be in a sense redundant. This may be so, first, because, as already stated, requests sometimes have an epistemic function — drawing the addressee’s attention to the speaker’s relevant needs or wants — but within close relationships there may sometimes be no need for requests to perform this epistemic role, as those in a close relationship often

GIVING PRACTICAL REASONS

PHILOSOPHERS’ IMPRINT

VOL. 11, NO. 4 (MARCH 2011)
3.3 Giving Epistemic Reasons

So far I’ve only been talking about reasons for action we sometimes give each other. But we also give each other reasons for belief. In which of the three senses distinguished above do we give each other reasons for belief?

Obviously, there are examples of purely epistemic reason-giving of this kind. By directing your attention to the fingerprint, I can epistemically give you a reason to believe that the butler did it. And there are fairly straightforward cases of giving epistemic reasons in the triggering sense as well. Perhaps, for instance, by conducting a certain original experiment I can make it the case that you have a reason to believe the truth of a theory, a reason that did not exist before the experiment. The more interesting question in our context is, of course, whether we can robustly give each other epistemic reasons. And here it seems to me the answer is rather clearly no.

Suppose that my request is not that you read my paper, but that you believe it’s a good paper. There seems to be something deeply wrong with this request. It doesn’t seem like the kind of thing that could be the subject of a bona-fide request. So much so, that there is significant pressure in this case to interpret my request (or my “request”) in some non-standard way: perhaps I am confused about the nature of requests, or perhaps I am really asking that you say that it is good, or in other ways act as if you believe that it is good, or perhaps I am asking that you somehow get yourself to have that belief. And similar points seem to apply to attempts at giving epistemic reasons by employing commands (“I hereby order you to believe that my paper is good!”) or promises (“Let me read your paper. I promise I will believe that it’s good”).

The difference here between epistemic and practical reasons can be put also in terms of the discussion of the previous subsection. There, I noticed how the nature of the relevant personal relationship is relevant for robust reason-giving, but not for other kinds of reason-giving. And it seems to me this result nicely coheres with the point in the previous two paragraphs, according to which epistemic reasons cannot be robustly given. For it seems to me personal relationships are completely irrelevant when it comes to the giving of epistemic reasons.

Epistemic reasons, then, cannot be robustly given. An account of robust reason-giving should explain why.

22. But things are tricky here. In the case of epistemic reasons, the distinction between the purely epistemic and the triggering sense of reason-giving sometimes becomes problematic. It can perhaps be argued, for instance, that the experiment case is one where the reason to believe the theory’s truth was there all along, and by conducting the experiment I merely drew your attention to it, so that this is a case of purely epistemic rather than triggering reason-giving. Or perhaps it can be argued that while the reason was there all along, you didn’t have it before the experiment. These complications, interesting though they are, are not ones I need to address in detail for my purposes here.

23. Though see footnote 57 below for a relevant complication.

24. Darwall (2006, p. 253) also discusses the relevant difference here between theoretical and practical reasoning, suggesting that it lies in the fact that while the views of others can be completely discarded epistemically if mistaken, this is not so for the practical case. If we apply this point to requests, the point becomes the interesting one that requests that ought not to have been made are not necessarily normatively void (see here Cupit 1994, p. 543). But in fact I think that Darwall here is not appreciating the full complexity of the epistemic case. The views of others, even when mistaken, can serve as evidence. For some relevant discussion in the context of the phenomenon of
4. Can We Get What We Want?

Cases of robust reason-giving—as in requests, commands, promises—are, then, different from cases of purely epistemic or merely triggering reason-giving. Robust reason-giving seems to involve a personal dimension that is not typically a part of purely epistemic and merely triggering reason-giving. And while epistemic reasons can certainly be given, they cannot be robustly given. As for threats: while they give reasons in ways that seem close to that of requests (or to robust reason-giving more generally) in that they involve an intention to (hereby) give someone a reason, still threats do not amount to robust reason-giving.

The discussion so far, summarized in the previous paragraph, was in a sense unambitious, for so far I have settled for characterizing what seem to be our pre-theoretical thoughts about the kind of reason-giving involved (for instance) in requests, giving it the place-holding name 'robust reason-giving'. But it is now time for theory. For nothing thus far said rules out the possibility that robust reason-giving, as characterized, would involve too much by way of normative magic and is therefore simply impossible, so that no one can ever give someone else a reason to Φ in anything like the sense I tried to capture in the previous section. In this section, then, I take some steps towards developing an account of what robust reason-giving consists in, an account that, if successful, will accommodate the data from the previous section. In Sections 4.1 and 4.2, I show why robust reason-giving 'peer disagreement', see my 'Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (But Not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement' (forthcoming).

25. The analogous worry with regard to Darwall's theory is that second-personal reasons as he defines them just do not exist. I didn't find in Darwall's book a convincing reply to this worry. For his attempt, see, for instance, Darwall (2006, p. 299).

26. It is sometimes said that each of us is a 'self-originating source of valid claims' (Rawls [1980, p. 546]), or some such. It is not at all clear, of course, what this metaphor comes to. But first, it is important to see that this metaphor is at best a catchy name for our problem (what robust reason-giving consists in, and how it is that it's possible), not a solution for it. And second, the discussion that follows may be thought of as one way of fleshing out this metaphor.

must be—if there is such a thing, and appearances to the contrary notwithstanding—a particular instance of triggering reason-giving. In Section 4.3, I briefly consider the more radical options of an error theory and an irreducibility view of robust reason-giving. In Section 4.4, I finally present my suggested account of robust reason-giving, and in Section 4.5, I show how this account satisfies the desiderata from the previous section.

4.1 Conditional Reasons and Conditionals

There is no plausible room in logical space for robust reason-giving that is not an instance of triggering reason-giving. Here's the initial story why (it will be refined later on).

Think about my request that you read my draft. We are assuming that before the request you had no reason to read the draft, and after it you do. But this means that the conditional 'If I ask you to read the draft, you will have a reason to read it' was true all along, or anyway shortly before—and independently of—my actually making its antecedent true (by requesting that you read the draft). But then it is very tempting to think of this case as yet another triggering case of reason-giving; for all I did here is to manipulate the non-normative circumstances so as to trigger your conditional reason to-read-the-draft-if-I-ask-you-to.

But it would be too quick to immediately conclude from this that all cases of robust reason-giving are instances of triggering reason-giving. As it stands, the argument in the previous paragraph moves too quickly from the truth of the conditional ("If I ask you to read the draft, you will have a reason to read it") and its independence of my request, to the existence of a conditional reason that's independent of my request. But as is well-known, such conditionals can be read in more than one way, and not all readings license such an inference.

The conditional can be read in at least the following two ways: The normative operator ("you have a reason to") can be understood as having wide scope, ranging over the entire conditional, resulting in, roughly:
We do not have to engage there with the recent literature on wide-scopism and narrow-scopism. For our purposes here it is sufficient that the narrow-scope is one possible reading of the conditional, and indeed one that is perhaps closer than the alternative to its natural-language formulation. Furthermore, the intuitive line of thought presented above — namely, that because you didn’t have a reason before I asked you to read my paper, and do afterwards, this shows that the conditional is true — does not support the wide-scope conditional over the narrow-scope one. The availability of this narrow-scope reading of the conditional, as well as some other data, shows that the truth of the conditional need not entail the existence of the conditional reason. The truth of the conditional itself, then, does not establish the claim that robust reason-giving can only be an instance of triggering reason-giving.

Nevertheless, a worry remains. For it is a natural thought that while the narrow-scope reading does not entail the wide-scope reading, still the only plausible explanation of the former is in terms of the latter. After all, requests are special in some normatively relevant way. Had I uttered very different words, had I committed some very different speech act (or had I refrained from committing any relevant speech act at all), I would not have given you a reason to read my paper. Furthermore, our personal relationship is, as emphasized above, relevant here. Perhaps, for instance, had a complete stranger asked you to read her draft she would not succeed in thereby giving you a reason so to do. My request is special, then, not just compared to other things I could have done (or failed to do) but also compared to (some) others’ requests. What is it, then, that explains why my request that you read my draft succeeded in giving you a reason, but all these other possible things would not so succeed? The natural reply seems to be in terms of something like the wide-scope conditional: the normatively relevant uniqueness of requests, and indeed of my request, is precisely due to the truth of something like the wide-scope conditional. The only thing that can explain why my request created reasons here whereas my exclamation “The draft I am working on is really cool!” does not is precisely that you have a prior conditional reason to-read-my-draft-if-I-ask-you, but you don’t have a prior conditional reason to-read-my-draft-if-I-say-it’s-really-cool. The worry, then, is that the only way the narrow-scope conditional can be non-mysteriously true is if the wide-scope conditional explains its truth. And we know that whenever a reason can be robustly given, at the very least something like the narrow-scope conditional must be true. So in order to avoid the mysteriousness of a brute narrow-scope conditional of this kind, we must conclude that whenever a reason can be robustly given, the wide-scope conditional is true independently of the act of reason-giving (say, the making of the request). And if so, we must conclude that any case of robust (or apparently robust) reason-giving is really a case of the triggering of (roughly speaking) a conditional reason.

**Giving Practical Reasons**

---

27. See, for instance, Schroeder (2004), and the references there.

28. As noted earlier, the triggering model encompasses more than just the triggering of conditional reasons. It includes also the triggering of a reason by assuring that an enabling condition is in place, by defeating a defeater, etc. With these cases too, the relevant conditional is true, but there is no relevant conditional reason.

29. The discussion in the rest of the subsection and in the next one relies heavily on Mark Schroeder’s “Cudworth and Normative Explanations” (2005), to which I am much indebted.

30. This argument is a particular instance of Schroeder’s “Cudworthy argument”, his generalization of the argument against divine command theory he finds in Cudworth, though applied to reasons, not to obligations. And see especially the quote from Price on p. 12 and Schroeder’s relevant discussion.
4.2 The Constitutive Model

Schroeder argues, quite convincingly, I think, that the explanatory model underlying this little argument—the one he calls "The Standard Model", according to which the truth of any narrow-scope normative conditional is explained by the truth of some categorical normative statement (for instance, the wide-scope one from the previous section)—is but one explanatory model, and that there is at least one alternative, the one he calls "The Constitutive Model".

If you are a divine command theorist, for instance, you believe that for any Φ, if god commanded that you Φ, then you are under an obligation to Φ. But this does not mean that you are committed to the claim that there is another, more general obligation, one that does not depend on god's commands, namely the general obligation to do as god commands, or the conditional obligation to-Φ-if-god-commands-that-you-Φ, or any such thing. True, you still owe us an account of how it is that when god commands that you Φ you are suddenly under an obligation to Φ, but when I command (or "command") that you Φ you often aren't. But the way to explain this is to point to the fact that obligations are (perhaps partly) constituted by god's commands (but not, alas, by mine), that being commanded by god to Φ is (perhaps somewhat roughly) just what it is to be under an obligation. The same goes, argues Schroeder, for any other perfectly general theory of moral obligation: the conditional capturing any such theory's heart—whenever god commands that you Φ, you are under an obligation to Φ; whenever Φ-ing will maximize utility, you are under an obligation to Φ; whenever parties in some privileged choice-situation require that you Φ, you are under an obligation to Φ; etc. — should be explained according to the constitutive rather than the standard model (on pain of falling victim to Schroeder's "Cudworthian Argument", an instance of which concluded the previous subsection).

As John Deigh reminded me, this sketch of a divine command theory may be a caricature. There may be versions of divine command theory according to which the reason-giving power of god is not that different from that of human robust reason-giving. These details need not concern us here, though.

Getting back, then, to reason-giving, the argument attempting to show that any robust reason-giving is really merely the triggering of (roughly) a pre-existing conditional reason can be resisted if we can offer an explanation of the truths of the relevant conditionals (like "If I request that you read my draft, you will have a reason to do so") along the lines of the constitutive model. Can this be done?

Well, in order to do so, one would have to argue that having a reason to read my draft consists in my having asked you to read it, that the request constitutes the having of the reason, that having been requested to read the draft is (perhaps partly) simply what it is to have a reason to read it. But this just seems utterly implausible. Whatever the problems of divine command theory, at least god's unique place in the universe (and in the theory) gives some plausibility to the claim that being under an obligation just is being commanded by god. No such plausibility carries over to the case at hand. The suggestion that the relation between requests—worse still, my requests—and your having reasons is a constitutive one seems just too much to believe. And it seems even harder to believe that anything like this is going on when we remember that requests give reasons only sometimes, depending on many contextual factors. The divine command theorist has a very simple conditional she needs to explain using a constitutive-model explanation (whenever god commands that you Φ you are under an obligation to Φ), and so the constitutive claim she ends up with is similarly simple (being under an obligation to Φ just is having been commanded by god to Φ). But the conditional that would have to be explained in order to apply the constitutive model to the case of reason-giving would have to be much more complicated: When someone asks that you Φ, and when Φ-ing is not too hard, and when the

32. Notice the distinction between saying that the request constitutes the reason, and saying that having been requested is just what it is to have a reason (here). In the text I attribute implausibility not to the former but only to the latter, and it is the latter that is the appropriate analogue of the claim that being commanded by god is just what it is to be under an obligation from the divine command theory example. Thus, it is this (implausible) claim that is needed for the application of the constitutive model to robust reason-giving.
personal relationship between you and the person issuing the request is such as to support such requests, and when Φ-ing is not too immoral, and ..., then you have a reason to Φ. Consequently, and also because not all reasons depend on requests, the constitutive claim that would be needed here would be terribly complicated, and so much less plausible than the simple constitutive claim the divine command theorist needs.

The Constitutive Model may be applied here also in a somewhat different way.33 Suppose we think that there is some other conditional that is explained in the sketched constitutive way. Perhaps, for instance, we think that the truth of the conditional “If you want X, and believe that Φ-ing can get you X, then you have a reason to Φ” is explained by the fact that having the relevant belief and desire is just what it is to have a reason. And suppose that you believe that Φ-ing can get you X, but you do not (yet) want X. I can then give you — robustly, it seems — a reason to Φ by making it the case that you want X. If I can see to it that you acquire this desire, I will thereby be making the case that you have a reason to Φ (for having the belief which you already have and the desire I am about to see to it that you have is just what it is to have the reason), and not by triggering a pre-existing conditional reason (for the explanation of the conditional “If you want X, and believe that Φ-ing can get you X, then you have a reason to Φ” is an instance of the Constitutive rather than the Standard Model).

I agree that there is room in logical space for this way of applying the Constitutive Model. Nevertheless, I think we do not need to pursue it further here, for the following two reasons. First, it is not clear to me that this way of thinking of robust reason-giving can satisfy the desiderata outlined in Section 3 (it is not obvious, for instance, why such reason-giving cannot occur with regard to epistemic reasons). Second, and more importantly, I just do not see how the details can be filled in here in a plausible way. Here are the conditions that must be met for something along these lines to work for our request case: First, there must be some constitutive account of having a (practical) reason; and second, it must be the case that by requesting that you read my paper I make it the case that that thing which is constitutive of having a reason — whatever it is — in fact holds. I do not have an argument showing that there is no way of filling in the details that can satisfy these conditions. But I can’t think of any remotely plausible way of doing this. And so I conjecture that there is no such way.

Let’s recap. The concern was that given the truth of the relevant conditionals (“If I ask you to read the draft, you will have a reason to read it”), and the need to explain them, we would be forced to acknowledge something like a conditional reason (to read-if-I-ask-you-to). Following Schroeder, I pointed out that there may be other ways of explaining the relevant conditionals, for instance according to the Constitutive Model. But now I’ve claimed that for the Constitutive Model to apply to the case at hand some highly implausible propositions would have to be true. So the Constitutive Model — whatever its merits in general — cannot help us here.

Are there, then, any other types of explanations of conditionals of the relevant kind? Schroeder introduces (12) “The Standard-Constitutive Conjecture”, according to which the only explanations of such conditionals are either in line with the Standard Model, or in line with the Constitutive Model. He introduces it as a conjecture, offering no argument for the claim that it is in fact true. I don’t have such an argument to offer either. But I can’t think of another possible explanatory model here,34 and so I am going to proceed on the assumption that none is to be found.35

33. I thank Mark van Roojen for making me see this.
34. In conversation, Mark Schroeder made it clear that neither can he.
35. John Gardner suggested to me the following heuristically helpful way of putting my point here. If we think of reasons with a classical practical syllogism in mind, then epistemic reason-giving amounts to pointing out a full practical syllogism that was available to the addressee all along; triggering reason-giving amounts to bringing about a change in a minor premise; instances of the Constitutive Model are ones where a new major premise is brought about; and the claim that the Constitutive Model does not apply to requests amounts to the claim that requests can only bring about changes in minor premises, though in syllogisms with interestingly unique major premises.
4.3 The Scylla of Error Theory and the Charybdis of Irreducibility

In Section 4.4 I am going to offer an account that understands robust reason-giving as an especially interesting particular instance of triggering reason-giving, the special features of which (compared to other cases of triggering reason-giving) accommodate the desiderata from Section 3. Before I do that, though, let me briefly address two more extreme strategies that at this point naturally suggest themselves.

The first is an error theory about robust reason-giving. What the arguments thus far have established, it can be argued, is simply that nothing can qualify as genuinely robust reason-giving. Nothing, after all, can both be an instance of triggering reason-giving (as the discussion in this section suggests robust reason-giving must be) and fail to be an instance of triggering reason-giving (as the discussion in the previous section seems to suggest must be true of robust reason-giving). Robust reason-giving, then, is simply impossible.

In the other extreme, we may be led to an irreducibility view, according to which the phenomenon of robust reason-giving is sui generis, not best understood or explained in other terms. The mistake in the discussion so far, the thought can go, was the attempt to offer an account of robust reason-giving in other, not too closely related terms. But it is this attempt that has been reduced to an absurd, and so it must be abandoned. We must simply acknowledge that the normative sphere is richer than we may have thought, and it contains — on top of everything else it contains — also the irreducible relation of robust reason-giving.

Both of these suggestions are indeed options, but they are ones to opt for only as a last (or second to last) resort, for both are highly implausible. Start with an error theory. Going error theoretic about robust reason-giving entails that there is some systematic error in our practice of reason-giving (for instance, in our practice of making requests), so that we never in fact succeed in giving each other reasons in the way characterized in Section 3. And as is usual with error theories, for the theory to be at all plausible an explanation will have to be offered of the relevant error. But such an error theory, it seems, is sufficiently implausible to be avoided if at all possible.

As for irreducibility, here as elsewhere, there is something less than fully theoretically satisfying about such a move. We have already seen that where robust reason-giving is possible, a certain kind of conditional is true, such as “If I ask you to read my draft, you will have a reason to do so”. And I’ve discussed two possible kinds of explanation for the truth of such conditionals. Endorsing robust reason-giving as an irreducible, sui generis normative phenomenon thus amounts to admitting the truth of such conditionals as brute, unexplained, and unexplainable. And this seems like a desperate move (though perhaps not as desperate as endorsing an error theory).

If at all possible, then, we should steer a course somewhere between the two extremes of error theory and irreducibilism. Now, given the discussion earlier in this section, robust reason-giving (if it is possible) cannot but be an instance of triggering reason-giving. And we already know — from the previous section — that robust reason-giving has characteristics that are not shared by other, perhaps more paradigmatic cases of merely triggering reason-giving. So if robust reason-giving is possible, this must be because it is an especially interesting instance of triggering reason-giving, one the special elements of which

---

36. Raz (1986, p. 84) seems to say explicitly that (in my terms) robust reason giving must be an instance of triggering reason-giving, when he writes (in the context of a discussion of consent): “Though the [will] can, within limits, create reasons, it can do so only when there is a non-will-based reason why it should.” For a similar point, see Watson (2009, p. 159).

37. It could perhaps be made somewhat (but not much) less implausible if softened by some kind of instrumentalism or fictionalism about robust reason-giving. Watson (2009, p. 157, footnote 9) suggests something along these lines as a possible reading of Hume on promises.

38. Darwall (2006) emphasizes the irreducibility of the second-person. And this is already somewhat unsatisfying. But Darwall nowhere discusses anything like the conditionals of the kind mentioned in the text, and so doesn’t acknowledge the even more problematic result — admitting the truth of such conditionals as brute. Lavin (2008) also emphasizes a close explanatory challenge left unanswered by Darwall.

(those not shared by other instances of triggering reason-giving) explain the unique features of robust reason-giving.

4.4 My Suggestion

A promising start is to think about the characteristic intentions of the reason-giver (and perhaps also the reason-receiver) in cases of robust reason-giving, compared to cases of purely epistemic and merely triggering reason-giving. It seems like a necessary condition for something to qualify as a request that the person making the request intend to thereby give a reason to the addressee. Something like this necessary condition also holds for the case of commands, as the literature on authority makes clear: one cannot issue a command inadvertently, without intending to issue a command, that is, (perhaps among other things) to give the addressee a rather strong reason to perform the relevant action. And notice that this condition is not necessary for many cases of purely epistemic and merely triggering reason-giving. One can, for instance, indicate that there is a reason inadvertently, or anyway without intending so to do. And one can certainly trigger a conditional reason without intending to do so, as the grocer example shows clearly. So insisting on this intention does seem like a step in the right direction.

But we already know that this intention is not a sufficient condition for robust reason-giving, because there are cases where this intention is present but the relevant reason-giving is not robust. One kind of case has already been mentioned—that of threats. More generally, take a case of triggering reason-giving (like that of the grocer and the price of milk), then add an intention to give a reason, and still all you have is a case of triggering, not robust, reason-giving. Or consider an example I take from David Estlund (2008, p. 118). 40 The son of a brutal dictator “orders” you to perform some action. He is, of course, not authorized to issue such an order, not even according to the rules his dictator father accepts. But if you don’t do as the child says, his father will become very angry, indeed angry to the point of brutalizing some innocent people. In this case, it seems you now have a reason (indeed, an obligation; but for my purposes a reason would do) to do whatever the dictator’s son ordered you to do. The dictator’s son has succeeded in giving you a reason for action. And indeed, this is exactly what he intended to do. But, of course, this is not a case of robust reason-giving. It is merely a case of a triggering reason-giving: you have a standing reason to prevent horrible disasters from befalling innocent people, and the dictator’s son has successfully manipulated the non-normative circumstances so that this general reason will imply a more specific one to do as he says. 41

To make some progress, compare threats and warnings. When all other things are equal, if a threat (“If you don’t Φ, I will kill you!”) gives you a reason to Φ, so would the relevantly similar warning (“If you don’t Φ, Bad Guy will kill you!”). The intention of the one issuing the threat to give you a reason for action—though very much a part of what makes the threat a threat—still in this way drops out of the normative picture. 42 A benevolent person issuing a warning, or indeed a non-person indicator of the imminent danger, would do just as well in terms of your reason to Φ.

Now consider requests again, and consider the following two cases. In the first one, I ask you to read my paper, and you go ahead and read it because, well, I asked you to. In the second case, you could not care less about me and my requests. But you’ve noticed that our

40. Estlund himself gives the credit for this example to John Deigh.

41. Estlund distinguishes the case of the dictator’s child from cases of real authority. But he doesn’t offer a satisfying explication of the distinction. Notice that the very fact that this case seems so very different from a genuine case of authority shows that it would be wrong to think about cases of authority as uninteresting particular instances of triggering reason-giving.

42. Perhaps this is roughly what Estlund has in mind when he says (about the dictator’s child example): “the command itself drops out of the set of reasons for action” (2008, p. 118).
department chair heard me asking that you read the paper, you know that she thinks you should do as I ask, and you recognize your general, standing reason to keep her happy. You proceed to read the paper merely in order to avoid a conflict with the department chair. There seems to be an important difference between the two cases. While you have done as I asked in both cases, in the latter the request did not function in the way I intended it to function. Think of it this way. If you come to believe that my request was not in fact sincere (say, I was just pretending to make a request), in the first case you will come to the conclusion that you don’t have any reason to read my draft. Not so in the second case: so long as the department chair believes the request was earnest, your reason for reading the draft stands. So what is important in the case of requests is that the reason-giver not only intends to give a reason, but also that she intends the giving of the reason to depend on the reason-receiver’s recognizing that very intention, and indeed on this recognition playing an appropriate role in the reason-receiver’s practical reasoning. There is nothing, then, which stands in the same relation to requests as warnings do to threats: a threat treated by the addressee merely as a warning is a fully successful threat. A request treated by the addressee merely as an incentive is not a fully successful request.

We can gain more support for this by thinking about a variant of the keeping-the-department-chair-happy case. Suppose that I knew all along how little you cared about me and my requests, and so I would never have bothered to ask you to read the paper if it weren’t for the department chair’s presence. Given her presence, I know that my uttering “Would you mind having a look at my draft?” will succeed in giving you a reason to read my draft. It seems to me that this case — in which I intend to give you a reason, and succeed in doing so by uttering words that sound like the making of a request — is not a genuine request at all, precisely because the reason-giving involved is not robust. Rather, it is a case of intentional triggering reason-giving. What seems to be lacking here is the complicated intention mentioned earlier: though I intend to give you a reason, I do not intend the giving of the reason to depend on your acknowledging of this very intention.

These considerations support, then, the following account, which it will be convenient to present first as an account of attempting to robustly give a reason, then adding the relevant success conditions:

One person A attempts to robustly give another person B a reason to Φ just in case (and because):

(i) A intends to give B a reason to Φ, and A communicates this intention to B;

(ii) A intends B to recognize this intention;

(iii) A intends B’s given reason to Φ to depend in an appropriate way on B’s recognition of A’s communicated intention to give B a reason to Φ. 43

The third condition can be understood as a generalization of such natural thoughts as that when I ask you to Φ, I intend that your reason for

43. There is an obvious structural similarity between this account and (one version of) Grice’s account of sentence-meaning. It’s not clear to me whether the similarity is merely superficial. Be that as it may, even if there are some objections that make a Gricean account of meaning unacceptable, they do not seem to me to apply to the reason-giving case. Rather, they are either instances of deviant causal chains of the kind I mention in the text below, or their force as objections to the Gricean account entirely depends on the latter being an account of meaning. This point is clearest in Schiffer (1972, pp. 42–3), where he distinguishes the phenomenon of speaker-meaning and that of telling (that or to), noting that (in my terms) purely epistemic reason-giving is consistent with the former but not the latter. And for a survey of the problems facing broadly Gricean accounts of meaning, see Schiffer (1987, Chapter 9).

For a similar understanding of requests, this time inspired by Searle rather than by Grice, see Cupit (1994, p. 450): “To request is to attempt to affect another’s actions, by doing no more than presenting those wishes in a form which constitutes an attempt to affect action.” Similarly, Raz (1975, p. 83) writes: “A person who makes a request intends his making the request to be a reason for the addressee to comply with it.” And there is something in the same general direction in Robertson (manuscript). And for explicitly Gricean discussions of closely related issues, see Hart (1982), and Sciaraffa (2009).
Φ-ing be *that I asked you to*; that when I command that you Φ, I intend that your reason for Φ-ing be *that I said so*, etc.

Thus, when I ask you to read my draft, (i) I intend to give you a reason to read my draft, and I communicate this intention to you by way of saying something like “Do you mind having a look?”; (ii) I intend you to recognize this intention; and (iii) I intend this recognition of yours to play an appropriate role in your practical reasoning, as can be seen from the fact that my request misfires when you proceed to read the draft (as I asked) only for the reason that this will keep our department chair happy. And a similar analysis seems plausible for at least some other cases of robust reason-giving (for instance, that of commands).

There are two kinds of success conditions necessary for robust reason-giving. The first kind is non-normative: For A’s attempt to robustly give B a reason to Φ to succeed, B must recognize A’s above specified intentions, and furthermore B must allow these intentions to play an appropriate role in his practical reasoning. Notice that this condition is not necessary for the attempt to succeed in amounting to a robust reason-giving, but rather for it to succeed in having the intended kind of effect in the world.

But this condition is not sufficient for the attempt at reason-giving to succeed, not even for it to succeed in amounting to a robust reason-giving. To see this, think again about the dictator’s child, and now assume, first, that he has all of the intentions specified above, so that he genuinely does attempt to robustly give a reason; and second, that the person he addresses treats him as genuinely authorized or in some way able to robustly give reasons in this way, so that she lets the child’s reason-giving intentions play the appropriate role in her practical reasoning. Still, it’s clear that the child has not managed to robustly give a reason for action. What is missing in this case is the normative success-condition, namely, the attempt must make it the case that a reason to Φ really does emerge (in the appropriate way). And we already know that whether this procedure will result in there being a reason to Φ here will depend on there being an independent reason that is triggered by this procedure — roughly, a reason (for B) to do as A intends that B have a reason to do. In the dictator’s child example, there is no general reason to do as the child “commands”, and so his reason-giving intentions do not trigger such a general reason, and so he does not succeed in robustly giving a reason, whether or not his audience believes that he does. But when I ask you to read my paper, presumably there is this general reason (to do as I ask, within limits, in a certain context, etc.), one that I presumably succeed in triggering by making the request. It is in this way, then, that the suggested account of robust reason-giving is a particular instance (but an importantly unique one) of triggering reason-giving. Now, I do not have (here) more to say on when such a triggered reason does and when it does not exist: it seems to me that sometimes such a reason (in the case of requests, roughly, to do as one is asked to do) exists, that sometimes it does not, that the strength of the reason (when it does exist) will vary from case to case, and that a general answer to the question “When does a potentially triggered reason exist, and how strong is it?” is a part of the most general substantive theory of what reasons we have,

44. The communication is important here. It is not sufficient for robust reason-giving that I intend that you know about my relevant intentions; it is important (as can be seen from [iii]) that what plays a role in your practical reasoning is that I actually communicated to you the intention that you take this very communicated intention as a reason. (I thank Joseph Raz for emphasizing this point to me.)

45. Notice that the “communicates” in condition (i) is not understood as a success term, requiring uptake of some kind. It requires merely the attempt to communicate the relevant intention. (I thank Hanoch Shelnman for a related point.)

46. Unless the Constitutive Model does apply. In such cases — as Dimitrios Kyritsis noted — the normative success condition is trivially satisfied.

47. I hope to discuss the case of authority — plausibly a particular instance of robust reason-giving — on another occasion. Let me just quickly note here that the point in the text is where discussions of the justification of authority come in. In the framework of the suggested account of robust reason-giving, for instance, Raz’s service conception of authority (e.g., Raz 2005) is best seen as an account of which prior conditional reasons exist, and so which attempts at robust reason-giving (in the special authority way) can succeed.
a theory I unfortunately do not have up my sleeve.48 So I am going to have to settle for stating the normative condition itself: For robust reason-giving to occur, there must be, independently of the attempt at robust reason-giving, a reason triggered by such an attempt.49

I am not sure what more to say about the “appropriate way” qualification in (iii). It is meant to rule out deviant causal (and perhaps other) chains.50 It would have been nice to have an explicit account of how exactly to do this. But I will have to settle for noting that usually we know a deviant causal chain when we see one, and for claiming companions in guilt—for almost everyone needs an account of deviant causal chains. This qualification in (iii) thus doesn’t make (iii) (or the account of which it is a part) empty, nor does it raise any new problems that are peculiar to my account of robust reason-giving. (If you nevertheless think that there is no way for the “appropriate way” qualification to be made respectable, then you may have to reconsider the irreducibility “way out” from section 4.3 above.)

48. In the Introduction I insisted that the phenomenon I am interested in—robust reason-giving—does not, unlike the phenomena Darwall is interested in, necessarily include anything like assumed authority-relations. But one way of describing the point in the text here is in the related (but, of course, not necessarily institutional) term of standing. Perhaps, for instance, the question whether there is such a triggerable reason can be redescribed as the question whether the speaker has the standing to robustly give certain reasons (like, for instance, whether she has the standing to make the relevant request).

49. Above I rejected an error theory about robust reason-giving. But the fact that I do not here supply a general theory about what reasons we have, or in particular an answer to the question when are there reasons that are triggerable in the way described in the text, means that there is another kind of error theory that I have not argued against. For perhaps even though there is nothing incoherent about robust reason-giving still there are no reasons that are triggerable in this way. If so, there are no cases of robust reason-giving, but this is so because of substantive normative considerations, rather than those having to do with the nature of robust reason-giving. Now, to repeat, I believe that we do sometimes succeed in robustly giving each other reasons, and so I reject this version of an error theory as well. But I do not argue for this claim in this paper. I thank Nadeem Hussain and Joseph Raz for pressing me on this point.

50. For a discussion of some deviant-causal-chain cases in the context of a discussion of Grice’s account of meaning, see Schiffer (1972, pp. 17 and ff.).

I should also note something it does not take for the role played by the given reason in the receiver’s practical reasoning to be appropriate. It is not required that the role be, as it were, ultimate.51 In other words, it is perfectly consistent with robust reason-giving thus understood that there be a further, fuller, perhaps more basic story of why it is that B does and should take A’s relevant intentions as reason-giving. Perhaps, for instance, B is a simple utilitarian, and let’s further assume that simple utilitarianism is indeed the true fundamental story about all reasons for action. If so, B will take A’s request as a reason to Φ if and only if, and because, doing so will maximize utility. But this does not mean that she doesn’t take, in those cases, A’s request to be a (non-ultimate) reason. The crucial question is whether the ultimate (or perhaps just more basic) story here is one that goes through the reason-giver’s special intentions identified above (and the receiver’s recognition thereof), as in the case of the utilitarian request-receiver, in which case we may have a case of robust reason-giving; or whether the more basic story here works directly, leaving no role for the specific intentions that make reason-giving robust (as is the case in the dictator’s child example). Cases of this latter type are not, on the account I’m suggesting here, cases of robust reason-giving. And this seems to me the independently plausible result here.

Notice that the intentions mentioned above do not include something like the intention that B actually Φs. This is so because A can give B a reason to Φ knowing well that other reasons may be relevant, including possibly stronger reasons not to Φ.52 Indeed, it seems to me A can make a genuine request that B Φs, all the time acknowledging that if certain other considerations bear on the case, B should not (all things considered) Φ. We do not want to restrict robust reason-giving to just the cases in which the reason-giver intends the given reason to outweigh all others. For similar reasons, A need not intend that the given reason be the only reason for which B Φs.

51. I thank Cian Dorr for pressing me on a related point.
52. See Raz (1975, p. 83).
You may be worried about circularity: the intentions appearing in the suggested analysis of robust reason-giving are themselves picked out in terms of reason-giving. But notice that the analysandum is robust reason-giving. And the reason-giving appearing in the analyses need not be robust: it can be, and perhaps usually is, triggering reason-giving.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, when I ask you to read my draft, I intend to give you a reason to read my draft and for this reason to play an appropriate role in your practical reasoning. But I need not intend to robustly give you a reason to read my draft. I certainly need not intend to robustly give you a reason under this description. I may intend to trigger a reason for you to read my draft with my relevant complex intentions, and this giving may amount to a case of robust reason-giving, but I need not intend it as such. The suggested account, then, explains the nature of robust reason-giving in terms of intentions to (not-necessarily-robustly) give reasons. At worst — when the intentions themselves are to robustly give reasons — there is something benignly recursive in the suggested account.\textsuperscript{54}

4.4 Evaluating the Suggestion: The Desiderata Again

Does the suggested account of robust reason-giving satisfy the desiderata from Section 3? How well does it fit with — and how well does it explain — the phenomenon of robust reason-giving as there characterized?

First, this account seems to me to get the central cases right, and for what seem to be the right reasons. Threats, for instance, are not cases of robust reason-giving (and so are cases of merely triggering reason-giving), because, though the intention (i) is present in threats, (ii) and (iii) typically aren’t. Of course, the intentions (ii) and (iii) may be

\textsuperscript{53} I don’t think that an intention to epistemically give reasons would suffice here. This is why warnings do not qualify as cases of robust reason-giving. (I thank Tom Hurka for this point.)

\textsuperscript{54} If you’re not convinced, compare the recursive but not circular following definition of instrumental value: ‘Something is of instrumental value if and only if it is instrumental to something that is of value’ (where this last occurrence of ‘value’ stands for ‘not-necessarily instrumental value’).
To see this, suppose (for reductio) that A attempts to robustly give B a reason to believe p. On the suggested account, for this to be the case, A must intend

(i) to give B a reason to believe p;

(ii) B to recognize this intention;

(iii) B’s given reason to believe p to depend in an appropriate way on B’s recognition of A’s communicated intention to give B a reason to believe p.

I don’t see any interesting problems with (i) and (ii). But (iii) is highly problematic. A’s reason-giving intention — and B’s recognition thereof — seem of the wrong type for an epistemic reason to depend on them. After all, they have nothing to do with p’s truth, or with evidence supporting the belief that p. So on the suggested account, in order to even attempt to robustly give an epistemic reason, the reason-giver must be confused about the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic reasons (for instance, for belief). And, of course, even where such an attempt is possible (because the reason-giver is confused in this way), still no such attempt can succeed, because of the normative success condition: there just is no pre-existing epistemic reason that can be triggered in this way.57

55. This much is, I take it, uncontroversial among those writing on intentions. The controversial questions are whether an intention that p entails a belief that p, or some such. Notice that the assumption in the text is much weaker than an affirmative answer to this question.

56. Darwall (2006, pp. 22 and ff.) emphasizes the distinction between giving someone an incentive, and addressing a demand in a way that the addressee is expected to recognize and internalize. Here too the account in the text differs from Darwall’s in its details, but may be similar to it in its spirit. Darwall (2006, p. 269) also insists that addressing second-personal reasons always presupposes that addressees can freely and rationally determine themselves by the addressed reasons. Here too a similarity to the point in the text is evident.

57. There is now a view in the epistemology of testimony — sometimes called the Assurance View — according to one understanding of which the epistemological status of testimony is thought of in a way closely resembling robustly-given epistemic reasons. See, for instance, Moran (2005). I cannot discuss this view at length here (and hope to do so elsewhere). Let me just make the following two points, then. First, partly for the reasons sketched in the text here, to the extent that the Assurance View is to be understood as claiming that epistemic reasons can be robustly given, it is for this very reason highly implausible. And second, we should distinguish between the phenomenology of telling and being told and the epistemology of testimony. The former may indeed be very close to the phenomenology of robust reason-giving (as can be seen from reading Moran’s paper alongside this one). But from this nothing follows with regard to the epistemology of testimony.
5. Conclusion

I tentatively conclude, then, that when I ask you to read my draft thereby successfully giving you a reason to read it, I do trigger a reason that was there all along, independently of my request. But this doesn’t show that robust reason-giving — in the case of requests, or more generally — is an illusion, or that there’s anything magical or mysterious about it. Robust reason-giving is a particularly interesting particular instance of what I’ve called triggering reason-giving. It is unique in the complex intentions it involves, and therefore also in some of its phenomenological characteristics.

Let me not pretend that this account is without problems. For one thing, and as I noted already there, it is in certain respects incomplete (lacking an account of when there are and when there are not triggerable reasons of the relevant kind, and lacking an account of deviant causal chains). Further, though I think the suggested account gets the central cases at least roughly right, it may have some moderately counterintuitive results. For instance, fairly young children — perhaps too young to have the complex intentions my account uses — seem to be able to issue full-blooded requests just like the rest of us. I may need to classify such requests as less than full-blooded requests after all (in the other direction, it seems to me that “requests” addressed at very young children are often not full-blooded requests). This may be a somewhat awkward result, but not, I think, too awkward, given the advantages of the suggested account.

Let me mention another possible objection. The requests that this account roughly fits, it may be argued, are rather thick requests — requests that rely on some fairly thick personal relationship, that are of non-trivial significance, and so on. But many, perhaps most, requests are not like this at all. If we are two complete strangers, and you ask me to tell you the time, haven’t you succeeded in issuing a full-blooded request? Haven’t you succeeded in robustly giving me a reason to tell you the time? But with such trivial requests (for instance, among strangers) wouldn’t it be too much to pack into the request the complex intentions my account of robust reason-giving utilizes?

I can think of two ways of thinking about trivial requests in our context. One would be to rule them less than full-blooded requests, or perhaps to allow them to count as full-blooded requests at the price of severing the tie between requests and robust reason-giving. This is not entirely implausible; perhaps when the request is trivial enough, the distinction between robust reason-giving and merely triggering reason-giving loses some of its force (it certainly loses much of its importance).

A much more interesting response, however, would be to insist that even such trivial requests among complete strangers are cases of robust reason-giving. Such insistence would involve insisting that we do have the relevant complex intentions when making trivial requests, and so also that we assume that complete strangers can and should take our intentions to give them a reason as genuinely reason-giving. Perhaps this way of thinking about things gets us back to the spirit of Darwall’s insistence on the normative felicity conditions of second-personal address, the kind of address we all experience, both as addressors and as addressees. Perhaps our tendency both to make trivial requests and to respond to them shows that in a sense we assume that pretty much all of us can respond to reasons, and indeed to robustly given reasons. (This would amount to another way in which requests are a better starting point in understanding robust reason-giving, compared to commands, for instance, as clearly much more is needed for commands than for requests to be possible.) And perhaps this shows not that robust reason-giving is possible even among people who stand at no normatively significant relation to each other, 58. I don’t know whether robust reason-giving, as understood by my suggested account, will satisfy Darwall’s taste for the irreducibly second-personal. Indeed, this account may be thought of as an objection to this irreducibility claim: If I am right, and so much can be explained without resorting to the irreducibly second-personal, resorting to it loses much of its underlying philosophical motivation. Nevertheless, perhaps Darwall can reply that filling in some of the missing details will after all require the irreducibly second-personal.
but rather that the possibility of robust reason-giving among strangers shows that even complete strangers do after all stand in some important normative relations to each other, and indeed that all of us know as much. 59

59. For helpful discussion and conversations, I thank Hagit Benbaji, Mitch Berman, Anne Burkard, Terence Cuneo, John Deigh, Cian Dorr, Janice Dowell, Luis Duarte d’Almeida, Yuval Eylon, Alon Harel, Scott Hershovits, Tom Hurka, Arnon Keren, Serena Olsaretti, Joseph Raz, Hili Razinsky, Gideon Rosen, Mark Schroeder, Stefan Sciaraffia, Russ Shafer-Landau, Hanoch Sheinman, David Sobel, David Sosa, Nick Southwood, Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, Mark van Roojen; audiences at the Hebrew University, Oxford, Rice; and two extremely helpful referees for The Philosopher’s Imprint. While working on this paper I was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and I gratefully acknowledge the Institute’s support. Also, this research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant no. 136/09).
References


Giving Practical Reasons

Simon Robertson, “Creating Reasons”, unpublished manuscript.