

Instrumentalism

VARIETIES OF PRACTICAL REASONING

edited by Elijah Millgram

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Chapter 3

Instrumentalism

Christoph Fehige

Instrumentalism is the doctrine that the choice of means to our ends can be more or less rational, but our ends themselves can't.¹ Except where the extent to which we attain our ends is at stake, reason will not require us to harbor or pursue one end rather than another. *De finibus non est disputandum*.

The meaning and the merit of this claim will depend on what we have in mind when speaking of a person's ends. In particular, whether we buy the instrumentalist refusal to pick out "rational" ends from among them will depend on how rich our notion of an end is all by itself. The bulk of this paper will sketch one view of endhood and a view of practical rationality based on it. If these views are plausible, we will find out how instrumentalist we should be by finding out how instrumentalist they are.

1 MATTERS OF THE HEART

1.1 Basics

Some things are dear to our hearts. To act rationally, I submit, means in essence: to look after these things, as best we can. I call this view, or rather the version of it that I will begin to spell out and inspect for evidence of instrumentalism, the Hearty View.

By saying that things are close to our hearts, I mean, roughly, that they affect us in a certain way. Somewhat less roughly, to think of them is pleasant, to think of their opposite unpleasant. The person to whom it is important that her children will be happy is the person who is delighted with the thought that they will be, and sad at the thought that they won't. These affects, the pleasures or pains of thinking that this and that is the case or is not the case, are the stuff of the heart. Less poetically speaking,

if processed properly, they constitute the fact that a person cares about certain things, that she values them, that they matter to her.

These pronouncements need elaborating. To begin with, if matters of the heart are to be the contents of pleasant thoughts, then the contents must indeed play their part in this business. In particular, nothing follows from the fact that the *words* “My children will be happy” flash through my mind and make me happy. Maybe the words make no sense to me at all, or no sense that at that moment I realize. We have to make sure that I get the semantics right, too, that I know what I’m talking about or thinking about. I must grasp, correctly represent to myself, the fact at issue. My being pleased will count as being pleased *at* a certain prospect, rather than pleased undirectionally or at another prospect, only if the prospect is there—only if it is before my mind’s eye, only if I’m fully and vividly aware of it.² It should be thoughts in this sense whose pleasantness counts.

A second point might appear opposed to the first. Something can be close to a person’s heart even when the person has different things on her mind altogether. Suppose that I’m a loving father and a plumber, and that right now I’m concentrating on repairing a dripping tap and hence not thinking of my children. Our theory should not force us to conclude that my children are, at this moment, not dear to me. My children may well be dear to me all the time—I just cannot think of them all the time. Not, for instance, while repairing a dripping tap in order to be able to afford their college fees. Thus, instead of asking *whether* a person is thinking of *p*, we should ask what would be happening *if* she were.³

Combining this point with the previous one, about pleasant thoughts, we can venture a slogan. A state of affairs *p* is dear to a person if and only if the following holds true of her: if she fully represented *p* to herself, she’d be pleased.

1.2 Complications

Complications abound. Cases come to mind that threaten our slogan as follows. They seem to invite the description that a person fully represents to herself that *p* and is pleased while or because of doing so, but they leave us hesitant or unwilling to say that *p* is dear to her heart. What, for instance, if Mary is thrilled to hear that *p* just because she knows that *p* will serve as a means to things dear to her heart? What if she has been given a drug that makes her enthusiastic about *p*, or a drug that makes her enthusiastic no matter whether she thinks of *p* or non-*p*? What if she

is half asleep and is having pleasant dreams, daydreams, fantasies about p ? And what if she's enthusiastic about p , but unenthusiastic about being enthusiastic about p ?

We can also think of scenarios that work the other way round. In these cases, it appears that a person fully represents to herself that p and fails to be pleased, but we may still want to say that p is dear to her heart. For instance, what if Mary is in such a lousy mood to begin with that her full representation of p , while making her noticeably less unhappy, fails to go all the way and make her happy? What if her belief that p is out of reach dampens her enthusiasm and turns the thought of p itself, a p that "deep in her heart" she is still enthusiastic about, into a sad one? And what do we make of force of habit? What if the thought of living in a nice cozy flat doesn't currently make Mary enthusiastic for the sole reason that, having lived in such a flat for years, she has got used both to the fact and the prospect of doing so?

All these issues call for legislation.⁴ Many of them will go away if we ask whether, *in a cool hour, when she's sober, awake, undisturbed by other thoughts*, Mary would be happy fully representing to herself that p . Others will go away if we switch to the comparative question: would she be happier fully representing to herself that p than she would be fully representing to herself that non- p ? These are just examples of refinements we may want to introduce.

They *can* be introduced, which is the main thing. If we can come up with a problematic scenario, we can ipso facto exclude it from the concept we're explicating. Moreover, once we know that we want some such concept of being dear to someone's heart to loom large in our notion of rationality, there is nothing to stop us from fine-tuning the former with a view to the latter. The details can be rigged so that they enable the concept to play the role.

1.3 Desire

Hearts or not, we may as well employ the standard term from debates on rationality. We can address the notion that is beginning to emerge as a notion of desire. Desires are, very roughly speaking and in the sense explained, pleasant thoughts. They are affects.

This view of desire has a pedigree that I cannot fully unfold here. We find it more or less clearly articulated in Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant.⁵ The Brits tend to concur. Hobbes, for one, says that "all ... desire ... is accompanied with some delight"; James Mill, that

desires are “ideas ... which it is agreeable to have”; his son, that “to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasant, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility.”⁶ Later, the view acquires a large following among such German-speaking thinkers as Wundt, Schneider, von Gizycki, Sigwart, Ziehen, von Ehrenfels, Pfänder, and Meinong;⁷ most notably, Moritz Schlick develops it at some length in chapter 2 of his *Fragen der Ethik*.

Modern proponents of the affective theory also include: Karl Duncker, who says that, as presented in anticipation, a situation that is desired “becomes aglow with an empathetical feeling tone of pleasantness”; J. C. B. Gosling, who develops a notion of wanting as “viewing with pleasure, or being pleased at the thought of”; Richard Brandt and Jaegwon Kim, who treat it as essential for the meaning of “wanting that *p*” that the agent would feel joy if she received the unexpected news that *p*, and disappointment if she received the unexpected news that non-*p*. More recently, Galen Strawson has developed the thought that “the link to the notion of affect dispositions is internal to and fundamentally constitutive of the notion of desire in a way that the link to the notion of behavioral dispositions is not.”⁸

Brandt’s and Kim’s reference to disappointment reminds us to count in the tradition of Plato, John Locke, Schopenhauer, and others who see desiring as essentially connected with uneasiness and pain.⁹ In as far as such explications refer to a negative feeling caused by the thought that a certain object is absent, they converge with the proposal at hand—see the remarks about matters of the heart from sec. 1.1 and about comparativity in sec. 1.2. It would thus be more accurate, albeit more cumbersome and potentially misleading, to say, not that desires are pleasant thoughts, but that desires are pleasant or unpleasant thoughts.

It has also been observed more than once that this conception treats us to a notion of strength. If joy turns a thought into a desire, a strong joy will turn a thought into a strong desire.¹⁰ The “strong joy”, we should add, is joy that would be strong under the proper circumstances; all the provisos from sections 1.1 and 1.2 carry over. So does the remark that, if somebody experiences the opposite of joy at the thought of the opposite of *p*, this, too, will have a say.

Like most products of philosophical concept-mongering, our concept of desire does not fully coincide with one particular previous usage. We have seen, however, that the affective view is not, as some people might want to put it, “revisionist”. Let’s be clear about who is: those authors

who saw off the phenomenal part of desire. They leave us with a torso of the concept, with a behavioral persiflage of desire. Their desire is desire as instantiated in robots, or in thermostats.

1.4 Desire and Pleasure

Two more words on the relation of desire to pleasure. On the one hand, our view runs no risk of collapsing into hedonism. The desideratum itself can be entirely nonhedonic and nonexperiential, and this can be known to the desirer. For instance, the thought that flowers will grow on my grave can please me, and will then count as a desire to have flowers growing on my grave. Furthermore, and as is illustrated by the same example, the joy we are talking about when we call desires joyful representations is not necessarily anticipated joy. To desire that p , I need not believe that p either entails or would cause pleasure for me or anybody else. Hedonism fails to ensue because there is no reason to think that if desires are pleasant thoughts they can only be thoughts *of* pleasure, in which case only pleasure could be desired. Saying that pleasure is the mode is not saying that pleasure is the content.¹¹

On the other hand, although our explication does not entail that pleasure alone is desired, it does entail that pleasure is desired—a claim that, over the centuries, has often been made, less often denied, and still less often argued for.¹² Here is one argument. According to the Hearty explication of desire, I desire the things that it would be pleasant for me to imagine. Now, my imagining that I am in a certain pleasant state of consciousness must involve an imagining of that state, and, as with all states of consciousness, nothing that doesn't involve that state itself *counts* as an imagining of it. (Anything that involved only different states would at best count as an imagining of those states or as a misimagining of the one at issue.) But if my imagining to be in a certain pleasant state of consciousness involves that very state and is therefore pleasant itself, then it constitutes a desire to be in that state. In other words, for every pleasant state of consciousness, it holds true on conceptual grounds, given the concept of desire that has been outlined here, that I desire, *pro tanto*, to be in that state.

1.5 Jargon

As to terminology: the things close to our hearts are our projects, ends, goals, or purposes, the contents of our pro-attitudes and inclinations; they matter to us; we care about them, we appreciate, cherish, desire,

prefer, value, want, and wish them. At times, there may be good reasons to distinguish between some of these expressions; for present purposes, however, we can treat them as by and large synonymous. The relation we're talking about, no matter by which name, is the relation that bottoms out in affects—along the lines proposed.

Moreover, the relation is, as has been briefly indicated in sec. 1.2, a desiring of the intrinsic kind, where states of affairs are desired for their own sake and not just as a means to other ends. Finally, when we say that a preference or desire is fulfilled or satisfied or frustrated, we do not in general imply that the preferrer's consciousness is affected thereby; but only, that what the preferrer has wished for is, or is not, the case. In this by now well-established terminology, "fulfillment" etc. do not serve as psychological notions.

1.6 The Picture Thus Far

In moving on from our concept of desire as a real or hypothetical affect, we are leaving behind unfinished business. The substance is there, but some details are missing. I pointed out in sec. 1.2 that various borderline cases remain to be settled. I have paid little tribute to the importantly different *ways* in which thoughts can be pleasant or unpleasant—witness anger, fear, hope, love, remorse, sympathy, and the like. I haven't stopped to criticize the wide-spread view that the "if" clause of a dispositional analysis should equip the agent not just with a full *representation* of the proposition at issue, but also with far-reaching *information* about the world.¹³ I haven't discussed the objections against employing certain kinds of hypothetical constructs to characterize what the agent "really" wants,¹⁴ let alone the more general philosophical issues of emotions and pleasure, of counterfactual conditionals, consciousness, and mental representation.

Still, some simple truths point our way. The person who would feel indifferent to the news that he will have to die tomorrow doesn't *care* to live. His *feeling* indifferent *is* his indifference, his not caring, his not desiring. Similarly, the child who pictures herself on a new bicycle, and revels in the prospect, desires to have the bicycle. Her reveling is not a symptom or concomitant. It *is* the desire. If we take away the reveling, both the real and the counterfactual, we take away the desire. In that case, the child might still exhibit bicycle-acquiring behavior. But if so, she is, as far as that desire is concerned, a zombie.

Desire, value, and the like are anchored in sentience. Launder the affects and modify the *experimentum crucis* as much as you like—at the end of the day we should ask, in one form or the other, how the subject would feel about p . When we ask this question, we're not using a metaphor.

2 COMPETING NOTIONS OF DESIRE

It was worth dwelling on our notion of a desire. For one thing, we will be talking about desires a great deal, with our whole conception of rationality pivoting on them. Besides, other notions of desire tend to give desire-based normative rationality, and the readings of instrumentalism associated with them, a bad name.

Suppose, for instance, that, whenever a person puts some thought into the question of what to do, we call the upshot of her deliberation, at least if she acts accordingly, a desire. Thus, if she comes to a conclusion like “I'd better ϕ (should ϕ , have more reason to ϕ than not to, herewith decide to ϕ)” and then ϕ s, she has ipso facto desired to ϕ . Suppose also that we plug this notion of desire into a desire-based conception of rationality.

The result would be unsatisfactory.¹⁵ The category of the rational would simply duplicate the category of the intentional or the deliberate. But clearly some intentional actions, some actions that arise from some thinking, are irrational. Thinking as such doesn't render an action rational; at best, correct thinking does. We must specify *what* the agent should have taken into account, and *how*, before we can call her action rational.

Next, suppose that by a desire we mean a disposition to act and that we make desires in this sense the foundations of normative rationality. This, too, would be peculiar. I might have who knows what tendencies. How could my mere tendency to ϕ constitute a normative reason to ϕ ?¹⁶

More or less the same question arises if we use the term “desire” for *causes* of our actions. Imagine that scientists find out that the quivering of my pineal gland causes me to ϕ . Why should we say that the gland's quivering provides me with a normative reason to ϕ ? And if in the realm of causes we switch from glands to thoughts, things look no better. For imagine that the thought, or the physical substrate of the thought, that a certain action would maximize the number of garden chairs in the world causes me to perform that action. Again, why should that make it *reasonable* for me to perform it?

Finally, suppose that, following the crowd, we say that a desire is an attitude characterized by its “direction of fit”. What makes an attitude a desire is that, if somebody has the attitude towards a proposition p , then the world should be, or should be made by that person, a p -world.¹⁷ To use the canonical comparison, desire resembles a shopping list: the question of what goes into your shopping basket should be governed by the list. Belief, on the other hand, resembles the list drawn up by a detective watching you shop: her list should be governed by what goes into your basket. That’s the difference. Desire is what the world should track (it has the world-to-mind direction of fit), whereas belief is what should track the world (it has the mind-to-world direction of fit). And suppose this time that we base rationality on desire thus defined.

What, however, are we going to make of the word “should” in these characterizations? One option would be to give it something like a statistical reading. What makes an attitude a desire for p , we would then be saying, is that people who have the attitude tend to try to make the world a p -world. That way, the direction-of-fit approach will collapse into the disposition-to-act approach, which we have already rejected. Alternatively, we could give the “should” a normative reading. What makes an attitude a desire, we would then be saying, is that for people who have the attitude it is *rational* to make the world a p -world. Putting desires-in-this-sense to the service of rationality, we will get a notion of rationality based on desire based on rationality. We will have gone full circle: it is rational to do what it is rational to do. “Direction of fit” doesn’t help.

All these unhappy episodes can be merged into one. Upon your return from the weekend shopping I notice that you bought, say, an early Rembrandt. “Was it wise of you to buy that painting?”, I might well ask. As we have seen, some theories of practical reason—some theories based on certain conceptions of desires—would commit you to answers like these:

- Yes, for I did it intentionally.
- Yes, for I had a tendency to.
- Yes, for my pineal gland caused me to.
- Yes, for I’m sure what caused me to was a thought.
- Yes, for I did.
- Yes, for it was wise to.

The answers are bizarre. This one is not: “Yes, for I had set my heart on it.”

3 EFFICACY

3.1 What Reasons Cause

We have severed, or rather denied, various conceptual links between reasons and causes—between normative reasons on the one hand and what are sometimes called motivating, explanatory reasons on the other. It is one thing to ask what it would be wise for you to do; several others, what you have a tendency to do and what causes this tendency, let alone what you end up doing and what causes you to.

This notoriously invites all sorts of questions. What about acting *for* a reason? Shouldn't we be able to say of an agent that she did it *because* it was the rational thing to do?¹⁸ Don't we see ourselves as creatures often influenced by reasons? And if our reasons have no causal power, why make so much fuss about them? Why deliberate?

These worries concern the efficacy of practical reason. There are two ways we might try to lay them to rest. If we accept the requirement that practical reason must in some sense or other be efficacious, we should now stop to investigate how the Hearty View fares with respect to that challenge. Not badly, we would probably find out, at least as far as the challenge concerns human beings on planet Earth. Surely, myriads of people do myriads of things that they believe will best fulfill their desires—desires in the Hearty sense. And frequency is a clue to causality.

However, I plead for a more radical response. We should not accept requirements of efficacy, not, at any rate, as constraints on a theory of normative reason. In saying this, I'm not denying that it would be a good thing if we acted for reasons; in several respects, it would. Nor am I denying that we act for reasons; as indicated in the previous paragraph, I suspect that we frequently do. I'm only denying that the extent to which we do should have a say in what *counts* as a reason. Rationality is an ideal. As with every ideal, the causal world can trample on it, but not refute it. If we don't live up to the ideal, that is too bad. But too bad for us, not for the ideal.

3.2 What Beliefs about Reasons Cause

Do things look any different if we turn our attention from reasons to beliefs about reasons? If I *believe* that I have, all things told, a reason to ϕ , I will tend to ϕ —doesn't this conditional qualify as a conceptual truth?

I don't see why. Who says that I *necessarily* am a creature driven, at least *ceteris paribus*, by its own beliefs about its reasons for action? The

possibility that I'm not should hardly be ruled out on the grounds that I shudder to think of it.

To be sure, if my behavior is immune to the results of my deliberation, there is no point in deliberating, and I may just as well—provided that at least this belief of mine translates into action—stop it. But this, too, neither is nor justifies a change of my beliefs about the underlying ideal. If the behavior is irrational, it is irrational, and that's that. We shouldn't knight knaves just because they prevail. Thus, while it might be true that, if beliefs about reasons were causal flops, we would have no reason to reason, neither would we have a reason to change our conception of a reason.

Efficacy, I suggest, must remain contingent. We may get good news or bad news about it, but no conceptual guarantees. There is really not much merit in the idea of putting practical reason in the driver's seat by withholding the title of reason from anything that doesn't happen to be in the driver's seat.

4 GOOD FOR US

We have begun to explicate desires as affects (sec. 1), and we have begun to see that this notion of desire matches normative reasons far better than its competitors do (sec. 2), worries about the efficacy of the resulting reasons notwithstanding (sec. 3). We now turn to another route that leads to desire-based rationality.

4.1 The Welfare Argument

The argument takes a bit of a run-up. It starts with the question what it is for a person's life to go well. What do we mean by a person's "good" or "welfare"?¹⁹ Clearly, something that is moored to her mind in one way or another. For consider a run-of-the-mill fact from the world out there, say that the sun is shining. This state of affairs may in various ways affect a person's welfare, but will not by itself constitute it. We can imagine a person who has no interest in this fact, a person who, even if the matter is brought to her attention, is indifferent to it (*ex ante*, *ex post*, and *in flagrante*) and to everything that comes with it. Sunshine is of no use to such a person. It would not make her better off. Our notion of welfare must include a subjective element; it must include "getting something out of it".

This requirement, the interest requirement, leaves us with two candidates. One is pleasure or, more precisely and in well-known words, “pleasure and the absence of pain”. The candidate succeeds. No doubt everybody is *ceteris paribus* better off feeling good than feeling bad; no doubt everybody is *ceteris paribus* worse off with a toothache than without. Pleasure is a component of welfare.

But is it the only one? Suppose it were. Then we would be doing people a favor if, one night while they’re asleep, we connected them to a pleasure machine for the rest of their lives.²⁰ We’d have to say that this would do them good—good all things told—even if, consulted beforehand about this option, they had vehemently declined it. This sounds implausible.

Or imagine a writer (if it helps, a philosopher) who desires her last book to be read even after her death, at least for a while. This is what she lives for, so that even in the final months of agony she battles to finish the work. And the minute she has breathed her last, you dump the typescript in the rubbish bin. Have you harmed her? I think you have. You have frustrated a desire she had. Her desire was for her book to be read—not for herself to believe it would be read, and not for herself to feel as good as she would if she believed it would be read. She desired a fact, not, at any rate not just, the pleasure that the fact or the belief in the fact would cause her. Thwarting her wish, I suggest, would make her worse off even without affecting her pleasure.²¹ Thus, in addition to pleasure, we have to count in the second candidate that meets the interest requirement: people’s getting what they want. Desire fulfillment, too, is a component of welfare.

Pleasure *and* desire fulfillment have a say, then, in what constitutes one’s welfare. But, as we recall from sec. 1.4, it follows from general considerations about desiring that a person’s pleasure ranks among the things she desires. Hence, every instance of pleasure, even if the subject hasn’t so much as thought of it, is an instance of desire fulfillment. To say that pleasure *and* desire fulfillment count is, then, not wrong but wordy—like saying that Safeway sells apples *and* fruit. From the true claim that welfare is a matter of pleasure and desire fulfillment, we may proceed to a claim that is just as true but shorter: welfare is desire fulfillment.

At this point, an argument for desire-based rationality drops into our laps. Rationality has to do with the good life. Most of us would agree that the person who believes an action to be best for him, but doesn’t perform it, is irrational—stupid, as laymen tend to put it. In other words,

it is rational for him to do what he believes is best for him. As we have just argued, “best for him” means “best fulfills his desires”. Thus, it is rational for him to do what he believes would best fulfill his desires. Ditto for each of us.

4.2 The Welfare Argument Annotated

These ruminations will profit from a handful of postscripts. First of all, note how welfare and rationality dovetail. They deal in the same currency: desire fulfillment. What fulfills our desires is good for us to get, what we believe fulfills our desires is rational for us to do. Rationality is prudence. It is the intelligent pursuit, within the limits of the available information and resources, of our goals and projects, and thus of our own good.

Second, since our explication of desire from section 1 captures what it is for something to matter to somebody, it also applies to the case of *welfare* as desire fulfillment. So the argument from section 4.1, the welfare argument, leads us not just to desire-based rationality, but all the way to desire-in-the-Hearty-sense-based rationality. It is an argument for the Hearty View.

Third, if desire is defined in terms of full representation, and desire fulfillment is both rational for you to seek and good for you to get, it doesn’t follow that full representation itself is rational or good. Full representation can be a nuisance and should be avoided much of the time. It can spoil our fun or peace of mind, and it can distract us from effecting the means to our ends. Still, we had better engage in it every now and then to make sure we’re still on target. While we don’t want to spend our days being charmed by our ends, neither do we want to wake up to the fact that we’ve been working for ends that ceased to charm us ten years ago.

Fourth, pleasure once again. Our plea for seeing welfare as desire fulfillment appealed to the desires for pleasure, whose conceptual guaranteed existence had been explained earlier. These desires, while not tailor-made for the occasion, come in handy. For often real or alleged divergences between *pleasure* and desire fulfillment get quoted as divergences between *welfare* and desire fulfillment. Pleasure is at issue when some instances of desire fulfillment are claimed to be no good for us (say that the fulfillment of a desire disappoints) and when, vice versa, some things that are good for us are claimed not to fulfill a desire (say that we experience a pleasure that we hadn’t known or thought of before).²² To

such claims, the standing desires for one's own pleasure provide the right answers.

Last, in having rationality linked to considerations about the agent's welfare, we're not embracing the doctrine of rational egoism, at least not in any sense that would make it objectionable. Egoists are not defined as people who follow their hearts, but as people whose hearts are cold. They are not defined as people who go by their desires, but as people who fail to have or go by desires of a certain type—by desires, of at least a certain strength, that others fare well. Imagine, for instance, a rational philanthropist who ardently and intrinsically desires to help others and acts accordingly. We would hardly call this person an egoist. And if by some terminological caprice we did, then egoism thus defined, with Mother Teresa among its representatives, would cease to be a spectre.

5 THE DYNAMICS OF DESIRE

Desires are the alpha and omega, but desires can change. This raises two questions: what to make of changes, and what changes to make.

5.1 When Desires Change

The first of these questions, how to *respond* to changes of desire, translates into three subquestions. Assuming that I have the relevant knowledge, should I take into account now desires that I had in the past, but have no longer?²³ What about desires that I will have in the future, but do not have now?²⁴ And what about my “asynchronic desires”—desires that are not around, either not yet or no longer, when their contents come true?²⁵

On the one hand, different trios of answers to these questions define significantly different versions of our central claim that desires rule the roost. On the other hand, the questions do not challenge that claim. So we may keep things simple here. Let us pretend that we answer all three questions in the affirmative. Let us pretend that, if my desires have a say in my rational decisions, then so do my past, future, and asynchronic desires. The truth, I repeat, may be different and less homogeneous.²⁶ We simplify in order to concentrate on the big picture.

5.2 When Desires Should Be Changed

This takes us from changes of preference that befall us to those we can bring about—clearly an issue of immense import for the debate about

instrumentalism. The disciple of a desire-based view, it is sometimes held, tends to overlook this issue. By having everything hinge on desires, he forgets that we can revise them. He forgets that we can, and quite frequently should, develop, drop, modify, or reverse a desire.

This reproach, however, lacks all foundation. As David Hume and many others have pointed out, devotion to desire fulfillment does not entail indifference between one pattern of desires and another.²⁷ Quite the contrary. Since some patterns would be more conducive to desire fulfillment than others, the seeker of desire fulfillment has a serious stake in the existence of the right patterns. He will try to overcome his preference for cigarettes, for Beatrices who don't respond to his advances, and so forth. His self-improvement manuals will include Ovid's *Remedia amoris*, Seneca's *De vita beata*, and Albert Ellis's *Practice of Rational-Emotive Therapy*. Without forgetting that *some* frustration paves the way to satisfaction, he will cultivate preferences that are satisfiable—jointly satisfiable, to be precise. Desire fulfillment is not a conservative or passive ideal that leaves us stuck with our orectic lot; it is the rational guide for the revision of desires.

I say “the” rational guide, because I know of no others. Where *is* the case in which a change of desire fails to promise more desire fulfillment, yet is recommended by reason?

Could it be a case where lack of imagination, or of this or that concept, prevents the desire from existing? Where the subject hasn't looked at a possible state of affairs, or hasn't looked carefully enough?²⁸ It can't, since (remember sec. 1.1) desires are already defined in terms of what would be the case if all the imagining and representing took place. Could it be a case where desires have been manipulated or distorted? It can't, since (remember sec. 1.2) desires are already defined in terms of what would go on in the agent's mind if no undue interference, by herself or others, by moods or drugs or whatnot, occurred. Could it be a case where the false belief that *p* is impossible stifles the desire? Or where an extrinsic desire is erected on a false belief? These can't be the problems either, since (remember secs. 1.2 and 1.5) our view makes desires immune, in more than one respect, to the beliefs the desirer happens to have.

Could it be a case where my desires have been formed by dreary circumstances? I doubt it. To be sure, preference formation can go badly wrong for me. But when this has happened, it seems that my only reason for a change would be that I'd be better off with the new set of desires. And since (remember sec. 4) “better off” is a matter of desire fulfillment,

so is that reason. Could it be a case, then, where not to acquire the desire, or not to dispose of it, harms me in any way? Same answer as before: since harm is a dent in my welfare, and welfare is desire fulfillment, this would be an argument from desire fulfillment.

Could it be a case of “genuine novelty”? This is Elijah Millgram’s concern. Unlike your typical philosopher, Millgram believes that “our world is full of new and surprising things”. Quite often, he argues, these things render “the desires, aims, and interests we already have . . . suddenly obsolete”. Therefore, “we must be able to learn new interests from experience”.²⁹

But why can’t the novelties be handled by an appeal to how we would have felt if we had vividly imagined them, however difficult the imagining might be? And surely, even if they can’t, the preference changes Millgram would recommend will be changes that, given the new circumstances, would be good for us. In which case, as has been pointed out above, the preference party fully agrees that we should try to bring them into effect.

5.3 Too Much of a Good Thing?

Oddly enough, friends of desire-based rationality get to hear the opposite reproach as well. The charge now is not that they change their desires too rarely, but that they might end up changing them all the time. Suppose that frequently, whatever project you have at that time, you find out that you could reap more desire fulfillment if you gave up that project and adopted a new one. Would reason require you to change your projects like socks?³⁰

As with socks, you shouldn’t overdo it, and nobody is asking you to. Given how the mind and the world work, continuous desire hopping, if psychologically feasible at all, would not pay (not in terms of desire fulfillment, that is), and will thus not be recommended by a desire-based theory. The reasons why it wouldn’t pay are manifold. Different desires require different resources, including different dwellings, friends, jobs, skills, tools; so you’d have to continuously chase after these things as well. Besides, changing the desires will tend to hurt, one way or the other. And after the umpteenth change, you won’t be able to muster up much enthusiasm for project umpteen plus one—not, at any rate, without playing certain tricks upon yourself that may well harm you elsewhere. True, significant drawbacks like these needn’t always exist, and this leaves us with conceivable and real cases in which the seeker of desire fulfillment would change his desires if he could. But with the significant

drawbacks out of the way, isn't that exactly the right thing for him to do? Why *not* change one's desires if it helps? You should "want the events to happen as they do happen," Epictetus recommends, "and your life will go well".³¹ Surely he has a point. The goal is harmony between the will and the world. Making a habit of attuning them *both* qualifies as wisdom.

There is one limit. You could change your desires so radically that the person with the new desires would no longer be you. That, of course, is a limit the theory observes. For if the person with the new desires wouldn't be you, then the new desires wouldn't be yours, and neither would their fulfillment. In saying that your rational actions serve *your* welfare, desire-based rationality will hardly advise you to adopt desires whose adoption would blot you out.³²

5.4 The Hearty View

Thus ends the sketch of one view of practical rationality. A sketch indeed, since much remains to be filled in. I have not yet linked these thoughts to the technicalities of rational decision theory,³³ and I haven't discussed the paradoxes of rational decision making.³⁴ I haven't asked whether the beliefs that render an action rational (say the belief that, if I press the yellow button, the machine will start) must be rational in their own right: sound, say, and warranted by the available evidence.³⁵ Some thorny issues concerning rationality and time haven't received their due, and neither has the place of *moral* reasons in this picture.

But we have made headway. While parts of the sketch fitted desire-based views in general, the mainstay of the Hearty View was one particular explication of desire. To desire something is to be touched by it. Or rather, to be disposed to be touched by the thought of it. Or rather, to be disposed to be delighted at the prospect of its being the case. More delighted, at any rate, than by the opposite prospect. In approximately this sense of "desire", the rational thing to do is the thing you believe would best fulfill your desires.

The Hearty View pinpoints what matters and puts it center stage. It goes by what the agent cares about. It explains why pleasure is a final end, and why it is not the only one. It observes the distinctions between justification and explanation, advice and prediction, "should" and "is", norms and facts. It dovetails with our considered judgements on welfare, and honors the appropriate links between what is rational for us to do and what is good for us. It is not egoistic. Finally, it tells us how to adjust not merely our actions to our desires, but also our desires themselves.

6 THE VERDICT

We now have at our disposal the outline of a theory of ends, namely of desires, and their role in practical rationality. As befitted the occasion, we paid particular attention to the strong requirements that govern the very notion of an end as well as to the malleability of ends. Most of the evidence being in, we can try our hands at a verdict. Drawing both on general reflections and on the particulars of the view that has emerged, we return to the big question: Should we be instrumentalists? Should we claim, and if so, in what sense, that we can reason about the best means to our ends, but not about the ends themselves?

6.1 The Pull

The most uncontroversial part of the answer says that we sometimes sit down with a pretty clearly defined goal in mind and ask ourselves how to get there. This is not exactly a rare occurrence. There can be little doubt, and there is little doubt in the literature, that the session such a question calls for merits the name of practical reasoning. The choice of what one takes to be the most efficient means to one's ends constitutes one large chunk of practical rationality.

Moreover, consider what would happen if somebody told us: that he wants to get rid of a toothache; that he could take aspirin; that this, but nothing else, would help; that taking it wouldn't conflict with any other project of his—and that he does *not* find it advisable to take it. We would suspect that the toothache is the least of his problems. Consider also the mirror image of that person: the man who is right in believing that no past, present, or future desire of his would be fulfilled by his taking an aspirin. Shouldn't we agree that he has no reason to take the tablet? If he asked us, "Why should I take it?", we would be hard pressed for an answer.

So there's a strong pull from desires to reasons, and a strong pull from the absence of desires to the absence of reasons. Far be it from us to jump to conclusions. As with UFOs, open-mindedness is the name of the game. Every alleged sighting of a case that does not conform to the basic pattern deserves our attention. Such cases would include desires one shouldn't act on or one should get rid of; desires one should have; and things one should do though one does not desire either them or their expected consequences. We ought to check every such report, dismiss or accept it, and maybe modify our Humean leanings in order to accom-

moderate it. If we proceed like this, the present paper has suggested and partly shown, a desire-based view will indeed prevail. The view can indeed be classified, this I hope to point out in a moment, as at least mildly instrumentalist.

6.2 Neutrality

With our emphasis on means-ends rationality, we follow in the footsteps of the Enlightenment. When one woman's meat is another woman's poison, this should hardly entail that one of these women is irrational. It would be presumptuous for a conception of rationality to give its blessing, other things being equal, to a desire to collect stamps, but not to a desire to collect coins.

This tolerance extends to all cases of that *form*. In particular, it also extends to the more eccentric predilections from the philosophical folklore. Well-known examples include the intrinsic desires to count blades of grass, to have a saucer of mud, or to drink paint.³⁶ To be sure, here our advice that the agent decide with a view to *all* her desires acquires a certain urgency. She may well have strong desires to survive, or not to be stared at. Still, if the fulfillment of no other desires were at stake, and if the agent had really set her heart, full representation and all, on one of these puzzling activities, then it would be only fitting for her to go ahead. It is just as rational for some people to act on desires that amaze me as it is for me to act on desires that no doubt amaze them. It takes many desires to make a world. Reason, like the state, should be neither dictatorial nor discriminatory. Both of them should say: *chacun à sa façon*.

6.3 Moderate Instrumentalism

The view of practical rationality sketched earlier in this paper has similar implications. To determine how instrumentalist this view is, I propose to collect, but not to reargue, the relevant points from the sections that lie behind us.

Most notably, desires—in the sense explained, in which “desire” captures what it is for something to matter to somebody—have the last word. Every such desire, and nothing but such a desire, counts. These desires are “given”, not just in the sense that their existence or non-existence need not always be in our power, but also in the sense that, if such a desire is really there, no rational critique can set its normative force to zero. Once their strength has been taken into account, all these desires are equal. There will be no reason to acquire, to keep, to act

upon, or to act as if one had, a desire of one content rather than another—unless it is a reason that itself has to do with the number and strength of fulfilled desires. Furthermore, desires, and thus reasons, can vary; for a large class of propositions p , it is quite possible that one rational person desires p while another does not.

This list should suffice to warrant the use of the term “instrumentalism”. It should be a cautious use, though, since some other features of rationality as it has been pictured here may sound inviting to the non-instrumentalist. For instance, finding out what our ends are, in the rationally relevant sense of “end”, can be hard work, and some ways of going about it are more reasonable than others. (Concentrating, and then calling up and rotating a candidate for endhood before our mind’s eye will often be more promising than consulting a psychic or the Bible.) In this sense, the sense of detecting rather than generating or eliminating, we reason about final ends, and face a genuine danger of getting the answer wrong. To some extent even in the other senses. We can have reasons to adopt, or to make ourselves adopt, new desires and to dispose of existing ones. These reasons, however, will themselves be accountable to nothing but the quantity of desire fulfillment. They will bottom out, say, in our desire to have, or not to have, certain desires, or in the fact that certain desires cannot, or cannot jointly, be satisfied.

On balance, features traditionally conceived of as instrumentalist dominate this view. If somebody disagreed and decided to say that the points from the previous paragraph amount to a denial of instrumentalism, he would have a hard time naming a single instrumentalist, dead or alive—a prospect that should raise further doubts as to the point of cutting up the field his way. Should we still hesitate to adopt the label “instrumentalism”, then perhaps “moderate instrumentalism” is the solution.

6.4 Pseudoinstrumentalism?

We get an appropriate coda to all this by looking at one possible objection. “With your full-representation requirement”, a critic might say pointing back to secs. 1.1 and 1.2, “you have simply strengthened the notion of an end. Ends can’t be irrational on your account for the sole reason that you have hidden the rationality in the notion of an end itself. So you did come round to noninstrumentalism in substance and are only keeping up a façade of instrumentalism.”

The underlying question here is how to interpret the force of full representation. When you fully represent things to yourself, what can this

effect? Some, whom we can call the *revisionists*, have it that full representation or some such process can change your desires, and, let us assume, rationally so. For example, you have a desire, fully represent, and end up with another desire, acquired and required by reason. If we accepted this answer, which we shouldn't, then the criterion of rationality endorsed by the Hearty View, as well as the criteria endorsed by various other views that appeal to full representation, would look anti-instrumentalist. Rationality or full representation would require preference changes all over the place.

Nonrevisionists, on the other hand, *grosso modo* exclude this. They say that only what would survive or emerge from full representation *is* a desire.³⁷ In that case, things will look different. The expression “rational desire” has become more or less pleonastic. Since, so to speak (and only so to speak), nothing but a “rational desire” counts as a desire to begin with, rationality will never change desires—except, of course, to secure larger *amounts* of fulfillment.

Let me illustrate the dissent with two examples. John McDowell considers cases of the following type. I have what seems like a desire to ϕ (say to tell the truth), discover that, in the situation at hand, ϕ -ing would amount to an act of category ψ (say betraying a friend's secret), and this discovery has the effect that I no longer have what seems like a desire to ϕ . What has been going on? McDowell answers with the revisionists. My discovery, or what for present purposes we can as well call my full representation, has “silenced” my desire to ϕ .³⁸ The Hearty View denies this. Full representation has helped me find out that I *have* no desire to ϕ , but at best a desire to ϕ in a way that does not amount to ψ -ing. Notice that when we come to criteria of rational action, the upshot is the same either way. Notice also that, as McDowell is right to emphasize, the case at hand should not be confused with a different type, in which a desire exists and survives, but is outweighed by another one.

Some writings of what has been dubbed the “specificationist” school lend themselves to a similar analysis. Take Henry Richardson's tale of a politician's catharsis—written, I believe, before the author moved to Washington, D.C. The plot goes as follows. A politician plans to impress his electorate by showing off how he helps the homeless. But chewing the prospect over, he comes to perceive their condition as truly appalling. The whole idea of using the homeless merely as a means in his campaign becomes disgusting to him. At the end of this “mental ‘experiment’”, as Richardson calls it, the politician wants to help street people, no matter

whether he gets elected. Richardson says, with the revisionists, that deliberation has made the politician adopt a new final end.³⁹ The Hearty View says, against the revisionists, that the politician has discovered what his ends are. They both want to say that the rational thing for this politician to do is to go and help the homeless.

Both parties should agree in at least one more respect: the “subjectivity” or “objectivity” of practical reasons. A revisionist should not be misled by her claim that certain changes of preference are required or effected by reason. This claim might make it sound (to resort to our brief discussion of McDowell for this purpose) as if *everybody* who fully represented to himself the issue of ϕ -ing-and-thereby- ψ -ing had, on pain of irrationality, to lose interest in ϕ -ing. This is not so. Some might rationally lose interest, and some might rationally not.⁴⁰ How a subject feels about ϕ -ing, and before, during, or after undergoing a full representation of ϕ -ing-and-thereby- ψ -ing, is, just as the words suggest, a subjective matter if ever there was one.

Where does this leave us? The objection we’ve been considering said that our instrumentalism is pseudo. We have identified the underlying dissent about the role of full representation: the revisionist says that it shapes desires; the nonrevisionist, that it detects them. It should be clear by now that, *if* revisionism is wrong, the objection backfires. For if revisionism is wrong, then what is pseudo is an *anti*-instrumentalism based on it. Such an anti-instrumentalism will only bid us to revise or ignore our pseudo-ends, not our ends.

As far as I can tell, the “if” clause is indeed true and revisionism wrong. We will see this if we return to the beginning of this paper. Desires, we said there and it is hardly controversial to say, have a content. Now, if we permitted ourselves to say that simply *grasping* the content could change a desire, then in what sense can it ever have been a desire *with that content*? In what sense does somebody desire p (p , and not nothing or something else) who, if only he looked at p a little harder, would desire it “no longer”? What on earth did his desiring of *it* ever consist in? Here revisionists have a lot of explaining to do. While waiting for them to do the explaining, we had better remain nonrevisionists. And moderate instrumentalists.

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this more fully when I express the thoughts themselves more fully. Thanks are also due to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung for research grants, and to Stanford University for its hospitality.

Notes

1. Examples of by and large instrumentalist creeds include: Allais 1953, sec. 47; Anscombe 1957, secs. 34 and 38; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112b; Audi 1989, chap. 4; Gauthier 1975, end of sec. 1, 1986, pp. 25 f.; Hempel 1961–1962, esp. sec. 2.3; Hubin 1991 and 1999; Hume 1739–1740, secs. 2.3.3 and 3.1.1; Hutcheson 1734–1737, vol. 1, p. 38; Luce and Raiffa 1957, p. 21; James Mill 1829, vol. 2, p. 262 (this covers father and son—more on their instrumentalism in Millgram 2000, p. 289); von Mises 1949, sec. 1.4; Rawls 1971, sec. 64; Resnik 1987, p. 5; Russell 1954, p. 8; Schmidtz 2000; Stampe 1987; Weber 1922, chaps. 2.1, 10, and pp. 597–613. Some of these are paradigm cases, some borderline cases, of instrumentalism.
2. Similarly, Brandt 1979, beginning of chap. 6, as well as sec. 3.4; von Ehrenfels 1897, secs. 20 f.; Lewis 1989, p. 121; Sidgwick 1874, p. 112.
3. Appeals to counterfactual conditionals in this and related contexts are standard; some classical sources are given in the previous note, more in Fehige 2000, sec. 1.2.
4. And many of them have received it, one way or the other—see, for instance, Brandt 1979, sec. 3.4, and 1998.
5. Aristotle, *De anima*, 2.2 f. and 3.7–3.13; Augustine, *De civitate dei*, sec. 14.7; Descartes 1649, secs. 87 and 91 f.; Spinoza 1677, part 3, esp. theorem 36 and definition 32; Kant 1797, beginning of the introduction. A handful of the sources I mention in this and the next section can be found, along with brilliant discussion, in Katz 1986.
6. Hobbes 1651, sec. 1.6.11; James Mill 1829, vol. 2, pp. 190 f.; John Stuart Mill 1861, towards the end of chap. 4.
7. Wundt 1874, secs. 17.1.a, 17.4.b, 17.4.c; Schneider 1880, pp. 75–77; von Gіzycki 1883, sec. 1.8; Sigwart 1886, sec. 1.3; Ziehen 1891, chap. 16; von Ehrenfels 1897, esp. secs. 20 f. and 79; Pfänder 1900, sec. 1.4; Meinong 1902, secs. 53–56, esp. p. 321, 1921, p. 667.
8. Duncker 1941, p. 416; Gosling 1969, p. 97 and passim, esp. chaps. 6 f.; Brandt and Kim 1963, p. 427; Strawson 1994, sec. 9.8.
9. Plato, *Gorgias*, 496d, *Symposium* 34c–36b; Spinoza, *loc. cit.*; Locke 1689, secs. 2.20.6 and 2.21.31 f.; Condillac 1754, sec. 1.3; Schopenhauer 1844, sec. 57 of book 3; Duncker 1941, sec. 14; for a discussion, see Sidgwick 1874, pp. 46 f. as well as secs. 1.4.4 (endnote) and 4.1.2 (first footnote). Descartes states the symmetry, concerning desire, of joy about p and sorrow at non- p particularly clearly (*loc. cit.*), and so do Gosling 1969, pp. 97 and 121, as well as, *loc. cit.*, von Ehrenfels, von Gіzycki, Pfänder, Schlick, Sigwart, and Ziehen.

10. See the various quantitative phrases in Locke 1689, secs. 2.20.6 and 2.21.31; similarly, Green 1883, sec. 105; Sidgwick 1874, last sentence of p. 47, as well as, loc. cit., von Gіzycki, Schlick, Schneider, and Ziehen.
11. In Carolyn Morillo's words, pleasure is the anchor, not necessarily the focus, of desire (1995, *passim*). The two claims have been run together by many authors, including the Mills: 1829, vol. 2, pp. 192 f., 327, 361, and 1861, end of chap. 4. Early clarifications include: von Ehrenfels 1897, sec. 9; MacKenzie 1892, sec. 1.2.5 (and note to sec. 1.1.3); Rashdall 1907, vol. 1, sec. 1.2 (esp. pp. 17, 28–32); Schlick 1930, sec. 2.8; Sidgwick 1874, last sentence of p. 47, and, loc. cit., Sigwart, von Gіzycki, and Pfānder.
12. MacIntyre 1965 discusses the issue and the literature.
13. As Richard Brandt's theory does; on the difference, see Lewis 1989, p. 124, and Murphy 1999.
14. See, e.g., Gibbard 1990, pp. 18–22; Johnston 1989; Rosati 1995; Velleman 1988; some of these authors list further critics.
15. I am paraphrasing very loosely Thomas Nagel's much-quoted protest from 1970, sec. 5.2. For works on the concept of desire, see the bibliography in Fehige and Wessels 1998.
16. A question asked forcefully in Quinn 1993, sec. 2.
17. The idea, as well as the shopping basket we are about to encounter, go back to Anscombe 1957, sec. 32; for a discussion of much of the literature, see Humbertstone 1992.
18. See, for instance, Davidson 1963; Smith 1994, sec. 5.2; Williams 1980, pp. 78, 82 f., and 1989, pp. 38 f. Emphatically affirmative answers to this question have given birth and publicity to a form of instrumentalism that concentrates on "desires" conceived of as causes of actions—see the previous section. I'm not the only skeptic about these answers. Korsgaard 1986 contains similar misgivings in a different terminology, and Schueler 1995, chap. 2, a plea to keep explanatory and justificatory reasons strictly apart.
19. The thoughts in this section ride roughshod over various complications discussed in Parfit 1984, part 2, but could be brought in line with that discussion; see below, sec. 5.1. Some of the moves that follow—especially the rejection of "objective list" accounts as well as of hedonistic accounts of welfare—are standard; see, e.g., Parfit 1984, appendix I. For other works on the relation of welfare to desire fulfillment, see the bibliography of Fehige and Wessels 1998.
20. Nozick 1974, pp. 43–45.
21. The view is developed more fully in Feinberg 1977; Goldstick 1988; Lockwood 1979; and Solomon 1976.
22. For such objections, see, e.g., Grice 1967, sects 1.2 and 1.4, and Katz 1986, sec. 2.2. See also the discussions above, sec. 1.4, and below, sec. 5.1.
23. See Bricker 1980, esp. pp. 389 f., and Parfit 1984, chap. 8.

24. See the works mentioned in the following note as well as Bricker 1980; Broome 1994; Nagel 1970, part 2; Parfit 1984, part 2 and appendix F; Sidgwick 1874, pp. 124 and 381; Weirich 1981. Some of these works deal with the discounting of *other* people's future welfare, but the problems are related.
25. See Arneson 1990, pp. 164–167; Brandt 1982, sec. 8; Bykvist 1998, chap. 4; Hare 1981, sec. 5.6; and Maslen 2000.
26. In particular, Parfit's present-aim theory (1984, part 2) is a strong candidate. The theory would complicate the discussions in secs. 1.4, 4, and 5.2 f. of this paper. For a simplification similar to the one I'm opting for, see Hare 1981, p. 105.
27. Hume 1741, p. 5 and essay 18. Long before, the Buddha and the Stoics said the same. Later statements include Bricker 1980, secs. 4 f.; Bykvist 1998, chap. 5; the editors' introduction to *possible* preferences in Fehige and Wessels 1998; Mill 1838, p. 98; Schelling 1978; Schmidtz 1994.
28. This and some of the following points are discussed more fully, with references, in Fehige 2000, sec. 6.
29. This is the topic of Millgram 1997, esp. chap. 5; quotations from pp. 89, 103, and 6.
30. See the numerous references in Wessels 1998, note 57.
31. Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, sec. 8.
32. Bricker 1980, p. 400.
33. Luce and Raiffa 1957 and Resnik 1987 are two of many introductions.
34. See, e.g., Blackburn 1998, chap. 6; Bratman 1999; Parfit 1984, parts 1 f.; Sidgwick 1874, sec. 2.3.
35. See Hempel 1961–1962, sec. 2.2; Weber 1922, pp. 432–438.
36. Rawls 1971, pp. 432 f.; Anscombe 1957, sec. 37; Davidson 1963, p. 4.
37. For a complication I will have to ignore here, see Lewis 1989, p. 117.
38. McDowell 1978, pp. 90 f., 1979, p. 56. Like the Hearty View, Hubin 1999, pp. 35 f., favors the opposite answer.
39. Richardson 1994, sec. 13, anticipating much of what happens with the hero of John Grisham's *Street Lawyer* (1998). More on specificationism in the introduction to this volume.
40. For most *representata*, at any rate. The remarks on pleasure in sec. 1.4 suggest an exception.

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