

Rational Action, Reasons, and Suicide

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1. Introduction

Every year more than 700,000 people die by suicide (WHO 2023). In the Netherlands alone this number in 2022 was already 1916 (CBS 2024). Here it is even the number one cause of death for people under 30 years old (CBS 2023), while globally it is the fourth cause of death in the same age group (WHO 2023). To possibly save lives, it is therefore crucial to understand suicide. However, there is not one type of suicide. According to Tanz and Tanz (2019) there are 36 categories of suicide. To understand suicide comprehensively thus requires an understanding of each category. This thesis focuses on one of these categories, aiming to contribute to this broader understanding. The category in question is called rational suicide, but it is also known under other names like logical suicide and surcease suicide (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 66), or balance suicides (Schramme 2013, 480). In these cases, a person rationally decides that death is the best, or only, option left.

The category of rational suicide is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it is intriguing as there is a debate whether rational suicide even exists (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 20; Mayo 1986; Clarke 1999; Schramme 2013; Pilpel & Amsel 2011). Secondly, the category is also interesting as it can be linked with assisted suicide, including euthanasia. This is because the person requesting it must show that they have the capacity to rationally make a decision (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 66 & 68). One can therefore argue that euthanasia is a form of rational suicide. This means the category is not only interesting for self-performed suicides, meaning a suicide in which an agent themselves performs an action with the intent to die, but possibly also in the debates about euthanasia.¹ This is thus a significant topic regarding the possible far-reaching consequences, both in the possibility of saving lives and in the legal terms of euthanasia. It is thereby important to know whether rational suicide truly exists and, if so, under which circumstances. In other words, when can a suicide be considered rational? This will be the main question of this thesis.

The literature regarding the existence of rational suicide states reasons which supposedly makes a suicide rational or irrational. To illustrate, some literature claims that rational suicides do not exist, as there are reasons which makes it impossible that death is the best option one could have. However, it is noticeable that this literature does not discuss the relation between reasons and rational action. This thesis will therefore first explore when an action, such as suicide, is rational. Specifically, it will target the relation between reasons and rational actions, as the literature uses reasons to argue in favor or against the existence of rational suicide. It will therefore be discussed

¹ One could also argue that euthanasia is a form of self-performed suicide because requesting euthanasia is performing an action (namely requesting or speaking) with the intent to die. However, this is far reached. The agent does not do the final action to ensure their death. One could thus also argue that it is not a self-performed suicide, but only a form of (assisted) suicide. Regardless, the concept of rational suicide is important to understand suicides in general, which can include euthanasia and other forms of assisted suicide.

when something can be considered a reason, how it leads to an action such as suicide, and what makes an action truly rational.

There is also a debate concerning reasons for actions and how they relate to rational action. Finlay and Schroeder (2017) state that two sides are called internalism and externalism. In essence, a more traditional internalism claims that any action, including rational action, is only performed if the agent has internal reasons to act. This is because internal reasons always have a connection with the motivations and beliefs of a specific agent, which are both aspects necessary to explain why an agent performs any action. Internalism thus argues that a rational action can only be explained by the reasons an agent uses to decide which action they should perform, as this is the only explanation as to why an agent does a rational action. This makes both the reasons and rational action agent dependent. The other side called externalism agrees that internal reasons exist, but they argue that there are also external reasons. Depending on the account used, one can argue that an action is only rational if the agent acts in accordance with the external reasons surrounding the situation. This makes it, for instance, possible to judge the action of another agent. In these situations, it seems indeed that there are reasons for actions independently of a specific agent. It might therefore be that internalism is confused about the existence of external reasons.

To be able to analyze where this possible confusion comes from, an account of internalism is explored in the second chapter of this thesis.² This will provide a basic understanding of internalism and internal reasons. This will be done by discussing probably the most influential account authored by Bernard Williams (1981). It consists of two parts, namely what (internal) reasons are according to him, and how this leads to a rational action. It will be argued that rational action is always based on (internal) reasons, but that not every reason leads to a rational action. However, in Williams' account, every potential reason for action should explain why that action could be performed. As the aim of this chapter is to provide a clear basic understanding of internalism, a few criticisms are also discussed to clarify what Williams might mean or where he might have made a mistake. This might create a somewhat altered version of Williams' account, depending on how one interprets Williams' work. Nevertheless, it will provide a clear account of internalism.

The third chapter will examine a few examples of why externalism suggests that external reasons exist. It will also be shown how it is impossible for these reasons to lead to (rational) action by exploring the criticisms provided by two internalists. The first one is Williams himself, while the second criticism is authored by Alan Goldman (2007). The last part of this chapter will show that external reasons do exist, but that a rational action can indeed only be explained by the reasons that motivate the agent to act. In other words, whether an action is rational depends on the agent, even

² To clarify, the second chapter is the one after this introduction.

though external reasons exist. This has been argued by Steven Finlay (2006). To fully understand where the confusion of internalism lies, Finlay's account is compared to Williams. It will be concluded that not every potential (internal or external) reason needs to be able to explain why that particular agent would act, but only how a reason could lead to a certain action. While Williams was thus correct in assuming that not every reason leads the agent to perform a rational action, he was mistaken that every reason an agent could potentially have should lead the agent to a particular action.

The fourth and last chapter before the conclusion applies these ideas about reasons and rational action to the reasons provided in the debate concerning rational suicide. It is noticeable that most authors argue against the existence of rational suicide, while some of them do make an exception for altruistic suicides being sometimes rational. Multiple examples of the reasons mentioned in these arguments will be discussed. The authors argue that the reasons they use apply to every agent who considers suicide. This means that those reasons are external reasons. While the reasons have been discussed up until this point as mostly leading to an action, it can, of course, also prevent one from doing an action as it could lead the agent to do another action instead. This means that even if the external reason would lead to the prevention of an action, it still cannot explain why that particular agent would not do the action without the agent first believing it and being motivated by it. If both are the case, then the authors are correct in stating that the suicide cannot be rational. However, if the agent does not agree with the authors or lacks the needed connection with motivation, then the suicide can still be rational, as the rationality action depends on the agent. Therefore, the authors are incorrect in claiming that it would make it (almost) impossible for a suicide to be rational, but they have provided reasons that could change the rationality of the suicide. In most cases, these reasons could thus make the suicide not rational if the agent believes them and is motivated by them.

Furthermore, there are authors who claim that suicides could potentially be rational. To reiterate, a rational action can only be explained if one can explain why the agents acts. This is therefore only possible if the agent has internal reasons, meaning reasons they believe and are motivated by, for that action. An argument in favor of the existence of rational suicide must therefore also explain how that agent is motivated. Two arguments are discussed which explain how an agent becomes motivated to take their life and how these reasons lead to the action of suicide being rational. One can therefore conclude that a suicide can be rational.

There are several important points to note here to prevent any confusion regarding the topic of this thesis. Firstly, while it will be concluded that suicides can be rational, it does not mean that every suicide is rational. There will also not be any claims made regarding how many suicides are rational, and therefore this thesis does not state that most suicides are rational. It only argues that

suicides can be rational, but these are still in very specific circumstances. Secondly, as previously mentioned but worth reiterating, not all potential arguments and reasons are discussed. This is because the reasons are categorized based on their underlying type of reason, namely whether they are internal or external. In other words, this thesis forms a structure or model for how to interpret the reasons and their possible problems. The point of the reasons is therefore to give an example of what those types of reasons look like and to give an idea of when a suicide could be rational.

Thirdly, this thesis will not give a clear answer concerning the morality of any suicide, including those that are potentially rational. However, morality will be discussed since multiple reasons revolve around moral considerations. The thesis will thus not give a clear answer whether (rational) suicide can be moral, but it will answer whether a potentially immoral action could be rational. The focus of this thesis is thus rational suicide, and it uses ideas regarding rational action and reasons in general. This will be shown by exploring multiple accounts of rational action. Using the definition of rationality that seems most plausible, various perspectives from existing literature concerning rational suicide will be considered. It will then be concluded that rational suicide does exist, and which type of reasons could lead one to rationally take one's life.

2. Williams and Internalism

In order to examine the type of reasons given in the literature about the rationality of a suicide and what this means for the possibility of rational suicide, one must first understand the debate concerning reasons and rational action. There are two sides to this debate, namely internalism and externalism. The difference between these two is that internalism claims that only internal reasons exist, while externalism claims that both internal and external reasons exist (Williams 1981; Swartzler 2015; Goldman 2007; Spaid 2021; Finlay 2006; Lubin 2009). It is possible that internalism is confused about the existence of external reasons. They claim that only internal reasons exist, as they are the only reasons which could lead to a rational action. To understand this, one must first have a basic understanding of internalism. This will be provided in this chapter. The next chapter will explore why internalism believes that external reasons cannot exist and why that might be wrong.

There are different accounts of internalism, but probably the most influential is authored by Bernard Williams (1981). This account will therefore be explored in this chapter. Furthermore, a few possible criticisms are discussed, as Williams might have made some mistakes in his account. To understand when an action is rational in this account, one must first know what an internal reason is. This is because Williams suggests that a rational action can only be based on reasons which explain why the specific action is performed by that agent. According to Williams, this means that there are two requirements for a reason. These are that it must have a connection with motivation and that the agent must believe that it is a reason for the action. One can also deliberate about their reasons, which can change an existing reason or create a new one. All of this will be explored in the first section.

Williams suggests that an action is not automatically rational if one has a reason for that action. This will be discussed in the second section. It will be shown that the agent also must have deliberated with their reasons. Furthermore, it seems that Williams believes one can only act truly rational if they do not have any false beliefs. However, it will be discussed that this is a too strict requirement for a rational action as people do not have perfect knowledge. To understand this, one must first understand internal reasons.

2.1 Reasons According to Williams

As a rational action is based on reasons, one must first understand what reasons are. According to Bernard Williams (1981), a reason must be able to explain why the rational action is performed. He argues that an agent only acts if they believe that they are motivated to act. This also means that reasons must always have a connection with motivation and the corresponding beliefs. Furthermore,

one can create or change which reasons they have through deliberation. To understand this, the three aspects of this account are discussed. The first one is the required connection with one's motivations, or as Williams calls it the subjective motivational set (S). The second aspect is the required aspect of beliefs. These could be about one's motivations or other information one believes in. Lastly, the deliberation process which can change or create reasons is explored.

2.1.1. Subjective Motivational Set (S) and Reasons

Williams (1981) argues that reasons must be somehow linked to one's motivations. This is because one only acts if they are motivated to do that action. A reason can therefore only explain why an action is performed if it has a connection with motivation. One way this connection happens is if the reason originates directly from one's motivations. Williams suggests that these motivations are elements of one's subjective motivational set (S). He provides a few examples of what elements the set contains, such as the desires one has. These desires can be a reason to act in themselves. For instance, the desire to eat candy can motivate an agent to eat candy. The desire is, in this case, a possible reason for eating candy. Reasons therefore have a connection with motivation if the reason stems directly from an element of one's subjective motivational set (S).

Furthermore, the connection with motivation does not need to be egocentric, but they can be altruistic as well (Williams 1981, 105). This might be best shown in other examples of the element in S which Williams provides. These are in regard to the commitments an agent has. It consists of the agent's personal loyalties and the projects they have taken on (1981, 105). A possible example of this could be the commitments one has toward their children. The agent is motivated to take the necessary steps to fulfill these commitments, such as keeping their well-paying job to be able to raise the children as the agent seems fit. Altruistic reasons can thus lead to action, for example because of the element of the commitments one has towards their children.

There is one other example Williams (1981) suggests of the elements in S, which can therefore also lead to reasons. These concern dispositions and patterns of emotions. The examples he mentions of dispositions include those of evaluation, actions, and approval (Williams, 1981, 105-107). For instance, if one has the disposition to protect their friend and their friend gets hurt by somebody else, then the agent might be motivated to attack the other person. In other words, the disposition is a possible reason for the agent to attack.

In sum, Williams suggests that reasons need to have a connection with motivation. More specifically, the reason must have a connection with one's subjective motivational set (S). This set contains multiple elements, such as desires, one's commitments, dispositions, and patterns of emotions. A reason can therefore originate directly from one of these elements. A reason can thus be

the desire for candy, which could lead to the action of eating candy. This type of reason explains the necessary link with motivation directly, as the reason itself is based on the motivations of the agent.

2.1.2 Problem of Depression and Reasons from Needs

Other internalists such as Goldman (2007) agree with Williams that a reason needs to be somehow connected with motivation.³ However, there are cases known where the agent seems to have a reason for an action, without being motivated to do that action. This can happen if the agent has depression, as depressed agents often lack the motivation to act. Therefore, this problem is sometimes called the problem of depression (Spaid 2021; Goldman 2007; Swartzler 2015). To illustrate, Spaid (2021, 7) notices that it seems that a depressed agent has a reason to seek treatment, even if they are unmotivated to get out of bed. As internalism claims that reasons always have a connection to motivation, it must therefore explain how the problem of depression is possible. There are several ways to respond to this problem. For instance, one could argue that it only seems like the depressed agent has a reason, while they do not truly have a reason (Spaid 2021, Goldman 2007). This is because the agent is not motivated to do the action, and therefore this 'reason' cannot explain the action.

One could also argue the opposite by stating that the agent does have a reason. It could be that it only seems like the agent is not motivated, even though they are in fact motivated. One way this can be argued is by using Williams' account, if one states that getting help is a need of the depressed agent. Williams (1981, 105-106) suggests that needs are not necessarily a part of S. However, he also states that it is rarely the case that one does not become motivated by a need, as this means that they do not care about their wellbeing at all. In other words, the desire for their wellbeing leads to the agent being motivated by a need. The depressed agent has therefore most likely a reason to get help, as the motivation comes from a desire and need. The question then remains why the agent does not act.

A possible solution is given by Swartzler (2015, 12-13). Swartzler states that the motivation is suppressed while leaving a desire-like state intact. This is because the depression makes the agent believe that they will not be able to achieve their desire, no matter how hard they try. They then stop desiring things in the full sense of the word. They merely wish that they could do the thing they want to do. As the motivation is only suppressed by a false belief, they still have a reason for that action.

³ Not all of them use S to describe where motivation originates from. To illustrate, Finlay (2006) argues that motivation comes from the cares and concerns one has. For more information on the different origins of motivation, see for example Swartzler (2015), Goldman (2007) and Finlay (2006). However, each internalistic account does argue in favor of the necessary condition that a reason must somehow be connected to motivation.

The depressed agent also fails to act for that same reason. Therefore, the solution to the problem of depression might be that a depressed agent does have motivation, which does indeed create a reason, but the agent fails to act on this reason as the motivation is suppressed by a false belief. This means that even if the agent is depressed, they can still have reasons based on their S through their needs, even if the motivation to bring that action about is suppressed.⁴

2.1.3. Beliefs and Reasons

The second aspect of Williams' account is beliefs. Williams (1981) seems to suggest that reasons not only need to have a connection with S, but also with beliefs. A reason must thus have a connection to both the agent's motivations and beliefs. For instance, a desire for candy is only a reason for the action of eating candy if the agent believes that they have that reason. One must therefore be aware that they have that reason. This is important, as the agent also only acts if they believe that they have a reason to act. A reason must therefore not only have a connection with the agent's motivation, but also with their beliefs.

According to Williams (1981, 102-104) a reason does not need to be based on a true belief. One can thus have a reason even though the belief in that reason is false. Williams mentions: "The difference between false and true beliefs on the agent part cannot alter the form of the explanation which will be appropriate to his action" (Williams 1981, 102). In other words, Williams suggests that a reason could be based on false beliefs, as this still explains why the action is performed. Williams states that there are two ways one might falsely believe in a reason (1981, 103-104). Firstly, one could have a false belief concerning a certain element of S, such as that they do not really have a desire for candy even though they believe they do. This belief in the desire would still be a reason for action, as the belief could still lead the agent to eat some candy. Secondly, one might falsely believe that they do not have a reason for an action. This can either be that they hold the belief that they do not have a reason, or they can even be completely unaware that they have a reason. For instance, one might believe that they do not have a desire for candy, or they might even not have a belief concerning the desire for candy. In those cases the desire cannot lead to an action and are thereby not reasons in Williams' account. The only requirement for a reason is thus that one believes they have a reason. It does not matter if that belief is true.

Furthermore, reasons can also be information other than the elements surrounding S, which

⁴ Whether this makes the inaction irrational is a different debate. However, to avoid any confusion, a quick explanation will be given. As mentioned, Swartzner argues that the suppression of motivation happens because of a false belief. As one will see in the section about rationality, one can still act rational even if they act on a false belief. Therefore, the depressed agent might indeed have a reason to act, but this does not mean that they are irrational for not acting on them as this is based on a false belief.

one believes to be true. This is because a belief can be formed by the elements of S and this reason has thereby the connection with both beliefs and motivation. Williams (1981, 106-107) explains this by using the example of a young man named Owen Wingrave. His father tells him that he should join the army, as it is a longstanding family tradition. Whether Owen believes this to be a reason to join the army depends on his S. To illustrate, he could have the disposition to believe his father, as he is an authority figure. If this is the case, then the belief that 'joining the army is family tradition' can be a reason for Owen to join the army. However, if Owen does not have such a disposition or another element in S that makes him believe this reason is a good reason for that action, then this is not truly a reason for Owen to join the army. A belief is thus formed through motivation, which makes it a possible reason for an action.

Williams (1981, 107) goes even a step further by arguing that an agent can sometimes also believe that they have a reason without knowing what that reason is. An example of this could be that Owen's father tells him that he should go join the army without giving an explanation. Owen then does not really know the reason why he joins the army, except for the fact that his father believes it is the best action for him. Owen's reason is then based on his disposition to trust his father. The agent thereby does not even need to know the true reason, as only the father knows this. One only needs to believe that there is a reason to perform that action, whatever that reason may be.

In sum, a reason is only a reason for action if it is connected to one's motivations, meaning the elements of S, and their beliefs. This can happen if one is aware of their elements of S or if the belief in the reason is formed through S. It does not matter if the agent has a false belief, as this belief can still explain why the action is performed. It is therefore still a reason for action. One also does not need to be truly aware of the reason itself, but they only need to believe that they have a reason.

2.1.4. Deliberation and Reasons

The last aspect of Williams' account is deliberation. One can use deliberation to change or create reasons. To do this, one uses the other aspects of the account, namely the existing beliefs and motivations. As these are already based on the two other aspects, the necessary connections are already made. All deliberation in Williams' account uses a means to an end approach. To illustrate, one can create a new (belief concerning an) element of S by deliberating about a specific element. More specifically, one could deliberate about the best way to satisfy an element such as a desire (Williams 1981, 104). To illustrate, one might desire candy while realizing that they do not have any. If the agent believes that they could get some in the store, then this might create the desire to go to the store. Deliberation can thus create a new desire.

Williams (1981) also mentions other examples of deliberation. This includes the example of combining different elements of S (Williams 1981, 104). This can happen if one is deliberating what

they could do that day. They might have different desires at that point, including the desire to listen to a podcast and the desire to go on a hike. The agent can deliberate and realize that they can combine these desires. As one believes that they can fulfill two desires at once, they become motivated to do that action. In other words, it changes two reasons into one new reason.

Another example is weighing different elements of S in case of a conflict between them (Williams 1981, 104). This can be weighing short-term desires against long-term desires. For instance, one could have a short-term desire for candy, while having the long-term desire to be healthy. The agent needs to decide which one they should comply with. If they decide that being healthy is more important to them, then that is a reason to refrain from eating candy. The created reason thus is that a desire, such as being healthy, is more important than another desire, in this case the desire for candy.

Additionally, an agent can also change and create beliefs which do not concern S directly through deliberation. This has already been shown in part with the example of Owen joining the army, as the father tried to persuade Owen by creating the belief (and thus potential reason) that it is family tradition. This is then indirectly connected to motivation, as the potential belief in this reason is created by an element of S. According to Williams, a conversation in which one tries to persuade another person counts as deliberation (Williams 1981, 104-105). It seems logical that persuasion can also change a belief. To illustrate, a friend could point out that one holds a false belief. The agent can then change the belief accordingly. Persuasion can thus change or create a belief.

There are more ways one can deliberate to change or create beliefs. For instance, one can reflect on their beliefs (Williams 1981, 104). This means that one should be able to realize if they made a mistake critically examining the beliefs they hold. The belief is then changed to their new belief. Furthermore, Williams (1981, 105) notes that an agent can imagine different options and what they would be like. These can create new beliefs, as one might have not realized a certain option before. It could also change a belief, as one might realize that they prefer one option over another. One can thus deliberate to change or create their beliefs by being persuaded by others, or they can use reflection or their imagination.

This aspect complicates the account, as the other aspects or reasons can influence each other. There is thus an interaction between the two. For example, one could desire candy and desire to be healthy, while believing that eating candy is bad for their health. They might decide through a deliberation process that not eating the candy is the better option and opt for a tomato instead. They have thus created a new desire, which is an element of S, by believing it to be the better option (Williams 1981, 108-109). In other words, through deliberation, the aspects of S and beliefs can influence each other. This means that new reasons are created which are believed by the agent, while also having the necessary connection with motivation.

2.1.5. Conclusion Reasons

According to internalism, reasons need to have a connection with something that motivates the agent. Williams argues that a reason can originate directly in one's subjective motivational set (S). The problem of depression showed that the motivation might not need to be experienced by the agent, as the motivation can be suppressed. The second requirement for a reason is that the agent must believe the reason to be true. This means that a reason can be based on false beliefs. As beliefs can form through one's S, such as a certain disposition, a reason can be any information one comes to believe. This information is thus a reason, as it is believed by the agent and has a connection to one's motivation. Furthermore, as seen with deliberation, this believed information, or reason, can be used to deliberate how to (best) satisfy an element of S. This can create new reasons or change existing reasons for action. To illustrate, two reasons can change into a one new reason, as one realizes that they satisfy two desires at the same time. Doing those actions thus become more appealing than other actions, which makes it another reason the agent now has. It can therefore be concluded that the requirements for a reason in Williams' account are that the reason must be believed by an agent, and it must also have a connection to their motivations. This is because only then can they explain how a reason can lead to an action. This happens if the reason either originates directly from S which the agent is aware of, if it is a belief that has formed through S and/or one has deliberated about it. As these all happen internally to the agent, Williams argues that internal reasons exist.

2.2 Rational Action According to Williams

As discussed, Williams suggests that a reason must have a connection with one's motivations and the agent must also believe that they have that reason. However, an action is not necessarily rational if one has a reason for that action. It seems that Williams (1981) suggests that there are two things needed for a rational action. Firstly, an action can only be rational if one has deliberated about that action. Having a reason is therefore not enough. Secondly, Williams seems to suggest that one can only act truly rational if the action is based on a true belief. This is therefore different than a reason in itself, as a reason can be based on a false belief. However, a criticism will also be discussed as to why this might be a wrong requirement for a rational action. It will be concluded that an action is rational if one has reasons which consist of motivations and beliefs and if the agent has deliberated with those reasons.

2.2.1. Deliberation and Rational Action

According to Williams (1981), an action is only rational if one has deliberated with their reasons. The same types of deliberation concerning reasons can be used for deliberating in regard to an action. To

reiterate, deliberation can be multiple things, such as the deliberating regarding how (best) to satisfy an element of *S*, combining and weighing different elements of *S*, being persuaded in a conversation, reflecting on either *S* or beliefs and imagining options.

The requirement of deliberation for a rational action means that having a reason for an action does not necessarily equal the action as being rational. This is contrary to what some believe (Brunero 2017). This could mean that a lot of actions would be considered rational, which most people consider irrational. The argument Brunero (2017) mentions goes as follows. If reasons can be anything the agent believes and is motivated to do, then actions based on those reasons would be rational, even if those reasons are not in one's own best interest. To illustrate, in the example concerning hitting a person who hurt the agent's friend, the reason was the disposition to protect their friends. According to Brunero, hitting that person would be rational in Williams' account, as they have a reason to do it. However, while this might be a reason, this does not mean that it is rational. For instance, the agent could also hold the belief that aggression of any kind is wrong. The deliberation between reasons -weighing the disposition and belief- then dictates if the action is rational.

2.2.2. False beliefs & Rational Action

As mentioned in the subsection called Beliefs, false beliefs can be reasons. However, it seems that a false belief does somewhat change the rationality of an action in Williams' (1981) account. Williams suggests that an action is only truly a rational action, if all the beliefs are true. To explain this, he uses an example of a person who wants to drink from a bottle as they believe it contains gin, even though it actually contains petrol (Williams 1981, 102-103). The agent believes they desire to drink from the bottle, as they have deliberated on how to satisfy their desire for gin. In theory, this would make the action rational. However, the desire for gin will not be satisfied. As drinking from the bottle will not satisfy the desire, it is not rational to drink from the bottle. Williams proposes that the agent in this case acts rationally relative to the false belief by drinking from the bottle, as the agent deliberated and had (falsely believed) reasons to drink from the bottle (1981, 103).

While it might seem intuitively correct that one must have true beliefs to act truly rational, it does pose a problem. The problem here lies in the fact that people do not have perfect knowledge, while this would be necessary in Williams' account to act truly rational. Mayo (1986, 151) notices that we rarely, if ever, know everything about the decision. For example, all the possible consequences of an action. People can try to predict these, but nobody knows for sure what the (possible) future looks like. In other words, people do not have perfect knowledge. In the case of the consequences of an action, an agent only knows afterward if they did not have a false belief concerning the action that they performed. It is therefore a gamble for the agent as to which action would be the best to

perform in the moment the agent is choosing. As it is a gamble, the action can only be accidentally rational (Mayo 1986, 151). In other words, if a necessary condition of rationality is that the action is not based on false beliefs, then a rational action can only happen by accident.

This is problematic because rationality seems to presuppose intentionality (Schnädelbach 2002). Rationality can therefore not be on accident. To illustrate, if an agent accidentally knocks a glass off the table, one does not consider the rationality of the action. On the contrary, if the agent throws the glass on purpose, which they need intentionality for, then one might consider the rationality of that action. In other words, the only way that an action can be considered rational is if the agent has the intent to do the action. Therefore, there is no such thing as acting 'accidentally' rational.

As most or all of people's actions are based on imperfect knowledge, and one cannot act rational by accident, then all the actions humans perform cannot be considered rational if one cannot have false beliefs (Mayo 1986, 151). One could therefore either accept that people cannot act truly rational, or that perfect knowledge is not necessary. As it seems intuitively correct that people are rational, perfect knowledge cannot be a part of the definition of rationality. Williams is thus probably too strict by stating that an action can only be relatively rational if one has a false belief, as this would mean that no action performed by a person is truly rational.

Mayo suggests that instead of rationality requiring the agent to have perfect knowledge, it could require that the action is based on the "best available evidence to them" (Mayo 1986, 151). One can argue that this means that the agent must have deliberated. For instance, one must have reflected on their beliefs to decide if they are most likely a true belief or not. According to Mayo, one does not necessarily need to be certain that their belief is true. This depends on the situation. The beliefs need to be held as profoundly and unambiguously as the situation calls for (Mayo 1986, 153). A possible example is when one is deciding what they want to eat for dinner. The beliefs concerning the agent's desires for types of food do not really matter, as it does not really matter what the agent eats. However, if one knows they are lactose intolerant, and they believe that they want something with a lot of cheese, then they should also make sure they realize what the consequences are. This belief then might lead them to reconsider the desire for cheese. An action can thus be rational, even if it is based on a false belief. However, one should act on the reasons they believe are the best available evidence as needed for that situation.

2.2.3. Conclusion Rational Action

In sum, there is a difference in Williams' account between having a reason for action and that action being rational. Williams suggests that a true rational action is one where the agent has deliberated

with their internal reasons, and it is not based on any false beliefs. If the action is based on a false belief, then this action is rational relative to that false belief. While this is the account of Williams, the requirement for true beliefs for a true rational action is too strict. This would either mean that people only act relatively rational, or that people do not act rational at all. Both are against the intuitive correct idea that people can be rational. Therefore, a better understanding of a rational action while using internalism is that the agent must have deliberated using internal reasons, and they must have considered, meaning deliberated, about their beliefs and how correct they need to be for that specific situation.

2.3 Conclusion Williams' Internalism

In sum, in Williams' account a rational action is based on reasons. William therefore argues that one must be able to explain how a reason leads to a (potential) rational action. One can only do this by explaining the connection between a reason and motivation, as an agent will only act if they are motivated. One way this connection is possible is by stating that a reason originates directly from one's subjective motivational set (S). As these reasons depend on the agent's motivations, these are internal reasons. One could argue that in the case of depression agent's do not have motivations, while they do have reasons. A solution has been given by stating that they do have motivation, possibly through a need, but that the motivation is suppressed. Furthermore, a reason can only lead to an action if the agent believes that reason to be true. An agent will not act on a reason they do not believe to be true. An agent can, however, act on a false belief. These are therefore also reasons for action. It also means that the reasons are internal, as they depend on what the agent believes. As reasons must also have a connection with S, they can concern beliefs in regard to S and other information that one comes to believe through an element of S. Lastly, one can also deliberate about reasons. This can lead to new reasons or change existing ones. As these are based on the motivations and beliefs an agent has, both the requirements for reasons are fulfilled. Williams has thus argued that a rational action is based on internal reasons, as they are reasons an agent somehow believes to be true, and which have some connection with one's S, which could happen through deliberation.

However, one must not confuse the difference between rational action and reasons in Williams' account. It might seem that an action is rational if the agent has reasons to do so, but this is not true. The agent must also deliberate about their action, for example by weighing different reasons. Williams also suggests that a true rational action is not based on false beliefs. While this is in line with the aspect of deliberation, as one can also reflect on their beliefs, it is too strict for an account of rationality. If this were to be the case, then people either must have perfect knowledge or people cannot act truly rational. Therefore, a better requirement is that an agent must act on the

best available evidence needed for that specific situation. An agent might thus have a false belief and still act rational, for example if they chose to eat something while actually desiring something else. A correct explanation of internalism is thus that a rational action is an action based on internal reasons which one has deliberated with, and depending on the situation, can be based on false beliefs. However, some argue that external reasons also exist. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

3. Externalism and the Confusion of Internalism

Whereas the previous chapter explored internalism, this chapter focuses on the debate between externalism and internalism. This is needed to discuss in the next chapter the reasons which might or might not lead rational suicide. The debate concerns the existence of external reasons, and how they might influence the rationality of an action (Williams 1981; Swartz 2015; Goldman 2007; Spaid 2021; Finlay 2006; Lubin 2009). This is because externalism agrees with internalism that internal reasons exist. However, externalism suggests that external reasons also exist. These are reasons which exist independently of a specific agent. For example, the rules of chess provide reasons as to why one should make a certain move when playing chess (Finlay 2006). It does not depend on a specific agent whether these reasons exist or not. Externalism also suggests that one should also act in accordance with these external reasons in order to act rational. In the example of chess, one can only act rationally if they act in accordance with the rules of chess.

This chapter begins by analyzing why internalism claims that external reasons cannot exist by exploring why internalist disagree with the arguments made by externalism. While one might already realize that external reasons cannot exist in an account like Williams since they cannot explain why a rational action is performed, the counterarguments from internalism do explain in more depth why this is the case. One argument concerns the possibility of judging another agent's action as an observer, which is supposedly only possible if external reasons exist. Williams himself disagrees with this because one cannot assume one believes something to be the case. Another argument is therefore analyzed, which Alan Goldman (2007) tries to disprove. It states that external reasons must exist as certain states of affairs, meaning facts, exist. It will become clear that even if it is obvious that an agent believes these reasons to be true, it does not mean that the agent becomes motivated to do an action. Internalism thus argues that external reasons cannot exist since they cannot explain why an action is performed.

While internalism is correct that external reasons do not explain an action, it feels wrong to state that certain possible reasons, such as state of affairs, do not exist. A solution is authored by Steven Finlay (2006). He suggests that external reasons do exist, but that they do not dictate if an action is rational. This is possible through a small difference between Finlay's and Williams account on the definition of reasons. It will become clear that the confusion lays in assuming that every reason should explain why a specific agent does a certain action, as this does not need to be the case. To fully comprehend this confusion, it is necessary to first examine why internalist suggest that external reasons do not exist.

3.1 External Reasons According to Internalism

To be able to understand in the next section where the confusion of internalists such as Bernard Williams (1981) and Alan Goldman (2007) originates, one must know why they believe that external reasons do not exist. This will be shown in this chapter by analyzing two arguments in favor of external reasons. Firstly, an externalist could argue that external reasons must exist, as it supposedly explains how judgment of another agent's action is possible. Williams rebottles this by stating that one cannot explain how that agent could know the reason exist. In other words, a reason cannot lead to action if one does not believe that reason. Williams argues that one can only judge another's action by attributing reasons. This therefore does not mean that the judgment is correct. A second way of trying to explain the existence of external reasons is prompted by Alan Goldman (2007). External reasons could be state of affairs, meaning facts. These exist independently of the beliefs of a specific agent.⁵ Furthermore, sometimes one can assume that believing in them would be the best available evidence to an agent. However, these reasons do not need to explain why an agent would be motivated.⁶ It will therefore be concluded that external reasons do not exist, as they do not explain why the agent performs a (potential) rational action. As mentioned, this will be discussed first by exploring Williams' counterargument regarding the ability to judge.

3.1.1. Judgment and Williams' Counterargument

One way externalism argues in favor of the existence of external reasons is that it leaves room for people to judge the rationality of another's actions. Agents who observe an action of another agent often judge the rationality of that action. It seems therefore intuitively correct that an account of rationality must explain why this happens. Externalism argues that this happens because one can judge an action based on external reasons (Finlay 2006, Williams 1981). This is because externalism argues that an action is only rational if the agent acts in accordance with an external reason (Finlay 2006). If the agent fails to do so, then observers can judge that the action is irrational. To illustrate, if the agent does not act in accordance with moral reasons, then other people judge the action as

⁵ Unless one follows the well-known argument of philosophers such as Berkeley, where something only exists if it is perceived. However, most people do seem to believe that facts exist. Furthermore, it seems that at least some facts are perceived by multiple people, which can lead one to argue that these facts exist independently of a specific agent.

⁶ It must be stated that not only accounts of internalism assume reasons should be connected to beliefs and motivations. For example, Lubin (2009) tries to find external reasons which also connected to an agent's motivations. However, he believes this is necessary as he assumes that Williams is correct in stating that all reasons should be able to explain an action. A clearer example can thus be given by examining the claim through internalism.

irrational (Finlay 2006).⁷ The claim is that internalism cannot explain this judgment, as the accounts suggest that any rational action is solely based on the motivations, beliefs, and deliberation process of the agent. Without knowing these, one cannot judge the actions of another agent. As the ability to judge seems intuitively correct, internalism should explain how somebody can judge the action of another agent.

However, Williams argues that the intuitive correct claim is incorrect. He suggests that one might feel that they can judge the action of another agent, but that does not mean that the action is truly irrational. According to Williams, this is because there is a difference between “A has a reason to ...” and “There is a reason for A to ...” (Williams 1981). The former concerns the reasons A actually has, while the latter are the (external) reasons other people attribute to A. The judgment happens based on the attributed reasons. According to Williams, the problem lies in the fact that

Williams argues that these ascribed reasons cannot explain why the agent would act. As mentioned in the last chapter, Williams suggest that a rational action is one which is based on internal reasons the agent has deliberated with. One of the requirements of these reasons is that they must be believed by the agent, as only this can explain why the agent has acted. In the example of Owen, it became clear that Owen must be aware of the potential reason of family tradition to join the army. Furthermore, he must also believe that it is a good reason to become motivated. An attributed reason does not necessarily mean that the agent also believes this reason. Williams thus states that an observer cannot judge the rationality of another agent’s action, as the attributed reasons one uses to judge cannot explain why that action is performed. In other words, it is not possible to judge the rationality of another one’s actions, as reasons and rationality are agent dependent. The observer might feel like they can judge the action, but Williams believes that this feeling is wrong.

3.1.2. State of Affairs

One can argue that judgment might still be possible, as there are at least sometimes reasons one can ascribe to an agent. This is because there are facts, or state of affairs, that are most likely believed by that agent. To illustrate, Goldman (2007, 712-714) uses the example of bad weather. This is an external reason, as it exists independently of the beliefs and motivations of a specific agent. One can argue that these types of facts are also the best available evidence to any agent, as one does not

⁷ Whether moral reasons are truly external reasons will be discussed in chapter 4 ‘Reasons from the Literature Concerning Rational Suicide’. At this time, one must know that multiple philosophers believe that moral reasons are indeed external reasons (Finlay 2006; Swartzler 2015; Spaid 2021). However, moral reasons are a good example of reasons people use to judge the rationality of another one’s actions, as people often believe that one cannot act rational if they do not act in line with those moral reasons (Finlay 2006).

need to deliberate about the weather to know that it is bad weather. If one goes outside and it is raining, then the agent most likely will believe that it is raining. One can thus assume that the agent believes this fact.

Goldman mentions that externalism believes that one can also assume that an agent wants to act in line with that fact (2007). In his example, an agent wanted to play tennis, but the external reason of bad weather should make the agent demotivated to do it. In other words, in an externalistic account an observer can assume that the agent is demotivated to play tennis if the weather is bad based on an attributed belief. The point of this argument is that one's motivation can be impacted by facts, meaning state of affairs, which exist independent of a specific agent.

There is a problem Goldman (2007, 727-728) notices with this argument. There are no objective values which dictate which action is always and for everybody the best action to do. In other words, a fact by itself does not necessarily determine what an agent needs to do. This can be shown by using Goldman's example of tennis while following the externalistic argument he mentions. If externalism is correct, then it would mean that an agent can only play tennis if it is not raining, or else they are irrational. At the same time, it would be rational to play tennis if the sun is shining, no matter what. One could argue that this is not true since it could be irrational to play tennis, even if the weather is nice. To illustrate, if the person has broken their back, then playing tennis could harm that person. Therefore, stating that the fact that it is 'nice weather outside' should lead to the motivation to play tennis is wrong. It depends on the agent and their situation. Even though facts or state of affairs might exist, they cannot lead to action. An internalist like Goldman therefore believes that they are not reasons as the connection with motivation cannot be explained. One can therefore also not judge based on this external reason.

Furthermore, the difference between the judgment and the true rationality can also happen, as the agent might have internal reason which dictates which option is the best to do. An agent can thus act rationally based on an internal reason even if they act contradictory to an external reason. If one does not know this internal reason, then the action might seem irrational. To illustrate, an external reason is that cherry tomatoes have great nutritional value. This is an external reason since this is true independent of an agent. One might therefore say that cherry tomatoes are a better snack than candy as that is the healthier option. However, if an agent wants to gain weight as they are (or believe to be) underweight, then candy might be a better choice to eat. The agent thus acts rational based on an internal reason, namely the desire to gain weight, while acting contradictory to an external reason. If the observer does not know this internal reason, then they might judge the action as irrational. In other words, an action might be rational even if others judge it as irrational, as it depends on the agent's situation and motivations.

3.1.3. Conclusion External Reasons According to Internalism

In sum, internalist such as Williams and Goldman reject the claim of externalism that external reasons exist. This is because these reasons cannot explain why the agent acts. Williams has explained this by criticizing the argument of judgment by externalism. He states that one can only ascribe reasons to an acting agent, as one cannot know what this agent believes. An externalist could also argue that sometimes an observer could assume that the agent has certain beliefs, as it is likely that they believe in the state of affairs, or facts. This is where Goldman's argument comes into play. He suggests that state of affairs might exist, but that they are not reasons. This is because there are no objective values to dictate which action is the best action to do. State of affairs cannot thereby not explain why an agent acts, as it cannot explain why they would be motivated. Moreover, one can also not assume that the agent does not have any other (internal) reasons, which could mean that another action would be better for them. Therefore, even if an observer could assume that an agent has certain beliefs surrounding the state of affairs, they cannot assume that the agent becomes motivated. Internalist such as Williams and Goldman thus suggest that external reasons cannot exist since the (potential) rational action cannot be explained by the assumption that an agent has certain beliefs or that a certain state of affairs necessarily leads an agent to become motivated. Whether this is true will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Confusion Internalism

Finlay (2006) argues that the other accounts of internalism are mistaken about the nonexistence of external reasons.⁸ As discussed, internalists like Williams and Goldman claim that external reasons do not exist since they cannot explain why a rational action is performed. They believe this is important, as a rational action is based on reason, which means a reason should explain why that action is performed. The only way they believe that 'external' reasons can influence an action is when the agent believes that reason and is motivated by that reason. For example, a fact could lead to an action if the agent is aware of that fact and wants to act in accordance with the fact. They therefore claim that only internal reasons exist. This section explores the account by Steven Finlay (2006) which suggests that internalist like Williams are confused, as some external reasons do truly exist. This argument will be discussed first by showing where Williams might have made his mistake. It will become clear that the confusion of internalism is based on its definition of reasons. While this makes external reasons possible to exist, Finlay does agree that the rationality of an action does indeed

⁸ Lubin (2009, 279-281) suggests Finlay's account is one of externalism, as Finlay argues in favor of the existence of external reasons. However, Finlay calls his own account one of internalism (2006, 19). Therefore it has been chosen to call his account one of internalism as well in this thesis.

depend on a specific agent, their motivations, and beliefs since only this can explain why the agent acts. Why this is correct will be discussed in the second subsection. Lastly, Finlay argues that one can still truly judge another one's action. This is explored in the last subsection. However, to comprehend Finlay's ideas, one must first understand why external reasons do exist.

2.2.1 Existence of External Reasons

While Finlay agrees with Williams and Goldman that the rationality of an action depends on the agent, he does not agree that this means that external reasons do not exist. This is possible because Finlay uses a different definition of reasons and rational action. He suggests that reasons are end-relational, which means that a reason is always connected to an end. In other words, a reason always has a relation to a certain goal. This mostly fits Williams' ideas. To illustrate, an example concerning internal reasons might be that the reason to eat candy is the desire for candy, which has the end of satisfying the desire. This reason could lead to an action if the agent wants to satisfy the desire. It also might not lead to an action, for example if the agent also has the desire to be healthy and believes that apples would be a better option. Finlay (2006) argues that the desire for candy is still a reason, even if the agent does not act on it. It seems that Williams would agree with this, as he also distinguishes between reasons that potentially lead to action, such as desires, and reasons that do lead to rational actions. Williams (1981) does not state that a desire must be completely gone after deliberation, meaning that it is not a reason anymore. He therefore seems to agree with Finlay that a reason does not necessarily need to lead to an action.

The difference between Finlay and Williams is that Finlay (2006) suggests that some of these ends, and therefore some reasons, exist independently of the specific agent. For example, the fact that apples are healthy as they contain nutrients does not change depending on the agent's beliefs or if they have the end, meaning desire, of being healthy.⁹ This end still exists, even if the particular agent does not hold it. The reason of apples being healthy could thus potentially lead to an action, if the agent has the goal of being healthy and believes the reason to be true. However, Finlay (2006) suggests that this leading to an action is part of rationality itself, just like what happens with deliberation and internal reasons as Williams suggests. As an internal reason can still be a reason even if it does not necessarily lead to an action, it seems logical to state that an external reason also

⁹ It is of course possible that one has an apple allergy which makes apples not healthy. However, this example is discussed as one might better understand the differences between Finlay and Williams, since it is in line with the example given concerning internal reasons. If one disagrees with the idea that apples are healthy, two options are possible. Firstly, one could state that apples are healthy for most people, even though most people would state the reason for eating an apple is 'they are healthy' instead of 'they are healthy for most people/me'. Secondly, one could use the example of rain discussed in Goldman's argument as an external reason. It does not matter if the agent believes that it rains or is motivated (or demotivated) by it, as this does not change the fact that it rains.

does not need to lead to an action. They can therefore still exist without needing to explain how they impact the rationality of an action.

Moreover, Finlay (2006) suggests that other external reasons than state of affairs, or facts, also exist. These ends exist because they are connected to an institution. Examples of this are morality, the law, and games (Finlay 2006, 5). The reasons that are connected to such ends also exist independently of a specific agent. This is because their existence does not depend on what the agent believes or is motivated by. Therefore, external reasons exist as state of affairs, and when they are connected to an institution.

2.2.2. Rational Action

While Finlay (2006) proposes that external reasons exist, he also states that they do not matter for rationality. This is because the rationality of an action depends on the agent, as it depends on the context. Finlay explains this by using the example of playing chess. Normally, one has the end of winning the game. However, in this example the opponent is known for becoming violent if they lose. In that case, one might not want to win. Thus, whether the end is to win or to keep oneself safe depends on the context (Finlay 2006, 9-12). In other words, the rationality of an action depends on which end is most important in a certain context and whether one follows the corresponding reasons.

Which end is the most important in a situation, or context, depends on the agent. According to Finlay (2006) this importance stems from what that agent has cares or concerns about. This thing or object is then derivatively and/or instrumentally important to the agent. In other words, the importance of something is derived from, and/or instrumental to, a care or concern. An example Finlay gives is the concern one has for their children, which makes their children important to them (Finlay 2006, 17). The end of their children's wellbeing is thus important for them. Furthermore, the connection between importance and cares or concerns also works the other way around. This means that the cares and concerns might arise from what the agent deems important. Finlay does not give an example of this. However, one can imagine that if an agent deems their health important, then something that influences their health can become a concern or a care. In other words, they care about achieving that end. Therefore, which end is to be pursued depends on the cares and concerns an agent has.

The condition of importance also explains the connection with motivation (Finlay 2006, 17). One is motivated to the action because they deem the reason to be important. This reason is important, as it relates to an end. This does not need to be an existing end. The reason could create a new end, as shown in the example of smoking. One can become motivated to stop smoking upon noticing their deteriorating health, even though they did not care about their health before. Finlay's account thereby addresses the problem of motivation as discussed with Goldman, since a new belief

could lead an agent to become motivated by different reasons.

Furthermore, Finlay agrees with the internalists like Williams and Goldman that this motivation also depends on the beliefs of the agent. Finlay might even be more lenient than Williams, as he states that a false belief does not impact the rationality of an action at all. He thus suggests that a false belief does not make the action relatively rational, it is just rational. This is because one can only consider a reason if they believe that reason to be true. Only if this is the case can the agent be motivated by it. This is not only the case for false beliefs, as Finlay agrees with Williams that one must also be aware of the reason to be motivated by it.

Lastly, it does not matter if the reason connects to something they already deem as important, or if new information raises a new care or concern. In other words, it does not matter if they are connected to an existing end, or if they give rise to a new end. For example, if an agent never cared about their health, but after many years of smoking they feel their body deteriorating, then the agent might become concerned. This could change the way they feel and think about their health, which leads to their health becoming important to them. The concern the agent has thus leads to a new end, namely being healthy. This is based the reason that their health is deteriorating, as this is what raises the concern.

This new end of wanting to be healthy could also lead to new reasons, as this end has now become important to the agent. For instance, they might start to exercise more. In other words, this end now creates new things that concerns the agent or that the agent cares about.

In sum, Finlay argues that the rationality of an action depends on the ends of the agent within a context, which depends on the beliefs and motivations the agent has. A reason thus does not need to show the connection with motivations and beliefs, as this connection is made in the ends of the agent. The rationality of an action thus depends on the agent's ends, and not on the external reasons that exist. Finlay therefore concludes that external reasons exist, but that they do not matter for rational action.

2.2.3. Judgment

One might wonder what Finlay believes about the intuitively correct claim of externalism that one can judge the action of another agent. It might seem impossible in this account to judge, as the rationality of an action depends on the agent. However, Finlay argues that one can truly judge another's action (Finlay 2006, 17-18). This is due to a small difference with Williams' account. To recap, both philosophers believe that the rationality of an action depends on the agent. An action can thus be rational, while someone other than the agent judges it as being irrational. Williams proposes that one only feels like they can judge the rationality of another's action. They do this by attributing reasons to the agent. However, these reasons are not the true reasons the agent acts upon. William

thus claims that one cannot truly judge another's actions.

The solution proposed by Finlay (2006) is that the rationality of an action is a matter of perspective. According to Finlay, it is possible that an action is rational for the agent to perform, while another agent judges it as irrational. Both the agents are thus correct, which means that the action is both rational and irrational at the same time. This is possible precisely because the rationality of an action is agent dependent. Each agent can have different beliefs concerning which end is important in that situation. As a specific end dictates which action is rational, more than one action could be rational in a certain situation. The rationality of an action is thus based on the perspective – meaning beliefs- one holds to be true.

To illustrate, Finlay argues that an agent might want to make a winning move in chess, as they want to win the game. An observer on the other hand, such as a friend, might believe that this is irrational as they know the opponent is notorious for being a bad loser. This friend thus judges the winning move to be irrational, as the end of (their friend) being safe is more important to them. Moreover, multiple agents might have different beliefs concerning a reason. They can either believe the reason to be true, false, or they can be unaware that that reason exists. In the example of chess, the agent who is playing might change which end is important if their friend tells them about the aggression of their opponent. Which end one deems to be more important thus dictates which action is rational, which depends on the beliefs they hold concerning reasons. Multiple agents can thus judge the rationality of an action differently since the perspective -meaning the beliefs regarding the situation, most important end and reasons- can differ between agents. This means that an action can be rational for one agent, while being irrational for another agent.

2.2.4. Conclusion Confusion Internalism

It has been shown that philosophers such as Williams are confused about the existence of external reasons, as they believe that all reasons must potentially be able to explain why the agent acts. On the contrary, Finlay argues that all reasons must be end-relational, meaning that they need to explain how they are related to a certain goal. This is mostly in line with Williams, as some ends could be the satisfaction of the elements of S. The difference is that Finlay suggests that there are also ends and therefore reasons which exist independent of an agent's S. To illustrate, there are reasons for action which depend on the existence of an institution such as morality. These reasons therefore do not depend on a specific agent, which makes them external reasons.

While Finlay suggests that external reasons exist, he does not believe that one must act in accordance with an external reason to act rational. This is because the rationality of an action depends on which end in a certain situation, or context, is important to the agent. Furthermore, what is important to an agent depends in part on the beliefs they hold. Finlay thus also agrees with

Williams that the rationality of an action depends on the agent. Furthermore, Finlay argues that this agent dependent of rational action is exactly why judgment is possible. Since it is possible that multiple agents believe different ends to be important, it is also possible that an action is rational for one agent and at the same time irrational for another agent. Therefore, it is concluded that external reasons exist, but the rationality of an action depends on the agent.

3.3 Conclusion Externalism and the Confusion of Internalism

The chapters thus far have analyzed what the relationship between different and rational action is. More specifically, they have explored how different type of reasons could potentially lead to rational action. This chapter showed that external reasons cannot explain why any action is performed, which also means that they cannot explain why a rational action is executed. This has been shown in part by Williams' counterargument on the argument concerning judgment. Williams argues that the observer can attribute reasons to an agent, but these attributions do not explain why the agent would act. This is because they do not explain the agent's beliefs, and therefore also does not explain why the agent is motivated to act. One could also argue that facts, or state of affairs, exist independently of an agent and can at least in some cases assumed that the agent believes them. Goldman argues that one can argue that facts exist, but they do not dictate which action is always and for everybody the best action to do. This is because are no objective values. In other words, whether an action is rational depends on the agent, and their situation. Williams and Goldman thus argue that external reasons do not exist, as it cannot explain why a rational action is performed.

However, Finlay suggests that the internalist such as Williams are confused about the existence of external reasons, while he also agrees with them that those reasons cannot explain a rational action. This is possible as Finlay makes a different distinction between reasons and rational action as Williams does. Williams suggests that a reason should always explain why an action is performed. Finlay, on the other hand, claims that a reason only needs to be end-relational, meaning that the reason should somehow lead to an end or goal. As there are certain reasons and ends that exist independently of an agent, Finlay concludes that external reasons exist. However, the rationality of an action depends on which end an agent tries to achieve. Rational action is therefore agent dependent.

According to Finlay, this dependency of rational action is also exactly the reason one can judge the action of another agent. This is because the rationality of an action depends on the perspective, meaning which motivations and beliefs are used, one has. An action can therefore be rational and irrational at the same time. The confusion thus lies in the fact that Williams suggest that every reason must be able to explain why an action is performed as it should be able to explain why a

rational action is performed, while it seems that only some reasons need to be able to explain an action. Finlay thus concludes that external reasons exist, but that rational action depends on the agent's beliefs and motivations in a certain situation. If it is indeed possible that a suicide can be rational will be discussed in the next chapter.

4. Reasons from the Literature Concerning Rational Suicide

This chapter will explore the arguments given in the literature concerning the debate surrounding the existence of rational suicide. More specifically, the different reasons the authors suggest will be analyzed, which supposedly make a suicide (almost) never rational or, in one case rational. However, it is noticeable that most of the literature does not discuss a definition of rationality nor rational action. For instance, not all arguments distinguish between reasons and rational action. While it has already been mentioned that rational action is always based on reasons, it has also been discussed that not every reason leads to a rational action. To illustrate, being angry might be a reason to act, but that does not mean that the action is rational. Therefore, some of these arguments might be false, as they do not make this distinction between reasons and rational action. In analyzing this debate an answer will be given concerning the question whether a suicide can ever be rational and, if so, under which circumstances.

To analyze the argument and specifically the reasons given, this chapter uses the division between external and internal reasons. As discussed, external reasons do not influence the rationality of an action, as only internal reasons can lead an agent to act. External reasons therefore cannot explain why an action is performed. However, the authors of these arguments claim that the reasons they provide apply to every agent. One could paraphrase this as the authors judge any suicide to be irrational, with one exception under strict circumstances. The reasons they mention are thus discussed as external reasons every agent should act in accordance with. To be able to analyze the reasons as they are intended, one must therefore explore them as external reasons. This happens in the first section.

Of course, it will also be shown why these reasons might not mean that (almost) every suicide is irrational. This mostly happens because of possible different beliefs, since one can assume that, in most cases, the agent is motivated to stay alive. This is because of what Williams already mentioned about needs. One can assume that, in most cases, one's wellbeing motivates an agent. One can also argue that, in most cases, one is well if they are alive. Therefore, the first section focuses on external reasons and particularly on the different beliefs which could change the possibility of the existence of rational suicide. It will be concluded in this section that the argument that suicides are never or at least almost never rational are false, as they believe that some reasons have an externalistic nature that every agent should follow. In other words, they do not differentiate between (possible) reasons and rational action.

The other side of the debate concerning rational suicide are the arguments which would make suicide rational if the agent has certain reasons. These seem to have an approach which is more in line with internalism. For instance, they are more concerned about the specific agent and their

experiences, meaning their perception of the situation. Moreover, these arguments make a distinction between reasons and rational action, as one must also deliberate about their action. These are explored in the second section.

4.1 External Reasons Rational Suicide

This section will discuss a few examples of the external reasons given in the literature about rational suicide. These reasons are therefore independent of a specific agent. This means that they exist without an agent needing to believe them or being motivated by them. As discussed in the chapter on internalism, Bernard Williams (1981) argues that these reasons do not truly exist but that the agent might believe in them. In the chapter on externalism, the account by Steven Finlay (2006) showed that these external reasons do really exist, as they are connected to institutions. An example that has been discussed are the rules of chess. They do exist, as they are connected to the institution of the game of chess. However, in practice, this difference does not really matter, as in both accounts, the rationality of the action depends on the beliefs of the agent. In other words, the agent must believe in the external reasons in order to affect the rationality of the action.

To analyze the external reasons from the literature concerning rational suicide, they have been divided into four categories. Every category explains why the reasons appear to be external in nature, so that it becomes clear why one can see them as external reasons. Some categories have different sub-arguments, while others explore different opinions about the subject. This will lead to a thorough understanding of the differences in the external reasons concerning (rational) suicide. However, this does not mean that all possible external reasons surrounding suicide will be discussed. It only provides information as to which types of reasons can be considered as external reasons, and how this impacts the rationality of a suicide if the agent believes them to be true. This starts with some reasons concerning morality.

4.1.1. Morality, Society, and Other People

The first category of external reasons in the literature is about morality, specifically that suicide cannot be rational is because it is not moral. As discussed with Finlay, if an agent is motivated by moral reasons, and they believe a moral reason to be true, then they should act in accord with that moral reason. These types of reasons are an external reason because the argument is about morality. If one follows the account by Finlay (2006), then one can argue that moral reasons are external reasons as they are connected to an institution. Finlay therefore suggests that moral reasons are external reasons. In other words, as moral reasons do not depend on internal factors of an agent, namely motivations or beliefs of an agent, but instead exist outside of (or external to) the

agent. In addition, Finlay argues that one can assume that a specific agent usually wants to act in accordance with these reasons, as they are broadly licensed. Finlay states that this is because the discourse of morality believes in moral objectivism (2006, 2). This means that morality is considered objective. If this is correct, then morality must be agent independent. Therefore, the arguments concerning morality argue that a suicide can never be rational, because of the external reason that they are not moral.

As mentioned in the general introduction, this thesis will not answer whether (rational) suicide is morally permissible. However, it is necessary to know at least some arguments as to why it might be immoral. Firstly, Pilpel and Amsel (2010, 115) mention that a utilitarian could believe that the 'negative social effects' outweigh the benefit for the suicidal agent. One way the 'negative social effects' could be interpreted is as the harm done to society by a suicide. To illustrate, a suicide (attempt) is a great economic cost for a society (Kumar 2017). Possible examples of this are the loss of labor the person could have produced or the loss of the knowledge and skills of the now deceased agent.

Another way 'negative social effects' can be interpreted is as the harm it does to the people who are in more direct contact with the agent. For example, Tanz and Tanz (2019, 9) state that some people believe that a suicide cannot be rational because of the 'aftershock' it leaves. They give the example of the harm done to the agent's family and friends. Schramme (2013, 479) gives a more specific example of this, namely the grief and anger those left behind might feel. Another example is given by Pilpel and Amstel (2011, 113) who mention that a suicide could lead to incomprehension, meaning questions surrounding why the person decided to die. Tanz and Tanz (2019, 9) also state that harm could be done to the professionals who come into contact with the deceased agent. This could be those who are responsible for cleaning up the scene after a violent suicide. An example of this type of suicide is when an agent shoots themselves (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 70).

The last example of a moral reason which will be mentioned that prohibits one from killing themselves is that it simply feels wrong to say that all (rational) suicides are morally permissible. This is what Pilpel and Amsel (2010) themselves believe to be true. In their article, they have given a counterexample of a suicide which they suggest is rational. This suicide is based on the agent's philosophical belief that life is meaningless and does not hold any value (Pilpel and Amsel 2010; Cholbi 2011). According to Pilpel and Amsel (2010) it feels wrong to say that this suicide is morally permissible. They conclude therefore that at least not all rational suicides are morally right.

The problem of external reasons can be shown by looking at the counterarguments to these moral reasons. As discussed, one of the aspects of a rational action could be that it is based on one's best available evidence. This means that if an agent is motivated by moral reasons, but simply

does not believe that (rational) suicide is wrong, then it could still be rational for them to perform this action. Multiple philosophers do not believe the reasons mentioned. To illustrate, it has not been proven that society is significantly harmed (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 182). Furthermore, Schramme (2013, 479) believes that sometimes the suffering of the agent can sometimes outweigh the harm done to the other agents who come into contact with the suicide more directly. Moreover, Schramme suggests that the agent could try and reduce the harm. The examples of considerations Schramme mentions are which person will find the suicidal agent and what probably the least violent method (e.g. medication) is. The agent could also leave a suicide note behind to explain their decision. This way, their direct relationships might not wonder what they could have done differently, and the finder has a less traumatic experience. The agent can thus reduce the harm they have created, which could lead them to believe that their suffering means that they outweigh the harm done to other agents.

As to why it might seem wrong, Cholbi (2011) notices that the example of a suicide Pilpel and Amstel used to base their feelings on is, in fact, not even rational. This is because the woman in the counterexample does not deliberate. More specifically, the woman does not weigh her different ends, meaning her goals, desires, and values (Cholbi 2011, 287-288). This means that the feeling of wrongness does not come from the suicide being immoral, but the feeling comes from a mistake in the reasoning. One can thus also believe that the moral reason of the suicide feeling wrong is simply in itself wrong. This means that there are different beliefs concerning moral reasons. As multiple philosophers do not agree on which reason is correct, it is also likely that the average agent might hold false beliefs concerning moral reasons. While one might thus assume that an agent believes moral reasons to be important, they do not know which moral reasons (if any) the agent believes to be correct. The statement that these moral reasons mean that a suicide is irrational is thus incorrect.

4.1.2. Suicide is Not Rational

It is also possible that one believes that suicides cannot be rational, while they also want the suicide to be rational. This can also be considered an external reason, as it can influence some moral considerations. As just mentioned, moral reason can indeed influence the rationality of a suicide. To illustrate, this argument is used in the debate about the morality and legality of physician-assisted suicide (Wittwer 2013). The argument goes as follows:

- 1) An agent or the person judging (e.g. the physician) must believe they act in line with moral reasons in order for an action to be rational (assuming that moral reasons are important to them).

- 2) They believe that the suicide must be rational to be moral.
- 3) They also believe that it is not rational.
- 4) They therefore believe that it is not moral.
- 5) The (assisted) suicide is not rational.

In other words, sometimes a suicide is only rational, if one believes that it is rational, as this could be a moral reason against it. The argument that a suicide cannot be rational is thus an external reason, as it could mean that the suicide is not rational.

One way to argue that a suicide can never be rational is because only mentally ill people kill themselves (Mayo 1986; Schramme 2013; Clarke 1999; Tanz and Tanz 2019). According to the WHO, there is indeed a link with suicides and mental illness in high-income countries, especially with alcohol use disorders and depression (WHO 2023). Tanz and Tanz note that there is a statistic which is often quoted which states that around 90% of people who die by suicide are mentally ill, and more specifically, that those people are often depressed (2019, 10, 46, 81). One might therefore argue that it is correct that at least most suicides are performed by mentally ill people.

However, it is unclear if this statistic is correct (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 10). It is therefore also unclear if the argument holds. For example, Tanz and Tanz refer to Shahtahmasebi (2013) who writes that the statistic happens because of selection bias. This is because there is limited information available, as this consists mostly of the records of those who had psychiatric help. Logically, this shows that these people had at least one disorder, which happens to be mostly depression. Of course, this does not need to be the case. Shahtahmasebi (2013) also claims that most people who die by suicide have never been in contact with any psychiatric help. In other words, there is no information available about the possibility of a mental illness, let alone which mental illness. It is therefore possible that the statistic is incorrect, which would mean that not only mentally ill people die by suicide.

One can argue that it is also possible that the statistic is correct, as one simply does not have enough information. However, the argument that suicide cannot be rational is then still problematic, as it has the assumption that mentally ill people are always irrational and likewise, every suicide is irrational. One philosopher who disagrees with this is Schramme (2013). His argument will be discussed in depth in the next section, but he believes that (severe and/or mental) illnesses do not need to influence the rationality of an action.¹⁰ On the contrary, he argues that these illnesses could lead to reasons for rational suicide. It is important to note that Schramme also believes that there

¹⁰ While Schramme discusses mostly illnesses in general, he also mentions that he does not believe that there needs to be a difference in rational suicide between mental illnesses and other illnesses (2013, 479). One must therefore not be confused when reading his paper.

must be no (realistic) prospect of getting better, as this means that there are other options, such as treatment, one should try first. The point is that even if it is indeed true that most people who kill themselves are mentally ill, it might be possible that at least some of those suicides are rational. Regardless, it depends on the agent who performs the suicide (whether that is the doctor or the suicidal agent themselves) and their beliefs concerning mental illness if these suicides are truly rational and if this makes it morally permissible.

Another possibility as to why suicide is not rational, is by stating that it is arational. Clarke (1999) mentions two reasons why suicide does not belong to the realm of rationality. Firstly, he suggests that rationality has to do with logical thought and cognition, while people often kill themselves for reasons based on emotions, feelings, and intuitions. He thus argues that suicide is not based on rationality, as the reasons are not based on logical thought. However, as discussed, all reasons are based on motivations such as emotions. Clarke therefore uses a definition of rationality which is simply not in line with the ideas concerning the relation between reasons and rational action as this thesis mentioned.

The second reason why Clarke suggests that suicide is arational is because there is uncertainty within the choice. According to Clarke, a decision can only be rational if a person has weighed the potential benefits and risks of each option. To do that, one must consider all the facts and think of all possible consequences. Since one cannot know what death entails, one cannot make a rational decision (Clarke 1999, 458). This uncertainty in combination with the aspect of emotions, feelings, and intuitions thus means that suicides are arational.

However, as discussed, perfect knowledge is too strict of a requirement of rational action. While one cannot know what death entails, it is also not something that can be avoided (Mayo 1986). This means that it is a choice based on the future, which one can make with less uncertainty (Mayo 1986; Schramme 2013). In other words, one can still act upon the best available evidence. One can thus still believe that suicide is rational. Therefore, it only matters for the rationality of the suicide if the agent (or possibly the physician as well) believes this to be true.

4.1.3 Sanctity of Life and Religion Reasons

The third category of possible external reasons in the literature is that a suicide can never be rational because of the sanctity of life, meaning the value every (human) life has. In order to understand why these are external, one must know that this argument is often given in religious contexts (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 134). Take, for example Christianity. Some Christians believe that life is a gift from God and therefore killing oneself goes against God's will (Tanz and Tanz 2019, 134). If one were to kill themselves, then they will go to hell. This makes it illogical to do so if one tries to escape pain and suffering. The (possible) existence of God does not depend on a specific agent.

To clarify, this thesis is not about religion. There will therefore also be no claims made about the existence of God. As Clarke notices, believing in God is a matter of faith (1999, 458). Nobody knows for sure if God exists, even though some strongly believe it to be the case. However, if He does exist, then His existence does not depend on the beliefs or motivation of an agent. On top of that, if God exists and the suicider¹¹ does indeed go to hell, then it would be an external reason not to do it. This is because God is external to the individual. A problem with this argument is thus that one only knows if it is a reason if they are dead. However, it is a possible external reason a suicidal person could consider.

The problem of beliefs as Williams mentioned also applies to this reason. Not every Christian believes one goes to hell if they die by suicide. This is because suicide is not seen as a terrible thing in both the New and Old Testament. The only thing possibly written about the wrongfulness of suicide is 'Thou shalt not kill' (Kumar 2017, 35). In other words, the Bible holds stories about suicide but lacks any judgment. It is therefore possible to believe that 'thou shalt not kill' is about taking the life of other agents, and not about your own (Hoedt 2008). Therefore, a suicide can still be considered rational, if one does not believe that they would go to hell. This is possible if they either do not believe in God, or that they believe the reason that they would go to hell is not true.

4.1.4. Altruistic or Admirable Suicides

Some of the literature against the existence of rational suicide does make one exception for a type of suicide that could be rational (Clarke 1999, 458; Tanz and Tanz 2019, 61; Mayo 1986). These are called altruistic or admirable suicides. This is when an agent sacrifices themselves for the interest of another. An example Mayo (1986, 152) gives is when a soldier gives up their own life to save the other soldiers. Another example might be a mother who can save her son, but she knows that she will likely die. The agent in these situations does not want to die but wants to save another life. If this is based on moral reasons, for example 'As a mother, I *ought to save my child*', then it can be considered external to the agent as discussed in the subsection *Morality, Society, and Other People*.

These are external reasons, as the circumstances, meaning the context or situation, are external to the agent. These circumstances also truly exist, as they are state of affairs. However, as discussed in the section regarding Finlay, which ends are important in a certain context depends on the agent. To illustrate, it might be so important for a mother to keep their child safe that she is willing to lay down her life to get there. A stranger, on the other hand, might not want to be willing to possibly die for a drowning man, as the end of their own safety is more important to them than

¹¹ This term is adopted from Tanz and Tanz (2019).

the safety of someone they have never met. Therefore, whether an altruistic suicide is rational depends on the agent and their ends.¹²

4.1.5. Conclusion External Reasons Rational Suicide

In sum, all the arguments given are possible reasons, but they do not explain the action, or withholding from the action, by themselves. For example, if the agent believes that they will go to hell if they commit suicide, then this external fact should matter in their decision. And vice versa, if they do not believe in that statement, then it is not a reason that matters. The same goes for the arguments based on morality. The agent must, for example, believe that it is wrong to commit suicide, in order for the suicide to be irrational. A more specific example is when they consider the harm to others. This person must care about others for this external reason to matter. It is most likely that the majority of people will care about at least some other people, even though it is possible that, in some cases, this is not true. On the other hand, if the agent does not consider this reason, for example because they are unaware of it, then suicide can still be rational. As seen, others can still judge the suicide to be irrational if they are aware of this reason. This means, in sum, that there are external reasons concerning suicide which might make the suicide irrational for a specific agent. However, the arguments are wrong in stating that this means that every suicide is irrational, as the rationality of an action is agent dependent.

4.2 Internalistic Arguments Concerning the Existence of Rational Suicide

The last section showed that there are multiple different external reasons which could influence the rationality of a suicide. Most of them are reasons that would make a suicide not rational, if the agent believes them to be true. This section will discuss two arguments that are based on internal reasons. In other words, they show how the rationality of a suicide depends on a specific agent. The first argument that will be discussed is that of Mayo. This is based on realistic beliefs and fundamental interest of an agent. A second example is also explored, which is suggested by Schramme. He argues that his reason can be used to judge another one's suicide. To understand the possible advantages of this, the argument of Mayo is discussed first.

¹² It is possible that somewhat the same argument can be made for other categories of suicide by Tanz and Tanz (2019, 61-69) which are not discussed as arguments surrounding the existence of rational suicide. For instance, an honor suicide means that an agent takes their life to make up for a wrong or shameful act. This might connect to moral reasons in some cultures. They are therefore external reasons, which could lead to rational suicide if the agent believes them to be true and is motivated by them. As this is not an argument made in the literature, they are not considered here. However, one might want to be aware that other categories of suicide could be types of external reasons, which could change the rationality of a suicide.

4.2.1. Mayo's Argument

According to Mayo, "If a person has good reason to *believe his interests* are better served by dying sooner rather than later, then suicide may be a rational course of action" (1986, 145, emphasis added). Mayo thus argues that a suicide can be rational if it is based on realistic beliefs and fundamental interests. He suggests throughout his paper that realistic beliefs have to do with careful and informed deliberation. One in which the decision is, for example, not made recklessly or with too much emotion. The assessment of the situation must be realistic, and the agent must consider all the different options and consequences. The latter means that the agent should also think about possible futures, as well as the probability of those futures. Furthermore, the beliefs do not have to be certain if they are the best available evidence one has. However, as discussed with Williams, the beliefs do need to be deeply and unambivalently enough. How deeply and unambivalent depends on the situation. As suicide is an important decision, one must really try not to act on false beliefs (Mayo 1986). Suicide can thus still be rational if it is based on false beliefs, but one must do their best to avoid this happens by using deliberation.

The second aspect of Mayo's argument (1986) seems to connect with one's motivations. He states that the suicide must be in line with one's fundamental interests, which are based on long-term fundamental values. The suicide must therefore not be based on short-term desires. Mayo (1986, 148) argues that this is important because long-term decisions must be based on long-term values. It means that not only the preferences somebody has now, but also the possible preferences in the future need to be considered. In other words, one must also deliberate in regard to their motivations.

To illustrate, Mayo mentions the example of avoiding pain and suffering as a fundamental interest (Mayo 1986, 152). However, the component of realistic beliefs makes sure that there should not be other preferred possibilities to achieve the goal than to kill yourself. Perhaps a good example of this is an agent who stubs their toe. It would not make sense if they kill themselves to avoid this pain, even though avoiding pain and suffering is a fundamental interest. Instead, they should wait a couple of minutes for the pain to go away. The other possible future – waiting – is preferred over a big and irreversible option, which also takes away any possible happiness later on (which can be a fundamental interest as well).

Furthermore, Mayo (1986) suggests that the interests do not need to be in one's own self-interest. He thus agrees with Williams that one might act in the interest of others or the world around them. This means, for example, that the argument of doing harm could lead the agent to reframe from the suicide in the interest of others. Mayo thus argues that the rationality of a suicide depends on the agent's (altruistic) motivations, beliefs, and deliberation. Mayo's argument is

therefore in line with the ideas discussed earlier concerning reasons and rational action, which means that rational suicide is possible. In other words, rational suicide exists.

4.2.2. Schramme's Argument

While Schramme (2013) agrees with Mayo that rational suicide exists, he suggests that these reasons are difficult to understand as an observer, which makes it impossible to know when to intervene. This is because one cannot know when the pain becomes unbearable for the agent, which makes it impossible to judge if the suicide is indeed rational. While judgment does not state anything about the rationality of an action, it is sometimes needed in for example a health care setting. Schramme (2013) suggests a different internal reason which would make a suicide rational. According to him, a suicide is rational if the agent would otherwise live a meaningless life. This is when an agent has, for some reason, lost meaning in their life and there is no prospect of getting it back. What meaningful is exactly depends on what the agent values in their life (Schramme 2013, 481-482). Meaning or loss thereof can thus come from all sorts of things. Examples Schramme mentions are relationships, overarching goals/projects, a significant shortcoming on one's ideals, or just being bored with life (2013, 481). One can argue that the lack of meaning in one's life is an internal reason, as it depends on the agent what is meaningful. Furthermore, one can argue one is only motivated to do an action, if it is somehow meaning full to that agent.

One can argue that loss of meaning is also a type of pain, namely existential pain. While this is probably true, it might be possible that existential pain can be judged better. For example, Schramme (2013) suggests that other people can still judge that the agent falsely believes their life is meaningless if it is based on misinformation or if there is a mistake in reasoning. The observer such as the healthcare professional thus does not judge whether the agent's life is meaningless, but whether the agent makes a mistake when reaching the conclusion that their life is meaningless (Schramme 2013, 482). In other words, people can still judge the suicide based on possible false beliefs or a possible error in deliberation. Thus, whereas in Mayo's argument nobody except for the agent can judge if the pain is unbearable, in Schramme's argument it is possible to judge whether a person's life is meaningless based on the way of reaching the conclusion.

It is important to note that Schramme (2013) argues that the other person should not impose their idea of a meaningful life on the agent. In other words, they should not determine for the agent what is valuable (Schramme 2013, 482). The observer should thus consider what is important for the agent. A possible example of this is that the observer cannot tell the agent which relationships should be considered meaningful. If, however, the agent believes that all their relationships are meaningless because they believe that they are unlovable, then the observer might judge that as irrational as they know this is not the case.

In sum, Schramme gives an internal reason which makes rational suicides possible. He believes that a suicide is rational if the agent does not have a meaningful life and has no prospect of getting it back. One could argue that this is another argument based on pain. However, the main difference with the example Mayo gave is that one can somewhat judge this pain. This is because they can judge if somebody bases their conclusion of having a meaningless life on a false belief or an error in deliberation. One can therefore also judge the rationality of a (future) suicide.

4.2.3. Possible Criticism Schramme

One could argue that the condition of false beliefs makes this argument more externalistic, as one should act in line with the true reason. However, it is unclear what Schramme means by false beliefs and thus whether perfect knowledge is needed. For example, he accepts that there is some uncertainty about the future possible (Schramme 2013, 482). One way to explain this is by stating that Schramme believes that one must act on the best available evidence to them. One can also deliberate about their reasons through conversation, as mentioned with Williams. The health care professional could thus figure out whether the suicide is truly rational by asking critical questions if they believe it might be irrational, so that both the suicidal agent and the 'observer' could decide if it is rational.

However, sometimes agents do not agree on what is true and thus what beliefs are false. This again raises the question when a belief can be considered true and when the professional should intervene. This is where Finlay's account gives the solution. It is possible that there are different opinions on what true is and therefore which action rational is. For example, if an agent believes that a certain belief is true and acts on that belief, it is rational. If their friend believes the belief to be false, then the friend would judge it as irrational. Another person like the therapist could agree or disagree with either party. For example, the therapist might agree with the agent that the belief is true. Whether the belief is true thus depends on who is judging that belief. It could therefore be rational for the agent to try to take their own life, while it is rational for the therapist to intervene.

In sum, both the reasons mentioned by Schramme and Mayo could potentially lead to rational suicide. Mayo's argument uses reasons one can consider as possible internal reasons, since they already have a connection with motivation, namely one's fundamental interests. For the suicide to be rational the agent must also believe they have this reason and that they act on their best available evidence. This includes the deliberation surrounding possible other (contradictory) beliefs they might hold, and the deliberation surrounding which action, if any, they should carry out. One should therefore not deem other reasons such as those discussed in the previous section to true or to be more important than their fundamental interest. Schramme agrees that rational suicide exists, but he argues that it is based on meaninglessness. As this seems to be another form of pain and possibly

another form of fundamental interest, this could be another internal reason. Schramme does focus more on the idea that one should not have any false beliefs, but he also argues that some uncertainty is possible. Furthermore, Schramme argues that his reason is better since a professional can somewhat judge this reason to dictate when they should intervene. However, it could be in both Mayo and Schramme rational for the professional and other observers to intervene if they judge it as irrational. It does not matter if the suicide would be rational. It is therefore concluded that there are (internal) reasons which could lead to rational suicide, which means that rational suicide exists.

4.3 Conclusion Reasons Concerning Suicide

The debate concerning the existence of rational suicide seems to be based on the debate concerning reasons for rational action. While this makes sense as suicide is an action, it does not become clear in the literature as they do not discuss what rationality is. This chapter has therefore analyzed the arguments and specifically the reasons given in the literature based on the definitions of reasons and rational action stated in earlier chapters. To reiterate, rational action is always based on reasons, but not every reason leads to a rational action. Furthermore, every rational action is only based on internal reasons, as one can only explain why an agent acts (rationally) by explaining how that agent is motivated. This is only possible in part if the agent believes the reason to be true and if the reason is somehow connected to motivations, meaning it must be connected in Williams' account to S and in Finlay's account to cares, concerns, or important ends. In either case, it must explain how the agent becomes motivated to act.

When applying these ideas on the arguments and reasons in the literature concerning the existence of rational suicide, it becomes clear that not every argument uses the division between rational action and type of reasons. Some authors claim that there are reasons which would make suicide irrational for every agent. Some of them do argue that there is one exception, which is that in some situations a suicide can be altruistic. The problem each of these arguments have is that it seems that the reasons they use to reach that conclusion seem to be external reason. They do not even consider that a rational action is agent dependent. This means that the rationality of a suicide should depend on the agent's beliefs, motivations, and deliberation process. It has been shown that even if the agent act on their best available evidence, that it is possible that they could hold different (perhaps false) beliefs concerning these reasons and/or motivations. It is therefore concluded that the arguments based on external reasons which claim that a suicide is (almost) never rational are false, as external reasons by themselves do not dictate when an action is rational.

However, some reasons that can explain (rational) actions and therefore (rational) suicides have been discussed as well. An example is Mayo's argument in which the agent's fundamental

interests are better served by dying. Mayo argues that it is only rational if the agent has beliefs that are realistic, and if they came to the conclusion by deliberating about their fundamental interest, meaning the weighing process of long-term and short-term desires. In other words, one must have deliberated and used the best available evidence. This could mean that a suicide based on avoiding pain and suffering could be rational. Another possible reason is mentioned by Schramme. He argues that a suicide is rational if it based on a meaningless life. This reason could potentially be used by health care professionals to dictate how they should help the agent, for example to dictate if they should intervene. However, this does not mean that Mayo's reasons could not lead to a rational suicide, as the rationality of an action does not depend on the judgment of others. It can therefore be concluded that rational suicide does exist since there are possible internal reasons which could lead through deliberation to a rational action, even though there are 'external' reasons which could prevent the suicide if the agent believes them and is motivated by them.

5. Conclusion

It has been concluded that a suicide can be rational if the agent believes they have reasons to take their own life, if they are somehow motivated to do the action and if they have deliberated about their reasons as well as what the best course of action is. This also means that they should not believe in contradictory reasons, or at least they should deliberate which reason and end is more important in that situation. Furthermore, the strictest requirement concerning beliefs is that they are the best available evidence to them, since the requirement of perfect knowledge would make no action performed by humans truly rational. As there are indeed internal reasons that could potentially lead an agent to die by suicide, a suicide can be rational.

To get to this conclusion, the chapter called internalism a basic understanding of internalism by discussing the account authored by Williams. He suggests that a rational action is based on reasons which means, according to him, that all reasons must be able to explain why an action is performed. This is only possible if the agent has beliefs concerning the reasons and is somehow motivated by them. This makes the reasons one acts upon internal reasons. Furthermore, Williams differentiates between having a reason for action, and that action being rational. The action is only rational if one deliberates about their action. It is unsure if Williams believes that a true rational action cannot be based on false beliefs. However, if this were the case, then Williams is too strict since it would mean that human agents cannot act truly rational as they do not have perfect knowledge. Moreover, it does not make sense that Williams truly means one must have true beliefs for rational action, since merely stating that one should have certain beliefs does not explain why the agent would act. It has thus been argued that one must act on the best available evidence instead. The conclusion of this chapter was therefore that in an account of internalism such as Williams, any rational action is based on reasons one believes to be true and is motivated by, since these reasons can also explain why an agent acts. Williams calls these internal reasons, as their existence depends on the specific agent.

The second chapter explored the debate concerning the existence of external reasons since externalism agrees with internalism that internal reasons exist. Internalism, however, states that external reasons do not exist, as these reasons cannot explain why an action is performed. To illustrate, Williams suggests that the argument concerning judgment by externalism is wrong since an action can only be explained by the agent's beliefs. This means that an observer can only attribute reasons to the acting agent. One could also argue that external reasons exist by stating that there are certain state of affairs, meaning facts, which exist. Some of these are likely to be believed by the agent, such as the belief that it rains if one is standing in the rain. An observer can therefore assume that the agent holds this belief. However, as Goldman notices, the observer can still not assume that

these state of affairs do lead to motivation. This is, in part, because it depends on the situation the agent is in. Internalism thus suggests that external reasons cannot exist since an action can only be explained if the agent believes the reason to be true and they are motivated.

However, the confusion comes from stating that every reason should lead a particular agent to do a specific action. This has been shown using Finlay's account. He argues that external reasons do exist, but that they do not matter for rationality. This is because actions can be indeed only explained through motivations and beliefs, but some reasons exist independently of a specific agent. These are the facts Goldman described, meaning the state of affairs, as well as reasons which are connected to an institution, such as morality. Finlay thus agrees with Williams that there is a distinction between reason and rational action, which means that not every reason needs to lead to an action. The main difference between the accounts is thus that Williams still believes that every reason should be able to explain why an action is executed by the specific agent, while Finlay argues that this is not the case as only the reasons that are important to the agent need to be able to explain the action.

The debate concerning the existence of rational suicide can be understood using these ideas concerning external reasons and their impact on rational suicide. This is because most arguments that argue against the existence of rational suicide, or that there is at most one very specific exception, seem to focus on reasons they believe every agent should act in accordance with. These therefore seem to be external reasons. While the authors claim that these reasons mean that a suicide can (almost) never be rational, it still depends on the motivations, beliefs, and deliberation process of an agent. This is because an explanation of any rational action, including suicide, must be agent dependent as it must explain why the action is performed. The suicide is thus only considered irrational if the agent believes these to be true and does not have any other (internal) reason or end that is more important to them. In other words, if after deliberation one is convinced that these (external) reasons are true and that they do not have any other reasons, such as long-term desires, which have a greater weight to them, then the suicide is not rational.

It is also possible for an agent to not believe these reasons, or that they are not motivated by them. Even if one follows the most strict requirement for a rational action, namely that one must act on the best available evidence needed for that situation, it is possible for an agent to act rationally if they falsely believe that these reasons are incorrect. This is because not all philosophers agree that these reasons are correct. It is therefore likely that the average agent might be mistaken, even if they have deliberated about their beliefs. Therefore, the arguments given that suicide is (almost) never rational are mistaken about the relation between reasons and rational action. The external reasons they provide do not automatically argue in favor or against a rational suicide.

However, the reasons given in favor of the existence of rational suicide do show how an agent

becomes motivated and how they could possibly believe that death is the best option for them. They are therefore internal reasons. To illustrate, Mayo suggests that a suicide is rational when an agent has realistic beliefs and if the action is in line with their fundamental interests. The reasons are thereby connected to the agent's best available evidence, and they are motivated because they believe it is in their best interest to die. It has been shown that the agent must also deliberate to weigh short-term and long-term desires or values. It would thus not be rational for an agent to die by suicide if they hurt themselves, as the agent can also wait for the pain to stop.

Another way suicide could be rational is if the agent bases their suicide on a loss of meaning, as Schramme suggested. The agent must also be somewhat certain that they will not get any meaning back, which means that they must act on the best available evidence. The argument of Schramme thus also shows an example of reasons based on the agent's beliefs and motivations. As Schramme also takes into account the deliberation process, one could argue that rational suicide is possible. Therefore, in both Mayo's and Schramme's argument rational suicide is possible, even if it is compared to the ideas of reasons and rational action as discussed in this thesis. As these ideas have combated various criticisms, they seem to be correct in concluding that the rationality of an action is agent dependent. One can therefore conclude that rational suicide exists.

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Abstract

There is no consensus on the existence of rational suicide in the literature, possibly because every author fails to use existing theories of rationality. The arguments and specifically the reasons they mention are analyzed using the ideas surrounding internalism and externalism. Some of the arguments state external reasons to conclude that suicide is (almost) never rational. It will be argued that this is incorrect as only internal reasons can explain why any (rational) action is performed. This means that the rationality of action depends on the agent's motivations, their beliefs, and their deliberation process. Since an agent could have (internal) reasons which might make a suicide rational, it is concluded that rational suicide exists.