UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
The Morality of Mental Practical Action

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1tc4v3np

Author
Richardson, Ira Andrew

Publication Date
2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Morality of Mental Practical Action

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Philosophy

by

Ira Andrew Richardson

2013

© Copyright by

Ira Andrew Richardson

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Morality of Mental Practical Action

by

Ira Andrew Richardson

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Barbara Herman, Chair

Thinking is something we do, and some of the thinking we do is morally wrong. If we included examples of morally wrong mental action among starting points for philosophical reflection, how would they be explained by our best ethical theories and what might they illuminate about ordinary examples of morally wrong overt action? My project develops the view that some mental activities are genuine practical actions, and I propose that the moral norm for mental practical actions is the standard of their kind: using standards of goodness to make determinations about what to do.

The practical activity standard requires practical agents to use valid standards of goodness only. A practical activity which fails to meet this standard cannot be good, I conclude, since it fails to meet the standard of its kind. I illustrate how this standard of practical activity can be used to articulate what makes it is morally wrong to fantasize about murder. To address

the practical mechanics of fantasizing about murder, a mental activity that consists in mentally imagining murder for pleasure, I sketch an account of the practical imagination.

Since our practical ends are regulative standards determining the goodness of what we do, our practical ends can determine the mental content of our imaginings. I argue that, by imagining murder for the sake of pleasure, the fantasizer uses an invalid standard of goodness and thereby violates the practical activity standard. The fantasizer's use of an pleasure as a standard of goodness is invalid, I argue, because it applies to the ends of whichever practical agent's murder is imagined but incorrectly determines that it would be good because pleasing. I show how this basic argument strategy can be extended to other salient moral phenomena, including morally wrong mental hopes as well as familiar examples of morally wrong overt actions such as making a false promise and killing for profit. I address examples of acting for the wrong reason and sketch a few interesting implications for future research.

I suggest that the moral significance of the practical activity standard suggests a friendly reinterpretation of Kant's Humanity Formula as a deliberative constraint against using the standard of practical activity as a mere means. Since the standard of practical activity captures the nature of practical agents as rational, to use it as a mere means is to use the rational nature of a practical agent as a mere means. According to the view that begins to emerge, morality calls for us to deliberate about the ends of other practical agents not only when our activities would do something to them (and hence use them) but also when our activities would do something about them (and hence use their rational nature).

The dissertation of Ira Andrew Richardson is approved.

John P. Carriero

Alexander Jacob Julius

Seana Shiffrin

David A. Scott

Barbara Herman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

DEDICATION

For my loving parents, Lloyd and Judith.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and setup…… 1

1.2 Initial resistance…….…… 6

1.3 The mind as a proper target of moral norms…….. 9

1.4 Initial cases and preliminary explanations……. 14

1.5 Limitations of the preliminary explanations……..... 20

1.6 The representative case and the adequacy condition ……. 26

Chapter II: STANDARDS OF MENTAL PRACTICAL AGENCY

2.1 Practical Mental Activities……..... 33

2.2 My primary opponent: the Interactionalist ……... 34

2.3 Ethics and properly proper conduct ……...37

2.4 Mental practical activities ……. 42

2.5 The Practical Imagination ……... 47

2.6 Imaginings as practical actions …… 53

2.7 The practical mechanics of fantasy…… 62

Chapter III: FANTASY AS A PRACTICAL ACTIVITY

3.1 Introduction:…….……. 68

3.2 Basic elements of the view……... 70

3.3 The murder fantasy…….……..... 78

3.4 Putting the idea another way…….……. 86

3.5 Objections and replies…….……. 97

3.6 Addressing a wider range of examples …..…….. 107

Chapter IV: CONCLUSION

4.1 Applications, Significance, and Implications..……... 117

4.2 Extending the account (I): Hoping……. 118

4.3 Extending the account (II): Familiar examples….……..131

4.4 Extending the account (III): The right thing for the wrong reason …... 137

4.5 A few implications.……..... 141

4.6 Humanity and the practical activity standard……. 148

CURRICULUM VITAE

Ira A. Richardson received his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Amherst College in 1999. He went on to receive his Master of Arts in Philosophy at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2006.

> "The highest stage in moral culture at which we can arrive, is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts. For what is true repentance but in thought."[1]
>
> Charles Darwin

> "The least important thing in my life is its tangibleness. The only things that matter lastingly are the things that happen inside me…. The adventures of my spirit are realer than the outer things that befall me."[2]
>
> Mary MacLane

1.1 Introduction

Thinking is something we do, and some of the thinking we do is morally wrong. The primary aim of my dissertation is to explain these claims in a way that remains true to common sense moral judgment. In general, when we make claims about the moral wrongness of an action such as theft or deceit, we ordinarily take something about the action itself to be morally objectionable. There seems to be something morally objectionable about *telling* of the lie and *stealing* a wallet. Could we make analogous claims about the moral wrongness of certain mental actions? I have in mind individuals like the surgeon who has tired of routine and decides to fantasize about different ways to take a patient's life, or an overworked airline pilot who wishes that an upcoming flight would crash. Suppose we agreed, along with common sense, that there is indeed something morally wrong about *making* a wish and *entertaining* a fantasy, which features of a mental action could ground those moral claims? Wishing and fantasizing are covert, hidden, interior movements that occur with a single individual's private mental space. How could we capture the moral rights and wrongs committed in the mind alone and, as a result, what might we learn about ethical theory?

This chapter introduces my basic interest and specifies the positive project I intend to carry out. My interest in this project was spurred by reflecting on cases in which someone seems to be doing something morally wrong, despite its happening in the mind alone. After I try to

[1]The surrounding passages suggests that Darwin saw the moral significance of thoughts as borne by the thoughts themselves (Darwin, 1871, p. 97).

[2] (Sèchehaye, 1951, p. 22).

defuse initial resistance to the project, I present several initial cases along with plausible ways to address and explain them. These preliminary explanations suggest a preliminary result: morality's reach extends into the mind via an agent's beliefs, dispositions, character traits, interpersonal relationships, and external causal consequences. I worry that explanations based on features that are related but external to the mental activity will not provide a thoroughly satisfying view. Since they locate the moral objectionability in features that were extrinsic to the mental activity, these explanations could not target the mental activity itself as a site of moral transgression. If overt actions are an apposite model for mental actions as I propose, then something about the mental activity itself can make it morally wrong. The view I eventually develop stresses the kind of practical agency and commitments that these action types have in common: the authority of morality extends into the mental domain and can directly govern the activities of a mind because they are practical.

My project's positive agenda is determined by reflecting on commonsense moral judgment about a representative example: deliberately fantasizing about murder. Commonsense tells us that deliberately fantasizing about murder is something that is morally wrong to do, based on the fact that murder is a terrible thing to fantasize about. Thus, commonsense sets the explanatory task and its condition of adequacy: we need to explain how fantasizing about murder can be something that is morally wrong to do on the basis that the activity is a fantasy and that the fantasy is about a murder. This condition of explanatory adequacy does a surprising amount of philosophical work: it poses a serious problem for a wide range of moral norms, including any norms that rely on consequentialist reasoning. I eventually develop and defend the hypothesis that some mental activities are genuine practical activities and that a norm for practical activities can be characterized to account for their moral wrongness in terms that satisfy the adequacy condition.

A few cursory remarks about the project's methodology and limitations are in order. The project's limitations are too numerous to identify, but two need to be mentioned. It is important for a general inquiry of this kind to articulate a practical taxonomy of mental acts—the doings,

activities and operations that take place in the mind. Whereas some seem to be discrete, others seem to be occurrent and activity-like. Making wishes resemble discrete, instantaneous acts. Birthdays are a time to celebrate, and our tradition is to make a single wish. Making the wish, and the wish that gets made, can be objects of deliberation-based choice that we can perform as singletons (so to speak). Other things that take place in the mind, such as fantasizing about winning the lottery or rehearsing a chess game, are ongoing and episodic activities. One indulges a fantasy or spends an evening deliberating about the next chess move. Regrettably, although I explore the practical agency we have over our own minds in Chapter II, I do not offer a general taxonomy of mental actions beyond what has already been offered by the wisdom of commonsense.

I have shaped part of the upcoming dialectic in light of the themes and general concerns that will naturally arise from the historical ethical traditions. But much of the specialist's work remains undone, however, on the assumption that any tradition-specific counterarguments will fare better in the hands of their adherents. My own goal has been to take a general, Kantian moral framework and develop its vision of mental actions as far as reasonably possible.

I hope to be permitted a certain amount of terminological latitude initially. As we begin, my use of terms such as "mental activity" and "thinking" remain vague. I mean for them to range broadly over the things a mind can do, including acts of remembering, imagining, reasoning, hoping, wishing, and praying. In ordinary language, "thinking" (and its cognates) can refer to any number of different mental activities and states. It can refer to reasoning about the way things are. I can reason about the weather in San Francisco, for example. It can also refer to considerations about what to do, for example when I think about stopping by my favorite café. In both cases I might say that I was thinking; in the one case that I was thinking about the weather and in the other that I was thinking of taking a trip to my favorite café. It can also refer to having a belief, as when I think the amendment will narrowly pass; or to an evaluative judgment, as when I believe that it would be good for the amendment to pass. There is also a use of "thinking" where something is entertained as the object of my thought. An old friend calls and I say, "I was

just thinking of you." It is used when I report that I am thinking about language, or the gas mileage of the newest hybrid car. I can call something to mind, have it in mind, entertain it, and attend to it. I begin from an admittedly vague sense of mental action, therefore, only to sharpen our focus and terminology over the course of several long chapters. I admit that this drawback is regrettable in a discipline where clarity and exacting precision are high virtues. The sacrifice struck me as necessary, however, in the spirit of tracking a loose and somewhat elusive phenomenon.

Indeed, the target of investigation is not always easy to identify. It appears to take place only in the periphery of view. Catching a glimpse of it requires a kind of theoretical reorientation: it calls for a general shift in the locus of importance from mental states to mental activities. When the operations and activities of a mind matter, they typically matter only because of what they tell us about an agent's mental states. This does not imply, however, that mental states will no longer have a significant explanatory role to play. On the contrary, just like ordinary overt actions, an agent's mental actions are done against a background of complex mental states, including the agent's beliefs, intentions and desires.[3]

We will also have to be wary of an ordinarily helpful pair of distinctions: the troublesome pair often operates silently in the background. Left unchecked, they will distort and obscure our view. The first distinction is between thinking and acting. Ordinarily, we conceive of thought as a precursor to action: we consider what to do, figure it out, and then we proceed to do it. Although it would be natural to contrast the antecedent thinking from the subsequent action, it would be a mistake to conclude that thinking cannot ever be a form of acting. It would be a mistake because overt physical actions are not the only things we can proceed to do as the result

[3] There are important questions about control or choice on the one hand, and a question about accountability or responsibility, on the other. It is possible to restrict our inquiry to cases where agents exercise deliberation-based choices over their mental activities and sure-footedly shape their content. I will forgo expressly adding this rider to my own cases since it strikes me as artificially cautious. But it could be overly optimistic of me to believe that fully-developed rational agents can direct the content and operations of their own minds.

of prior consideration: the things we proceed to do sometimes include mental actions. Since the options for what we can proceed to do sometimes include thinking itself, the distinction between thinking and acting is not mutually exclusive.

As a result deliberating about how to spend my evening, for example, I can decide that after dinner I will begin deliberating about where to take my next spring vacation (but to spend at most one hour trying to make up my mind, since I need to finish that paper for next week). These examples will become central to my account, and I will discuss them along with our mental agency more thoroughly in Chapter II.

The second distinction is between the real and the imaginary; between what actually happens in the real physical world and what is merely mentally represented as happening. Although this distinction is sound, however, our mental representings and our mental imaginings are part of reality: whether or not an imagining occurred is a fact of the matter, and a fact of the matter about what actually happened in the real world.[4] Moreover, even things that are merely imagined are in some sense part reality: whether it was a unicorn or a large Dalmatian dog that I imagined jumping out of the bushes is also a fact of the matter, and a fact of the matter about what actually happened in the real world.

We can keep these distinctions honest by minding two caveats. First: although thought is not action, thinking is nevertheless something we do. Second: although the imaginary is not real, our imaginings are nevertheless part of reality. I will elaborate and defend these ideas in subsequent chapters.[5] This method has also been my guide to reckoning with other thinkers and their theories. I have sought greater synthesis and unity wherever possible: to incorporate and

---

[4] I do not mean to suggest that these claims have been overlooked in philosophy. To the contrary, they have sometimes been central parts of a philosopher's theory. One of the best and earliest examples of this is Descartes, who pay much heed to facts about the formal and objective reality of ideas. But the claims have not been fully appreciated. The real is not the imaginary, but our imaginings can be part of what they are about, *viz.* the real world. This becomes immensely important in Chapter 3.

[5] Readers who favor cutting to the chase over exploratory preludes are invited to skip to the main event, in section six, where I give the first sharpened statement of the positive philosophical project.

extend any insights I might glean from past thinkers and theories. I have benefited from a diverse group of thinkers, including especially Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell, for clues and ideas about the nature of mental activities as well as how to approach a hard subject. The developments of own account are little more than tiny tributes to past thinkers.

1.2 *Initial resistance*

Ordinary language also suggests that mental activities can be morally objectionable. Our moral language is not divorced from the way we talk about thinking. When the stakes are a matter of life and death, including decisions about abortion, we say that you should think about it long and hard. When acts are repulsive or detestable, including pedophilia and necrophilia, we say that you should not even be thinking about it. When it is time to celebrate intimate relationships with a gift, including anniversaries and weddings, we say it is the thought that counts. Sometimes morality does the counting.

The proposal that morality has direct authority over the mind is met with a surprising amount of resistance. The resistance takes several forms, including misinterpretations of the basic proposal. When it is interpreted as making the weak claim that mental states such as impure thoughts, adulterous desires, and evil intentions are morally objectionable, the proposal sounds uninteresting because it says nothing new. When it is interpreted as making the strong claim that it is morally wrong merely to imagine committing a moral wrong such as stealing someone's wallet, the proposal sounds implausible because the imaginary thief does not actually steal anything. As it turns out, I share these concerns. The interpretations that motivate them, however, leave plenty of room for the middle ground view I intend to explore: what minds do can be morally wrong.[6]

[6] Since these concerns are raised early and often in conversation, I wanted reassure the concerned reader that we will chart a course through them. Resistance based on these concerns should be resisted, I suggest, until we have explored the territory a bit further. The frequency and force of these concerns might be attributable, I speculate, to the popularity of certain religious authorities and the value of individualism in many modern cultures.

Resistance is sometimes backed by concerns about mental control. We cannot be held morally responsible for our thoughts, since we seem to lack the kind of control over our mental content that would be necessary for moral responsibility. After all, we seem to have less control over what our minds do than over what our bodies do. It can be easy to resist actually acting on impulses that one finds it difficult to resist thinking about, whereas it is generally up to us what we say to others and whether or not we disclose our thoughts.

Resistance is also backed by concerns that human psychological needs will go unmet. Perhaps we need a private, unfiltered, uncensored space where we can satisfy our deepest pre-social drives. Shouldn't we have a place, after all, to redirect suppressed anger or to satisfy deeply primal sexual desires that are not compatible with modern public life?[7]

I am most sympathetic to concerns about the freedom of thought. A free mind is essential for self-understanding and self-actualization. The space of thinking is a secretive and private place. I do not have to reveal my thoughts to you; but even if I did, our access to them differs and it differs essentially. Whereas you must trust a fallible method, such as believing what I say or divining my thoughts by observation, I know the content of my thoughts merely by thinking them. Due to differences in the way we access and share thoughts, they can be kept safely withdrawn from the public domain, thereby limiting our exposure to the censure of others. As a matter of human psychological constitution, the privacy of one's own thoughts encourages a sense that one's mind is safe from the disapproval and retribution of other persons. In this way, our thoughts can provide an intimate and revealing portrait of the way we relate to and conceive of other people.

The mind is an invaluable playground. We use it to explore and think things through, to test them without actually acting them out in the real world. That looks valuable. It also indicates that we can look at our thoughts with varying degrees of seriousness. We take stock of our

[7] (Nagel, 2002). I suspect that the insistence on keeping a special place where we can do whatever we please is a manifestation of the Peter Pan syndrome, which has simply disguised the desire for a kid's only clubhouse where no adults are ever allowed.

mental inventory: these things are important enough to think about more or remember, those things are important enough to actually do; whereas those other things aren't even worth a second thought.[8]

But the assumption that these values will be jeopardized by morality should be questioned. On the one hand, if our actions are truly free because of morality, then morality would not jeopardize mental freedom but make it possible. On the other hand, the claim that we should have a morally protected *Spielraum* for the mind does not imply that it would be impossible to commit a moral wrong in the mind.[9] Ordinarily, we distinguish between what we are free to do and what it would be morally wrong to do. The fact that I might be free to write anything I please does not imply, for example, that it wouldn't be morally wrong to plant misleading falsehoods in my online blog, or to write a fake diary that I know will be misinterpreted and hurtful. And furthermore, the claim that moral wrongs can be committed in the mind, moreover, does not imply that the mind should be subjected to regulation. Regulations placed on the mind threaten to impose especially steep psychological costs. The efforts of surveillance and anxieties about mistakes could threaten our peace of mind; and if peace of mind weren't found in the mind, then where would we find it? It is not clear, furthermore, that effective mental regulations are possible. The mind is a domain of ironic effects: trying not to think about something is, ironically, among the best ways to get it stuck in your head. Our good-faith intention to comply with a regulation placed on thought, therefore, could be the very thing that causes our non-compliance.

Two modest observations draw this section to a close. The debates raised are much too complicated for me to resolve in this short work. But they are debates are worth having, and they

---

[8] The view that morality applies to everything we do mentally does not imply that any mental content *per se* could be morally wrong. On the view I eventually develop, the primary moral question about our mental representations is not a function of their but rather of the end we seek to achieve by mentally representing them.

[9] From the German words *spiel* play and *raum* room. Suggested originally by (Kries, 1886).

should be informed by the results of our present undertaking. Since the initial forms of resistance were based largely on theoretical considerations, however, a number of competing theoretical considerations will be discussed in the next section. Subsequently, several examples will be presented in order to begin shaping the starting points of my positive view.[10]

1.3 *The mind as a proper target of moral norms*

It is a familiar philosophical claim that normative standards apply directly to our mental activities and mental states. Epistemic standards apply to beliefs and belief formation. The beliefs we have can be false, and the grounds we have for accepting them adopting can be unjustified. We can make mistakes about which considerations are relevant to a decision, about which are more beneficial, and about which actions will be the means to our end. Memories can be accurate; representations can be veridical; and so on. Mental operations, such as the addition of numbers, are subject to mathematical standards of correctness. The claim that normative standards apply to the contents and activities of the mind is not a matter of widespread dispute.

Our everyday practices and expectations about what takes place in the mind presuppose that normative standards do indeed apply. Interrupting someone who is in the middle of thinking, or interrupting them enough, can be wrong. We can inflict distressing thoughts on others by, for instance, reminding them about an intense sadness that they had momentarily forgotten; or by disclosing bad news when it will cause the most distress; or by showing age-inappropriate violence or sexually explicit content to the very young. Thus the things we do to affect the content of someone's mind can count as ways to exploit or corrupt it. We seem quite comfortable using normative standards, therefore, to characterize and criticize our use of someone else's mind.

This is also true of the use we make of our own minds. We expect our conversational partners to pay attention and to participate in ways that are responsive to what has been said. We

[10] I agree with Burge (2010) that we should tend to trust our judgments about particulars over our general judgments.

expect scientists to spend part of their workweek thinking about their research. When a natural disaster strikes, we voice the expectation that thoughts and prayers will be with the victims. We expect loved ones to think of us fondly when we are absent; we expect neighbors not to indulge sexual fantasies about our children.

People who deviate from these expectations make themselves vulnerable to moral sanction and blame. Known deviants are vulnerable to criticism, correction, and occasionally even ostracism. A neighbor whose pedophilic fantasies were discovered should anticipate being confronted and perhaps asked to move elsewhere; and it would not be odd for this neighbor to feel a sense of guilt and shame, to ask forgiveness, or to resolve to change. On the face of it, therefore, we display a high degree of moral sensitivity to mental actions and our assessments of them carry the kind of gravitas characteristic of moral judgment.

Moral obligations of gratitude and guilt generate moral standards for what takes place in the mind. The obligation to express gratitude requires remembering some particular past event.[11] Morally obligatory guilt requires that we consider our previous behavior and acknowledge our fault. The obligation to acknowledge or feel guilt implies that that it should be acknowledged or felt for the right reasons. The adulterous husband should not feel guilty because it was his own fault he got caught; he should feel guilty because betrayed his wife. The obligation to acknowledge or feel guilt for the right reasons requires a rather elaborate set of mental operations, including accurately recalling and correctly judging one's own past behavior. Notice, however, that the moral requirement on these thoughts was introduced because of their relationship to some appropriate object of moral guilt (the bad behavior). But can thoughts themselves be appropriate objects of moral guilt?

[11] They might not require that we remember specific details of a particular past event, but they would at least require that we remember something about some past event (namely that it occasions the expression of gratitude). Although thinking is at least as central to gratitude as to guilt, my discussion will focus on guilt primarily because it has received greater philosophical attention.

Herbert Morris presents a distinguished discussion of the relationship between moral guilt and death wishes. As a passing fancy, he argues, the wish is not something for which we can be held genuinely responsible. Since we cannot be held morally responsible for passing fancies, the guilt we feel over death wishes is a case of (rational) nonmoral guilt. Furthermore, according to Morris, some agents experience a kind of supererogatory guilt: guilt experienced in response to the exceedingly high standards that they themselves placed on their relationships. Although someone might feel guilty for not spending more time wishing his friend well, he is responding to an exceptionally high set of standards that he himself has placed on this relationship. Since morality does not require what is supererogatory, the guilt in this case does not imply that the lack of friendly wishes transgressed a moral obligation.

I agree with Morris on these points.[12] I would add only the point that we should not overgeneralize his conclusion. First, it seems to me that not all wishes are mere passing fancies. There are some wishes for which we can be held genuinely responsible. Consider making a birthday wish. A lot of consideration can go into what to wish for. The wishes we make while blowing out the candles can be the wishes we intended to make. It would follow that wishes cannot all be excluded as objects of moral guilt on the grounds that we cannot be responsible for any of them.[13]

Second, the claim that is not morally wrong to fall short of a supererogatory standard does not imply that it can never be morally wrong to fall short of a supererogatory standard. Suppose that it would be supererogatory for me to promise you a loan in circumstances when I myself am in a financial pinch. If I nevertheless make such a promise despite my financial woes, it would be morally wrong to break my word afterwards. Analogously, it is supererogatory to form exceptional friendships that strive to meet exceptionally demanding standards. If I

[12] For my own interests, what is stunning about Morris's insight is that it presents a way for us to begin conceiving of supererogatory mental activities.

[13] The fact that some wishes are mere passing fancies whereas others can be made deliberately suggests that we need a clearer taxonomy of our mental activities. Although I do not give such a taxonomy, I do give a plausible principle of taxonomy.

nevertheless form such a friendship despite its demandingness, it would be morally wrong to violate those standards after establishing and maintaining these friendships. It also seems to me that a mental action (or lack thereof) could potentially transgress the minimal standards of friendship. Someone who always dwells on malicious thoughts about a mere friend (or never wishes that friend well) might fail to be a good friend.

But how can we determine whether something is an *appropriate* object of guilt, independently of knowing whether it is morally wrong? Survivors' guilt is not an appropriate object of moral guilt because it fails to satisfy several well-established criteria. These criteria include: that the object of guilt is something for which the agent is morally responsible; that the feeling itself would be intelligible to others and would be something that others could reasonably agree one ought to feel; the guilt is something that could intelligibly dispose one to confess, apologize and repair; for which it would be sensible to forgive, and a reasonable basis of indignation. Whereas these criteria are not met by paradigmatic cases of nonmoral guilt such as the guilt survivors often feel in the wake of tragedy, they would appear to be met by some mental activities and thus confirm that thoughts can be appropriate objects of moral guilt.

1.4 Initial examples and preliminary explanations

My aim in this section is to convey the spirit of my interest in telling the moral story about mental activities and, by casting the net of examples widely, to spark interest in the need for an explanation. The flavor of a case will be more important than its specifics.[14] The first set of examples illustrates that an agent's mental activities, not merely that agent's mental states, can be the object of moral objection. It seems clear that our thinkings themselves can be directly targeted by genuine moral obligations:

[14] I do not mean to use these examples as a platform to present my own sustained analysis. That kind of discussion will not occur until Chapter III, where I apply my own account to a series of examples about fantasy.

> Professional is a highly ambitious professional and is constantly absorbed in her work. Professional and her colleagues decide not to work during lunchtime. Although they promise not to think about work, Professional decides to dwell on thoughts about work anyway.

It would be natural to say that Professional broke her word and that she should not have been thinking about work. Professional's promise creates an obligation against deliberately entertaining thoughts about work over lunch. Setting special stories aside, by deliberately thinking about the very thing she promised not to dwell upon, Professional broke her promise.

> Daydreamer has an active, itinerant mind and she enjoys few things more than spending an evening in thought. While trying to figure out the best move in her correspondence game of chess she receives a distressing message on her answering machine from her mother, who is seeking comfort because her best friend recently died. Instead of returning the call, Daydreamer continues thinking about the chess game.

In the daydreamer case, the daydreamer's mother needs to be consoled while daydreamer spent the evening happily thinking about chess instead. In this case, it is clear that Daydreamer should not have spent her night thinking rather than returning her mother's call. The fact that Daydreamer spent her time ruminating instead of consoling her bereaved mother is morally objectionable.

Yet there is nothing morally distinctive about mentally ruminating as such, it will be pointed objected, since the same moral objection would apply to doing (nearly) anything rather than providing consolation. It makes little difference, for example, whether the daydreamer had been busy doing laundry rather than busy thinking about chess. It makes little difference whether the action was mental or overt. In this sense, ruminating is morally objectionable only in an accidental fashion and so our familiar ethical resources would provide a perfectly satisfying explanation. The force of this worry can be sharpened by analogy. Consider that there are cases where it would be morally objectionable to drink a cup of coffee (it might have already been purchased by another customer, for instance). There is no urgent need to develop a philosophical

ethics of drinking coffee: it poses an underwhelming explanatory task because it yields immediately to readymade explanation.

Thus it will be worried that the daydreamer cases are no different from any other garden-variety overt action that fails to do what we have a moral obligation to do. On the one hand, I should like to say that this lack of difference illustrates my general point: the same considerations bearing on our ordinary actions as the target of moral criticism also bear on our mental activities—and, in light of their great differences in kind, that is not a trivial matter. On the other hand, I should like to say that there are also morally distinctive features of mental action. Consider moral failures that are due to poor thinking. I might be behind enemy lines and pick up a curious doll I see in the middle of the road, thereby springing a trap that kills my platoon. I should have thought twice, we might say, or I should have known better. It is not clear that any garden-variety overt conduct leading to the same outcome would be equally morally objectionable—since the problem seems essentially tied to the agent's ignorance (a mental defect). But the objections share a common basis, since the moral obligation protects unnecessary loss of life in both cases.

Consider someone who is thinking about telling a financially lucrative lie, but then decides against it. It seems that this is morally praiseworthy even thought the thought is about doing something quite bad. What do such cases show? The person who deliberates about doing something that's morally wrong, and considers whether the risks are worth the rewards, appears to be one step closer to actually doing it than the person who has never thought about it before. But we praise her restraint, not the thought she resisted. The same should be said of someone who wonders about making a charitable donation only to shrug it off—it is the failure to take such thoughts seriously enough, not the thoughts themselves, that merit moral praise or criticism. We need to distinguish between moral claims made about the content of an agent's thoughts and the moral claims made about the relationship these thoughts bear to other morally-relevant features of the agent.

This distinction does not imply, however, that these relationships cannot adequately explain why an agent's mental activities are morally wrong. Part of what makes these explanatory moves compelling is that our ordinary moral reactions to morally wrong actions are responsive to facts about the character and disposition of the agents who perform them. Mental activities can betray important facts about a person's character or disposition because they often contain unmet desires and betray concealed or suppressed attitudes. The relationship that a mental activity bears to other aspects of our agency are indeed a natural basis for explaining its moral objectionability.[15] Consider:

> Pilot pilots a large, commercial aircraft and often feels the urge to crash the plane during midflight.[16] Pilot willingly indulges in elaborate imaginative acts about the most thrilling way to crash the plane.

The Pilot's fantasy invites us to explain the moral problem in terms of what the pilot might actually do. We are sometimes alarmed after learning that someone harbors sinister thoughts, for instance, because we take thoughts to be a sign of how thinkers might act. If I were to learn, for instance, that the pilot of my flight enjoyed fantasizing about a crash during flight, I would be afraid that the pilot might actually attempt to crash the plane. Since the pilot has the power to perform the very action that is being simulated, the pilot becomes a kind of moral hazard.

> An inveterate but absent-minded racist never remembers to pay his membership fees for the clan and always forgets which night the clan rally is. But every Sunday, as it so happens, he prays to one day participate in a lynch mob.

The role of racist thoughts in the disposition to racist conduct is a basis for their moral objectionability. Racists are disposed to discriminate against or harm individuals who belong to other races, to make racist slurs and pressure group conformity; they are likely to vote for racist

---

[15] Once we consider the cases and explanations *in toto*, by contrast, it will become clearer that a central moral feature of in cases remains unaccounted for.

[16] It was reported in an Australian newspaper that a commercial airline pilot for Qantas confessed to repeatedly feeling the urge to crash while operating the aircraft.

legislation, join racist groups and encourage others in their racist activities. Racists also set a bad example, and provide others with an excuse (albeit an illegitimate excuse) to follow their lead. The disposition to discriminate against others in these ways is immoral because the commission of those acts is immoral.[17]

Personal relationships are another basis for the moral objectionability of our thoughts. Relationships can be partly defined by the regard each person has for the other: an intimate, loving couple may be committed to high standards of regard, and so certain mental activities could count as form of betrayal. Relationships with rich causal histories and a shared faith in higher standards seem to fuse us together with greater moral demands. As the obligations we have to others become stronger, the sense that they should guide not just what we are to do but also guide what we are to think becomes stronger as well. These special relationships, especially when their nature is romantic, seem to claim more of us than merely what we do and why we do it.

> Groom weds his bride after establishing a trusting, monogamous relationship. On their honeymoon, however, Groom spends much of the time deliberately indulging erotic fantasies about an old flame.[18]

Assuming that this couple has a special kind of trust, confidence and hope in one another and their marriage, Groom's thinking could count as a betrayal of trust or breach of commitment. In this case, it seems clear that deliberately indulging that sexual fantasy is subject to moral review and censure in light facts about his relationship's history. It seems fitting to ground the moral

[17] My own view about grounding the moral objectionability in facts about dispositions or character is that, although the moral wrong would not have been located in the wrong place, it would not have been located in all the right places either.

[18] Although we could worry that some instances of restraint are supererogatory, it seems clear that there are cases where such restraint is the expected norm.

objectionability of Groom's fantasy on the shared standards that partly define his romantic relationship.[19]

There number of cases seems to be countless.[20] There will be unsympathetic attempts to explain these cases away as the product of badly mistaken judgment. This move is characteristic of an error theory, but comes with especially high costs against the preceding cases. Mental activities arrive on the scene chaperoned by a host of normative standards and familiar moral phenomena. That is exactly what we would expect from a genuine moral phenomenon, and it suggests that their wrong-making features need to be identified and explained. So an acceptable error theory will also have to explain why our judgments are not substantiated by any of the relationships that were identified by our preliminary explanations. Assuming it can explain that away as well, accepting an error theory would still be quite costly. The interesting philosophical question is not, "which of these mental actions are morally wrong and which are not?" The interesting philosophical question is rather, "what must be true of ethical theory in order for us to

---

[19] The concealment of thoughts might be objectionable too—Groom's decision to conceal the fact that he was thinking of an old flame is a target for criticism. It might be true that Groom makes a moral mistake in not disclosing such thoughts. But it is a further mistake, and a mistake in part because it serves to conceal something morally objectionable.

[20] We could continue to enumerate distinct cases for some time. Instead, I have included a few more examples in this footnote. Some cases suggest that thinking can deprive someone of a moral good. It matters to me whether, as it so happens, I married an axe murderer or a racist. Other cases suggest that the moral status of thinking can be changed by the circumstances, e.g. that it was done in church of all places. We have not only have attitudes about the objects of our thoughts, we also have them about ourselves for having those thoughts. A devout catholic might despise himself for the same thoughts that are sources of pride for a rebel. Although they might both agree that lustful acts are bad because they're sinful, only the rebel takes sinning to be a good thing; on the coin's flip side: consider a partially reformed criminal who finds himself repulsed by the good things he is now prone to think. An old rival was recently stabbed and the partially reformed criminal is disgusted with himself for thinking about lending the grieving family a helping hand. Consider a "mental voodoo" case: a witch doctor imagines killing someone, believing that merely thinking about causing the death will cause it to happen. We can model some of these cases after impossible attempts; of others we might say that, in light of their own (false) beliefs, these agents should not be thinking what they are thinking.

capture and explain the moral picture that is framed by our ordinary intuitions about mental actions?" The philosophical task of explaining any example of morally wrong mental action, therefore, comes to the task of articulating the conceptual resources that make them possible. Thus an error theory not only rejects commonsense intuition about specific cases, it would also abandon any promise of theoretical insight that might be developed by a positive explanatory undertaking.

1.5 Preliminary explanations: results and limitations

The preliminary explanations strongly suggest that morality does have authority over the mind. They also suggest that ethical theory has the resources to address the moral wrongness of the mind's activities. As it turns out, thinking exposes thinkers to a variety of moral criticisms: thoughts can express objectionable values and attitudes, they can be disrespectful, they can reflect or result from objectionable beliefs or desires, and they can lead to objectionable overt actions. Since ethical theory is not unfamiliar with such features, they might suggest that the previous cases will not require much philosophical work or innovation in order to adequately explain.

But there are problems. As we continue to reflect on the range of cases, the fit between our ordinary resources and intuitions about cases becomes more strained. It is my belief that the preliminary explanations fail to capture what is distinctive about the moral wrongs of mental activities. Note that we can object to this omission without objecting to the validity of the explanations that contain it. The fact that an agent's mental activity bears a relation to something that can ground its moral objectionability—such as a morally defective belief, desire, attitude, value, disposition, and so on—does not imply that there is only a single basis for its moral objectionability. It also does not imply that the mental activity itself cannot be a basis for its moral objectionability. This is the idea I intend to develop.

The scope of what we can think about outstrips the range of things we can actually do. In these cases, there is no corresponding overt conduct for the agents to undertake which could

adequately capture what they have in mind. Hence there are cases of morally wrong thinking such that it would be impossible (or unintelligible) for us to do the very things about which we are thinking. But even mental actions that are not about the thinker's agency can be morally wrong:

> Through a series of unlucky setbacks, Underachiever has failed to the level of success that his friend Overachiever enjoys. Bitter with disappointment, Underachiever wishes Overachiever would have a minor heart attack (not fatal, just financially disastrous).

If Underachiever envies Overachiever as a self-made financial success, for instance, Underachiever might wish to have no hand in Overachiever's financial ruin. It might be essential to Underachiever's wish that Overachiever's ambition causes the loss. Much the same is true of examples about natural disasters, mechanical failures, and bad luck. This puts resources that depend on such conduct at pains to correctly specify the problem.[21] If a mental activity is morally criticizable because of what it is about, but it is not about the agent's conduct, then we would clearly be missing something by explaining the wrong in terms of the conduct.

But even when the mental activity is about the agent's conduct, conduct-based explanations could still be missing something. It does not follow from a person's thinking about doing bad things, for instance, that the person will be disposed to do anything bad. Much the opposite can be true: recognition of bad thoughts can steel us against doing bad, and so make doing good more likely. Take a veteran mountaineer who is envious of a young protégé's ambition and natural talent, and secretly wishes the protégé would slip and break a few bones from the fall. The veteran might find these wishes disturbing, and become alarmed about making an inadvertent mistake. In response, the veteran might decide to redouble his efforts to keep the protégé safe: to tie his friend's rope securely, to double check the hold of each carabineer, to watch the protégé's movements more vigilantly, and so forth. If the wishes were morally

[21] According to the view I eventually develop, the real moral problem is present in mental actions whether they are about the thinker's own agency or not. Since the moral problem is the same in both, giving an explanation of the one gives an explanation of the other.

disturbing because they were about a dangerous fall, it would be dubious to identify their causal consequence as the real culprit.

Thinking about bad actions can even be a means to prevent oneself from actually doing it. We sometimes defuse the force of an emotion by redirecting it to the mind: an angry employee, for example, might think about punching his boss in the face in order to blow off steam in order to avoid a confrontation. The prevention of a moral wrong does not imply, however, that the preventative measure is not morally wrong: in an effort to maintain self-control, a frustrated criminal might kick the hostages instead of execute them, but the act of physical violence is morally wrong nevertheless.

> In 1945 during WWII, Harry Truman had to decide whether or not to order the United States military to drop an atomic bomb, thereby making the US the first country in history to use nuclear warfare. Suppose that, counter to actual historical fact, Truman spent no time deliberating about his decision to drop the bomb.

Deliberating, considering and reflecting are among the things we can decide to do; and it would have been morally wrong for Truman not to do those things. He should have made his decision in a manner befitting its gravity; to have taken the time to consider matters seriously because they are serious matters. It would be unsatisfying, I think, to explain why it was wrong to decide flippantly by appealing to facts about Facts about Truman's insensitivity, the poor example he set as a leader, his disposition to make flippant decisions in the future. It is the fact that so many lives hang in the balance that calls for Truman to think about it long and hard.[22]

By shifting the problem from mental activities to a variety of related but extrinsic features, the preliminary explanations overlook the very phenomenon they seek to illuminate. By analogy, consider the attempt to explain why it is wrong to kick someone in the face, for instance, based on the claim that face kicking makes violent retaliation more likely. Although this consideration is not morally irrelevant, we would not take it seriously as the explanation of

[22] The moral obligation remains even if Truman would have made the same decision without considering it, and even if the first thought that occurred to him was the decisive consideration.

why it is morally wrong it morally wrong to kick someone in the face. We would not take it seriously because it puts the wrong in the wrong place. In this case, we know that the real problem is in something about the kicking itself such as the way it interferes with another person's autonomous activity or the way it infringes the right against physical violence.

The tendency to criticize thoughts based on their relationship to action betrays a general bias about the significance of physical overt conduct: that there has to be something that I do, out there in the world, which can causally affect `you in some morally objectionable way. We cause those kinds of effects by means of motor movement: we must either utter words or move a body part. Given the bias, our story about the moral significance of thinking will be derivative. By casting thoughts into a morally derivative role, we abandon the idea that a mental action itself can be morally wrong. Instead, it says that moral norms prohibit the genuine moral wrongs – wrongs such as acting maliciously or crashing planes – and then regards mental actions as morally objectionable on the basis of the relation they bear to those genuine moral wrongs.

> Player has been the home team's star basketball player. But after an especially lousy performance during the first half of a championship match, Player gets benched for the rest of the game. Sitting on the sidelines, Player secretly begins to root for the other team and to hope that his replacement breaks an ankle.

It seems to me that Player is vulnerable to criticism because of rooting for the other team and hoping for his own teammate's injury. It might also be true that Player is disposed play more poorly, to cheer less vigorously from the side-lines when his team scores or give as many high-fives to his teammates; perhaps it even disposes him to go so far as to insult or injure the coach. But these features seem to locate the wrong in the wrong place:, *viz.* with a certain occurrent activity stretching across time. This is indeed where we locate the problem when someone makes a mathematical miscalculation. Suppose that, in order to calculate a tip, I add a string of numbers, multiply the result by some fraction, and write the final amount down on my bill. As it turns out, the amount of tip I calculated was incorrect. The mistake might have been the product of carelessness. It might also be true that, my careless mistake caused me to write down the

incorrect tip amount and that, if I keep doing this sort of thing, I will make similar mistakes in the future more likely. This indicates merely that defects cause my mistake, which, in turn, caused further defects. We do not learn what makes the mistake a mistake. In order to do that, we would need to invoke the standards that are relevant to the nature of what I am doing, i.e. certain normative standards of mathematics. By analogy, this suggests that to get a better handle on what makes mental actions morally wrong, we should wed our account to facts about the mental action itself, including the operations involved in exercises of mental agency.

I continue to have the nagging suspicion something is morally wrong about the mental activity itself (in addition to whatever wrongs might be attributed to other features of the example). Wrongful thinking seems morally problematic in itself. To evaluate wrongful thoughts in terms of states of affairs or actions is to fail to treat the problem itself. The sense that this "in itself" is missing from the preliminary explanations is heightened by the fact that they fail to use the mental activity itself as the ground of its own moral objectionability.

The intuition that these explanations are missing something important can now be sharped in terms of the previous examples. In the professional's promise, recall that we saw it was possible for a mental action to be morally wrong *directly*, i.e. to be the direct target of a moral demand. Although it was morally wrong to dwell on thoughts about work, however, the thinking was moralized in an incidental fashion—the source of the moral demand was a prior, voluntary act of will. Although a moral norm prohibited the mental action, the norm was established by an incidental agreement between particular individuals. In the daydream case, by contrast, the source of the moral norm arises from the morally relevant needs of Daydreamer's mother. It is no accident that Daydreamer was required to visit and comfort her mother: comfort is the kind of thing that causally affects the mother's need in the right way. But this could not be accomplished by any of Daydreamer's merely mental actions. The question becomes, therefore, can we identify a moral norm that—like professional's promise not to dwell on thoughts of work—directly targets a mental activity, but whose source—like the daydreamer's obligation to help a loved one—somehow derives from facts about another person?

1.6 *The representative case and the adequacy condition on its explanation*

To recapitulate: I have been voicing the concern that explanations cast in terms of character, disposition, causal effects on agents who perform, facts about the agent's relationships, and so forth, may not discover or fully capture the moral richness in all of these examples. We might worry that these accounts are incomplete, however, since we would not be completely satisfied with using them to address overt moral wrongs. If we tried to explain why it is morally wrong to lie under oath solely in terms of the liar's objectionable beliefs, desires, and character traits, our explanation would be incomplete. It would fail to capture something about telling a lie—e.g. that it involves the use of a language to verbally communicate with other language users by relying on the very truth presumptions it flaunts. Analogous attempts to explain what makes it morally wrong to fantasize about murder would also be incomplete, since they would fail to capture something about fantasizing about murder.

By putting the wrong in the wrong place, so to speak, these accounts overlook the very thing we wanted to explain.[23] But what are they missing? Trying to answer this question is the primary aim of my positive explanatory project. I begin that project by consulting the wisdom of commonsense. Common sense tells us that fantasizing about murdering a kid is morally wrong. It also tells us that it is morally wrong because murdering someone is a horrible thing to fantasize about. Commonsense moral judgment, therefore, suggests that an adequate explanation should appeal to the type of mental activity as well as its object. These considerations have led me to propose the following agenda for my positive explanatory project:

1. *The basic explanatory task:* to explain what makes certain mental activities morally wrong to do.

[23] One reason mental actions receive less theoretical attention is that their overt, physical counterparts are more visible, more pressing, and more immediate.

2. *Its condition of adequacy:* to articulate the moral wrongness of a mental activity in terms of:
    a. The type of mental activity (e.g. a fantasy), and
    b. Its object (e.g. a murder).

The first condition identifies the primary aim of my project, and specifies the *explanandum* as something to do. The adequacy condition implies that morally wrong mental activities should not be explained in terms of other facts about them—facts such as character, disposition, causal effects, and so forth. And it specifies what was missing from the preliminary explanations: we need to address the *fantasizing* about murder (as opposed to remembering, dreading, or expecting it) as bad thing to do, and address the fantasizing about *murder* (as opposed to fantasizing about world peace or making creative charitable donations) as a bad thing to fantasize about.

The adequacy condition implicates a surprising range of norms, from simple utilitarian norms to more sophisticated norms against placing unreasonable or objectionable burdens on other people. . To stated it dramatically: norms whose violation depends on the possibility of physical effects cannot adequately explain morally wrong mental actions.[24] It implies that any moral norm which appeals to the causal consequences of a practical action rather than to its object will be inadequate to explain mental practical actions Surprisingly this includes traditional interpretations of Kantian ethics, because they explain how an action violates the conditions of universality and humanity by appealing to the causal effects of that kind of action on other people in the external world.[25]

---

[24] Elsewhere I have made arguments against explaining the wrongness of mental action by appealing to facts about its *intra*activity. This move categorizes morally wrong mental actions under duties to self. It thus opposes the commonsense view that associates the moral wrong in fantasizing about murder with the fact that it is about killing another person.

[25] This is one way for Kantians to acknowledge that an action's consequences can make a moral difference. It should be stressed, however, that the physical causal effects of a morally wrong action are *emphatically not* what makes action morally wrong on a Kantian theory of morality. Maxims of action, rather than actions *as such*, are the appropriate targets of moral evaluation.

We can begin to illustrate these theoretical difficulties with a crude but instructive example. Suppose that I propose to explain morally wrong practical actions by appealing to the *no-physical-harm norm*: an action must not cause physical harm to other people. On that assumption, we determine whether an action performed by an agent is morally wrong by determining whether that very action fails to satisfy the conditions specified by the norm of no-physical-harm. It would be morally wrong to kill another person according to this norm, for example, since it would cause physical harm to the victim.

But what does the no-physical-harm norm say about an "imaginary killer" who merely imagines killing another person? Is it morally wrong to imagine oneself killing another person according to this norm? In the previous case, we determined whether an agent's action is morally wrong by considering whether *that very action* causes physical harm to another person. In this example, that very action is the imagining. The killing is emphatically not one of the agent's actions. To merely imagine doing something is not to actually do it. I cannot become an Olympic gold-medalist, unfortunately, by merely imagining myself winning an Olympic race. Indeed, I cannot even win a race by imagining myself win a race. The actions we imagine are merely imaginary! Merely imaginary actions are not things that we actually do—the imagining is what we actually do. It is the agent's imagining, therefore, rather than any actions imagined by the agent that must satisfy the conditions specified by the no-physical-harm norm.

Since the imagining does not cause physical harm to another person, according to the no-physical-harm norm it is not morally wrong to imagine murdering someone. This result, by itself, is not a problem; the problem is that norms of this kind are unable to account for morally wrong actions that have no relevant causal consequences. It would be a mistake to claim that our thoughts, unlike our overt actions, do not have any real causal effects. After all, they can affect the thinker who entertains them. Thinking about a loss can make one sad; recalling an accomplishment can bring a sense of pride; rehearsing betrayals can make one feel vindictive.

For a more general and more trenchant discussion of these matters, see Herman "What Happened to the Consequences?"

Our moods, emotional states and what we are likely to do can change depending on what we have in mind. Thoughts can be directly related to overt conduct, furthermore, because they often pave the way for action. Imagining various ways that a situation might unfold can better prepare us one for its actual occurrence. We can learn how to accomplish something by visualizing how to accomplish it. People who indulge in malicious fantasies might be more likely to act them out as a result.[26]

Of course our mental actions can have causal effects—but these causal effects are morally different in kind from the causal effects specified by the no-physical-harm norm. The underlying processes in the human brain responsible for our mental actions do have physical causal consequences. But *those* effects are not effects of our mental actions insofar as they are practical action (e.g. In trying to think of the best chess, I'm not typically aiming to make my synapses fire; if I were, my action would be best characterized as a covert physical action), nor are these effects morally significant, relevant, or objectionable effects of our mental actions insofar as they have an underlying physical basis.

Mental practical actions will not generally violate moral norms, including the no-physical-harm norm, whose criteria depend on action's physical causal effect because the relevant kind of effect cannot be caused by a merely mental action. Hence the trouble with the no-physical-harm norm is that it gives the wrong kind of explanation. This problem generalizes to any moral norms whose violation depends on an action's overt physical effects, therefore, and jeopardizes the explanatory adequacy of these norms.[27]

---

[26] This empirical assumption can be contested, although modern debates over the behavioral influences of violent video games and pornography suggest that many reasonable thinkers accept assumptions along these lines. But even when overt behavior is not more likely, agents could still be the cause of their own moral corruption by dulling themselves to the needs of others.

[27] Meir Dan-Cohen (1999) suggested that thoughts can be harmful to other people by causing negative effects to their relational properties. This is a nice insight, and it belongs in any complete ethics of mental action. I do not believe, however, that relational properties can do all of the work. It is more important, however, to see that the spirit of my project encourages us to move away from models of morality based on the effects an action has on other people (even its relational effects). I believe that the key to elaborating a compelling alternative to those models is by scrutinizing the practical features of mental action.

The adequacy condition also threatens standard interpretations of the Categorical Imperative. Ordinarily, an action's failure to satisfy the conditions of universality or humanity is elaborated by appealing to facts about the physical causal changes it makes (or would make) to other people. The problem is that elaborations of how a maxim of action violates those conditions tend to rely on claims about how the maxim of action, if carried out, would change our shared physical world. The Humanity condition is violated when we use another person as mere means. But agents who merely imagine using another person as a mere means do not actually use them as a mere means. Hence merely imagined wrongdoing does not violate the Humanity condition.[28] The universality condition does not fare much better. The universalization of performing an imaginative act might produce a world full of people who lead especially vibrant and creative mental lives, but we have no reason to conclude that the original imaginative act would somehow be impossible or contradictory to perform in this world.[29]

If these moral norms are ruled out by the adequacy condition, however, what kind of moral norm can satisfy the adequacy condition while delivering the right results? My suggestion will be that some mental activities, like ordinary overt actions, should be counted as genuine practical activities; and that a norm of mental practical activity can be characterized to explain their moral wrongness in terms of what they are about instead of what they cause to happen.

---

[28] Indeed, the intuitive traction behind a demand for humane treatment disappears entirely in cases of mere imaginings: surely we do not use other people as mere means by merely imagining ourselves using them as mere means.

[29] Actions that fail the universalization requirement are typically identified by one of two conditions. The first is met when the original action cannot be performed in the new world because it is no longer a means to the agent's end. The second is met when the original action cannot be performed because it depends on a practice which has been undermined in the new world. Neither of these conditions are met by merely imaginative acts.

"The Disney Imagineers, renowned for their ability to turn fantastical ideas into magical realities, confront creative challenges every day. They do so—and succeed—utilizing time-proven techniques and a belief that anything can be achieved if the mind is freed from conventional formulas…. Now, just as you would work out physically for better agility and health, you can shape and develop your imagination by adapting the mental processes and creative techniques the Imagineers have honed over many years."

2.1 Practical Mental Activities

In the first chapter, I presented an array of cases about agents engaged in a morally objectionable mental activity and I discussed several preliminary ways to explain them. These preliminary explanations accounted for the moral objectionability of each mental activity on its relationship to some further morally objectionable feature of the acting agents, such as their beliefs, desires, dispositions, or character traits. I was dubious about the exhaustiveness of these explanations, however, and I turned to commonsense for clues about what they might be missing. Commonsense moral judgment about a representative case—the murder fantasy—suggested our best explanation should address the mental activity as something morally wrong to do, and address the mental activity's wrongness in terms of its object (a murder) and its kind (a fantasy). According to the solution I eventually offer, both our mental activities and our overt physical conduct can be genuine instances of practical action. To put it roughly: some (mere) thoughts are (real) actions.

Since the conception of thinking as a morally relevant form of action is admittedly unusual, the first half of this chapter is devoted to discussing the general relationship between practical agency and the mind. Examples of general mental activities include imagining, fantasizing, and deliberating. Specific examples include playing through one of Bobby Fischer's chess games "blindfolded", recalling Beethoven's third symphony, reciting the English alphabet, hoping that traffic clears so that I can say goodbye to my friend who is leaving for Europe, and so on.[31]

The second half of this chapter is devoted to discussing the specific relationship between practical agency and our imagination. I use these discussions to provide a sketch of mental

[30] (Van Pelt, 2005)
[31] In chess parlance, the term "blindfolded" refers to playing a game a chess in one's mind; it covers solitary games, where one mentally plays oneself, and exhibition games where opponents, aided by a board with pieces, call out their moves to a player who keeps the entire game in mind.

fantasy as the pleasure-directed imagining of a practical agent. Section II introduces my primary opponent, who will deny that it could be morally wrong to do something merely in one's own head. Section III discusses the relationship between activities of the mind and the practical agents who perform them. Section IV considers the value of practical agency and explains how it is possible for mental activities to be practical.

2.2 My primary opponent: the Interactionalist

My primary opponent, the Interactionalist, has a serious objection the position that my mental activities could be morally wrong to do. If the things I do cannot interact with other people, then they cannot make a difference to them; and if they make no difference, they cannot be morally wrong. At the heart of this objection is a fundamental concern about the fact that mental activities are causally-insular: they simply are not the kind of actions that causally interact with the lives of other people. Although I will be unable to fully address the basic worry until Chapter III, where I present my view about why the murder fantasy is morally wrong, this section discusses two of its formulations in order to avoid misinterpretations about the claims my view makes. The objection can be formulated in terms of action as well as the patient of action: whereas the agent of a fantasy is the fantasizer, the patient of a fantasy is the victim murdered within the fantasy. Although the agent-centered formulation turns out to be weaker than the patient-centered formulation, both formulations are based on the rather compelling claim that a mere fantasy is "merely in the head".

The first version of the Interactionalist's objection focuses on the agent of action: since the fantasy murder is merely imaginary, the fantasizer does not really do anything to anyone. Someone who merely fantasizes about murder does not commit a real murder; indeed, nothing of the sort takes place. This makes all the difference, according to the Interactionalist, who points out that we draw a sharp distinction between individuals with a rich interior life, who imagine committing all kinds of heinous murders, and real murderers who actually go out and murder another person. If we assume that real actions have actual impact on the world, then the

fantasizer is not actually performing a real world action. Since the fantasizer is merely fantasizing about murder, the fantasizer's murderous act is merely imaginary. The fantasizer's act is not morally wrong, the Interactionalist concludes, because it is merely an imaginary act.

This is a crucial point. My view does not claim that it is morally wrong to fantasize about committing murder because it is morally wrong to commit murder. If that were my view, I would be conflating what agents merely imagine doing and what agents are actually doing.[32] But no matter how vividly I imagine myself performing some action, such as cleaning the dishes, I cannot actually clean the dishes without using some real world elbow grease. We do not actually perform the actions that we merely imagine ourselves performing. It would be a serious mistake, therefore, to assert that the fantasizer commits a murder.

But we should not conclude on this basis that the fantasizer does nothing at all. It is true *ex hypothesi* that the fantasizer puts the faculty of imagination to use. True, the claim that it is morally wrong to fantasize about murder implies that what the fantasizer is doing is morally wrong. But what the fantasizer does wrong is not commit murder. What the fantasizer does wrong is fantasize about it. The claim that fantasizing about murder is morally wrong, therefore, does not imply that the morally wrong action is a murder, that it is somehow equivalent to the moral wrong of committing a murder, nor that it is morally wrong only because murder is morally wrong.[33]

---

[32] More strictly speaking: my view does not claim that agents are actually doing what they merely imagine doing because they imagine doing it. There might be especially dull individuals who can only imagine doing the very things they are doing at that moment. Consider a couch potato who only imagines sitting on the couch. In that case, what the agent is actually doing is the same as what the agent imagines doing.

[33] Nor, just to be clear, is the moral wrong attaching to the murder fantasy the same as the moral wrong attaching to *attempted* murder. It has been assumed that the fantasizers is under no delusions about the causal limitations of their minds. It has been assumed, in other words, that the fantasizer is not attempting (and failing) to murder; instead, the fantasizer is attempting (and succeeding) to fantasize.

The second version of the Interactionalist's objection focuses on the patient of action. In the murder fantasy, for instance, there is no actual murder victim. So how could it be morally wrong to do such a thing all by itself? Indeed, whatever people might decide to do to us merely in the confines of their own minds, they are not actually doing anything to us at all. Insofar as mental doings are merely mental, they simply are not the kind of thing that could affect other people. The view that doings of this kind can be morally wrong should either be rejected, therefore, or explained in terms of their relationship to morally objectionable beliefs, desires and dispositions of the agent who performs those mental doings.

Much of this objection is convincing. I accept the claim that mental doings as such are not the kind of thing that could affect other people. The conclusion that they cannot be morally wrong, however, follows only because of the suppressed assumption that actions which cannot affect other people are not morally wrong.[34] Although this assumption is quite plausible, our acceptance of it should be temporarily suspended. Why? Because it makes a claim about the necessary conditions of morally wrong action, and this is among the very claims that my project calls into question.

Suppose that the assumption's apparent plausibility, for example, was due to our familiarity with the ordinary moral concepts it invokes. If those moral concepts impoverished, however, they might fail to capture and convey the full richness of ordinary moral phenomena. There is good reason to worry about the reliability of judgments, however, that are based on impoverished concepts. But this is precisely the situation I fear we face, since I am worried that our familiar moral concepts might be impoverished. If our familiar moral concepts were developed from an impoverished set of examples, it would not be surprising to learn that they were unable to represent the complex splendor of morality. Since, on my view, the starting points

[34] Morally wrong, that is, in the way that lying cheating and stealing are morally wrong; thus, moral wrongs against oneself are being set aside for moment. This seems in keeping with the spirit of interactionalism, since it denies that mental actions are morally wrong on the grounds that they fail to cause an interaction between the agent and patient of action.

for ethical reflection should include examples of morally wrong mental action, a set of example about overt actions only would be impoverished. At this stage of the current dialectic, therefore, we should avoid relying on assumptions that restrict the space of moral possibility prior to an inquiry of the present sort.[35]

I propose instead that we accept the commonsense judgment that fantasizing about murder is morally wrong and that we also accept the Interactionalist's claim that a mere fantasy about murder does not do anything to the imagined victim. This revised set of premises suggests a revised conclusion: although mental and overt physical actions can be morally wrong things to do, mental actions can be morally wrong because of what they do about other people (as opposed to what they do to other people). On this picture of morality, we can be under moral obligations to deliberate about the practical ends of other agents not only when our activities might (causally) affect them, but also when our activities are (constitutively) about them.

2.3 Ethics and properly proper conduct

In this section, I begin to develop the idea of mental practical agency by making a few observations about the relationship between our agency and what takes place in our minds. A discussion of the kind strikes me as potentially helpful both because my account relies on the connection between our practical agency and our mental activities, and also because this conception of a mind's activity is opposed to the standard conception of actions as only those things we do out there in our shared physical world.[36]

---

[35] It would be sufficient for my purposes if we agreed on the plausibility of this last claim—that it would be plausible to suspend the ordinary force of theoretical conceptual judgments. As it turns out, I think we have sufficient reason to deny the claim that an action's causal effects on someone are a necessary condition for its being morally wrong. I take it that this claim was denied outright in the introduction by commonsense moral judgment that the murder fantasy is morally wrong because murder is a horrible thing to *fantasize about* (quite independently of whatever actual causal effects it could have on the victim).

[36] More specifically: our mental activities can be produced by our practical agency, i.e. the ability to use standards to make choices about what to do.

Thought tends to be implicitly contrasted with action. Thought tends to be associated with logic and theoretical activities, whereas action and conduct tend to be associated with ethics and practical activities. In its finest hour, thinking is sometimes incorporated into action as a proper part because, for example, an overt action was executed as the result of a carefully considered plan. Yet, even here, thinking earns its status because it brings the actor one step closer to the real action. Overt practical behavior is where all the real action is. G.E. Moore, for instance, claimed that ethics is the general inquiry into what is good. He proposes that it should be a relatively simple matter to explain good conduct once we give a proper analysis of the good, since "we all know pretty well what 'conduct' is" (p. 18).[37]

I do not share Moore's confidence about knowing what conduct is, and the suggestion that conduct consists in overt physical behavior is one that I dispute. My project runs in much the opposite direction: I believe that closer scrutiny of our practical agency will reveal its ordinary uses in overt conduct as well as its uses in mental conduct. The Walt Disney Imagineers, to take another example, would dispute the claim that conduct consists principally in our physical or overt behaviors (along with whichever mental states accompany them). As their eponym suggests, the expertise of the Disney Imagineers combines the mathematical rigors of engineering with the creative inspiration of imagination. They pursue mental exercises to develop the imagination just as we can exercise physically and develop muscles in the body, and that the mind is a place where we can choose to represent events as we see fit. Their view reflects a conception of thinking as practical, and I would like to elaborate this idea of thinking as a form of genuine practical acting.

[37] Moore himself went on to assume that the conduct at stake only the overt conduct occurring in our shared, physical world. This is exactly the assumption I wish to challenge. In my view, Moore's work established the *Principia Ethica* as a normative counterpart of Newton's *Principia Mathematica*: just as the gravitational law describes the behavior that *any body will exhibit*, the moral law describes the behavior that *anybody should exhibit* (Newton, 1687).

The view that practical agency extends into mental life and the affairs of a mind is far from uncontroversial. It will be pointed out, for example, that psychiatric patients sometimes report that they cannot stop obsessively fixating on a thought, or that a thought cannot get a thought out of their heads; these include ideations or elaborations of possible suicide and murder. But ordinary minds are prone to ironic effects: the mind sometimes does exactly what we intend not to do—just try not to think about a pink elephant. In each moment, the mind remains vulnerable to sudden disruption and intrusion by external stimuli. The flow of mental content continues even against an agent's best efforts to stop it; from the anxious student the night before an exam to the monk who spends a lifetime trying to master the cessation of thought.

It is easy to exaggerate the significance of examples where we cannot control or change our thoughts, especially if we are preoccupied by concerns about moral responsibility. In general, I believe that we should guard against over exaggerating the mind's occasionally feral and recalcitrant companionship. It simply does not follow from the fact that we can lack control over our minds that we never control them, since instances of failure do not imply that genuine cases of success are impossible.

As it turns out, many of the worries about responsibility are quite far afield from the central aims of my project. A quick survey of the relevant aims could be helpful here. Recall that the primary aim of my project is not to explain the moral wrongness of a mere occurrence of thought or mental content. The mere occurrence of a mental representation as such is not something that we do, properly speaking, and therefore the mere occurrence of a mental representation is not even the type of thing that is targeted by my account. We need to set aside the tendency to conceive of the mental as a mere representational state and to conceive of the mind as a mere repository for mental states.

My primary aim is to explain the moral wrongness of an activity, of something we do. The fact that the explanandum is an activity will be crucial to the view I eventually develop. On my view, whether it would be morally wrong for someone to imagine assassinating the King depends largely on that person's practical end. It would not be morally wrong for the King's

chief protectorate to imagine assassinating the King, for instance, if the protectorate was trying to identify weaknesses in the royal security formations (if anything, it might be morally required).

In the spirit of taking mental activities seriously, my view welcomes the analogy between our mental and overt activities. I see our overt action as a model for understanding our practical agency over mental action. Like the mind, bodies sometimes resist our efforts of control them. The fact that my fingers will not move when my hand has fallen asleep does not imply that I cannot control my digits or lack manual dexterity. The fact that some capacities and functions of the human body are beyond our control—cell division, for example, and organ functions, involuntary facial responses, the patellar reflex, muscle twitches, saccadic movements of the eye—does not imply that all of them are beyond our control. We can happily accept that we lack physical control in such ways without concerns that we could thereby be committed to the claim that agents can't make deliberate and exacting use of their bodies. Analogously, the fact that some capacities and functions of the human mind are beyond our control does not imply that all of them are beyond our control. We are not mere spectators of our own minds, observing what takes place in them from a helpless remove.

There are also many similarities between how we successfully use our minds and bodies. Aspects of our mental agency, for instance, are similar to proprioceptive motion. Not unlike our ability to take over the movement and direction of our hands, we can also take over our imaginations by "putting ourselves into" them. We can make a scene unfold imaginatively or imaginatively explore how an upcoming confrontation could play out. I can begin imagining myself trying to rescue my neighbors who are stranded in their burning apartment building and decide, in the midst of my imagining that a beam falls in my path and that I have to leap over it. I seem to be able to bring those changes about directly, at will.[38]

[38] The mind is easily shaped by directives of the will: I need only wish to redirect my thoughts and they have already begun to take shape. The body, by contrast, tends toward stupor and rest; but its physical condition certainly does not take shape at will. (This is the punch line to the only *a priori* practical joke I have been able to think of).

Although the mind tends to be in constant motion, we can steer its course and direct its flow. It strikes me that this aspect of the agency we exercise over our minds is analogous to the agency we have over breathing. Most of the time, I breathe without being aware of it. However, by taking note of it, I can guide my breathing. I can control whether I breathe deeply and slowly or short and quickly. I can do this for a variety of reasons. In a situation where I need to relax, I might try to take slow, deep breaths. In a situation where I'm trying to remain concealed, I might try to breathe quietly. If I were underwater where breathing is dangerous, I might hold my breath entirely. Analogously, much of the time thoughts drift in an out. When it is called for, however, I can dwell on particular thoughts or think about something else entirely. I can think carefully and meticulously, or quickly and carelessly. We ourselves can determine what our minds are up to. Often we are in full control of our minds. We can call forth, entertain, shape and direct the content of our minds. We can even to perform specified mental actions at a particular time and place as the result of a prior decision.

When I'm not actively steering my mind, it continues to think on its own. Our thoughts, one might say, seem to have a mind of their own. It seems to be part of the nature of human minds that they think on their own, even without active guidance while we continue to accept them as ours.[39] Thinking is an activity we often find ourselves already in the midst of having been performing. We simply find ourselves thinking about something—even about things that are quite complicated. I might suddenly find myself in the midst of thinking about walking along the beach or about a complicated game of chess without any intention to do so. And we tend to retrospectively claim unbidden thoughts as our own: when my mind wanders, it does not seem to me that someone else was thinking those wandering thoughts. That a thought occurs to me just is

[39] This is not true for all of our thoughts, however. Many are uninvited and intrusive: we don't have an interest in thinking them at the time because we are trying to think about something else instead. Other thoughts are unwelcome because we don't endorse them, they are thoughts we feel alienated from them. These kinds of thoughts don't seem to be "ours" primarily because they are unrepresentative of who we take ourselves to be.

a way for it to be mine.[40] But this does not seem equally true of our overt activities, at least not as a general rule. I would be much more surprised to suddenly find myself actually walking along the beach or actually playing a game of chess without any intention to do so.[41]

2.4 Mental practical activities

The explanatory view being developed calls for a reorientation of emphasis on what takes place in the mind: our primary focus shifts from mental states to mental activities, and from a conception of mental activities as theoretical to a conception of mental activities as practical. The things we do overtly in our shared physical world are not the only genuine practical actions we perform; in exactly the same way, some of what takes place in the mind counts as a genuine practical action. This view is directly opposed to a view advocated by Humeans. They explain sequences of thought mechanistically, proposing that its patterns and regularities can be accounted for by resemblance and association. I deny that these mechanisms are the only glue that determines our sequences of thought. I advocate that we can exercise our own practical agency over our minds as well as our bodies.[42]

---

[40] This claim hints at the possibility that there might be a unique dimension of our mental practical agency.

[41] Sometimes thoughts assail us, by force of an external stimulus; in a seemingly automatic way. Our minds are assailed by external content that it is nearly impossible not to represent; it is the mental analog of a simple reflex action, such as the patellar reflex. Other mental associations can be complex: I might automatically think about practicing the piano whenever I hear my music instructor's name. These cases seem analogous to Pavlovian habituated responses. Other analogs include weakness of will, unwilling addiction and obsessive preoccupation with certain trains or patterns of thought. Whereas the one person feels compelled to check whether the door is locked, whereas another feels obsessed over cancelling out any negative thought with a positive one, or thinking every thought an even number of times. The obsessive thought and the behavior accompanying it, however, are quite different: whereas the intrusive thought just occurs, the behavior occurs as a response to the thought. The psychological distinction between obsession and compulsion corresponds to the distinction between mental ideations and physical behaviors. (American Psychiatric, 2010).

[42] If the view that our practical agency can determine what our mental activities are about, then the relationship between sequentially connected mental content is more significant than a

Our own experiences as *practical* agents—as agents who deliberate about and into a future that we must view ourselves as shaping—belies the view that our minds are determined independently of us.[43] It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of mental activities in the life of a human. Much of a human life is spent in the mind. Attending, thinking, hoping, wishing, fantasizing, deliberating, and planning are ways that we spend our lives. Countless mental activities—solving puzzles, reflecting on one's aims and ambitions, imagining what might have happened had one made different choices in life—can matter to us directly, as rewarding sources of insight and enjoyment. The future we take ourselves to have a hand in shaping includes the hopes and aims we have for general development and particular direction of our minds. These reflections suggest that understanding what is really transpiring as minds change over time might require that we conceive of its change in light of wider historical narratives of the practical agent.[44]

As practical agents, we sometimes capitalize on the very fact that there are patterns and regularities in the sequence of our thoughts. In other words, we use the fact that our minds tend to regularly associate certain thoughts as a means to bringing about our own ends. There are many examples of goal-directed, occurrent, intentional uses of our mental faculties. We use mental heuristics as our instrumental means to successfully recalling complex information. To recall the order of colors in the visible spectrum of light according to wavelength, high school students often memorize the mnemonic string of letters: *ROYGBIV*. By calling it to mind, they deploy a simple mnemonic device that enables them to encode a larger piece of information

---

relationship of mere association, since it establishes a new normative relationship between mental representations that we can see as an expression of our own agency.

[43] It's unsurprising that Hume might characterize the mind without appealing to this kind of agency, since he denied the existence of the self and the will. The question of whether we could explain mental agency in terms of belief and desire seems wide open to me.

[44] I hazard that we might even view practical agency as one of the intelligibility conditions of an individual's mental life, one without which we couldn't make sense of particular changes in an individual's mind over the course of a lifetime.

within a smaller one. Hobbes noticed that we make instrumental use of the imagination to achieve a desired goal. He mentions mentally retracing one's steps throughout the day in order to recall the location of a misplaced set of keys. In the Hobbes case, the faculty of imagination is used as a means per force of a desire to bring about a goal-directed memory.

The reach of practical agency extends into the mind and can exercise our mental powers just like our physical ones. I can think of a number between 1 and 100, for instance, and I can call double-digit prime numbers to mind in order to practice multiplication. In an effort to improve my short- and long-term memory, I might decide to spend part of my Monday nights making a mental list of what transpired that day and to recall it as many times as possible within two hours. With sustained effort, we can shape the form and content of our minds: we can have a say in when they take place, how long they continue, and what their contents will be.

The practical questions that we ask ourselves concerning what to do include questions about whether to spend part of the day thinking and, if so, what to spend that time thinking about. I can consider whether to spend this evening thinking, for instance, about my dissertation or about a paper that I agreed to present next month. Familiar, garden-variety practical reasons can bear on my decision. One reason to think about my dissertation, for example, is because I enjoy it; another reason is that I am curious to think through a new line of argument.

Pursuits of mind are also among the most important of ways for us to carry on, because they make up part of what it is to lead a distinctive life of one's own. Our personal relationships and careers require us to devote time to a wide variety of mental activities such as thinking, hoping, wishing, imagining, fantasizing, reflecting, deliberating, planning, and so forth. They are necessary for coming to understand and interpret oneself, one's actions, the world, and one's place in it. They enable us to inhabit moral relations with each other, partly because mental actions develop our agential and rational capacities and partly because they make it possible to develop and to share the particular lives that we each lead. Without mental actions, agents would be unable to pursue the kind of sustained self-examination that illuminates a true sense of self. To develop into fully autonomous, rational adults we must cultivate our capacity to exercise

greater and greater forms of self-control over the contents of our minds. Cultivating these capacities is part of what enables us to entertain, evaluate and set our own goals, and exercising these capacities as we see fit to lead our lives rather than to be led by them.

But if the practical features of fantasy are such an important aspect of a practical agent's life, we might wonder why they have been overlooked or ignored. Research has estimated that we spend around one-third of our waking day simulating various aspects of our lives (Klinger & Cox, 1987). Scene construction has been hypothesized to be a central feature of episodic future thought (Hassabis & Maguire, 2007). These mental simulations play a doubly-instrumental role in action, since they trigger emotions that motivate problem-solving behaviors (Taylor & Pham, 1998). Mental simulation helps agents cope with stressful events by imagining personal, future episodes as a means to regulate emotions and problem solve (Taylor, 1989).

As best I can tell, there were two reasons I kept overlooking the practical nature of the imagination despite making it the subject of my study. I find it's easier to focus on what things are about instead of the things which are about them. The intentional or referential object tends to be the object of attention. When reading, for example, it is easier to focus on what words are about than to remain aware of the fact that they are words. Similarly, when thinking about something, it's easier to focus on those things than on the fact that I'm thinking. Second, I naturally tend to shift my attention from the tools I use to the task I'm using them for. For example, I tend to shift my attention away from my shears and onto the tomato plant I'm trying to prune. Similarly, when using the imagination, it is natural to shift attention away from the imagination and onto the things imagined.

Several conceptions of practical agency can create room for the possibility of mental practical action. A practical conception of mind is generated by the traditional conception of practical agency as a power of powers. It is quite clear that the powers we have power over include the power of attention and the ability to mentally represent things that are not present to us. Since mental powers are among the powers we have, they can be exercised and directed by our power of powers, *i.e.* our practical agency.

A practical conception of mind can also be generated by understanding our practical agency in terms of our ability to choose what to do on the basis of deliberation. Since the things we do mentally are among the options we can choose from, they can be done (mentally) as the result of deliberation-based choice. The space for this possibility is undeniable once we distinguish the antecedent mental activity of mentally deliberating about what to do from any subsequent mental activities we might choose to do.[45] We can rationally deliberate and make choices about which mental endeavors to pursue in the future. When I consider the options I have about how to spend my life, I view questions about what to think about, reflect on, and try to figure out as central. The choices I have concerning which mental enterprises to pursue are some of the most meaningful choices I can make. The things that go on in the mind play an integral role in the story of the life of a practical agent.[46] From the point of view of practical agents participating in practical mental activities, we cannot view our minds as mere mental assemblages of associated content. Insofar as we set ends that involve our minds, we cannot see their operations as pulled by the strings of an alien force like marionettes.

Our capacity for reflective self-awareness enables us to step back from our overt conduct and pose questions about what overt behaviors we should perform and why. How should I be conducting myself? In this way, we can ask practical questions about what to do overtly. In response, we can answer this question for ourselves by making deliberation-based choices. I can take a step back and ask myself a practical question about what I want to think about or what it would be good to think about. Like robust overt actions, they are naturally construed as practical activities: taking means to our ends, as the result of practical deliberation about what to be doing.

I can ask myself, furthermore, what I *should* be thinking about. Suppose that I resolve to drink less coffee each day, and I hear that visualizing the achievement of my goals can help me

---

[45] I am grateful for conversations with Seana Shiffrin who made this distinction as well as its importance clear to me.

[46] They have that role not because they lead to some overt practical activity we perform, but because they themselves are among the practical activities we perform.

achieve them. But, I ask, "Should I?" In posing the question to myself, I thereby raised a practical, normative question about my own mental activities. What is more, there can be a fact of the matter about the correct answer: perhaps visualizing the possibility will help me kick my caffeine addiction, perhaps imagining such a harsh reality will frighten and depress me. The facts of the matter that answer the normative practical question can be based on moral considerations as well. If I'm supposed to help you finish your research by coming up with a few counterexamples to consider, I had better start considering them. Thus, we ask practical questions about the mental domain and our answers as well as our actions can be subject to normative standards. In what follows, I hope to sharpen these general claims by examining the relationship between practical agency and imagination.

2.5 The practical imagination

On the conception of mental fantasy I intend to develop, fantasizing about murder consists in imagining it for the sake of pleasure. A *mental fantasy* is a self-directed mental imagining that aims to produce pleasure—a unified succession of imaginings that are brought about, sustained, revised, elaborated, and intentionally ordered for the sake of taking pleasure in the object that is imagined.[47] An account of mental practical actions will call for us to broaden the scope of our examinations and to carry out, as I explain below, a philosophical reorientation to the imagination. We lack a set of questions about the imagination (and potentially the resources to adequately address those questions) that are fully responsive to the concerns of an ethics practical mental activities, since imaginings are things we do about other people (instead of things we do to them). I turn now to a discussion of the imagination and the practical agency we have in using it.

[47] This conception of fantasy is stipulative, but I have a few supporting remarks to make later in the chapter. At this point in the discussion, I am less concerned about how we use the term "fantasy" and more concerned to pick out instances of imagining something for the sake of taking pleasure in it.

The imagination has fascinated thinkers in a diversity of disciplines, captivating the theoretical attention of poets, theologians, philosophers, and scientists.[48] A remarkable amount of work on the imagination has been done by contemporary analytic philosophy, especially in aesthetics, modal epistemology, and philosophy of mind.[49] These developments are essential to a complete account of the imagination and have informed much of my own understanding. But we should be cautious not to overgeneralize, since much of the theoretical interest driving treatments of the imagination are largely orthogonal to the questions and concerns that motivate my account of the imagination.[50]

The sheer number of powers attributed to the imagination has tempted many philosophers, including most prominently Peter Strawson, to conclude that there could not be a single mental faculty of imagination.[51] Leslie Stevenson (2003) recently outlined twelve of its most historically influential conceptions. Much of the diversity in conceptions of the imagination could be accounted for in just this way, since accounts of the imagination have been developed in response to the various philosophical phenomena, questions and concerns that are

---

[48] John Cocking (1991) traces the historical development of the idea of imagination from Plato through the Renaissance. See Brann (1993) for a philosophically sensitive and historically thorough guide to the major philosophical theories of imagination.

[49] For an introduction to the philosophical puzzles that arise in the different areas of philosophy, see Nichols (2003).

[50] See my distinction from the second section between constitutively and instrumentally practical imaginings.

[51] Strawson was not alone in making this claim: denying that the diversity of claims about the imagination could be attributed to a single or general mental faculty was a commonplace within scientific and literary publications dating back to the early 19th century. "The numerous works devoted to this subject, too well known to be insisted on here, lead us to this conclusion: that there is no general faculty of imagination" *(Ribot, 1899,* p. 112). According to Curry (1896), "the most diverse opinions are held regarding the imagination. One of the latest theories is that there is no such faculty, but that the human mind is full of 'imaginations.'… Another theory is that the imagination is not a separate faculty, but is the spontaneous and harmonious union of all the faculties of the mind acting together contemplatively or creatively" (p. 64). Though compare Roger Scruton (1973), ''there are links of an important kind between the various phenomena grouped under the heading of imagination ... [I]n effect, there is only one concept expressed in the use of this term.'' (p. 91).

characteristic of the disciplines from which those accounts were developed. Different branches of philosophy emphasize different uses of the imagination depending on which uses are most relevant to the central questions and concerns of that branch.

Indeed, it would come as no surprise that a variety of disciplines might produce a variety of conceptions about a single phenomenon. Although it may be true that there is no single faculty of imagination, it would be hasty to draw this conclusion based on the mere diversity of powers attributed to the imagination.[52] Consider an analogy to the diverse powers that could have been attributed to the human hand. The human hand is responsible for handwriting, making artifacts, grasping and holding, pointing for demonstration, shaking hands as a form of greeting, clapping as a sign of appreciation, swinging and throwing weapons, playing musical instruments, and so on.[53] Despite the variety of powers attributed to it, we could plausibly entertain the hypothesis that the human hand is a protean faculty used as the means to accomplishing a wide variety of practical ends. It is this sort of idea—the idea of a protean faculty—that I would like to develop about the Imagination.

Major treatments of the imagination arise primarily in the philosophy of mind, modal epistemology, and philosophical aesthetics. I will discuss a small sampling of those treatments that should be sufficiently representative for a general contrast, and I will mention a few specific points of intersection along the way.[54] In brief, it is not surprising that we tend to find accounts of the imagination in philosophy of mind concerned about the imagination's role in perception and belief formation, since both are central to philosophy of mind. Accordingly, philosophers of mind tend to be more distressed over claims about the imagistic or propositional nature of the

---

[52] After correcting for any misattributions, it wouldn't be implausible to maintain that the diversity of conceptions could be explained by a diversity of discipline-specific interests.

[53] It is likely that some powers have been misattributed to the imagination (such as a voodoo-like power to harm others by imagining it a certain way, or a creative-like power to conceive of new ideas by imagining them). Likewise, an analogous list of powers may have been misattributed to the human hand (e.g. the ability to cast spells by waving or to cause the gods to appear)...

[54] I mean the same kind of conduct that Moore called the proper subject matter of ethics: full-blooded, genuine practical action.

imagination's content. Much of the emphasis in philosophy of mind has been on *the propositional imagination* and what it is to imagine that such-and-such.[55]A primary philosophical concern has been to identify its role in and to distinguish it from other mental states such as to perceive, see-as, believe, desire, suppose or pretend. The importance of imagination for aesthetics, especially to our imaginative engagement with written works of fiction, has given rise to a number of interesting problems.[56] Much attention in modal epistemology has been directed to the relationship between imagination and possibility.[57]

---

[55] According to Nichols (2006), the propositional imagination is a power to imagine that P, but remains neutral about whether the underlying representations are imagistic. Nichols compares the propositional imagination to beliefs: whereas to believe that P is a belief representation with content P, to imagine that P is to have an imaginational representation with content P. Imagining that P is an internal mental state that is distinguished from believing that P or desiring that P in terms of its functional role.

[56] Alvin Goldman (2006) claimed that mental engagement with fiction involves the imagination, at least to a minimal extent. Goldman distinguishes between supposition-imagination and enactment-imagination. Whereas the supposition-imagination is responsible for making suppositions and entertaining hypotheticals, the enactment-imagination creates facsimiles of perception-like states. Entertaining the supposition that, for example, mars might have been made of mercury, is an example of supposition-imagination. Representing a golden meadow dotted with windmills along the Dutch countryside would be an instance of enactment-imagination.

Kendall Walton (1978) made one of the most relevant distinctions for our purposes: he distinguishes between deliberate imaginings, acts of imagination that occur with the subject's conscious direction, and imaginings that are spontaneous. (The idea that imagination is subject to will, however, dates back at least to Aristotle. What is called for is an account of willing the use of imagination to achieve practical ends.) Walton is primarily interested in the role that make-believe plays in the arts; he gives a "make-believe" theory representation, since make-believe continues into adulthood in our interactions with art. The ideal instance of imagining is overt, pretend play: e.g. let's imagine that we're prospectors and these clumps of dirt are gold. Accordingly, Walton distinguishes between social and solitary imaginings, viz. episodes of imagining that occur with or without the joint participation of several subjects. Unfortunately, since Walton claims that fictional truth consists in prescriptions to imagine something, many of the demands made by moral obligations would turn out to be mere fictionally truths. Morally complex situations will often require agents to imagine their options, and morally complex actions will often require agents to imagine what they require. The demand that *we should be thinking of the* troops or that *our thoughts should be with the fallen* would be fictional prescriptions.

[57] Steven Yablo (1993) drew a distinction between the content types of objectual and propositional imagining. Only the objectual imaginings contain referential content, i.e. content that purports to depict an object; and only propositional imaginings, on the other hand, contain alethic content, i.e. content that can be evaluated as true or false.

I mention Yablo's distinction not because my account will depend on it, but rather to use it as an occasion to make a familiar point that applies across any such distinction: the content of

Moral interest in the imagination tends to emphasize the imagination's role in some further, morally salient phenomenon. Work on the imagination within philosophical ethics has traditionally focused on the intentional and causal relationships it bears to overt action. It has focused, in other words, on the fact that imaginings *can be about* practical action and imaginings *can bring about* practical action. It plays an essential role in practical deliberation about future action, plans, and identifying the means to our end. And as the faculty used to entertain other perspectives and visualize future actions, the imagination has sometimes been dubbed the "moral imagination".[58]

Martha Nussbaum (1990) developed the claim that imaginative engagement with fiction helps us to develop one of our primary moral skills: the ability to discern morally salient, though sometimes subtle, aspects of the situation we face.[59] She argues that imaginative engagement with fictional worlds opens us up to new perspectives, allowing us to apply our understanding of morality to novel circumstances, and also to respond emotionally without the distorting influence

---

objectual and proposition imaginings can be *evaluated normatively*, *in two relevant respects*. The imaginings can be normatively evaluated with respect to what they represent. I can (objectually) imagine a rotten tomato, for instance, and I can (propositionally) imagine that my prize-winning tomato plant is wilting. In each case, I imagine something which is defective for its kind. Alternatively, the imaginings can be normatively evaluated with respect to what I aimed to imagine. I might have been trying to imagine a large juicy tomato, for instance, or I might have been trying to imaging that my prize-winning tomato plant is flourishing. But my imaginings would have been defective—they would have been about the wrong things—if instead I had (objectually) imagined a rotten tomato and (propositionally) imagined that my prize-winning tomato plant is wilting.

Thomas Nagel (1974)makes a related distinction between *sympathetic imagining* (undergoing a certain experience is what the agent imagines) and *perceptual imagining* (perceiving a certain event or state of affairs is what the agent imagines).

[58] "Moral imagination can be defined as '…the ability to discover, evaluate and act upon possibilities not merely determined by a particular circumstance, or limited by a set of operating mental models, or merely framed by a set of rules" (Werhane, 1999, p. 93). But much the same was said prior to that by Scott (1997).

[59] See especially pages 46 & 47 of Nussbaum's work.

of self-interest.[60] The view that imagination plays a central role in the development of our moral capacities is widely shared.[61]

My interest is not to deny these claims but rather to point out, if my view is correct, that these claims marginalize the moral importance of imagination. The theoretical interests behind this conception of imagination, however, take its primary moral significance to be compensatory: the imagination can help agents correct their lack knowledge—knowledge of the means to their ends, knowledge of someone else's feelings and perspective, knowledge of situational subtleties that nevertheless merit moral consideration.[62] This approach views the imagination's primary moral value as instrumental because of its relationship to phenomena that bear antecedent moral importance—phenomena including empathy, self-control, perspicacity, and deliberation.

The considerable amount of work on the intentional and causal relationships between the imagination and practical action are immensely important, and have illuminated its causal role in moral action. What tends to remain unnoticed is not the imagination's causal role in producing

---

[60] Nussbaum advances the stronger claim that "moral imagination" is the power to visually perceive the morally relevant features of an actual situation, which the moral imagination enables us to perceive-as or see-as in ways that are richly responsive to concrete particulars of the situation we face.

[61] See also (Currie, 1995), (Mullin, 2004), & (WOUDENBERG, 2006). For a particularly strong view about the role of imagination in moral development, see Tirrell (1990) who claims, "It is through the articulation of events, motives and characters that we become moral agents. This is the sense in which storytelling is necessary for moral agency" (p. 125). See Landy (2012) for the view that philosophical ethics is inadequate without fiction. "The link between imagination, fiction, and knowledge is perhaps nowhere more tangible than in the area of morality. It is agreed on all sides that genuine morality requires more than mere assenting to moral principles and other moral truths. It requires having certain attitudes, dispositions, and emotions. These latter items, however, seem to be such that they cannot be adequately dealt with in moral treatises. It is here that reading fiction may come to the rescue. Reading fiction may provide us with aspects of moral knowledge that moral treatises typically won't."

[62] Given these concerns, it is not surprising that there would be significant interest in distinguishing the perspectives and possible experiences within imaginings. Richard Wollheim (1984), distinguished between *central* and *acentral* imagining. Central imaginings involve imagining a scene from the point of view of someone who is represented in the imagined scene; this includes representing that individual's thoughts, feelings and experiences. Acentral imaginings, on the other hand, involve imagining what happens but not from anyone's point of view within the imagined scene.

practical action, but rather its constitutive role as practical action.[63] I hazard that the imagination could bear an entirely distinct moral significance: on my view, *imaginings can be practical actions*. It is this constitutive relationship that invites our scrutiny, and it is to this task that I now turn.

2.6 Imaginings as practical actions

The development of my own views regarding the constitutive relationship between imaginings and practical action has been influenced by an admittedly odd couple: Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell. Although I could not possibly convey the depth of their ideas sufficiently, I think it will prove useful to retrace how they have shaped my own views. Freud's deep insights into the imagination's psychological function were the basis for two ideas. First, imagination serves a practical function: its activity can be the instrumental means to achieving some goal. This goal can be determined by an unfulfilled wish, furthermore, and regulate the agent's imaginings. Together, the ideas suggest that a practical end can regulate the mental content of the mind's activity in order to satisfy an agent's unmet desires, wishes or needs.

It was Sigmund Freud who, in my opinion, gave the imagination its first systematic and rigorous treatment as part of a scientific psychology. Freud was chiefly interested in the psychological roles of imagination in two aspects of fantasy: *daydreaming* and *pretending*. Appealing to the common wisdom of language, Freud used (nighttime) dreaming and (make-believe or pretend) playing as models to understand fantasy (1937). The idea that dreams modulate and partially satisfy our unmet needs dates back at least to the Greeks. Artemidorus (1975) was among the first thinkers to attempt a systematization of dream interpretation in his 2nd century BCE work entitled *Oneirocritica*.[64] Freud observed that as conscious fantasy is a

[63] Whereas the relationship is intentional just in case the imagining is about a practical action, the relationship is constitutive just in case the imagining is a practical action. It is worth noting that the former is neither necessary nor sufficient for the latter.

[64] Apparently it was commonly understood that dreams were often extensions of unfinished business from one's daily concerns. The seventy-ninth dream from Book I might be of interest to the connoisseur, for there Artemidorus states that a son's erotic dreams about his mother mean

natural counterpart to dreaming, it too can partially satisfy the fantasizer's unmet needs. Needs produce persistent and strong desires that do not simply disappear or lose their force if unmet. The negative mental effects caused by unmet desires can be partially mitigated in fantasy by imagining the object of desire. But they can also be exacerbated if an individual's psychology represses the objects of desire. This process is often disguised in adults, according to Freud, because a well-developed superego disapproves and censures taboo desires.[65] Because elaborate repression of sexual fantasy had significant psychological consequences, interpreting their concealed symbolic meanings became a primary focal point in Freud's work.[66] He was quite clear that fantasies are regulated by other unmet needs too: "there are numerous dreams which satisfy needs other than those which are erotic in the widest sense of the word: dreams of hunger and thirst, dreams of convenience" (Freud, 1921, p. 105).[67] As I interpret his view, however, Freud's focus on the instrumental use of imagination to partially satisfy repressed sexual desires was largely an artifact of his ambitions for psychoanalysis.

Erotic, sexual fantasies would thus come to occupy much of Freud's attention, because repression and its causally nefarious effects tended to be triggered by "taboo" objects of sexual desire. Satisfaction of unfulfilled, taboo desires can be concealed from conscious awareness in several jarringly elaborate ways. Freud believed that an operation of the imagination could be disguised as an operation of memory. Thus, individuals might come to believe that they were

---

that he and his father will become enemies because the jealousy within their rivalry will be especially great.

[65] In this way, part of our psychology protects us from the learning about our "nastier" desires and the accompanying discomfort.

[66] As I read his theory, in order for patients to be released from their self-manufactured neuroses, therefore, the content of their dreams and fantasies stood in need of interpretation. Freud's psychoanalytic method assumed that his recognition of the genuine underlying wishes could be used as a means to effective treatment.

[67] This claim is confirmed by modern empirical psychology, since it has been demonstrated that people who are deprived of food tend to have more frequent daydreams about food (Keys, Brozek, Henschel, Mickelsen, & Taylor, 1950).

remembering some past event when they were in fact merely fantasizing about it. But even when agents know that they are merely imagining something, they can be unknowingly satisfying one of their unfulfilled, taboo desires. As Freud explains, the true identify of a desired object can be disguised within the imagined situation. It can be disguised by association: an oedipal desire could be satisfied by imagining sex with one's spouse in the backseat of a car, for example, that just so happens to be the mother's car. But it can also be disguised symbolically: daydreams about the Washington monument might, due to its shape, symbolize sexual virility.[68]

In addition to using dreams as a model to understand fantasy, Freud believed that important features of fantasy could be modeled by children's make-believe or pretend play.[69] Freud saw that, as a form of pretend play, fantasy not only facilitates skill mastery but also serves the psychologically indispensable function of meeting the fantasizer's *current* emotional needs. He observed that the infant, for example, develops the representational capacity to produce a mental image of the mother and eventually produces this image in her absence in order to soothe itself.[70] Thus, in effect, Freud extended scope of the practical ends assigned to the imagination from merely repressed desires to current needs that are not repressed.

Freud's spanipelagic insight into the psychological complexities of fantasy and repression led him to become, in my view, the first systematic thinker to sufficiently appreciate the practical nature of imaginings. By drawing on analogies to dreams and pretend play, Freud was led to the observation that operations of imagination can partially satisfy unfulfilled wishes and needs. He thus regarded the imagination as having, in effect, a *practical end-directed* function: an operation

---

[68] The latter forms of encoding often require sophisticated interpretation and psychoanalysis to unlock, and I suspect that their complexity naturally appealed to a great mind like Freud's.

[69] Perhaps inspired by Anna O, an early patient who described daydreaming as a private theater. See (Person, Fonagy, Figueira, Freud, & International Psycho-Analytical, 1995).

[70] Freud's insights here were characteristically prescient: modern experimental psychology posits that daydreams tend to be regulated by "current concerns". It also vindicates Freud's claims that imaginative rehearsals develop our skills and extend our know-how. For emotion regulation and problem solving, see (Taylor, 1989).

of the imagination would be caused by an individual's psychology, in order to satisfy unmet desires, needs, or otherwise unfulfilled wishes.[71]

To this—to the idea that mental imaginings can be end-directed and that, as such, their content can be regulated by unfulfilled repressed desires as well as current or ongoing needs that are unmet—we add the idea that the unmet need is one among many practical ends that can regulate mental content. This kind of generalization of the Freud point was suggested in Bertrand Russell's plea for a logical use of imagination in pursuit of the ends of philosophical knowledge. Thus it was Russell who gave me the idea that the content of an individual's imaginings might be regulated by complex principles that can impose their rational order on the imaginative activities of a mind.[72] Russell cautions against the pratfalls of making use of the imagination with only a meager set of logical principles at hand: "when an imagination better stocked with logical tools would have found a key to unlock the mystery."[73] We can use logical principles as tools with

---

[71] In a characteristically insightful moment, Freud speculates that this ability is first used in the moment an infant learns to mentally represent the image of mother in order to soothe the discomfort associated with her actual absence.

[72] It seems clear from the context that Russell means to include a use of imagination that can answer to logical principles: "at the same time, and as an essential aid to the direct perception of the truth, it is necessary to acquire fertility in imagining abstract hypotheses. This is, I think, what most of all has been lacking hitherto in philosophy. So meagre was the logical apparatus that all the hypotheses philosophers could imagine were found to be inconsistent with the facts. Too often this state of things led to the adoption of heroic measures, such as a wholesale denial of the facts, *when an imagination better stocked with logical tools would have found a key to unlock the mystery*. It is in this way that the study of logic becomes the central study in philosophy: it gives the method of research in philosophy, just as mathematics gives the method in physics" (Russell, 1914, p. 239). "It is necessary to practice methodological doubt, like Descartes, in order to loosen the hold of mental habits; and it is necessary to cultivate *logical imagination*, in order to have a number of hypotheses at command, and not to be the slave of the one which common sense has rendered easy to imagine. These two processes, of doubting the familiar and imagining the unfamiliar, are correlative, and form the chief part of the mental training required for a philosopher" (Russell, 1914, p. 238).

[73] There have been other philosophers to attribute rational regularities to the content of imaginings, even regularities that are self-directed. The most sophisticated examples of this sort include Kant's geometric proofs. I especially admire Russell's view, however, because he gives the imagination a central role in philosophical logic despite the heavy-handed contrasts between imagination and logic drawn by prominent thinkers. By Russell's time, however, the imagination and logic had already been sharply criticized by the Romantics.

which to operate the imagination. As his remarks imply, the content of our imaginings should be regulated by the use of logical principles—in particular, we can evaluate their content for logical consistencies. Insofar as I take the logical regulation of my imaginings to be a good worth achieving, my imaginings come to be directed towards a practical end. Putting both contributions side-by-side, it becomes evident that they produce a picture of imaginings as practical, end-directed activities of our mental powers of presenting (objects which are absent from immediate representation) that can be regulated in accordance with complex normative standards.

Among contemporary psychoanalysts, Ethel Person has proposed an extended taxonomy of fantasy: "first, we can categorize fantasies according to our emotional experience of them. While many fantasies are intensely pleasurable, others are not…. Second, we can distinguish between fleeting and repeating fantasies (brief, evanescent, unbidden and triggered by an event or stress of the moment…. Third, fantasies may be either substitutive or preparatory." Person notes, "affect-driven fantasies include the murderous fantasies so often evoked by rejection and the fantasies of impoverishment fueled by depression." Like Freud, Person's conception of fantasy includes not only our daydreams and pretend play, it also extends the conception of fantasy beyond the bounds of its occurrence as a mental activity and includes the general idea we have of our own identities.[74] Person's taxonomy of fantasy squares with much of the modern psychological literature, in which individuals who consider how friends and family would respond to their death, for instance, or even people who might wish for death, are often referred to as having a suicide fantasy. A suicide "fantasy" is often used interchangeably with "ideations" of suicide or mere suicidal "thoughts".[75] Her conception of fantasies as potentially unpleasant, depressing or anxiety-ridden is also consistent with modern psychological usage.

---

[74] I myself will not adopt such a capacious conception of fantasy. Moreover, I do not construe depressing imaginings of impoverishment as fantasies. In general, I deny that fantasies are about that which the imaginer finds unpleasant: I view fantasy as the sort of thing that is pleasurable (a view suggested by its etymological connections with fancy).

[75] This usage leans on a conception of imagination that I eventually resist.

I construe mental fantasies narrowly, as practical imaginings done for the sake of pleasure. My treatment of fantasy will depart, therefore, from its treatment in modern psychology in two ways: insofar as I distinguish fantasy from a myriad of other mental activities and insofar as I reserve "fantasy" for pleasure-directed imaginings. It is of great importance in psychology, for example, to draw a distinction between fantasy and reality—a line according to which what is represented in thoughts, reveries, wishes, hopes, ponderings and so forth do not qualify as actually happening. It is important on my account, by contrast, to recognize that mental activities are actually happening; and to distinguish the various kinds of mental activity, such as fantasizing, thinking, wishing, hoping, praying, considering, and so forth. Practical fantasies, therefore, should not be categorized with similar mental phenomena, including idle daydreams, distracted reveries, or passing whims.

The interests and motivations that drive therapeutic psychology are quite different from that drive moral account of fantasy as a practical rational activity. Therapists appeal to this distinction as a reminder to patients that they are not guilty of actually doing what they have merely fantasized. An inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality can be a key sign of underlying psychological disorder, and emphasizing the moral importance of their difference can facilitate recovery from certain mental illnesses. I do not deny the importance of this moral difference. But the needs of the current explanatory project call for us make more finely grained distinctions between the activity types that can take place in an agent's mind.[76]

I reserve the term *fantasy* more narrowly to refer to a mental activity consisting in mental imaginings or mental simulations that are undertaken or continued for the sake of deriving pleasure.[77] The act of imagining something for the sake of pleasure, on my view, just is a mental

[76] Some of these activities turn out to play a more central to in the project's explanatory account than others. Fantasizing itself is an important class of mental activities because it distinguishes those mental activities regulated by pleasure as an end.

[77] I wish to leave it open, strictly speaking, whether it is possible to fantasize about something without imagining it. I believe that it is, since it strikes me as possible to conceive of something in order to take pleasure in it and to succeed without imagining it. On this possibility: it possible

practical action called *fantasizing*. This narrow conception of fantasy as mentally imagining for the sake of pleasure agrees with at least one central conception of fantasy within psychology today.[78] Person recognizes this more narrow conception in a passage from her own work in which she gives a stunning description of fantasy: "once a fantasy is invoked, the fantasizer savors, lingers on, or revises the most exciting, pleasing, or soothing part of his or her mental creation, whirling it around in the mind until arriving at the 'version' that is most gratifying, often slowing the fantasy down at the most stimulating point, speeding it up at moments that have begun to seem boring, improving on the dialogue, adding new touches to glamorize the setting."

In addition to simplifying the upcoming exposition, a narrow conception of fantasy retains a conceptual relationship between the etymologically related terms "fantasy" and "fancy": whereas fantasy is the mental activity that consists in an imagining directed at pleasure, fancy is the underlying mental state or experience of being pleased about or delighted by what is imagined.[79] We might breeze past this claim holding a slogan: agents fantasize about what they fancy.[80] I look favorably upon this underlying connection. The common wisdom of ordinary

---

for us to fantasize about things without imagining, because the scope of conception (and thereby the scope of mental representation) outstrips the scope of imagination.

[78] The differences between our conceptions—the conception from psychology being more capacious—strikes me as driven by different disciplinary agendas.

[79] It might be said that we have the ability to fashion the content of fantasy to suit our fancy—and thus that which has the most intricacy in fashion is also that which is the most fancy.

[80] My view is thus distinct from the view of Samuel Coleridge (1907) for whom imagination is distinguished as reality tracking, and also from the view of Iris Murdoch "I'd want to make a distinction between fantasy and imagination, not the same as Coleridge's, but a distinction between the expression of immediate selfish feelings and the elimination of yourself in a work of art. The most obvious case of the former would be the novel where the writer is the hero and is always succeeding. He doesn't succeed at first, but he's very brave, and all the girls like him, and so on. That tends to spoil the work. I think some of D. H. Lawrence's work is spoiled by too much Lawrence. What is important is an ability to have an image of perfection and to expel fantasy and the sort of lesser, egoistic cravings and the kind of imagery and immediate expressions that might go with them, and to be prepared to think and to wait. It's difficult, as I say, to make this into any sort of program, to overcome egoism and fantasy" (Meyers, 1990).

language suggests this sort of connection between pleasure and goodness.[81] Ordinary language fastens pleasure and goodness together in terms of fantasy and in terms of liking. We fantasize about the things we like, and the things we like tend to be things with which we are alike. Insofar as two things are alike, however, that which is good for one is also good for the other. We fantasize about that which we fancy, and ordinary language suggests that we fancy those things that suit us in some fashion. For a thing to be suitable for me, however, there must be some respect in which it is good for me (if only for its fit); by denying the latter, we would undermine the basis for establishing the former.

Understood as an account of mental fantasy in general, the narrower conception of fantasy I use would not be without drawbacks. Although nothing speaks against having a depressing fantasy, in my terms it would be excluded as a proper fantasy. Similarly, it seems reasonable to say that imagining oneself being ostracized or punished, even when it feels bad, can be a fantasy. Although we might say that their daydreams about punishment were fantasies, we would not to say that they were fantasizing about being punished—unless we were implying that they like punishment.[82] It would not conflict with my account if we subsequently agreed that my narrow conception of fantasy is better understood as a (non-narrow) conception of hedonic fantasy.[83]

2.7 The practical mechanics of mental fantasy

---

[81] I am appealing to the common wisdom of ordinary language because it can light the way when things grow dark. I take the connection it makes between pleasure and goodness as an important moment, and I use this connection to articulate a conception of fantasy.

[82] To say that someone has "a fantasy about being punished" would imply that the fantasizer's masochistic pleasures were indulged as readily as it would imply that the fantasizer's anxieties were overactive.

[83] The narrow conception also rules out "paranoid" fantasies as genuine instances of practical fantasies. I admit that this is controversial. It still strikes me as odd to say that the paranoid person is fantasizing. But helpful criticism from Seana Shiffrin has led me to reconsider my position.

I have been construing mental fantasy in terms of pleasure-directed mental imaginings whose content is determined by the agent's practical ends. The characteristic end of a fantasy about such-and-such is to cause (derive, or take) pleasures that are associated with such-and-such by mentally representing a sequence of such-and-such related content. The mental content of the fantasizer's mind – which is to be categorized in light of its role with respect to relation to what the fantasy is supposed to be about – is organized around the agent's end. In other words, fantasies are regulated according to practical principles in order to achieve the fantasizer's end. Hence, the agent's end—to derive certain pleasures associated with such-and-such—can be a regulative principle or standard of the agent's practical activity. In this section, I intend to sketch a few of the mechanics of fantasy.

The objects of fantasy—i.e. what some particular fantasy is a fantasy about—tend to be events or scenarios that have significance for the fantasizer. In general, objects of fantasy have a narrative structure or plot: examples include winning the lottery, playing a game of chess, and travelling back in time to make a face-saving repartee. But their objects can be simple too, such as the mere presentation of a cigarette or an especially dark cup of coffee. Either way, however, the agent who undertakes a fantasy faces a practical task, the status of which is yet-to-be-done. To fantasize about something, mental representations with the right kind of content have to be generated and sustained. In turn, content that isn't sufficiently relevant to the fantasy has to be rejected in favor of content that is sufficiently relevant. If I am trying to fantasize about winning the lottery, for example, whereas picturing myself driving to the local gas station to buy a ticket is relevant, picturing my kittens chasing their tails is not relevant.

Even when stretches of content are sufficiently relevant to the fantasy scenario, however, they should be ignored or set aside if they fail to further the fantasizer's ends. That can happen if the fantasizer doesn't happen to find a particular specification of the content gratifying (despite its relevance). An overworked employee fantasizes about vacation by imagining a museum tour of Italy, for example, and yet strangely finds no pleasure in it because it doesn't seem frivolous enough. Imagining the museum vacation will now count as defective in light of the fantasizer's

end, which calls for the fantasizer to imagine a new and more gratifying vacation. In general, therefore, the fantasizer will take any irrelevant or unsatisfying content to be defective and in need of revision.[84]

A particular imagining belongs in a fantasy sequence insofar as what it represents plays a role in bringing about pleasure. The imaginings do not merely occur one after the other, but rather are linked or concatenated in accordance with the role their content plays in the fantasy. In this way, therefore, we can think of the imaginings as unified thematically: imaginings belong to a fantasy insofar what they represent plays a role in the plot that brings about the correct pleasure. For example, the particular imagining of me driving to the local convenience store and the particular imagining of starting an academic charity with my lottery winnings can both belong to the same fantasy—my fantasy about winning the lottery. In this sense, pleasures taken in intentional objects may be regarded pleasures that are conceptual, intellectual, or psychological.

The Western philosophical tradition has taken notice of conceptual (intellectual or psychological) pleasures from its earliest beginnings. Plato calls attention to them in the Republic, writing that Leontius was "overpowered in despite of all by his desire, with wide staring eyes he rushed up to the corpses and cried, 'There, ye wretches, take your fill of the fine spectacle'"(Grube, 439e-440a). The interesting association between these pleasures and the human eye is taken up later by St. Thomas Aquinas. He maintained that these psychological pleasures require cognitive apprehension of an object, whereas physical pleasures (or pleasures of the bed and table as he sometimes says) require causal contact with their object. Aquinas categorized psychological pleasures under "concupiscence of the eyes" and physical pleasures under "concupiscence of the flesh." Since the former pleasures arise from apprehension of

[84] The fact that fantasy is routine activity that we perform without special deliberation or methodical attention does not undermine the fact that fantasizing is an accomplishment. The wages of agency become more evident, for example, kin circumstances that are extremely distracting.

objects, those objects do not have to be immediately present for us to take pleasure in them. We can be delighted by and we can aim to be delighted by things that are not present: we can imagine absent things that please, in other words, and we can imagine absent things because they please.

Ordinarily it would be important to keep track of the fantasizer's points of view, since differences in perspective can affect our assessment of the fantasizer's character, attitudes and dispositions.[85] Since these assessments are not relevant at the moment, we will not need to concern ourselves about the different perspectives an agent adopts in practical fantasy. The defining moral feature of a practical fantasy is the fantasizer's end—i.e. what it is that the fantasizer seeks to take pleasure in.[86] The morally relevant categories of practical fantasy can be distinguished by the object of pleasure (what the fantasizer aims to take pleasure in). We can illustrate the importance of tracking differences in the various objects of pleasure by looking at a few examples. The soldier imagining strategic weaknesses in an enemy position as part of a military training exercise, for instance, might be pleased because the imagining succeeds as a means to bringing about a goal. The geometer imagining an icosidodecahedron might be pleased because the representation of such a complex figure is itself a difficult achievement. The artist imagining entirely new vistas and fanciful creatures to draw could take pleasure in the vivacity or creativity of such imaginings. The patron of the arts might enjoy rehearsing scenes from a film that portrays the plight of a people in powerful and moving ways. Agents can be pleased because of the imagining's role in their ends, for example, or pleased because of various features associated with the imaginings and their content. But these cases are worlds apart from the

[85] See Wollheim (1984) for a very fine discussion about mental perspectival differences.

[86] I am going to assume that any fantasy under discussion is genuine practical action—a result of deliberation-based choices—unless specified otherwise.

murder fantasy.[87] In the murder fantasy, the fantasizer is pleased by what the fantasy is about—the object of pleasure, in other words, coincides with the object of fantasy.[88]

[87] Equivalently, we might say of what's imagined—i.e. of that which the agent's imaginings are imaginings about—that it is what the agent takes pleasure in, that it's what the agent likes about these imaginings, or that the agent is pleased because of it.

[88] We can now see that whether the fantasizer achieves this end by adopting a first or third person point of view is of little concern. Despite dissimilar perspectives, therefore, these cases can be treated alike by a moral account of practical fantasy.

The imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense.
Shakespeare, Troilus & Cressida

Who can hold a fire in his hand,
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite,
By bare imagination of a feast?
Or wallow naked in December's snow,
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
Oh no! the apprehension of the good
Gives but the greater feeling to the worse.
Shakespeare, Richard II

3.1 Morality and Practical Fantasy

Chapter I established that one of my primary aims is to account for the moral wrongness of the murder fantasy—a representative case of morally wrong mental activity—based partly on the fact that the fantasy is about a murder. Chapter II identified fantasizing about something as imagining it for the sake of pleasure, discussed the relationship between our practical agency and the things we do mentally as well as overtly, and sketched an account of the practical imagination in particular. In Chapter III, I articulate how I propose to account for what makes a practical activity morally wrong and then apply this view to the schadenfreude fantasy.

In Section II, I quickly survey the basic elements of my view that will be relevant in the upcoming arguments. Section III articulates the basic standard of practical activity and its requirement that agents to use only valid standards in determining what to do. Section IV voices worries against my argument along with my replies.

My basic line of argument will run as follows. There is a standard of practical activity that governs the activity of determining what to do by using standards of goodness. Thus it is a standard for how to use standards. In particular, it requires agents to determine what they do in accordance with using standards which make the correct determinations—i.e. in accordance with using *valid* standards. Practical agents who determine what to do by using invalid standards,

therefore, violate this standard of practical activity.[89] Subsequently, I apply this general framework to a specific case of fantasizing about murder, arguing that fantasizer violates the practical activity standard by using an invalid standard. My specific contention will be that the fantasizer's aim—to take pleasure in what the fantasy is about—relies on the use of a standard that cannot be valid.

The fantasizer's aim, I argue, uses a standard that cannot be valid because it is rationally inconsistent with the practical activity standard, a standard whose validity is presupposed by any use of practical agency. Since the practical activity standard is valid for uses of the fantasizer's practical agency, it is valid for any instance of that kind—including uses of the imagined victim's practical agency. If it is really the murder of another practical agent that the fantasizer is imagining, therefore, treating the standards of practical activity as valid requires the fantasizer to apply this standard to the imagined victim's practical.

It should come as no surprise that the basic features of the account I develop turn out to be a bit idiosyncratic, since they have been developed from starting points that are somewhat unusual. I will start with an overview of these basic features, and later I return to illustrate the features more concretely by drawing an analogy to ordinary features of our manual activity.

3.2 Basic elements of my view

The most fundamental move in my project is the connection I make between two ideas: that mental actions are practical, and that practical standards are moral. I claim that the same practical activity standard that applies to our overt actions (the things we do overtly as a product of practical agency) also applies to our mental actions (the things we do mentally as a product of

[89] A standard is treated as valid whenever an action is chosen in accordance with accepting judgments based on that standard as true, correct, veridical, valid, right, etc. For example, in choosing an action as the means to my end, I treat the standard of instrumental rationality as valid for my practical activity. Alternatively, if I choose to move my Queen's bishop to the center for the sake of gaining tempo, then I treat a standard of gaining tempo as valid with respect to the goodness of making particular chess moves.

practical agency). On the Kantian assumption that practical standards can address the moral wrongness of our actions insofar as they are practical, it follows *a fortiori* that they can account for the moral wrongness of our mental practical actions.

The idea is not that mental activities precede and lead to real world practical actions, but that mental activities are real world practical actions. Our genuine, practical activities include the things we do mentally as well as the things we do overtly. Since mental activities are genuinely practical, they are governed by the practical activity standard. Mental and overt practical actions are both vulnerable to assessment by the same standard of practical activity. Agents who use standards to make determinations about doing something mentally or overtly, therefore, are required by the standard of practical activity to use valid standards only.

The account I have been developing stresses the practical aspects shared by our overt and mental activities alike: they can both have a common origin in practical deliberation, an activity I describe in terms of figuring out what to do by using standards of goodness. Practical agents use standards of goodness to make judgments about what to do mentally as well as overtly.[90] This use of standards should be a familiar, albeit somewhat abstract, activity of ours.[91] A student of logic says, "Just use *modus ponens* for that one," and a geometry student uses the Pythagorean Theorem to determine the length of a hypotenuse. A dog show judge uses rather lofty standards

---

[90] Should it be denied that agents conceive of their ends as good, per force of the worry that weak-willed individuals do what they know is not good? The example presents a good worry, but the worry does not strike me decisive grounds for rejecting the common view of taking one's ends as good. My own intuitions about method have been to use hard cases to modify and further enhance the picture we get from reflecting on standard cases, rather than to reject it altogether. In this case, the modification was to introduce qualify "*some* good" and, thus, to make a weaker claim about how the agent conceives of the goodness of their ends. For readers who remain unconvinced, I propose that I hope to be able to re-describe weakness of will in terms of the account I develop. (To anticipate: whereas weak-willed agents know that they should treat a certain standard as valid, they actually treat as valid a standard according to which what they do is good even though the latter standard is taken to be invalid).

[91] It also anticipates the general moral significance underwritten by the rationally consistent use of standards. I propose that this significance, as it turns out, just is the significance in treating rational nature as an end in itself (more on this in the final section).

associated with a particular breed of dog in order to determine which dog is the best specimen of its breed. A carpenter estimates right angles by using a carpenter's square (sometimes referred to as a *Norma*).[92] An engineering student uses Newton's gravitational law to approximate the speed of an orbiting satellite.[93] It is not unusual to talk about using things like standards, norms, principles, and laws.

The argument I deliver against fantasizing about murder appeals to several abstract features it has in virtue of being a practical activity. I propose to illustrate these abstract claims more concretely by elaborating the analogous features of our ordinary manual activities.

We use concrete particulars as manual tools to make and do things. Some examples of manual labor or activity are simple: the loom is used to make fabrics by weaving them; the scythe is used to reap crops by cutting them; the forge is used to soften metals by heating them. Specialized manual activities tend to be a bit more fanciful: modern scrap bookers use cardstock paper and mounting glue to preserve memories in decorative D-ring binders; urban graffiti knitters use bloom looms and crochet hooks to weave whimsical fabric designs around the mundane public objects that city-dwellers encounter every day.

But we also use concrete particulars as standards to measure things. Elementary school students practice using a wooden ruler to measure the length of lines, music students use a metronome to keep time, and construction workers use a carpenter's square to true up every angle. Many of the earliest things we used as standards were denominated by the things made common by nature: feet and hands were used as standards of length and height, plant seeds and grains were used as standard units of weight, and the motion of the sun was used to measure the

---

[92] Cf. the Constellation *Norma et Regula* named by Abbé Nicolas de Lacaille (Simpson, 2012).

[93] By "use" of a standard, however, I do not mean that an agent must consciously or explicitly have that standard in mind. I talk about the explicit use of standards because it makes related issues clearer and because agents can, upon reflection, make explicit use of standards. The goodness of a thing, with respect to a certain standard, is determined on the basis of whether that thing satisfies the conditions specified by the particular standard.

passage of time. Traces of this tradition remain, but it has largely been replaced by manmade instruments of greater precision.

We also use abstract ideas, principles or formulae as standards. Students of logic practice using modus ponens as a standard to determine whether this or that is a good inference, and students of chess practice using the movement rules for each piece and common checkmating patterns to determine whether this or that move is good. Notice that there is something special about the former pair of standards: they get things right. The goodness of an inference can indeed be correctly determined by modus ponens as its standard, and the goodness of a move can indeed be correctly determined by using checkmate as its standard. By contrast, determining a good inference by using comfort or familiarity as a standard doesn't get things right, nor would using alphabetical order as a standard for making a good chess moves get things right. I refer to standards that get things right in this way as *valid* standards.

It is by grasping manual tools with the hand that we come to use them. The hand is our finest physical instrument, a protean tool that can be molded to fit and handle countless concrete particulars. Since the manual-activity standard directs us to use the proper tools properly, and since the hand is the tool we use to grasp and use things as manual tools, the manual-activity standard directs us to make proper use of the hand. To satisfy the standards of manual activity, therefore, the hand itself must be used properly in addition to the proper use of the proper, specific tools. In this way, therefore, the standard manual-activity standard is doubly-directive.

The manual-activity standard is doubly-directive because our manual-tool use is necessarily mediated. Our manual capacity enables us to grasp and use the concrete particulars we use as manual tools. Since every instance of manual activity requires using our manual capacity, we cannot use specific manual tools without using the hand as a tool to grasp them. Since a specific tool can't be used without using the tool of tools, therefore, the standard of manual activity calls for the proper use of two distinct tools.

We can now begin to bridge these considerations about manual activities to my proposals about practical activities. Much as the hand grasps this or that concrete particular and uses it as a

tool, so reason grasps this or that abstract idea, principle, and formula to use as a standard for determining whether this or that is good. We can grasp and use abstract ideas as standards of goodness by using our reason. Much as the hand gives us the manual capacity to grasp and use manual tools, so reason is our rational capacity to grasp ideas and use them as standards in determining what to do.

I call the rational capacity we have for this kind of activity our *practical agency*, the use or actuation of which I call a *practical activity*. To help keep track of these practical aspects of mind, I have adopted the following terminology. A *practical agent* is a rational agent with practical agency; practical agency is the power to perform a practical activity. In general, a practical activity is a deliberation-based choice about what to do and the subsequent actions that result from these choices. In particular, I characterize *practical activities*—choices agents make based on deliberating about what to do—as the activities of choosing what to do by making judgments about goodness in accordance with standards. The subsequent actions that result from these deliberation-based choices about what to do are practical actions. Motor practical actions and mental practical actions are a species of practical action.[94] *A mental practical action* is the exercise of a mental power insofar as it is the result of deliberation-based choice.

Much as we illuminated the valid standard for manual activity by looking at instances of good use of manual tools, we can illuminate the valid standard for rational activity by looking at instances of good use of abstract standards. We discussed one such instance in the carpentry case: the Pythagorean formula is a good standard to use for making determinations about the goodness of a carpenter's square. By analogy, the right standards for practical agents to use for making determinations about goodness are the standards which make the correct determinations, i.e. the valid standards. But how should the valid standards be used? Again, in the carpentry case, we found that one and the same standard determines the goodness of a carpenter's square—

[94] A motor practical action is the exercise of a motor power insofar as it is the result of deliberation-based choice.

regardless of whether it happens to belong to me or to you. In this case, the right use of the Pythagorean formula requires using it as the standard when making determinations of any carpenter's square. The valid standards, in other words, should be used as standards. Thus, just as the standard of manual activity directs us to use the proper tools and to use them in the proper way, so the standard of practical- activity directs us to the valid standards and to use them as standards.

Furthermore, much as the manual-activity standard was doubly-directive: it applies to this or that specific tool and to the manual capacity used to use them (i.e. to our hand). Likewise, the rational-activity standard is also doubly-directive. Since every instance of rational activity involves using the rational capacity—i.e. using reason, the use of which is an activity with valid standards—whenever we use our rational capacity, the rational-activity standard directs us to use the standards of rational activity and to use them as standards. Thus there are two activities with respect to which the rational standard is valid: to this or that specific activity (the goodness of which is being determined by the use of this or that specific standard), and to the rational capacity used to use them (i.e. to our reason).

The use of a particular manual tool alone is not sufficient to satisfy the manual activity standard. Since the capacity we use to grasp and make use of manual tools (the hand) is itself a tool, the manual activity standard also makes a demand about how the hand is used. Thus the manual-activity standard is valid for a specific activity—i.e. the activity of using this or that tool (e.g. this hammer-using or that loom-using). And it's not *merely* valid for using this or that tool: it's also a valid standard for using the hand which reaches out to grasp this or that tool. The standard that's valid for the use of a specific manual tool, therefore, is also valid for the manual capacity which is used.

By analogy, the practical activity standard calls for us to use standards that are valid. Since the capacity we use to grasp and make use of standards itself has standards that are valid for its use, the practical activity standard also makes a demand about those standards. Since they are valid for its use, and since any use of standards presupposes its use, the practical activity

standard calls for using its standards as valid. Thus, a given use of manual tools meets the manual activity standard only if it makes proper use of the hand and, likewise, a given use of standards meets the practical activity standard only if it makes proper use of valid standards.

Much as the manual activity standard applies to each use of the hand and the work it does with concrete manual tools, so the practical activity standard applies to each use of reason and the work it does with abstract standards. Since part of reason's work involves making determinations about the goodness of things, it follows that the practical activity standard applies to the judgments we make in our rational activities. Again, it tells us to make our determinations about what's good to do by using valid standards. And since the practical activity standard is valid for each instance of using standards, it is valid for any of our determinations about what's good to do.

Having identified a concrete activity that is structurally analogous to practical activity, we need to identify a set of examples that are comparable to the murder fantasy in order to illustrate how my argument plays out in this new context. So the features of a murder fantasy which are crucial to the argument I make against it must also be present in the new example. What might be called the object of fantasy has a very special relationship to the activity: the object of the activity and the capacity used to produce the activity are of the same kind. Why is this feature so important? Because the same standard that's valid for one is also valid for the other. And the standard that's valid for the capacity used in this case is the practical activity standard. When the manual capacity is used to grasp another person's hand, the capacity used and the object it's used to grasp are instances of the same kind. This possibility was represented by the master calligrapher taking the apprentice's hand and uses it to guide the brush correctly. It follows that the manual activity standard is valid for the object grasped by the hand. And that standard calls for proper use of the hand. So the master calligrapher couldn't take that standard to be valid while also taking the apprentice's hand to break it.

Much as our manual activities sometimes involve other people's hands, our practical activities sometimes involve other practical agents. Likewise, when one practical agent's activity

involves making determinations about another agent, the practical activity standard will be multiply-determinative. To return finally to the fantasy about murder: just as the master calligrapher can't conceive of crushing a hand to be good while also taking the manual-activity standard to be valid, the fantasizer can't conceive of someone's murder as good while also taking the practical activity standard to be valid.

My general argument should start becoming more clearly evident once we recognize the analogous structure between our manual and practical activities. My argument runs along the following lines: since any use of practical agency yields an instance of practical activity, the standards of practical activity are valid for it. Each use of practical agency, therefore, guarantees that the standard of practical activity is valid for it. If this standard were inconsistent with one of the particular standards I happened to be using, then my particular standard would be inconsistent with a valid standard. The determinations made by a standard which is inconsistent with a valid standard have to be incorrect, however, and hence the standard has to be invalid. It follows that the use of this standard would fail to meet the practical activity standard.[95] The use of a standard which fails to meet the standard of practical activity would not be good, however, and it would follow that I should not use it. [96] I argue that these claims are true of the murder fantasy.

---

[95] This follows from the fact that two inconsistent standards cannot both be valid at the same time. Again, the basis for claiming that the general standard must be valid is that the use of a particular standard presupposes the general standard's validity. Thus, whenever the particular standard's use is given, the general must indeed be valid for it.

[96] What makes me think this is a rational "should"? Insofar as it is the norm of proposing standards to ourselves, the standard of practical activity just is the norm of rational nature. Moreover, the directive of the standard of practical activity functions to preclude failures of a very specific sort, i.e. those failures that are somehow fundamental ways in which we might otherwise fail as we carry the activity out. But this activity is an essentially rational activity, i.e. rationality is somehow fundamental to it. It seems plausible to suggest that the activity's fundamental failures, i.e. failures of a fundamental order, are rational failures or failures of the rational order. A failure that is fundamental to an activity is a failure with respect to that which is fundamental in such an activity; thus a failure that is fundamental to a rational activity should be a failure with respect to that which is fundamental in it, i.e. the rational.

3.3 Fantasizing about murder: Freud's schadenfreude fantasy

The complex, personal relationship between Sigmund Freud and his erstwhile protégé, Carl Jung, provides a rich basis for speculating about examples of mental practical actions that are morally wrong. Their relationship was marked by intensity from the very beginning: it's said that they talked for over thirteen hours straight at their first meeting. Later, Freud came to view Jung as his chief disciple, responsible for advancing the field of psychoanalysis in his death, and even went so far as to refer to Jung as his dear son—an interesting development, given the centrality of the Oedipal complex to Freud's own theory.[97] After several tense episodes, their relationship ended in a bitter schism after a letter from Freud to Jung suggested that they terminate all aspects of their personal relationship.[98]

Suppose that, shortly after they officially terminate their personal relationship in correspondence, Freud learns from a mutual acquaintance that Jung's latest work was recently discredited at an important conference. Delighted to hear about this turn of events, Freud wonders how it might have happened. Soon he finds himself picturing quite elaborate scenarios, savoring each turn of events in anticipation of Jung's embarrassment. He might, for example, imagine things unfolding like this: Jung finishes his presentation on a triumphant note of characteristically stout note of arrogance, an increasingly hostile audience asks a series of critical questions, a diplomatic commentator attempts to smooth over the wrinkles but to no avail, a well-respected researcher interrupts with a witty barb exposing the fatal flaw, then laughter, then

---

[97] (Jung, 1963, p. 150).

[98] Freud disclosed in correspondence (Freud, Jung, McGuire, Manheim, & Hull, 1974) that he looked forward to his upcoming publication, which he referred to as a "bomb," in which he intended to distance himself from Jung and refute Jung's latest developments. The latter disclosure was made to his friend Ferenczi. In the work itself, Freud claims that "the effective refutation of Jung's misconceptions of psychoanalysis and his deviations from it is not difficult" (Freud, 1917, p. 57).

desperate backpedaling, then relentless pursuit, and finally a reluctant acceptance accompanied by shame, embarrassment, and a sense of disbelief.[99]

This sort of pleasure feeds on the misery and misfortune of other people. Historical records trace the first written use of a name for this feeling back to the German term, "schadenfreude." It typically refers only to pleasures associated with a malicious delight—a delight experienced in response to someone else's misfortune. The word was introduced into English by Archbishop Trench in a footnote to his work on words in which he suggested the mere fact such a word had been coined implied that the existence of depraved inner lives was already widespread (Trench, 1900, p. 51). But the concept itself arguably dates back to Plato, however, whose discussion of mixed pleasures in the *Philebus* suggests that envy is the cause of taking pleasure in the misfortunes of one's own friends. Schadenfreude earned explicit recognition within philosophy dating at least back to Kant, who regarded it as one of the three principal moral vices.[100] As for the sciences, recent work in empirical psychology appears to have vindicated Trench's sinister speculation, demonstrating that schadenfreude is experienced with surprising frequency. In general, it's been shown that the likeliest targets of schadenfreude tend to be individuals who are envied, seen as undeserving, or simply disliked.

After tiring of the same well-worn fantasy, however, Freud might eventually exaggerate the misfortune by, for instance, imagining dropping dead of a heart attack caused by the shock of his work being refuted—perhaps such a thought would give Freud quite a chuckle.[101] In

---

[99] My examples do not purport to have any historical validity about the inner psychic life of the actual Sigmund Freud whatsoever. It would not be entirely unreasonable to suppose, however, that Freud's feelings of anger, envy and betrayal might have manifested themselves in his own psychic life. I should like to point out that Freud is one of my own intellectual heroes and that, as will become evident after the next set of examples, I have chosen him as the running protagonist primarily because of his heightened interest in and self-awareness of imaginings, their interpretations and underlying causes.

[100] See Kant's work on Religion (2009, p. 30).

[101] Freud's work on humor was one of the few times he wrote explicitly about schadenfreude. (2003). In detailing his account of humor, Freud appeals to schadenfreude to explain why we laugh when bad things happen to other people.

particular, Jung's work is refuted in an article published by Freud himself; an article he wrote with the intention of shocking Jung to death. So suppose that Freud imagines this scenario because he takes pleasure in the mere thought of such an ironic misfortune befalling his erstwhile disciple. Since Freud aims at this sort of pleasure as his end, I will refer to this particular example of fantasizing about murder as ***Freud's schadenfreude fantasy***.

I will be assuming that the fantasy is indeed about murder, since it is supposed to represent Freud intentionally causing Carl Jung to die. Admittedly, the causal chain leading to Jung's death is quite elaborate—Freud's writing an eviscerating but brilliant article that gets published in a journal delivered to Carl Jung, who then reads, understands and accepts it as a definitive refutation of his own work and it causes such a shock that Jung suffers a fatal heart attack.[102]

Freud's fantasy involves actively seeking to evoke or savor feelings of schadenfreude by imagining a particularly grave misfortune befalling Jung—in this case, his tragic death resulting from his work being discredited. The source of pleasure in Freud's fantasy—what it is that Freud likes about it, is delighted by, or enjoys—is what Freud imagines: Jung's tragic death, which is a source of pleasure because it represents Jung's misfortune. The fantasizer is pleased by what the imaginings are about: the murder of a bitter rival.

But the schadenfreude fantasy is not merely a mental activity. It is also a practical activity, since it consists in the end-directed imaginings of a practical agent. The explanatory task, therefore, is to provide an account of the moral wrongness of such fantasies as practical actions, *viz.* insofar as the fantasizer endeavors to bring about a sequence of imaginings for the sake of experiencing or savoring the pleasure taken in what's being imagined, partly because of what the imaginings are about.[103] The first chapter established this as an adequacy condition, in

---

[102] Insofar as Freud takes his action to be the sole and direct cause of Jung's death, however, it seems plausible enough suppose that his action deliberately killed Jung and therefore counts as a form of murder.

[103] We talk about the kind of examples I have in mind when we saying, for instance, that "I'm very glad to hear that" so-and-so is doing well, or when we say that such-and-such is "what I like

order to give a respectful nod to common sense moral judgment. But the explanation must also meet the objections from my primary opponent who points out a glaring difference between a mere fantasy about Jung's death and a real murder: there is no death in the case of mere fantasy. There is no actual, tragic death suffered by Jung. This difference motivates my chief opposition: since there is no murder performed by Freud and since there is no victim of Freud's action, there is no sound basis for the claim that Freud's fantasy is morally wrong.

I accept that there are grave differences between an act of murder and a merely imaginary one, since in the former case a person actually dies. We should not conclude on the basis of this difference, however, that there is no similarity or feature in virtue of which each action is morally wrong. My positive proposal is that fantasy murders as well as real murders fail to meet the practical activity standard because, in each practical activity, the acting agent uses a standard of goodness that is invalid.[104] The moral significance of this moment, as I intend to elaborate in the next chapter, implies that the rational nature of another practical agent is actually misused by the fantasizer and the real murderer alike. First, however, I need to establish that the agent who fantasizes about murder violates the practical activity standard.

Recall that Freud's schadenfreude fantasy is a practical activity in which he imagines Jung's murder for the sake of taking pleasure in what it is about (i.e. Jung's murder). Jung's murder is what Freud imagines because he takes pleasure in it. Freud determines what to fantasize about (Jung's murder), therefore, by using pleasure as a standard of goodness. But, I claim, this is an invalid standard of goodness. Thus, contrary to what the practical activity standard requires, Freud uses a standard of goodness that is invalid.

---

about" some object, experience, or event. The corresponding pleasures can be independent of my direct sensory experience, and they can even stem from displeasing physical sensations: I might hear about my financial windfall over the phone from a friend whose shouting is interrupted intermittently by strident bursts of static. Intentional pleasures have received treatment from a number of philosophers. See Scruton (2006) and Brentano (2004).

[104] The idea of comparing the two actions side-by-side was suggested to me in a helpful conversation with Trent Teti.

In order to articulate my view about the murder fantasy as a practical imagining and give a proper response to the Interactionalist (my primary opponent), it is crucial that we avoid confusion by distinguishing between *imagining*, the *imagined*, and the *imaginary*. Imaginings are acts, exercises or operations of the imagination. That which is imagined just is what an imagining is about. This is the same familiar distinction we find between, e.g., my saying something and what I said, or between my answering a question and my answer. There is more room for confusion about the imagination, however, because it is tempting to think that both the imaginings and the imagined are imaginary. But that would be a mistake. The imaginary tends to connote a contrast to what is real and factive. Against the real: a belief that God is imaginary, for instance, certifies the believer as a card-carrying atheist. Against the factive: whereas the fact that I imagined drinking tea with my newest friend, implies that I have a friend, the fact that I imagined drinking tea with my imaginary friend implies no such thing. It could be true of me that I have more imaginary friends than anyone else in the world while, sadly, also being true of me that I am a friendless hermit. Used as a predicate, "imaginary" tends to subtract reality from the subject it predicates. Now we sometimes use "imagining" to mean imaginary, such as when you say that I was just imagining things. We sometimes use "imagined" to mean imaginary too, such as when the psychiatrist reports that the patient imagined the entire affair. And we sometimes attribute things to the imagination to indicate pejoratively that they are merely imaginary, such as when we say that it was just a figment of your imagination.

None of this should be taken to imply, however, that our imaginings and the things we imagine are imaginary. Indeed, both claims are false because there are genuine facts of the matter about our mental activities and psychological processes. Suppose that I start imagining Lincoln deliver the Gettysburg Address. There are two relevant facts of the matter about what has actually occurred. First, it is a fact of the matter that I am really engaged in an imagining. It is also a fact of the matter that it is really Lincoln, and not John Wilkes Booth, who I have imagined delivering the Address. Dismissing what happens with respect to our imaginings as

merely imaginary seems to me like it is a non-starter. Nor can such a move survive the scrutiny of our rational reflections upon our own minds.[105]

If the fantasizing and the murder being fantasized about are imaginary in the sense that they lack reality, then there would be no occurrence of a murder fantasy for a project of this kind to explain. The fact that Freud fantasizes about Jung's murder implies that Freud is really engaged in an imagining and that it is really Carl Jung who Freud has imagined. Now, although there is not a real murder, Carl Jung is a real person whose murder Freud really imagined. These facts of the matter about these real elements in fantasy are significant because practical agents can form conceptions of them and form judgments of them in accordance with standards of goodness; and, as we saw in Chapter II, these are the kind of features that can make a practical activity violate the norm of practical activity.

We might get a better feel for the tension between these standards from a similar tension in a different case. Consider an instructor of formal logic who happens to enjoy drawing invalid inferences. Doesn't that seem odd? We expect logicians to enjoy deriving inferences that are valid, not invalid. The oddity could be due to a variety of psychologically formative, causal histories. We might imagine a masochistic logician whose mistakes were sources of chilling pleasure, or a nostalgic logician whose mistakes evoked romanticized sentiments of a misspent youth. Suppose that this logician also spends much of the year looking forward to drawing invalid inferences on summer vacation, however, and thus *aims at* taking pleasure in drawing invalid inferences. The pleasure is now, properly speaking, a practical pleasure. Now whichever standards the logician might use to conceive of the invalid inference (which is sought for the sake of taking pleasure in it) as good cannot be the standards of logic. This is because an invalid inference cannot be good with respect to the standards of logic. So they cannot be used to

[105] There are other grounds for resisting dismissal. Imaginings will qualify as real insofar as they are operations or events that take place in time, insofar as they are products of human effort and responsive to corrective direction, and insofar as they are particular actuations of a power that occupies us.

conceive of an invalid inference as good. In this way, whichever standards are used are inconsistent with the standards of logic.

Much the same should be said of whichever standards get used by a practical agent. By parity of form: Freud conceives of what he is imagining as the death of Carl Jung. Given that his fantasy is a fantasy about Jung (a fact secured by Freud's own practical aims), it follows that the standards of practical activity are valid for Freud's practical fantasy and that it is also valid for what the practical fantasy is about (since the standards of practical activity apply to Carl Jung because he too is a practical agent). Hence, insofar as it really is Carl Jung who Freud imagines, the goodness of Jung's death is determined by the standards that are valid. Thus, just like in the vacationing logician example, whatever standard might get used to conceive of the object of practical pleasure as good cannot be a standard that is valid.[106]

This argument relies on the claim that the standards of practical activity are valid for Freud's schadenfreude fantasy. That is because Freud's fantasizing is one among many instances of an activity that belongs to a more general kind. This more general kind of activity is practical activity. Since the standards of a thing's kind determine its goodness, the goodness of his fantasizing is determined by the standards of this more general kind of activity. And since the standards of a thing's kind are valid for it, the goodness of Freud's fantasizing is determined by the standards of this more general kind.

Because the standards of a thing's kind determine its goodness, the standards of this kind of activity determine the goodness of Freud's fantasizing. Hence, Freud's use of practical agency presupposes these standards of practical activity as valid. Freud cannot abandon these standards,

[106] This implies that agents should only aim at taking pleasure in some intentional object if they conceive of that object as good in some respect. I suppose that I am inclined to accept the implied claim. One line of support for it runs like this: if the intentional object could not be conceived as good in some respect, then it could not be conceived as good insofar as it is the object in virtue of which the practical pleasure is achieved. But this pleasure counts as a good, *ex hypothesi*, because it is the end at which the agent's action aims. As a standard of goodness, however, it is inconsistent with the valid standards of practical activity because they deliver inconsistent claims about the goodness of Jung's death.
.

therefore, since their validity is presupposed by the fact that his fantasy is a practical activity: fantasizing about murder for the sake of schadenfreude is a specific instance of the kind: acting for the sake of an end as the result of a deliberation-based choice.

Thus the practical activity standard does not somehow disappear, as if by magic, merely because a practical agent happens to turn away from the sensible world into a world of the agent's own making. The condition of its validity does not depend on the constitution of an agent's activity either as mental or overly physical. Its validity is instead secured because the agent's activity is practical.

Since Jung's tragic death would not be good according to the standards of practical activity, it follows that the source of Freud's pleasure is something that Freud must agree cannot be good and, therefore, a pleasure that he shouldn't aim at as an end. Freud cannot renounce a commitment to the validity of the standards of practical activity, since the validity of those standards will be presupposed by any particular use of practical agency. In this sense, the standards of practical agency cannot be abandoned or relinquished.

3.4 Putting the idea in a different way

Let me try to put things another way. The basic gist of my view is that, as practical agents, we act from our understanding: we have our own ideas about what's good, and we use them to figure out what to do. This is done by using them as standards of goodness to determine or figure out what to do: by using, for example, the idea of pleasure as a standard of goodness. But when I actually proceed to do whatever this particular idea says would be good, I implicitly accept another idea of goodness. For I implicitly accept that acting-in-accordance-with-this-standard is indeed good; thus, I implicitly accept this more general idea of goodness as a standard. We could call this more general idea of goodness a practical idea of the good—an idea that this sort of thing (acting on the basis of an idea) is good. This more general idea of goodness is determined by the standard of practical activity.

But if I really do implicitly accept the more general idea of the good, then I still have to accept it even when it applies to someone else. So I better not use an idea claiming otherwise—the particular idea I use, in other words, had better not claim that you acting on your own ideas isn't good (when it is good, according to the standard of practical activity). It is this sort of idea, one that conflicts with an already accepted idea, which is used by the agent who fantasizes about murder.

Thus, on my view, committing real murder and fantasizing about murder are both morally wrong because they violate a general standard governing the use of practical agency, which I refer to as the standard of practical activity. My argument against real murder, which I revisit in Chapter IV, begins with the claim that the practical activity standard applies to real murders because they are practical activities.[107] It also applies to the agent whose murder is caused, however, since they are practical agents who perform practical activities of their own. According to the practical activity standard, the victim's murder is not good, because it requires destroying the victim's practical capacity.[108] Since the murderer is committed to the practical activity standard, however, the murderer must agree that murdering the victim is not good. It follows from this that, according to the practical activity standard, the murderer shouldn't aim to cause the victim's murder. Hence committing real murder violates the practical activity standard.

My argument against real murder begins with the claim that the practical activity standard applies to murder fantasies because they too are practical activities. It also applies to the agent whose murder is conceived, however, since the fantasy is a fantasy about murdering a practical agent. According to the practical activity standard, what the fantasizer is imagining (murder) isn't good. Since the fantasizer is committed to the practical activity standard, the fantasizer must agree that the fantasy is about something which isn't good. But the fantasizer

---

[107] I return to elaborate this argument again in Chapter IV.

[108] Assuming that the destruction of a capacity is not good with respect to a norm of the capacity's activity, the destruction of an agent's practical capacity is not good with respect to the practical activity standard.

shouldn't aim to take pleasure in imagining something (murder) that is not good. Hence fantasizing about murder violates the practical activity standard.[109]

Both arguments rely on several assumptions that I eventually defend. They assume that the practical activity standard applies to actual murders as well as to fantasizing about murder, even though the fantasizer doesn't actually do anything to anyone else. Indeed, the practical activity standard applies twice: once to the agent's activity, and again to the victim or patient of the agent's activity. They also assume that agents are committed to the practical activity standard, and that its claims about goodness are correct.

We can make these assumptions and their importance more evident by considering a contrasting example. Suppose that eating lots of potato chips would be bad according to some standard of dietary health. According to this dietary standard, therefore, I shouldn't eat lots of potato chips. Of course, my dietary commitments are up to me—if the salty greasiness of potato chips is sufficiently alluring, I may very well decide to abandon my current standards of dietary health in favor of indulging in gustatory delights. But there is a kind of incompatibility between accepting the dietary standard and consuming large quantities of potato chips.

Is there also a kind of incompatibility between accepting a healthy dietary standard and fantasizing about consuming large quantities of potato chips? No. Dietary standards are about the causal effects of food consumption on our bodily health. They indicate which foods to eat and which foods to avoid due to their causal effects on physical health. Unlike actually eating potato chips, merely fantasizing about it does not have any causal effects on our bodily health. Since we

[109] According to the hypothesis I develop in Chapter IV, the practical activity standard captures the nature of a rational agent. (The nature of a rational agent is to act in accordance with reason; where reason uses standards of goodness to determine what to do). To use the practical activity standard, therefore, is to use our rational nature. Since the restrictions in the Humanity Formula are placed on uses of rational nature, the Humanity Formula places restrictions on our use of the practical activity standard.

don't actually consume food merely by fantasizing about it, therefore, dietary standards of health are silent with respect to the activity of fantasy.[110]

There are at least three differences between diet cases and murder cases to be addressed. First, a dietary standard applies to actually eating potato chips; it doesn't apply to mere fantasies about what we eat (at least not directly). But the general standard is supposed to apply to real murders as well as to mere fantasies about murder. How can it do that? Second, commitment to this general standard is not up to me: in some sense, practical agents have to be committed to it. Unlike a health standard, agents can't decide to abandon this general standard and act however they would like. How can we explain this? Third, it is relatively clear what a dietary standard of health is and why it is important. What is the morally significant role played by the general standard?

First, consider why the dietary standard doesn't apply to food fantasies. Dietary standards that apply to food consumption do not apply to mere fantasies about eating, since no food is consumed merely by fantasizing about it. Actually consuming food and merely fantasizing are constituted by different underlying behaviors: whereas eating is accomplished by motor movements, fantasizing is accomplished by acts of imagination. We could enjoy an imaginary feast even while we starve.

Our mental and motor performances have dramatically different constitutions. But they can belong to the same kind insofar as they are caused or generated by practical agents. Both can be products of deliberation-based choices that I make about what it would be good to do. Thus, although they are constituted by very different kinds of behavior, each can be generated by one and the same kind of activity. I call this sort of activity—in which I decide to do something for the sake of my own ideas about what's good—practical activity. Standards of practical activities

[110] Notice that, if fantasizing about potato chips causes me to actually consume fewer potato chips, then I should fantasize about it according to my dietary standard. In this case, the health standard applies to my fantasy indirectly: it applies directly to facts about my food consumption, and indirectly to the fantasies because of their instrumental causal impact on my food consumption.

can apply to instances of actually eating food as well as to instances of merely fantasizing about it because, from a practical point of view, both are instances of practical activity.

Second, if eating potato chips would be incompatible with my dietary standards, however, I can decide to abandon them even if they get it right that potato chips is unhealthy to eat. If fantasizing about murder would be incompatible with the standard of practical activity, why can't I just decide to abandon it and fantasize about murder anyway? I eat potato chips despite their unhealthiness presumably because they taste good. In that case, I abandon or suspend my dietary standards and determine my food choices by using a standard of pleasure instead. No problem so far: nothing about determining my food choices in accordance with standards of pleasure commits me to the standards of health.

The same story cannot be told, however, about the standard of practical activity. When I decide to imagine someone's murder because I like it, I determine what to do by using a standard of pleasure—and this just is a practical activity. My imagining someone's murder for the sake of pleasure, in other words, counts as a practical activity of mine. As the standard of its kind, therefore, the standard of practical activity must be valid for it.

But why would this commit agents to the standard of practical activity? The short answer is that this standard calls for agents to use valid standards, and since it is one of those valid standards, it calls for agents to use it.

The long answer is that I am committed to the standard of practical activity because I presuppose its correctness (its validity) whenever I determine what to do based on using my own criteria for what counts as good. Can we show that I am committed to the correctness of the standard of practical activity, and that the standard is indeed correct? I argue that this can be shown in the following way. Each use of practical agency generates an instance of practical activity.[111] Each use of practical agency, in other words, is an instance of the kind: practical activity. Since the standards of a thing's kind determine the goodness of each instance of its kind,

[111] I am assuming that the activity of practical agency is practical activity. This is from the more general principle that using a power generates or produces an instance of its activity.

it follows that the standards of practical activity determine the goodness of each particular practical activity. Hence, any use of practical agency thereby presupposes the correctness of the practical activity standard (i.e. whenever I use standards of goodness to determine what to do, I presuppose the validity of the practical activity standard).

It's this fact of use that establishes the agent's activity as practical. The agent who fantasizes about murder uses a standard of pleasure in determining what to imagine. Since this produces an instance of practical activity, the standards of practical activity must be valid for it. Suppose that Bobby Fischer uses the King's Gambit against his opponent. This produces an instance of a certain kind of activity, *viz.* an activity of playing chess. Fischer's use of the King's Gambit initiates or makes it the case that Fischer is playing a game of chess. It follows that the rules and standards of chess apply to this instance of Fischer's activity—the rules of chess are valid for it. This conclusion follows, moreover, irrespective of whichever particular opening Fischer happens to use. Fischer's use of the Queen's Gambit rather the King's Gambit would also produce an instance of the same activity kind. Analogously, a practical agent's use of goodness standards produces an instance of a certain kind of activity, *viz.* a practical activity. The agent's use of goodness standards initiates or makes it the case that the agent is performing a practical activity. Thus it follows that the standards of practical activity apply to this instance of the agent's activity. And this conclusion follows irrespective of the particular standards a practical agent happens to use. Whether the agent uses a standard of pleasure, or a standard of health, or a standard of monetary cost, it follows that the agent produces an instance of a practical activity (since the agent's use of goodness standards produces an instance of the same kind: practical activity).

Third, this claim—that any use of practical agency presupposes the validity of the standard of practical activity—has significant implications. Anyone who is committed to the standard of practical activity is thereby committedcommitted to accepting its valuations or verdicts whenever it applies. The standard of practical activity applies equally to any use of

practical agency. Since my practical agency is the same as your practical agency, the standard applies equally to uses of both.

The agent who merely fantasizes about murder, as well as the agent who commits real murder, acts in a way that's incompatible with the standard of practical activity. Neither agent can accept the valuation of applying this standard to the (purported) victim. Whereas the real murder involves a second practical agent causally, the fantasy involves a second practical agent intentionally. Since the real murderer and the fantasizer are both committed to the standard of practical activity, they are both committed to the valuations or verdicts it delivers when applied to any use of practical agency. But neither the real murderer nor the fantasizer can apply the standard of practical activity to the victim and accept its valuation (i.e. accept its valuation with respect to the practical agent whose murder is either caused or fantasized about).

As I plan to elaborate in Chapter IV, the standard of practical activity is important because it is the standard of our nature as rational. Thus, by acting in a way that is incompatible with this standard insofar as it applies to you, I have acted in a way that is incompatible with the rational nature in you. This can occur not only when I do something to you, but also when I do something about you. What makes this possible is that the standard of practical activity is a standard of reasoning, not a standard of cause and effect. Thus it places constraints on the things I do that result from reasoning about you, not on the things I do that result in causing an effect to you.

The practical activity standard emphatically does not require agents to use the standards which are valid for an activity in order to perform it. A standard with that requirement would be quite unusual, since the goodness of a performance would depend on whether the performer was using the proper standards. The goodness of my running, for instance, would depend on whether I was using the standards of running. But surely the goodness of my running depends on how well I use my body to run, not on how well I use standards—using standards, after all, is a

rational activity. So a norm demanding that their use accompany any activity we perform seems either hyper-rational or confused.[112]

These rather unusual demands are very different from the demands made by the practical activity standard. The practical activity standard does not place demands on all of our other activities; it places a requirement on but a single kind of activity, namely our practical activity. Moreover, there is a clear relationship between the norm's requirement (which makes this requirement) and the relevant activities (on which the norm makes a requirement)—it is the relationship between the nature of a kind and its particular instances.

This standard is a standard of practical activity because it corresponds to a fundamental rational failure in a practical activity. Because it's fundamental to practical activity that agents use standards to make choices, and because practical activity is a rational activity of an essentially rational agent, a rationally inconsistent use of standards reflects a fundamental kind of rational failure in practical activity.[113] Failures that are fundamental to an activity, as opposed to failures that are mere defects, correspond to minimal standards for that activity; these minimal standards are norms.

A secondary argument against the murder fantasy appeals to the claim that an agent's practical capacity is destroyed by murder together with the claim that this is not good according to another valid standard of activity. I intend to elaborate three additional standards that are valid

---

[112] Among the questions leading to confusion, I mention three: are these activities individuated by the standards I happen to use or by the standards I should use? Why is there but a single norm for the performance of every activity? Why aren't there any activities for which the goodness of my performance depended on facts about my performance rather than facts about how I guided myself in bringing that performance about?

[113] "As the rational activity of practical agents who are essentially rational, the practical activities of a practical agent need to satisfy certain basic requirements of rationality. Since the use of standards to make choices is essential to a practical activity, the standard of practical activity requires the rationally consistent use of standards…." Or so I once wrote. I no longer accept that view. Part of my mistake was that I accepted a norm that is implied by the standard of practical activity and mistook it for the norm itself (which calls for us to use valid standards).

for practical activity: a standard of rationally consistent judgments, a standard for the capacity of practical agency, and a standard of instrumental rationality.[114]

First, practical activities are governed by a standard of making judgments that are rationally consistent. We set ends and take their achievement as worthy of pursuit: an agent who sets an end, therefore, is rationally committed to a certain view about that end. When we set ends, the standards associated with those ends identify conditions in virtue of which to judge the goodness of that to which the standards apply. From a practical point of view, we see our activities in light of how they are assessed by a variety of standards associated with our ends. To add another standard that is inconsistent with one of the standards I already use would make it the case that I could not satisfy both standards.[115] The inconsistency of standards is more commonly known as a conflict of ends, where an agent cannot satisfy both of the conflicting ends. Greater harmony among our ends, at least as such, is better than greater conflict among our ends. Thus, it is better to use a set of standards with greater consistency. I refer to the standard of this goodness as the standard of rationally consistent judgments.

Second, it is possible to bridge the standards of an activity with certain facts about its capacity, we can identify certain broad parameters concerning our capacities as practical agents. As a practical agent, the wholesale destruction of my own capacity for practical activity is not

---

[114] There are important controversies in this neighborhood that my own aims and limitations require me to set aside. The existence of a principle of instrumental rationality, for instance, has received sharp criticism. I am conceiving of it as a standard insofar as I can try to choose the means to my end while, nevertheless, actually choosing something that is not a means to my end. There is also a difficult question about whether standards are prior to or somehow consequent upon underlying natures, functions or ends. My intuition is the latter. We can leave this matter unresolved, however, and still articulate the content of a standard by characterizing the underlying nature, function or end that correspond to it.

[115] This is roughly correct, but the basis for inconsistency between standards is really the inconsistency between the judgments that are based on those standards. (That is why it this standard of practical activity is called a standard of rationally consistent judgments). Since the discourse of standards seems sufficiently transparent, I have opted against tracking the difference closely.

good. It isn't uncommon for us to (implicitly) characterize natural events in terms of standards of those kinds which are impacted by the events. Global warming isn't good for sea life; soil erosion isn't good for this forest; a substantially lower bee population isn't good for that ecosystem; high cholesterol isn't good for the heart; blunt force trauma isn't good for the brain. As we begin to tell the moral story, the capacity standard will become increasingly important because practical judgments about murder are practical judgments about the destruction of a practical agency.

Practical activities are also governed by a standard of instrumental rationality: our actions should be means to our ends.[116] When I choose this particular action for the sake of my end, for instance, I must view my activity as one that meets the standard of instrumental rationality. According to this standard, instrumental means are better insofar as they are more efficient, more likely to succeed, and able to maximally promote my other ends. Correspondingly, one practical activity is better than another insofar as, according to this standard, its means are better. Although it might be worse to choose less efficient means, however, I would fail in a basic way if I made my choice in accordance with a standard that couldn't be valid.

To see why this sort of failure should be so basic, recall the general idea that practical agency involves choosing an action for the sake of some good. As practical agents, we would fail in a fundamental way if we had to deny the validity of the very standards we were using. That would be a fundamental kind of failure because we're supposed to be using standards of goodness—to be acting for the sake of some good—not standards which we deny are standards of goodness. This basic failure, therefore, corresponds to a minimal standard of goodness. I call this minimal standard the practical activity standard, which demands that agents use valid standards.

To articulate this second line of argument, we could distinguish basic or minimal demand made by the practical activity standard from the demands of other valid standards by

[116] Rawls has a nice discussion off instrumental means (1999, p. 127).

distinguishing between norms and standards. Norms articulate the minimum conditions that are necessary for a thing's goodness. Anything failing to satisfy these necessary conditions would fail altogether to be a good instance of its kind. On the other hand, standards specify conditions for what it would take for something to being ideal or perfectly good. Something can be imperfect but nevertheless good with respect to these standards. Failures that are fundamental to an activity correspond to minimal standards, or norms, according to which instances of the activity failing to meet those norms fail to be good.[117]

Whereas ideal standards correspond to the best a thing could be, in other words, norms express certain minimal conditions it has to satisfy in order to be good in the first place. For example, it is an ideal standard of practical activity that practical agents should choose the means that would most efficiently achieve a maximum number of their ends. Other things being equal, it is better to choose more efficient means over less efficient means: choosing the most efficient means is among the ideals of practical activity. But goodness and imperfection are not mutually exclusive: my use of practical agency can still be good, even if I chose a means to my end that fell short of perfect efficiency.

3.5 Objections and replies

An initial criticism is that, once we set the subtilities of my view aside, it will be a rather circuitous way of showing that practical deliberation is a complicated affair, since things tend to be good in some respects and not good in other respects; foods that are the best for a diet, for example, are often the least good tasting. My argument merely demonstrates that the schadenfreude fantasy is good in some respects but not others. My mistake, as it might described today, was to impose "black and white" thinking on a world with only shades of grey.

This characterization of my view overlooks the one point that my argument uses to leverage its conclusion. To start getting at the point, consider the possibility that goodness in this

[117] I am drawing heavily from my understanding of Burge (2010).

one respect might presuppose goodness in this other respect. If we discovered such a case, we would have discovered an example of necessity in a goodness relationship. The rough idea is that practical agency, in some way, is an example of just such a case. Since practical agent determine a thing's goodness based on some standard, the use of which produces an instance of the activity of practical agency (for which there are valid standards of goodness). In making use of this particular standard to determine a thing's goodness, I would thereby have produced a determinate instance of some kind—practical activity—such that the standards of this kind were valid standards for the goodness of its members, a particular instance of which I myself would have produced.

Why does the practical activity standard determine whether using a standard is good rather than correct? Suppose, to take an example, I determine that running faster is a means of achieving my aim to cross the finish line sooner. Perhaps all we should say of this case is the following: although it's true that I produce some particular instance of an activity kind, the valid standards of this kind are just the standards of instrumental rationality; and that those standards determine the correctness of my determination—my determination that running faster would be a means to my end—as opposed claiming that those standards determine something about the goodness of my activity.

A second worry is that it would be a mistake to claim that Freud's pleasure standard is invalid because it conflicts with the practical capacity standard. The immediate concern is that the destruction of an agent's practical capacity could be good. Consider what we would say about examples of destroying some analogous capacity. It seems to me that there could be a holy harmony whose notes are so high that the human vocal chords can only strike them by stretching to their breaking point. I'm inclined to accept the possibility of special, perfect performances that are good even though they require performances so demanding that performers have to destroy their capacities for performance. Perhaps someone's lament can reach a state of idyllic beauty or poetic sadness only when and because the very act of lamenting is that person's final act. It

seems to me that laments of this sort could be good despite their essential connection to the loss of good capacities. Let's call such examples *swan songs*.

Swan songs cases could pose a problem for my central argument against the murder fantasy, because it relies on the claim that it can't be good to destroy an agent's capacity for practical activity. The problem gets going like this: swan songs represent activities that are good, despite the fact that their performance destroys a capacity that is deemed good *ex hypothesi*. But if the destruction of a capacity to sing can be good in special circumstances—circumstances in which the capacity to sing is destroyed by singing a swan song—why shouldn't there be circumstances in which the destruction of a practical capacity would be good too?

Suppose we agreed on a certain standard of goodness as valid for a capacity for practical activity (whatever it might turn out to be); call it the "practical capacity" standard. In the argument I give, there are two points of contact between the practical capacity standard and the murder fantasy. The practical capacity standard applies (first) to the fantasizer's practical activity, and applies (second) to what the fantasizer's activity is about.

Why does the practical capacity standard apply (first) to the fantasizer's practical activity itself? It applies on the following grounds: since the murder fantasy just *is* an agent's practical activity, the standards of practical activity are valid for it. Among the valid standards of practical activity, furthermore, is a norm of practical activity that requires agents *to use valid standards only*. Since the practical capacity standard is valid, *ex hypothesi*, it follows that agents should not use standards that are inconsistent with it. Hence, a particular activity violates this norm's requirement if it uses a standard that's inconsistent with the practical capacity standard. Therefore, the fantasizer should use only standards that are consistent with the practical capacity standard.

The agent who fantasizes about murder, however, violates this requirement to use only standards that are consistent with the practical capacity standards. To show as much requires observing that the practical capacity standard applies (second) to what the fantasizer fantasizes about. Whereas the standards of practical activity apply to the murder fantasy because it *is* a

practical activity, the practical capacity standard applies to what the fantasy is about because it is *about* a practical agent. In the particular example I discuss, Freud fantasizes is that Carl Jung dies as a result of reading about his many mistakes in Freud's published refutation of his former protégé's view. The claim I make is that, with respect to the practical capacity standard, this—Jung's being killed as a result of reading Freud's momentous criticism of his work—is not good.

Is it ever possible to fantasize about a situation involving the destruction of practical agency that isn't morally wrong? Is it impossible for any destruction of practical agency whatsoever to be good? The swan song cases suggest that the answer to these questions should be "no," since it gives a possibility in which the destruction of a good capacity is itself good. Making direct headway with such questions, however, would require addressing some hard cases.[118] But my argument was designed to avoid the hard cases. Freud's schadenfreude fantasy is merely about a simple situation: Freud kills Jung. What the fantasy is about—Carl Jung's being killed as a result of reading Freud's refutation of his view—is clearly not good with respect to the practical capacity standard.

But this leaves room for concerns about the practical capacity standard's validity. If we don't establish that it is indeed valid, the argument would be unable show that the pleasure standard is invalid (due to it conflicts with a standard that is valid). To better motivate the claim, I will elaborate the relationship between the activity and capacity more fully. The relationship between the goodness of an activity and the goodness of its underlying capacities are connected in terms of their relationship as potentiality and actuality: the standards for an activity fix or determine the standards for the capacities corresponding to that activity (i.e. standards for those capacities whose characteristic actualization just is that activity). In general, with to the standards for an activity, impairments to its underlying capacity are defects and the complete destruction of its functioning are privations of its good.

---

[118] Perhaps the destruction of someone's capacity for the sake of saving everyone else's life would be good; in that case, fantasizing about such a scenario would not require an inconsistent use of standards and would not, therefore, be morally wrong.

The idea that the standards for a capacity depend on the standards for its activity isn't unfamiliar. Take human vision as an example. Typically, having 20/20 vision counts as having good sight. In light of facts about the well-functioning of an eye, we can assert that cataracts are a defect because they impair vision, for example, and that prolonged light deprivation can be very bad for the eyes. We can count certain changes to the human eye as good or bad, therefore, in light of certain general standards of its activity.

By parity of form, the standards of practical activity can determine certain facts about changes to the capacity for its activity. Changes that impair its well-functioning count as defects and, in particular, the destruction of practical agency counts as a fundamental privation of good (i.e. not good) with respect to the norm of practical activity. Thus, we might say, there is a non-negligible normative relationship between the standards of practical activity and certain facts about practical agency, i.e. facts about a practical agent's capacity for practical activity.

A deeper worry is about the force behind the requirements of rationality: why, after all, should I be rational? Why should I care about whether I carry on with my life takes place in a way that's rationally consistent? If I'm deliberating about whether to eat a pound of chocolate, questions about enjoyment and repercussions seem relevant; questions about rational consistency do not. Moreover, the very bearing that rational consistency might have on our decisions seems to undermine its authority. For often we care more about things like pleasure, advantage, or friendship than we care about acting in a way that's rationally consistent. Suppose, for example, that I most want to experience certain pleasures, acquire certain advantages, or help a certain friend. If I learned that these experiences, acquisitions or forms of help somehow embroiled me in a rational inconsistency, so much the worse for rational consistency.

This worry has a long philosophical legacy and I have no intentions of solving it. But part of Kant's triumph, at least in my opinion, was to show that an ethical theory is responsible for addressing only a restricted version of it. The basic Kantian complaint against practical action does not target rational inconsistency *per se*, but instead targets a specific kind of rational inconsistency that derives from special features of practical agency. Indeed, the argument I gave

did not make any general appeals to inconsistency. Instead, it makes a rather restricted claim against a special type of rational inconsistency. This special type of inconsistency occurs only if the judgments in a particular, determinate use of practical agency is inconsistent with the judgments whose truth is presupposed by any use of practical agency (because those judgments, as the argument goes, are based on standards that are valid for any use of practical agency whatsoever). We can think of this special kind of inconsistency in terms of rationally inconsistent use, i.e. using practical standards in a way that's rationally inconsistent. Once the inconsistency's scope has been properly limited, the initial complaint quickly loses its force. The complaint now becomes: I am using my practical agency, why should I care about the rationally consistent use of practical standards? I should care because it's a necessary condition that my activity has to meet in order to be good. Without this kind of rational consistency, in other words, my-doing-this-for-that-good can't be good—a truth even in my own eyes.[119] Insofar as I care about doing that which could be good, I have grounds to care about the rational consistency of my uses of standards.

It bears reemphasizing that the requirement against using standards that cannot be valid is based solely on their being rationally inconsistent with the standards of practical activity, the very validity of which their use presupposes. This should be clearer as we field-test the norm against particular cases in chapters three and four. For now, it is enough to note that the practical rationality requirement is not the same as the requirement of rational consistency on an agent's beliefs, intentions, or attitudes in general.[120] The inconsistent use of standards is only possible for us insofar as we are exercising our practical agency by using particular standards in order to choose what to do. And this is precisely the kind of limitation that confines the scope of the "why care about rationality" complaint thereby making it manageable.

---

[119] A consideration of this kind seems not only relevant (to speak to the elaborated version of the worry) but also authoritative.

[120] I have in mind, for example, requirements of rational consistency on our hopes; e.g. against hoping that something happens and hoping that it doesn't happen.

A fourth worry is that, although it makes sense to say that we should choose one means over another, it doesn't make sense to say that we should choose one use of practical agency over another. My characterization of practical deliberation in terms of the activity of using standards was meant, in part, to circumvent this kind of worry. I have always been somewhat confused about whether I can choose my own reasons. But I fear that this characterization may not capture practical agency in its full splendor. Consider, for example, the standards we might use in a game of chess. If I decide to play a game of chess, then I have decided to participate in a certain kind of practical activity. It consists partly in principles (or rules) concerning the legal move for chess pieces. I would like to say: the principle that pawns move forward but capture diagonally, for instance, is a principle of a certain practical activity, namely chess (or playing chess, if you prefer). In general, if I play an opponent in a legal game of chess, i.e. in a chess game where no illegal moves are made, I have to adopt the principle concerning pawn movement as my own. In other words, when I assess what move to make next, among the principles I use are the standards associated with how pawns move.

Now, of course, I might proceed to play by trying to arrange the pieces into an appealing configuration. Were that the case, one might say that I'm not really playing chess – underscore "really playing" – or that I'm not really playing chess – underscore "chess".[121] That claim strikes me as correct. But we should be careful not to overgeneralize it. In particular, we should not take it to imply, for instance, that I would have to use only the principles of chess in order to count as really playing chess. I might decide to play a semi-closed game simply because I enjoy them more than playing what are called "open" games. I might look for gambits to play because they're fun, or bold sacrifices because they lead to more interesting games. I might search for a crushing victory, to intimidate my next opponent; or I might make a move to stall the game, so as to rest my spinning mind for a moment.[122] World champions, moreover, have distinctive styles

[121] It seems to me that the latter use suggests that I don't even know the rules.

[122] I see this as more reason to regard these as principles of practical activity, since I use these principles in deliberating about which move in the game I will make next.

of play that express aspects of their personality. This is part of why we can recognize a certain aggressive sacrifice as vintage Bobby Fischer.

Once we take practical reason seriously as an activity, we can begin to see how agents come to take a more active role in shaping their practical deliberations. Suppose that a chess player, named C, is deliberating about what move to make next in a game of chess. Let's suppose that C ranks each move, from best to worst. C finishes ranking the alternatives and, making the move ranked "best", moves the King's bishop.[123] If this is all there is to the story, then C has little choice in the matter: which move C believes to be best and which move C makes are more or less fixed. But by taking a closer look at the different options C has as a chess player, we can begin to make a space for C to exercise a greater degree of agency. C begins by picking a few salient options as potential moves. Those options are then evaluated. But how would C evaluate those options? If C has just learned how to play chess, then each move will be evaluated by a simple criterion. A common criterion for beginners is to count the number of pieces captured: the move ranked "best" is the move that wins the most pieces from an opponent. There isn't very much about this that C can change because, as one would expect of a beginner, there isn't very much about the game of chess that C understands. We might capture what C is up to by saying that C is taking as many pieces as possible.

Advanced tournament players, however, do not have to construe the "best" moves as those that win the most pieces from an opponent. They enjoy a more elaborate understanding of the game, one that puts a much wider range of criteria at their disposal. Here are a few examples of such criteria for a move: whether it is an elegant sacrifice or gambit; whether it yields the largest number of moves in a position of forced checkmate; whether it is the least efficient way to secure a win, and so on. It would be dubious to say that an advanced player has no choice

[123] If we remain at this level of description, C's belief that a particular move is best is not a matter of choice. Nor, however, is it out of C's control: C evaluates the moves in a careful manner, rather than a hasty or lazy manner, precisely because C's belief about which move is best will be an outcome of how well C evaluates the candidates.

about which of these criteria to use. After all, there are countless considerations in favor of selecting one criterion over another. For example, suppose that C's current opponent will play C's teammate in the next round and, certain that a win is in hand, C wants to exhaust this opponent. Based on this consideration, C might decide to evaluate moves based on which one is the least efficient way to secure a win. On the other hand, suppose that C anticipates playing future rematches against this opponent. On the basis of that consideration, C might decide to try to use this match to intimidate the opponent by finding an extremely long series of moves that force checkmate. Surely we should say that C *chooses* this criterion: C selects it from a number of alternatives, and do so based on a variety of considerations.[124]

In the chess examples, it seems as though we can choose from a variety of standards to make our determinations of good moves. Thus I characterized practical deliberation as an activity of using standards partly because it seemed to reveal a richer space for the practical agency we have over our ends and end-regulated actions.

---

[124] We could go further and try to show that there is a presumption against any criteria that C did not select. The presumption is that they are not C's reasons for action.

This is how I would approach this claim. When C decides to favor of moves that will intimidate C's opponent, let's describe what C is up to as "intimidation". Suppose that it turns out by a happy coincidence, however, that the very same move satisfies all three criteria. It turns out, for instance, that moving the King's bishop is an elegant sacrifice that is the least efficient way to secure a win because it leads to a forced checkmate containing such a large number of moves. We should not revise our assessment of what C was up to and say that C was stalling for time – C intended no such thing!

Even C's knowledge that moving the King's bishop is the least efficient way to win is not sufficient to make it the case that C is stalling for time when C moves the King's bishop. Suppose that C has this knowledge because C has been in this position before and in that previous game C needed to stall for time. However, given this second chance, C is curious to try a different strategy and so evaluates potential moves based on whether they are elegant sacrifices. If C evaluates a number of alternative moves only to discover that moving the King's bishop is most elegant sacrifice available, then C is not stalling for time when C moves the King's bishop. Surely if a teammate asked C after the game whether C stalled for time, C could truthfully say "no."

If we regard reasons for action as playing active roles like this, then the following picture emerges: the criteria C selects for action evaluation are C's reasons for action and if a criteria is incompatible with the one selected by C, then we have good reason to presume that it is not one of C's reasons for action.

Finally, we should ask whether my explanation addresses the moral wrongness of fantasizing about murder in a way that satisfies our initial adequacy condition. Recall that the adequacy condition calls for an adequate explanation to account for the moral wrong in terms of the content and type of mental activity in question. How does my explanation about what makes the fantasy morally wrong satisfy the condition of adequacy? It might not be entirely obvious how the adequacy condition is met by my explanation, since my view locates the problematic crux in the agent's use of an invalid standard.

The murder fantasy is determined by practical ends that fail to meet the standard of practical activity.[125] As practical agents, we can determine what a fantasy is about by using pleasure as standards of its goodness. Because it is practical, in other words, what mental activity is about can be determined by the standards which agents use.[126] Using pleasure as a standard to determine what to imagine is what a fantasy amounts to on my view. So the type of mental activity an agent performs can also be determined by the standards they use. Thus to explain the moral wrong in terms of the practical standards agents use for their mental activities is to explain it based on what the mental activity is about and what type of mental activity it is.

3.6 Addressing a wider range of examples about fantasy

It is important to bear in mind that the argument should not be read as making an objection against pleasure. It rather targets only those pleasures that are playing a very particular practical role—the role of being the practical end at which an agent is aiming. The claim that we shouldn't aim at certain pleasures *provided that* we accept the validity of certain goodness

[125] On the hypothesis that moral norms are among the practical norms, it would follow that the moral practical norms apply to mental practical actions; it would follow because moral practical norms govern to practical actions, and mental actions are practical actions.

[126] On the hypothesis that moral norms are among the practical norms, it would follow immediately that the moral practical norms apply to mental practical actions; it would follow because moral practical norms govern practical actions, and mental actions are practical actions.

standards—is limited in its scope: it is a claim about the rational commitments we inherit by presupposing the validity of the standards of practical activity. The argument is rather concerned with only those pleasures that play a very special role in the life of a practical agent, namely only those pleasures at which a practical agent *aims*. By aiming at certain pleasures as an end, practical agents cast those pleasures into a particular practical role. Insofar as they are cast to play that practical role, those pleasures become vulnerable to assessment by the standards that apply to practical ends. But this is not true of mere pleasures.[127] Thus the argument should not be understood as criticizing *mere* pleasure, but only practical pleasures insofar as they are the agent's ends.[128]

To be clear: I am not making a claim about the goodness of pleasure, nor about the state of mind associated with pleasure, nor about the value of pleasure, nor about the appropriateness of pleasure.[129] I am also emphatically not saying that, as an empirical fact of the matter, Freud does not or cannot experience this delight. I am also not making a normative claim about

---

[127] In the murder fantasy, the practical pleasure is a pleasure taken in what the fantasy is a fantasy about. Although the imaginings are instrumental means to causing the pleasure, it will be those imaginings that the pleasure is taken in because of what they're about. (So we should expect that pretense and a suspension of disbelief would have the effect of strengthening the pleasures of fantasy because they facilitate the agent in attending exclusively to the objects imagined and ignore the mode of their being imagined by the agent's imaginings).

[128] Thus, I intend to set aside an ancient topic about whether pleasures *as such* can be assessed as good or bad, as true or false, as rational or irrational, and so forth. This debate can be traced at least as far back as Plato (Grube & Reeve, 1992).

[129] Let me offer a more tentative argument based on the concept of a rational delight in support of the same conclusion. If I aim at a particular delight as an end, I must conceive of this delight as good. This delight should also be good according to the standards of rational nature, since I accept those standards as valid for the judgments I make about the goodness of my own practical actions. *A delight is good according to the standards of rational nature, however, only if it is a good delight.* (This rests on the assumption that: insofar as I aim at X as my end, rationality requires that I aim at a good X. An X is good, however, only if it satisfies the minimal standards for its kind). Delight is the kind of thing that rational agents take in things insofar as those things are good. If I accept the validity of standards according to which something isn't good, therefore, whatever delight I might take in it would fail to be a good delight; hence, this delight would fail to be good according to the standards of rational nature. If the latter is true, however, I couldn't aim at this delight as an end without falling into inconsistency with the fact that I accept the standards of rational nature as valid.

whether Freud should or should not feel delighted about Jung's misfortune. I am instead trying to say, as a rational fact about practical action, Freud shouldn't aim at satisfying and savoring delight about Jung's misfortune (since it can't be good according to standards that Freud himself accepts as valid).

Indeed, the fact that Freud's delight is the end at which he aims makes all the difference to my argument. The significance of targeting *practical* pleasures comes in to focus once we contrast the schadenfreude fantasy with a neighboring variant. Suppose that Freud again imagines Jung's misfortune and again is delighted. This time, however, suppose that Freud's aim is to discover the underlying psychological causes of his malicious feelings. It is quite reasonable to suppose that the father of modern psychoanalysis might have been acutely sensitive to the workings of his own psychic life, and that his egoistic desires might have driven him to diagnose and explain the elements of his own psychology better than the capabilities of anyone else might allow.[130] Freud's aim is not to relish the pleasures of schadenfreude but rather to diagnose and explain the underlying causes of the original schadenfreude fantasy. In this case, which I refer to as Freud's psychoanalysis, the practical mental activity is Freud's psychoanalyzing his own schadenfreude fantasy.

Included among the instrumental means to success in the psychoanalysis of his schadenfreude fantasy, let us suppose, are the discovery and diagnosis of its underlying causes. Knowing that the precise details of a fantasy could be of great significance, Freud decides to rehearse his schadenfreude fantasy and attend to every facet of the delight it evokes. Once they are brought to light, Freud reckons, they can be properly scrutinized in the light of his psychoanalytic theory. And so Freud sits quietly, takes a few deep breaths, and calls forth the by-

[130] Although conscious fantasies as such were not Freud's principal interest, he nevertheless had characteristically convictions about them. He believed that fantasies were controlled by the egoistic desires they were designed to satisfy *in absentia* those desires which the individual is unable to satisfy in real life. In particular, he believed that "fantasies are dominated by very transparent motives. They are scenes and events in which the egoistic, ambitious and power-seeking desires of the individual find satisfaction" (Freud, 1920, p. 76).

now familiar scenes depicting Jung's tragic death. Once again, as he expects, they bring about a sense of delight. But this time he doesn't linger over these scenes in order to relish in their delight. It is no longer the end that finishes an activity and brings it to a natural completion, or an occasion for satisfaction that calls for self-indulgence. In the psychoanalysis case, the production of delight counts only as a kind of instrumental progress along the way to achieving the further end of self-reflection and edification. The occurrence of delight signals the beginning of a new mental endeavor, i.e. psychoanalysis—its occurrence calls for Freud to turn his intellect to the task of psychoanalyzing the very fact that he such delights are being experienced. In so doing, he construes the delights as the sort of phenomenon that his own mechanism of psychoanalysis was designed to scrutinize and explain. Rather than relish the delight, he subsequently begins—and here I can only speculate about how the original master might have proceeded— to consider questions concerning why he sought intimacy from individuals he perceived as threats and later ostracized, about why he tended to conceive of his own relationships in the likeness of the oedipal complex, about which of his own early childhood experiences would have caused the desires that these tendencies now serve to satisfy.

The difference between the schadenfreude fantasy and the schadenfreude psychoanalysis cannot be overstated. Whereas in the schadenfreude psychoanalysis, Freud might very well view his delight as bad, irrational, inappropriate, and so forth—indeed, it's precisely this sort of view that would rationally motivate a psychoanalytic fantasy in the first place. But in the schadenfreude fantasy, the delights of schadenfreude are the very ends at which Freud aims. It follows that in the schadenfreude fantasy, but not the psychoanalysis of it, Freud conceives of the satisfaction of his schadenfreude as itself a good.[131] Freud's judgment that the delights of schadenfreude are good, however, is inconsistent with accepting the standards of rational nature's characteristic activity as valid.

[131] Of course the schadenfreude is good merely as a means in the case of the psychoanalysis, since it is the instrumental means to successfully psychoanalyzing the fantasy.

Having emphasized that only practical pleasures are the right sort of pleasures for the preceding arguments to target, we can now begin to address a wider range of examples and consider the broader significance of our results. To begin, consider a case where someone decides to just "blow off a little steam." We do this in overt actions by venting our anger in a harmless way, such as "punching a pillow." What if Freud merely intended to fantasize about something bad happening to Jung in order to blow off a little steam? Would that be morally wrong? The first point to be made is that this type of activity is based on a popular misconception: empirical psychology has debunked the claim that expressing or acting out our anger will reduce anger or make us feel better. If anything, the opposite tends to occur.[132] Consider a counterfactual world, however, where we can self-regulate and even diminish our anger by "blowing off steam." The original schadenfreude fantasy can be modified to represent a case of "blowing off steam." As the result of psychoanalyzing his own schadenfreude, suppose that Freud comes to believe that it has been caused by latent feelings of anger about Jung's (perceived) betrayal of their friendship.

Under the counterfactual assumption that we can release anger through fantasies about retribution, would it be morally wrong for Freud to imagine causing Jung to suffer, in order to feel better by venting his anger?[133] The answer to this question depends on how we should address yet another question: what explains the release or satisfaction of anger at the thought of Jung's misfortune? Given that Freud is angry, the thought of Jung's misfortune is pleasing. But the thought of Jung's misfortune shouldn't please Freud because it satisfies his anger; it should be pleasing only because of its goodness. Jung's misfortune can't be good, and Freud must conceive of Jung's misfortune as something that can't be good. If the pleasure Freud seeks is derived merely from the release of anger alone—like we might expect from punching a mere

[132] See (Geen & Quanty, 1977) and (Bushman & Baumister 2001):

[133] To properly answer this question, we need to distinguish examples of anger that are morally justified from those that are not morally justified. This is because it's reasonable to think of justified anger as a burden imposed by the wrongdoer.

pillow—but not from any aspect of Jung's misfortune, then it would not be rationally inconsistent. If the pleasure he seeks is however derived from some feature of the misfortune he represents, then it would be rationally inconsistent (for the same reasons cited against the initial schadenfreude fantasy).[134]

Second, suppose that I am working arduously to meet numerous obligations. Seeking a moment of solace from my otherwise stressful and harried evening, I start imagining how much fun it would be to go out for a movie instead of finishing all of these deadlines. There are two cases that can be distinguished and, in order for my account to apply, we need to point out their difference. In the first case, I am in unusually stressful circumstances and start imagining what my life would be like if I were free from the many burdens of obligation and, by contrast to my actual life, the delights of my imagined life seem all the more pleasant. In this case, my pleasure derives from a feeling of relief based on an imagined release from my real obligations. Examples of this kind do not violate the practical activity standard, since a life filled with fewer obligations is not thereby a life that isn't good with respect to it. In the second case, however, I imagine renouncing my obligations and I enjoy something about transgressing my moral obligations—perhaps I feel empowered, or free. In the latter case, my pleasure derives from a sense of moral transgression, and it is only the latter case that my account would find objectionable.

But both of these examples should be distinguished from the following case. I might decide to imagine myself renounce an obligation because I am curious to know how I might feel, for example, or because I wonder how morally bad it would be. Although these cases might seem similar, they are actually a very different kind of case. They must be distinguished on my account because, in light of their practical ends, they are not examples of fantasy.

[134] What, on my account, should be done instead? I will have a bit more to say on this matter in the final chapter, but for now suffice it to say that reflective individuals will see such occurrences as moments that call for self-examination. To live an examined life involves reflecting on the anger one has: its causes, its intensity and extent, and inter alia whether it is morally justified or merely a product of brute biological and psychological mechanisms.

To take a third example, consider a patron of the arts who is visibly moved upon seeing Guernica for the first time. Suppose that the viewer starts looking forward to a weekly trip to the local museum in order to delight again in the work's depiction of suffering, misfortune, and the evils of war. A practical action of this sort is structurally analogous to the schadenfreude fantasy. In the latter case, Freud sought to delight in his own imagining's depiction of Jung's misfortune.[135] On the account I advocate, the decisive question concerns the explanation of the viewer's pleasure. Explanations of artistic pleasure in terms of an artwork's visual beauty, its ability to evoke an experience, or the significance it is able to somehow capture. Being pleased because of such things is not rationally inconsistent, however, and it is entirely distinct from being pleased because it's a person's suffering that is depicted. When we take pleasure in an artwork that represents suffering, we are not typically pleased because of the suffering it represents. What moves us is rather something about the work's power to captivate and arrest us, to call up a lost feeling and illumine new understanding, or to depict a transformative beauty.

Ordinary language is, again, a helpful guide. It suggests how we should categorize the type of pleasures by using distinct names to reveal their source. The fact that Freud's pleasure should be called "schadenfreude" indicates that his pleasure is responsive to misfortunes suffered by someone else.[136] Unlike this pleasure, however, we do not standardly take pleasure in a work of art that depicts suffering *because* it depicts suffering. Since the standard pleasures we take in works of art are *aesthetic*, the patron's pleasure in Guernica as a work of art is not, at least not without a special story, a form of schadenfreude. Notice, also, that there is no tension between the patron's aim (to savor these aesthetic pleasures) and the patron's conception of the suffering being depicted as terrible. This indicates that the patron's judgment that aiming to savor these

---

[135] Their moral difference remains, on my account, even if it were assumed that Guernica depicted the misfortune of a particular individual.

[136] If it is schadenfreude that the patron seeks to savor, it follows that the action is (at least *prima facie*) morally wrong. I say "*prima facie*" because we might take the arts to be a morally protected domain. More on this topic shortly.

aesthetic pleasures is good is not inconsistent with the patron's judgment that the suffering they depict is not good. (Recall that it was precisely this sort of inconsistency that made Freud's schadenfreude fantasy morally wrong).

The preceding arguments also have consequences for a phenomenon that has come to be known as "imaginative resistance". It seems puzzling that we can easily imagine scenarios in which our beliefs about the actual world are false (or do not obtain). Although I'm typing at my computer while drinking a cup of coffee, I can imagine myself flying around Neptune in a magical coffee cup. Indeed, fans of science fiction and fantasy are eager to imagine worlds that are radically different from our own, including worlds in which the natural laws do not obtain. And yet despite the fact that we can imagine those differences, it seems extremely difficult to imagine a world where it isn't morally wrong to kill someone for profit. We seem to *resist* imagining such a world.[137]

We can use the account being developed to elaborate the sense in which there is resistance as well as the reason for thinking of it in terms of unwillingness. According to the arguments I've given thus far, imaginings are genuine practical actions that we can choose to perform in accordance with certain standards. Hence, our imaginings are governed by moral norms in just the way they govern the ordinary overt practical actions we choose to perform. Thus, we should expect agents to conceive of their imaginings as governed by moral constraints in just the way they conceive of their ordinary practical actions as governed by moral constraints.

Treating the norm of practical activity as valid for what I imagine is analogous to treating it as valid for what I say: the norm governs my saying and my imagining the content of what I say and imagine. It dictates whether the act of imagining and the act of saying are suitable; but its dictates are also content-sensitive. In trying to convince someone that P by saying certain things, I have to see my activity as norm-governed; thus the content of what I say is a target of

[137] Its characterization as resistance is an allusion to Hume, who first articulated the problem as a type of unwillingness—an unwillingness to imagine that an action we believe is actually morally wrong is otherwise (Gendler, 2000).

normative evaluation. The relevant evaluations depend largely on facts about language, communication, and my own views of the content of what I say. Analogously, in seeking to take pleasure in imagining such-and-such, I have to see my activity as norm-governed; thus the content of what I imagine is a target of normative evaluation. Here, similarly, the relevant evaluations depend largely on facts about my own views of the content of what I imagine. Thus, treating the norm of practical activity as valid has rational consequences for the content of what I say and imagine insofar as they are elements in a particular practical activity.

Thus, just as we should expect someone who accepted the norm of practical activity to resist the call to make a false promise for profit, or to give directions for driving off a cliff to an unsuspecting tourist, we should expect that person to resist fantasizing about murder as well. This is partly due to the fact that moral truths are necessary.[138] However, it's also due to the fact that, as I've been arguing, imagining the murder for pleasure is a practical activity and so it is a standard that agents must treat as valid for their practical imaginings. The latter fact helps make sense of why it seems natural to explicate imaginative resistance not merely in terms of a resistance in believing, but as a form of unwillingness. If the account thus far is correct, practical imagining is an instance of willing and, therefore, a resistance to imagining oneself murder another person should manifest itself as resistance to willing contrary to the norm of practical activity.

Insofar as our mental activities can be the result of practical activity, we can determine what they are and what they are about by using our practical agency. Insofar as a mental activity results from the use of practical agency, it is governed by the same practical activity standard

[138] The mere fact that moral truths are necessary won't fully explain the phenomenon, however, since we can perform particular imaginings of some necessary truth being otherwise. E.g. I can imagine several physical objects moving in ways that disobey the natural laws of physics; or I can imagine myself as unable to think because I'm in a vegetative state—given that I'm imagining it, and therefore capable of thinking, what I am I'm imagining cannot possibly be true (and, stronger still: I can't even believe that it's actually true without contradicting myself)—but I can, nevertheless, still imagine it. These considerations indicate that the resistance to imagining oneself murder someone will have to be explained by appealing to something more than facts about an agent's (modal) beliefs.

that governs our ordinary, overt behavior in the shared physical world. In this way, practical standards extend their reach into the mind and the content of its activities. Thus, on the Kantian hypothesis that practical standards can capture or articulate the standards of morality, practical standards carry the familiar moral standards (which govern the things we do as practical agents) along with them when they apply to the activities of a mind.

Nature loves to hide from us.
Heraclitus

His substance is not here. For what you see is but the smallest part, and least proportion of humanity; but were the whole frame here, it is of such a spacious, lofty pitch, your roof were not sufficient to contain it.
Shakespeare Henry VI

4.1 Applications, Significance, and Implications

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I extend the kind of argument from Chapter III about the murder fantasy to three new examples. The first example represents morally wrong hoping. Since hope has received relatively little attention as a practical action, and in order to distinguish it from fantasizing, I specify the conditions I take to define hope. In the second example, I examine a pair of familiar cases that represent overt practical activity (making a false promise and killing for profit). In the third example, I consider a case of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons (making a charitable but demeaning donation). In the second part of this chapter, I consider a few potentially interesting implications. First, since reasoning to action is itself a practical activity, the moral wrongness of certain reasons can be explained in terms of the practical activity standard. Second, the fact that an agent's reasons can make an action morally wrong is often, but not always, a morally decisive reason against it. Finally, in the last part of this chapter, I reflect on the moral significance of the practical activity standard. I propose that it is by using this standard that we use rational nature, and I propose that its moral significance calls for a plausible reinterpretation of Kant's Formula of Humanity.

The mental domain highlights a conceptual gap between doing what is morally wrong and doing what is morally impermissible, in part because we often use the mind to harmlessly redirect motivations that might otherwise terminate in harmful overt conduct.[139] By generalizing

[139] I will elaborate this claim later in this chapter, along the following lines: since moral obligations can be violated by mental practical actions, they can be morally wrong; but it does not always follow from this claim that they are morally impermissible, since no party is

this feature of morally wrong mental practical actions, we can illuminate distinct features of ordinary, overt moral wrongs that might be otherwise obfuscated or difficult to explain in a direct and satisfying way.

4.2 Extending the account

a. Applications (I): morally wrong hoping

It is not uncommon for philosophers to claim that hope is a feeling.[140] This much seems right. Hope *is* something we feel. To feel hope is roughly to feel a kind of yearning, and to feel it towards a likeable prospect. Since the prospect is likeable, feelings of hope are typically pleasant. Hope is also a positive feeling, one that has an uplifting, buoying, or bracing effect. Hopefulness too is something we feel. It is the anticipation felt when something that we hope for is also something that we believe is likely to occur. To feel hopeful about something, moreover, is to anticipate it with a kind of pleasure. If the weather forecast calls for heavy snowfall, for example, students might be hopeful for a snow day.

Many philosophers also claim that hope does not belong within the domain of strict moral right and wrong, since it is a mere feeling rather than the sort of thing we do.[141] This much does

---

wronged. Because of the strain on some ears, I will avoid saying that an action can be morally wrong even though an agent may perform it. Instead, I will use the locution "morally wrongful." What I have in mind by morally wrongful actions is this: an action is morally wrongful for an agent to perform if and only if the agent's performance of that action fails to meet a moral demand, the failure for which that agent is fully morally responsible; hence, the agent's action counts as violating a moral demand.

[140] Thomas Scanlon is among the most prominent advocates of the claim that hope is a feeling (Scanlon & Scanlon, 2008)

[141] Scanlon seems to accept this stronger claim; I say "seems" because Scanlon says very little about hope, aside from referring to it as a feeling and, on those grounds, dismissing it as the subject of permissibility questions. I would not be surprised if he conceded it was also an attitude. But he would not concede it is an activity without revising his claim about the domain of permissibility or revising his claim that hoping cannot be subject to questions of permissibility.

not seem right to me. I deny that hope is a mere feeling. Although hopes may trigger and partly consist in feelings, they are not mere feelings. Hopes can have propositional and representational content. I hope *that* you enjoyed eating the turkey I made for Thanksgiving; you hope that I remembered to prepare pecan pie for dessert; afterwards we say "hope to see you soon." These examples of hope are examples of propositional attitudes. They indicate that hopes can be judgment-sensitive attitudes. I propose that hopes can be end-directed practical mental activities.

Aside from its immensely important role in the life of practical agents, any general ethics of practical mental activities should provide an analysis of hope as a practical activity, since it is a representative example of a natural kind of mental activity.[142] I begin by considering the way we use the term *hope* and its cognates—including hopes, hopeful, and hoping—can identify the correct conditions of its application and, thereby, can illuminate our understanding of it is to hope. The elements of my account of hope designed in light of ordinary language. A desideratum for an adequate account of hoping, to state the claim boldly, is its conformity to our linguistic practices around the way we use the word "hope". Let us ask: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for hoping that P?

Unfortunately, we cannot hope for just anything. We must, to begin with, believe that P is possible. We cannot hope for that which we believe to be either impossible or certain. If I believe that you are in California, for example, then I can't hope that you are enjoying your vacation in Europe (provided I also believe you cannot co-locate). If I believe that you are in Europe, by contrast, then I cannot hope that you are in Europe. Suppose, however, I know that you are on vacation but that I do not know where you will be traveling. In that case, I can have all sorts of hopes about your location: I can hope that you are in Europe or California or wherever. Thus, in

[142] I also believe that hope can help provide a fairly strong case for the position I favor in this paper. Though there are aspects of the discussion of hope that prove more difficult than would, say, a discussion of fantasy. With hope, for example, it is easy to confuse the attitude of hope with the activity of hoping and therefore it is easy to believe that the aim of the project is to criticize mental states.

order to hope that P, I must believe that P falls somewhere between what I take to be impossible and what I take to be certain.

Desire is also necessary for hope: surely if I hope for something then I can be said to want it. It would be odd of me to say I hope you bring a bottle of merlot over for dinner but also express my indifference about whether you bring any wine. Surely I would contradict myself by saying, "I hope you bring a merlot tonight, although I don't want you to bring any wine." A second necessary condition of hope, therefore, involves some form of desiring the object to be hoped for.

But the belief and desire together are not jointly sufficient for the hope that P either. If I *want* you to bring a merlot to dinner and I know that you can, don't I hope that you will? I don't think that follows; or, it does not follow if the desire in question is a mere desire. A recovering alcoholic may have a desire to drink a glass of wine at dinner and yet hope that he never drinks another drop, including tonight at dinner. In that case, the alcoholic would satisfy the purportedly joint sufficiency conditions but lack the relevant hope.

What, in addition to a belief-desire pair, must be the present in order to establish the existence of a hope? I can desire that something will happen, despite hoping that it will not—or, stronger still, even though I do not hope it will happen. I cannot prefer for something to happen, however, despite hoping it will not—or, stronger still, even though I do not hope it will happen. For example, it would be odd of me to say, "I prefer to spend this weekend hiking in the great outdoors, but I hope I don't have to spend this weekend anywhere near the great outdoors." Similarly, it would be odd of me to say, "I prefer to spend this weekend hiking in the great outdoors, but I don't hope to spend this weekend anywhere near the great outdoors." That would be an odd thing to say, and our concept of hope makes it natural to reinterpret what I must have meant; so I will be heard as lamenting that, even though I would like to spend this weekend hiking in the great outdoors, I have no expectation that it will happen.[143]

[143] I should restate, for the sake of clarification, that this represents a necessary condition. The mere fact that I might choose this over that does not imply that I hope this happens.

What about a dinner guest who prefers beets to broccoli, say, but who hopes neither will be served? In this case, given the restricted choice between beets and broccoli, the dinner guest would choose beets. But the guest would clearly prefer neither to either. I take it, after all, that the guest would not prefer a dinner with beets or broccoli to a dinner without them. Thus, the relevant alternatives should clearly include the dinner with neither beets nor broccoli.[144]

In light of these considerations, my proposal is that to hope for something, one must not only desire it but also be willing to choose it (with respect to some standard of goodness) over a relevant array of alternatives.[145] In particular, therefore, I propose the following three necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions *to hope that P*:[146]

i. *To have P in mind, and*

ii. *To be willing to choose P over its relevant alternatives (with respect to some standard of goodness);* [147]

---

[144] A potential counterexample of this sort was pointed out to me by Seana Shiffrin.

[145] My point is not that we must abandon the idea of desire in order to capture the notion of hope. My point is that mere desire is not sufficient for hope (it would have to be a special kind of desire, such as a desire to desire or one's "strongest" desire, etc.).

[146] The necessary and sufficient conditions on hoping that P are present in other cognates of hope and can be used to account for them. To be hopeful that P, for example, requires the conditions on the hope that P and an additional judgment that P is (reasonably) likely. To get one's hopes up is to raise the degree of expectation in the probability that the possible state of affairs P will be actual. A "false hope" is a hope that P where the degree of expectation an agent has that P is not warranted. I take the necessary and sufficient conditions of *hoping that P* or *hoping for P* as basic, therefore, and set aside alternative albeit interesting cognates. (I view "A hopes to ø" as a false cognate, since it expresses a fact about A's intentions. Insofar as hoping to ø is a form of intending to ø, I set it aside to be handled by a general theory of intention).

[147] There is room for vagueness in this condition, since the relevant alternatives to P may be quite unclear or even unknown to the agent. But I mean for this condition to suit the exactness of its subject matter, since it strikes me that there is much vagueness in the content and basis for our hopes.

iii. *Where P falls within a range of possibilities determined by (but not including) what the agent takes to be true of the actual world.*[148]

This account is at odds with a philosophical tradition that restricts the objects of hope to actions or events. Neither feature is necessary for something to be a genuine object of hope on my view: the objects of hope are not necessarily actions or events. While I can hope to become an astronaut or hope that Haley's comet returns soon, it is possible to hope that there are actually, say, fifteen planets in our solar system or to hope that God exists.

It also breaks with a philosophical tradition that construes hope as future-directed.[149] If the objects of hope are as wide-ranging as my account suggests, however, then they range over past, present, future and counterfactual events. Since there can be uncertainty about the past, the present and also about counterfactuals, each domain should contain appropriate objects of hope on my view. Suppose I know that you are on your annual culinary expedition through Europe this week. I can hope that you were able to find some wild milk-caps while you were picking mushrooms yesterday; I can hope are enjoying their wines at least as much as you did last year. I can hope that were you offered an opportunity to go truffle hunting last night, and that you didn't let your fear of the dark stop you like last time.

My account takes hope to be uncertainty-directed, because it ranges across what the agent believes to be possible (once the agent's beliefs about what is and is not actually the case are fixed). The proper objects of hope, therefore, range over the domain of things that we take to be uncertain.

---

[148] RS Downie provides similar conditions, but thinks that desire (not judgment) is what forms part of the necessary *and* sufficient conditions (Downie, 1963). My original account—in which I analyzed hope in terms of preference rather than judgment— was closer to Downie's desire-based account; but an analysis in terms of judgment is closer still to an analysis in terms of judgment. The reason for this is that preferences, and judgment, involve a form of acceptance which is lacking in desire.

[149] The sample size is relatively small, since there are only a handful of articles on hope. I cite three in this paper, all of which fall into the mistake of relating hope to desire and to conceiving of hope as hope about the future.

I speculate that two contributing factors explain the tendency to think of hope as associated with the future and with events. First, feelings of hope are anticipatory, and we tend to associate that which is anticipated with that which is yet to occur. Since what has yet to occur can occur only at some time in the future, it is natural to regard hope as future-directed. It is a mistake, however, to collapse the space between anticipation and what has yet to occur. Although the discoveries that will resolve my anticipation can occur only in the future, what it is that I anticipate finding out is not necessarily a fact about the future. Second, since we cannot hope for what we regard as impossible or necessary, there must be a degree of uncertainty about the facts of the matter regarding what we hope for. Since the future is a particularly salient domain of uncertainty, a domain about which individuals spend much time worrying and deliberating, we should not be surprised to find that it enjoys the lion's share of attention in discussions of hope.

We can now ask: what more is required of that for which I hope in order for it to count as what I most hope for? Hope has dimensions of magnitude and of duration: I can spend more time hoping for some things than others. I can hope for some things more strongly or intensely than I hope for others.[150] It would be plausible to measure the strength of a hope in terms of the intensity and duration of whichever desires underwrite it. I myself am inclined to think that the strength of one's hope is determined by the degree to which one is willing to choose it (and that intensity and duration are symptoms of willingness).[151]

We can also ask, more to the point, whether the account I have been sketching can help us to make sense of hope as a moral virtue. We could construe the claim that hope is a virtue as a claim about hopefulness: that hope is a virtue because it is virtuous to be cheerful, optimistic, to

---

[150] Where this doesn't merely mean that I spend a larger portion of my time, when hoping, hoping for them.

[151] This pushes the question back to how we measure the strength of one's willingness. My hunch is that my willingness to choose P could be measured in terms of how good I judge it to be and have convinced I am of my judgment.

have the kind of rosy disposition that can endure hardship, or to have a faith that things will turn out for the best. But it seems to me that we can use the account of hope sketched above to identify the virtue of mere hope, as opposed to hopefulness. A Kantian line of argument can illuminate how hope might be a virtue under the somewhat spare, secular conception of hope I have offered above.

In her Tanner Lectures, Onora O'Neill draws our attention to a rather startling claim about hope in Kant's first *Critique*. There he claimed that human reason has a basic interest in settling three questions: What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope? Although the argument O'Neill gives to make sense of Kant's claim as a claim about the things for which rational agents *must* hope, I intend to modify her argument in light of my account of hope in order to make sense of hope as a secular virtue.[152] The Kantian argument O'Neill delivers starts with the claim that, for us to be committed to goals, projects and the realization of some conception of the good, we must be committed to the belief that there will be future in which our goals, projects and good can take shape and be achieved. Given that we are committed to pursuing our goals, undertaking our projects, and realizing our good, however, we must believe that a future in which we succeed is possible.[153] Since hope is a precondition for the commitment to such projects, its presence as a disposition or character trait would be a virtue.[154] Thus it

---

[152] I do not presume that Kant had anything like the following argument in mind, but it gives us a space in which to see that we must have some hopes.

[153] By contraposition: to lack all such hope for a better future would imply an unwillingness to choose such a future. But if we were unwilling to choose such a future, we could not be committed to our projects; since that future is a necessary condition of their success.

[154] Eric Roman argues for a position that I believe is too strong, namely that hope is necessary for any willing, which he maintains on the basis of the relationship between hope and uncertainty (Roman, 1975). If A wants to ø but lacks hope about ø, then either A believes ø is impossible or certain. And if A believes with certainty that A will successfully will to ø, then A won't will to ø because ø is certain. I find this line of reasoning troubling because I don't think that extreme forms of confidence must neutralize the will; just the opposite, if A wants to ø and knows willing ø will be a success, I think that A would be more likely to will ø. Further, Roman's assumption rules omniscient willing out as impossible; but claims about God's willing need not be necessarily false (or if they are, they shouldn't be necessary false for *that* reason).

would be quite natural to characterize of hopelessness—or despair, which I take to be its equivalent—as a vice insofar as it undermines one's resolve and commitment to one's life projects.[155]

But my project is less concerned about hope as a mental state than it is with hoping as mental practical activity. On my view, things we do mentally can be genuine practical actions, on the grounds that there are two distinct practical roles that mental activities can play. On the one hand, they can constitute the activity of mentally deliberating about what to do that precedes choice and action. On the other hand, mental doings can be the actions that result from deliberation and choice, because our deliberation-based choices about what to do can include the activities of a mind. Hoping, I propose, is among these choices. This line of thought is essential to an account of hoping as a practical mental activity

I acknowledge that a distinction drawn between hope and hoping may sound flat to some ears. What importance, after all, could turn on the difference between hope and hoping? It may sound like hair-splitting to demand a distinction between asserting that I hope you will speak next year and asserting that I am hoping you will speak next year. By analogy, it seems silly to suggest that something very special hangs on the difference between "I believe that you spoke at the conference" and "I am believing you spoke at the conference." Nevertheless, I deny that the difference between hope and hoping is trivial.[156]

---

[155] Given my account of hope, the argument here is a bit more complicated than I make it out to be. Here it is: if we lacked all such hope about the future, then either we would be unwilling to choose that future or we would believe that it was either an impossibility or a certainty. If I can have any knowledge of the future, however, I cannot be certain of my success or failure. So I must believe that such a future is at least possible. Thus the only rational way for me to lack all hope about the future is if I were unwilling to choose it. But if I were unwilling to choose it, I would have to be unwilling to undertake my goals, projects, and good (else in undertaking them, I might bring cause such a future to exist as the result of my choice).

[156] Among the take-away messages of my project is the importance of mental activities over mental states, and the general need to scrutinize the practical aspects of mental activities. I think we need to take a harder look at just what we're up to with our mental activities, including instances of believing, but the case I want to make now is for hope.

One of the important differences between attitudes of hope and activities of hoping is based on the claim that the latter plays a rich psychological role in the life of a practical agent. Hoping is an activity: it something we can be up to, an activity that can be undertaken as well as interrupted. I suggest that the activity plays a rich psychological role in our lives, some of which are instrumentally valuable and others of which intrinsically valuable. Hoping can be a form of loving: loving others consists partly in hoping that things go well for them. To be hoping that one's sick parent gets well, for example, is a way of manifesting one's love and concern for their welfare. Hoping for a better future can potentially inspire us, by presenting *vivid* reminders that it is still possible for our lives to improve and for things to turn out for the best.[157]

Hoping can achieve what merely implicit attitudes of hope do not. By actively turning our attention to the prospect of a better future state, hoping can give us the strength to endure challenging hardships. Focus on positive outcomes can also facilitate taking advantage of good gambles by shifting our attention away from the negative outcomes and thereby to help counteract anxieties over the associated risks.[158] On the other hand, hoping sometimes give substantive form to outbursts of anger and can function as outlets to channel frustration (e.g. my rival who is hoping, as I am in the midst of my speech, that I on my words). My point in drawing our attention to these observations is to convey that hoping is a robust activity that plays a deeply important role in the course of a human life.

Claims about whether a particular instance of hoping is morally wrong are too exacting for accounts of hope as a general virtue to adequately individuate and explain. They also cannot be explained, interestingly, by looking only to the representational content of a hope. In the first

---

[157] The recent presidential election swept many Americans into this kind of grand, audacious form of hope.

[158] This point is made by Luc Bovens (2010). A good gamble is one that it is rational to take because the expected value of the gamble is positive (e.g. to accept bets on a coin flip when offered ten dollars in return for every dollar gambled).

chapter, I appealed to commonsense moral judgment about a morally wrong fantasy in order to establish my explanatory task and its adequacy condition. By parity of form, explain how a certain hoping can be morally wrong because it is a terrible things to be hoping for.

In the previous chapter, I claimed that practical agents are committed to the practical activity standard as valid. The use of practical agency gives an instance of its activity, I argued, for which the standards of its kind are valid standards of its goodness. Insofar as particular, occurrent episodes of hoping are practical mental actions, therefore, practical agents who are hoping must be committed to the standards of practical activity as valid. Much as I did to address Freud's schadenfreude fantasy, I intend to explain such claims about moral wrongness in terms of the hoping as a mental practical action. Not unlike the murder fantasy, hoping for something would be morally wrong if the goodness of what's hoped for depends on a standard whose determinations conflict with the practical activity standard. I will illustrate by returning to the schadenfreude theme.

Suppose that Freud has become so embittered that his erstwhile murder fantasy has graduated into genuine hope. Walking up to the podium to deliver his vituperative landmark against Jungian psychoanalysis, Freud spends the entire time hoping that his refutation will be so shocking to Jung, who is seated in the audience, that it actually causes him to die from heart failure.

Freud's hoping is morally wrong as a practical activity, I argue, because it uses an invalid standard. Freud uses it to determine the goodness of what he hopes for (i.e. Jung's death). But no such standard could be valid, since its determinations conflict with the valid standard of practical activity. Since Freud's use of practical agency presupposes the practical standard's validity, he must deny that Jung's death is good. Hence he would have to deny that the object of his hope is good. It follows that there are no valid standards available for Freud to use to conceive of Jung's death as good. And yet use of such a standard is precisely what Freud's hoping requires, since conceiving of something as good is a condition of its becoming an object of hope.

But then what should be said about the case where, say, a madman has taken us hostage and decided to shoot one of us based on a coin toss. As the coin is flipped, wouldn't it be reasonable for you hope that I get shot rather than you? That seems fine. Can the argument deliver this result, however, since what you hope for cannot be good with respect to my practical agency? [159]

As we widen our considerations to better reflect the agent's historical narrative, it might be possible to handle the reasoning in this case much like a case of self-defense. Assume that your hoping is responsive to historical facts about the circumstances we both face. Assume, in other words, that your deliberative considerations are responsive to the fact that your own life is in jeopardy. Part of the explanation for why you are hoping I get shot, in other words, is because in that case you will be alive. The question, therefore, is how use the standards of practical activity and agency to judge this object of hope, an object which is about a complex situation in which one practical agent is lives only if another practical agent is killed.

In this situation, the same valid standard of practical activity applies twice: it applies once to me and once to you. The outcome that is good with respect to you is also not good with respect to me. In fact, each outcome is equally as good with respect to one of us as it is not good with respect to the other. Notice that this situation is not equivalent to situations where a single thing is good (according to one standard) and not good (according to a different standard). In this situation, a single standard determines the goodness of both alternatives. They are equivalently good according to the practical activity standard, however, because both lead to equivalent outcomes: one person survives if and only if the other person does not.

If the object of my hope is that you will be shot so that I will live, then the object of my hope is as good as it is not-good with respect to the valid standard we both share. Hoping for this

[159] It wouldn't be implausible to bite the bullet at this point, and say that you and I should hope for some unreasonable alternative (such as, e.g., the madman's sudden change of heart). I don't adopt that view, however, because it seems to me that common sense does not make any such demand on our hopes.

outcome (that I do so that you live) is not inconsistent with our shared commitment to the same standard, therefore, because the object of my hope is as good as the alternative.[160]

Not unlike other types of mental action, practical agents can have a wide variety of ends for the sake of which they perform a particular hoping. For example: to pass the time; to search for potential counterexamples; for self-discovery; for fun; out of intellectual curiosity; out of respect. What is the general relationship, if any, between the ends of hoping and the question of its rational inconsistency? I propose that only if the end of a hoper's practical activity suspends or undermines the agent's preference-backed judgment can it change the rational consistency of the hoping as a practical activity. This could happen, for instance, if an agent calls forth an old hope in order to discover whether it remains something genuinely hoped for, as might be the case for an agent taking stock of values old and new. It can also occur when an agent searches to discover whether one hope is based on another. Reflecting on my hope to win the lottery, for instance, I might wonder whether my hope is based on a hope for a sense of safety and security or for the freedoms that accompany having more money than one truly needs. I might consider whether to revise my hopes in light of discovering the possibility of new alternatives. Having recently learned that an old friend will return early from a trip abroad, I might hope that I can get a refund for cancelling a final wine class that I would have otherwise enjoyed attending. In these cases, the agent's judgment about an object of a hope is suspended in order to ascertain or reconsider whether the object of hope is now, after all, something that the agent still takes to be

[160] An alternative idea is to make the rational consistency condition stronger by, for example, adding the claim: hoping that P can be rationally consistent provided that the alternatives to P would be no worse than P. This proposal has some bite to it, since it seems reasonable to say that judging P best is rationally consistent with judging P is not good; provided that we keep the judgments explicitly limited to examples where there is no good alternative to P. A second alternative is to say that the object of hope is not so simple, after all, since surely you were hoping for me to be shot *rather* than you. And the claim that my-being-shot-rather-than-your-being-shot isn't good according to N_{PA} seems much less clear, and strikes me as likely false. A virtue of this solution, as I see it, is that it gives an important role to the agent's reason for hoping in the explanation of its rational inconsistency (i.e. it makes a difference whether you hoping that I would get shot because then you would live, or were you hoping that I would get shot because you've been waiting for my demise).

better than the relevant alternatives. This is because of the agent's different practical end: we would not say that the self-reflective agent who seeks to discover whether a hope exists is hoping—unlike Freud, this agent is reflecting on the existence of hopes rather than hoping.

4.3 Extending the account (II):

a. Familiar examples of morally wrong action

Consider the familiar false promise. Suppose that a debtor lacks the funds to pay an overdue debt and so asks an acquaintance, the dupe, for the amount due. The dupe is willing to lend the money, but wants the money returned. To ensure repayment, the dupe decides to give the loan only if the debtor intends to repay it. Despite lacking any intention to repay the loan, the debtor makes a false promise and accepts the loan. In return, the dupe accepts the debtor's promise and makes the loan.

Recall that, when practical agents act, they presuppose that the standards of practical activity are valid. As I have already argued, these include a means-end standard of instrumental rationality: indeed, the debtor treats the standard of instrumentally rational deliberation as valid. This is evident because the debtor decides to make the false promise because it is a means to the debtor's end—making the false promise is a way to acquire sufficient funds to repay an overdue debt.

The validity of this standard, however, imposes rational constraints on the debtor to accept judgments based on the standard of instrumentally rational deliberation as valid whenever it applies. But it applies to the dupe's practical activity too. And the dupe's practical activity fails to satisfy the conditions specified by this standard: the dupe's practical activity isn't good, because accepting the debtor's false promise is not a means to bringing about the dupe's end (repayment of the loan), nor is it a way to satisfy the dupe's own necessary condition for making the loan (that the debtor intend to repay). The debtor knows as much, since the debtor promised to repay without intending to repay. Since the debtor treats the standard of instrumentally rational deliberation as valid (with respect to the debtor's own practical activity), it follows that

the debtor must accept the judgment that the dupe's practical activity is not good (with respect to a standard which is taken to be valid).[161]

But the debtor is also committed to accepting the opposing judgment that the dupe's practical activity is good. In these circumstances, the debtor's end will be achieved only if the dupe makes the loan. Since the debtor knows that the dupe will make that loan only on the condition that the debtor intends to repay it, the debtor attempts to convince the dupe that this condition is met. The debtor acts so as to bring these things about, therefore, because of their role in bringing about the debtor's own end. Thus debtor must judge that the dupe's practical activity is good because of its role in bringing about the debtor's own end. Thus the debtor uses an invalid standard of goodness, e.g. a standard according to which repayment of overdue debt is good. But this standard cannot be valid, since it is inconsistent with a standard of instrumentally rational deliberation.[162]

---

[161] Actually, there's a trick here; the trick is to notice that the debtor's end is to repay a debt, but that the debtor goes about it by accepting a new debt without making the repayment of this new debt an end too. Thus: since the debtor treats debt repayment as a valid standard, the debtor has to accept the judgment that {not intending to repay the new loan} fails to satisfy the conditions specified by the debt repayment standard; hence the debtor must judge that, according to the standard of debt repayment, making a false promise to repay a debt is not good. And this is inconsistent, given that the debtor judges that making the false promise is good with respect to the end of repaying the (original) debt.

[162] A second line of argument is established by the soundness of the deliberator's own practical activity. The dupe's deliberation is unsound because it is based on a false belief. This false belief is brought about when the promisor exploits common principles of honesty and the general truth presumption we share in communication. Because of their relationship to rationally inconsistent practical activity, these are exactly the features that we should expect to find as marks of morally wrong action. Here I hope to have elaborated the problematic role they play at a different level of description.

I put the second argument in a footnote because it seems to me that there has been some confusion around the soundness and validity of deliberation, i.e. practical reasoning. It has been claimed that the following is an invalid inference:

(i) There's practical reason to avoid [Intend End but not Intend Means];
(ii) Intend End;
(iii) Therefore, there's practical reason in favor of Intend Means.

This inference has been referred to as the *factual detachment of a reason* and is generally regarded as an invalid inference because, instead of (iii), the agent could simply abandon Intention End and thereby avoid the problematic state described in (i). Instead of concluding (iii),

Consider next an example of killing for profit. Suppose that a bounty hunter decides to kill someone in exchange for the monetary bounty on that person's head. Now, explanations of the moral wrongness in acts of natural violence are notoriously difficult unless they appeal to that action's consequences.[163] Again, I do not deny that those features make natural violence morally wrong. What I deny is that they provide a complete moral profile of the action's moral wrongness. In light of this difficulty, my explanation of the moral wrongness in natural violence requires substantially more argument than the explanation for making a false promise. The argument purports to show that practical agents are rationally required to treat certain standards—namely, the norm of practical activity itself—as valid. I intend to show that the bounty hunter can't chose to kill another person for profit in accordance with the rationally consistent use of the norm of practical activity (a norm which the bounty hunter has to treat as valid, according to the initial argument).

The basic argument structure is familiar: in bringing about a particular practical activity, the bounty hunter brings about a practical activity the goodness of which is determined by the valid standards of its kind.[164] The standard that determines its goodness, however, is the standard

---

in other words, the agent could simply falsify (ii). This criticism puzzles me. It certainly doesn't represent business as usual: the fact that a conclusion doesn't have to be true *given that* one of the premises is false, does not impugn the validity of an inference from those premises to that conclusion; it merely impugns the argument's soundness. Business as usual has us determine the validity of an inference based on the preservation of truth; thus we determine its validity by assuming the truth of the premises. A different point applies in the case of formal validity, but it leads to the same worry. See Bratman for background (2009, p. 421-426).

[163] Or to some such variation of the action's consequences, viz. its likely consequences, the type of consequences that actions of this kind have, the agent's intended consequences, etc. On a purported difficulty for Kantian accounts, see Korsgaard (1988).

[164] Though I cannot say for certain, it seems that we conceive of the practical activity standard as valid for our practical activities seems to be conceptually necessary. As a matter of conceptual necessity, however, I must accept that a particular practical activity's goodness as a practical activity is determined by the norm of its kind—in just the way I must accept that the goodness of any member of a kind is determined by the norms of its kind. In bringing about a particular practical activity, therefore, I must conceive of it as a good one and I must conceive of its goodness as determined by the valid standard of its kind. But this is just to say that, in bringing

of practical activity. But the bounty hunter determines the goodness of killing with respect to a standard of monetary gain, which conflicts with the practical activity standard.[165]

We can now demonstrate how the bounty hunter's choice to kill someone for profit cannot be made in accordance with the rationally consistent use of standards. The bounty hunter determines the goodness of killing someone on the basis of its profitability. Thus, the bounty hunter uses a standard of monetary gain as a valid standard to determine that this killing would be good. But the bounty hunter must also use the practical activity standard as valid, and it rules the killing out as not good. Since part of what it is to kill a person is to destroy that person's capacity for practical activity, it follows that in these circumstances killing the person is not good. But this was precisely what the killer denied by determining what to do by using monetary gain as a standard of goodness. Hence this determination made by the standard of monetary gain conflicts with the determinations of a valid standard and, therefore, is incorrect; since it is incorrect, however, the standard of monetary gain is invalid for it.

The argument against killing for profit can be based on claims about destroying another person's practical agency. This claim depends on establishing a relationship between the goodness standards of an activity and the goodness standards of its underlying capacities. They are related as potentiality to actuality: the standards for an activity fix or determine the standards for the capacities corresponding to that activity (i.e. standards for those capacities whose characteristic actualization just is that activity). In general, with respect to the standards for an activity, impairments to its underlying capacity count as defects, and the complete destruction of

---

about a particular practical activity, I must take the standard of practical activity to be a valid standard

[165] The following alternative struck me as compelling, but it requires greater consideration. In representing myself as a practical agent in the midst of a practical activity, I must conceive of the standard of practical activity as valid for me. This follows because the norm of a kind is valid for every instance which is a member of that kind. And I must conceive of myself as such an instance, provided that I conceive of myself as a practical agent in the midst of a practical activity.

its functioning are privations of its good. In particular, therefore the destruction of a person's practical agency as such is not good with respect to the standards of its activity.

As I mentioned in Chapter II, the idea that the standards for a capacity depend on the standards for its activity is not unfamiliar. We rely on this idea in our accounts of human vision. Physical changes to the human eye count as defects based on how those changes affect the overall functioning the visual system. Impairments such as cataracts and nerve damage are defects in an eye because they make vision worse; as the complete privation of vision, total blindness is a fundamental privation of goodness (i.e. not good) with respect to the standards of human visual functioning. By parity of form, the practical activity standard should fix the standards for the capacity for practical activity, i.e. practical agency. Changes that impair its well-functioning count as defects and, in particular, the destruction of practical agency counts as a fundamental privation of good (i.e. not good) with respect to the norm of practical activity.

We might worry, however: doesn't the claim that the bounty hunter's practical activity is not good follow directly from the claim that it is not good to destroy a capacity for practical agency? In response, it is important to remember that in order to show why bounty hunter's action is morally wrong, we have to accomplish a rather narrowly defined task: to show that the bounty hunter's practical activity fails to meet the standard of practical activity because it uses an invalid standard. The standard of practical activity makes a demand about our use of standards in determining what to do; it does not, as such, make a demand about the goodness of what does or does not get brought about by a practical activity.[166] The argument is not concerned *per se* with the goodness of actions.[167] The task of the argument is to identify a special kind of rational

[166] As it turns out, this will become an important difference for the mature version of my view. It provides the conceptual room for certain instances of deadly self-defense to be morally justified: for although they bring about the destruction of a person's practical capacities, and thus bring about that which is not good, they are not thereby rationally inconsistent qua practical activities.

[167] But it is not out of skepticism about the goodness of actions and causes that the argument sidelines questions about the action's goodness. Rather, those questions are set aside because the norm gets violated another level up, so to speak.

inconsistency such that the bounty hunter's practical activity violates the practical activity standard.

Thus, the standard of practical activity calls for us to locate the morally objectionable feature of an agent's action within the space of practical reasoning. It indicates that one of the morally decisive moments in the biography of an agent's action takes place within a deliberative context in which claims are made *about* other agents. As it turns out, the worry cautions against the tendency to take overt actions as theoretically primary, since we risk overlooking the fact that an agent's reasoning is itself a practical activity and thereby subject to the standards.

4.4 Extending the account

a. Applications (III): doing the right thing for the wrong reason

I have been suggesting that certain examples of practical reasoning are instances of morally wrong practical activities. Just as calling certain content to mind in order to fantasize about it can be morally wrong (because it's a terrible thing to fantasize about), calling certain content to mind in order to practically reason from it can be morally wrong (because it's a terrible thing to reason from). They are morally wrong, according to the view I advocate, because they make use of invalid standards. This approach would allow us to explain the moral wrongness of certain actions by appealing to the practical reasoning responsible for producing them.[168] This kind could explain how morally wrong reasons are able to morally taint the actions they produce.[169]

---

[168] One might worry that in order for us to be fully responsible for our practical reasoning, we have to subject it to a prior instance of practical reasoning, which in turn must be subjected to yet another instance of practical reasoning. However, the endless chain that confers responsibility from one instance of practical reasoning to another is broken. What breaks the requirement that a prior instance of practical reasoning exist is a power that we identified previously: we can exercise our rational agency *occurrently* over mental activities by calling content to mind on the basis of various considerations.

[169] Since practical reasoning is a mental activity, and since mental activities can be morally wrong, practical reasoning can be morally wrong. Hence, reasons for action can be morally wrong.

In the previous chapter on fantasy, we stated and accounted for one example of a practical action that's morally wrong because of the reason for which an agent performs it: fantasizing about murder consists in imagining a murder for the sake of pleasure. As we saw, it was because the agent is seeking pleasure that imagining a murder is morally wrong. Different practical ends, such as an attempt to discover counterexamples or to better understand the criminal mind, affect whether an action is morally wrong.

The same account can be extended to ordinary overt practical actions to explain cases where common sense tells us that the moral wrongness of an action is due to the agent's own end in acting (or, equivalently, the agent's reason for performing that action). I intend to proceed from easier cases in which the agent's action and end are objectionable, to harder cases in which the agent's action and its effect are morally good even though the agent's end is objectionable. I will use an analogous argumentative pattern to explain the moral wrongness of overtly acting for certain ends: the agent's practical ends can violate the practical activity standard if, as standards of goodness, they are invalid. Since standard of practical activity has to be treated as valid, the agent would be rationally required to abandon the end.

Consider a simple case first. Suppose that a gunman is robbing a bank and takes aim at a teller who can't find the keys to the vault, and shoots the teller dead in order to intimidate the remaining hostages. Since this is the gunman's end, the gunman takes killing this teller to be good… according to some standard the gunman uses. Whichever standard turns out to be the basis for this judgment is the very standard which the gunman takes to be valid. According to standard of practical activity, however, killing non-compliant individuals per se cannot be good, since it necessarily involves the destruction of an agent's capacity for practical activity. Hence the gunman is rationally required to judge that this end—as a killing of a neighbor—isn't good according to a valid standard of goodness. But this is rationally inconsistent with the gunman's judgment that killing non-compliant hostages is good with respect to some standard.

Now consider a case of doing the right thing for the wrong reason called *the demeaning donation*: suppose that there is a well-funded charitable organization that allows people to

sponsor a needy child in a third world country by donating a few dollars a month and will receive updates from their sponsored child in return. The charity is popular, and there are always more sponsors than children that can be taken care of by the organization. A wealthy individual decides to make a charitable donation to an indigent third-world child. The donation actually results in a noticeable benefit to the child's wellbeing. Suppose, however, that the donor's end is to prolong the child's misery. Even though the child might have benefited as a result of the donation, there nevertheless seems to be something morally wrong with the fact that, in making the donation, the donor aims at this particular end. According to the view I have been developing, the demeaning donation does not satisfy the practical activity standard: the donor, by using prolonged misery as the standard for making a donation, thereby uses an invalid standard of goodness.

But how can we establish that the demeaning donor uses an invalid standard? After all, the determination it makes about the goodness of this donation is correct. What is so wrong, we might ask, with using a standard that delivers the right result? Notice that the practical activity standard does not call for practical agents to use standards that incidentally deliver the right result. It calls for agents to use valid standards. And valid standards do not deliver the correct result by accident: a standard of goodness is valid for a thing only if delivers the correct result for any instance of its kind.

According to the donor's standard of prolonging misery, however, making charitable donations that alleviate a recipient's suffering would not be good. Presumably, however, that claim is false *ex hypothesi*. Surely we would explain why making the donation was right thing to do on the basis that it helps to meet the child's morally relevant needs. A charitable donation that alleviates suffering would be good to make. Thus the donor's misery standard delivers an incorrect result in this case. The misery standard's failure to determine the correct result in this instance implies that it is invalid for any instance of the kind. Since the misery standard is invalid for determining whether a charitable contribution is good, therefore, it is invalid even if it happens to make the right determinations in certain cases.

Consider a new variation of the previous case. In this case, the donor believes that the better off are better—that individuals in the upper class are superior, full stop, to individuals in the lower class. Suppose that the donor makes the donation for the sake of taking delight in being superior to a destitute and dependent person. This is a demeaning reason to make the donation, and a donation made for this reason would be a demeaning donation. As a sign of this, I take it that we would be willing to call this donor's donation a demeaning donation. It seems to me, therefore, that the demeaningness of the donor's reason or end spreads to the donor's wider action. It's a horrible reason to make a donation and among some of the most demeaning reasons that could come to mind. Common sense tells us that the moral wrongness associated with the donor's reason spreads to the donor's wider action.

We can use the standard of practical activity to show that the moral wrongness of the demeaning donation stems from the donor's reason or end for making it. By making the donation for the sake of that particular end—to experience a certain sort of delight—the donor acts in accordance with a judgment about the delight's goodness. Thus, the donor treats as valid the standard according to which that delight is good (whichever standard it happens to be). Again, however, the donor must treat standard of practical activity as valid, and the donor has to represent is as the valid standard of goodness for more than just the donor's own activity: as a norm of the activity characteristic of practical agents, there are some facts about practical agents to which it applies. Since the donor infers that the better off are better, and determines the goodness of being better in accordance with a standard of pleasure. But the validity of the practical activity standard ensures the equal worth of all practical agents, since they are all equal as members of the same kind—the kind: practical agent—in virtue of which their goodness as such is determined. Hence, the better off cannot be better, and the goodness of both is denied by the valid standard of practical activity.

A general account of how an agent's reasons can make actions morally wrong had better be able to deny an inference from the premise that an agent's action is morally wrong to the

conclusion that the agent must not do it. An account that advocates this kind of moral logic will fail to get the results right for compelling cases. Consider, for instance, someone who rescuing a drowning victim out of spite. It would be implausible to say that victim should not be rescued, since surely the opposite is true. Surely the rescue is required despite the fact that it would be spiteful. How do we make a full-throated moral objection to spiteful rescue without implying that the particular agent in this case should not rescue the victim?[170]

A specious line of response traverses the following points. The fact that the rescue is morally wrong in some way does not imply that it must not be performed. It implies only that the agent should not [rescue the victim out of spite]. Thus, it would be true that it would be morally wrong to rescue out of spite and also true that the agent must perform the rescue.

But that reply will not suffice. It is false to say that the agent must not rescue the victim out of spite. Suppose that the acting agent, as a true Darwinian, seeks advantage at every turn: there is simply no changing the agent's mind during the few precious minutes the victim has left. Suppose that this is a stubborn psychological fact: the agent will only rescue the victim out of spite. In this case, is the agent morally forbidden from rescuing the victim spitefully? Surely not; surely the victim must be rescued nevertheless.

4.5 **A few implications**

I contend that, although Sponsor's donation is morally wrong because it's made for a demeaning reason and, although in this particular case Sponsor shouldn't make that donation, it does not follow from the claim that the donation is morally wrong that Sponsor (morally) shouldn't make it. For consider a variation on the demeaning donation where Sponsor makes *the demeaning donation in a misanthropic world*: in this world, charitable organizations never have sufficient funds and there are too few donors. Because this world contains an insufficient number

[170] There is a general tendency to explain the wrongfulness of reasons in terms of defective character or defective deliberation and the significance it has for other agents. These attempts are well-articulated alternatives to my account; but here I will only begin to sketch my own account and mention a few of its advantages over others.

of sponsors, many needy children will starve. Indeed, it turns out that Child will starve unless Sponsor makes a donation. Unlike the original case, it is surely true that in the misanthropic world Sponsor may make a donation in light of Child's urgent needs. I find the intuition that Sponsor may (morally speaking) make a donation in the misanthropic world to be extremely compelling, even if it is a demeaning donation.

But the argument that the demeaning donation is morally wrong did not depend on whether it was made in a philanthropic world or a misanthropic world. This supports the claim that, even in the misanthropic world, making a demeaning donation would still be morally wrong. If so, then making the demeaning donation is morally permitted despite its moral wrongness. And this is true despite the fact that this kind of moral wrongness, as we saw in the original case, is the kind that can ground a claim that Sponsor shouldn't make the donation.[171]

The demeaning donation in a misanthropic world, therefore, is an interesting example of a practical activity that a practical agent may perform despite the fact that it is morally wrong. The argument against the practical agent's end allows us to explain why Sponsor's donation is morally wrong in both the philanthropic and misanthropic worlds. Although examples of this kind occupy a complicated moral territory, the account on offer can provide a surprisingly straightforward explanation, and one that I believe can capture the complexities of intuition. On the one hand, each donation remains morally wrong. Each donation has to be morally wrong, since we assumed that each donor makes the donation for the same demeaning reason and the moral wrongness derives from that reason. On the other hand, however, only the donation made in the misanthropic world is morally permissible, since only in the misanthropic world must the child's morally relevant need be met by a demeaning donation.

It is important not to conflate culpable dilemmas and situations where we are forced to choose the lesser of two evils. Although the cases might still appear to be similar, they have an entirely different moral profile. The appearance of similarity is due to conflicting demands: in

[171] See Barbara Herman (Parfit, 2011).

both kinds of cases the agent has no option that can satisfy both of the conflicting moral demands that apply. But these cases do not generate a conceptual gap between an action's moral wrongness and its moral permissibility. The morally relevant dissimilarity between these cases is that when an agent chooses the lesser of two evils, that agent is not morally culpable for leaving the other moral demand unmet; hence the agent does nothing that counts as morally wrong.

Consider, for example, a lifeguard who faces the unfortunate choice to either rescue a single drowning victim or to rescue a group of three drowning victims. If the lifeguard is merely a victim of unfortunate circumstance, then the lifeguard has no fault for failing to satisfy the moral demand made by the single drowning victim by rescuing the three instead.[172] This stands in sharp contrast to the situation in the demeaning donation, since Sponsor is surely culpable, answerable and to blame for the relevant failures of practical deliberation.[173]

Standard two-stage theories distinguish moral wrongness and moral impermissibility in terms of their objects: whereas acting for reasons can be morally wrong, acting itself can morally impermissible. This is inadequate to capture the conceptual gap opened by the demeaning donation case, since the gap occurs at the level of actions and at the level of actions done for reasons: in the demeaning donation, the act of donating as well as the act of donating for a reason are both morally wrong. [174] This complexity calls for a distinction between moral wrongness and

---

[172] Thus, examples of merely choosing the lesser of two evils do not generate a conceptual gap between an action's wrongness and whether an agent may not perform that action.

[173] Unsurprisingly, it is possible to find the conceptual gap in examples of overt actions. If, for instance, the lifeguard is at fault say, because a hangover has depleted an expected but necessary level of endurance, then the lifeguard's failure to save the one is a failure of a different moral order and one: by saving the three and failing to save the one, the lifeguard morally wrongs the one. Elsewhere I have discussed examples of this kind and some of their theoretical consequences at greater length.

[174] Elsewhere, I have developed the claim that this gap is best captured by drawing a distinction within moral logic: whereas moral wrongness consists in culpably failing to meet a moral obligation, moral impermissibility consists in a verdictive fact that is derived from the totality of an agent's moral obligations. This distinction is not equivalent to a "two-stage" theory that distinguishes action and action-for-a-reason.as different objects that are proper to distinct moral principles.

moral impermissibility (such that both can be applied to acting and also to acting for a reason).[175] I propose the following distinction: whereas moral wrongness consists in breaching a moral obligation, moral impermissibility consists in a verdictive judgment about what the agent must not do. Culpable dilemmas show how it is possible for an action to breach an obligation and yet also be moral required. An agent is in a *culpable dilemma* if and only if the agent facing that dilemma is to blame or responsible for the conflict between competing moral obligations. Agents can face culpable dilemmas of positive as well as negative obligations. Let's begin with the dilemmas between positive obligations.

> *Lifeguard*: A is standing on a dock and can save either one drowning victim or five drowning victims but cannot save all six.

In *Lifeguard*, A is required to save the five even though this requires A to fail to save the one. A's failure to save the one does not count as a breach of obligation because A should receive an exemption. After all, the fact that A did as required in this case exempts A from the failure to save the one. How can we fault A when it was humanly impossible to discharge both obligations, and A did as required by discharging the obligation to save the five? But now consider the situation faced by an irresponsible lifeguard:

> *Hung-over Lifeguard*: each of the drowning victims is located closer to the dock such that, ordinarily, A would be able to save all six victims. But in the current circumstances, A lacks the speed and stamina to save all six victims because A has a hangover due to a wild night of extravagant partying.

In both cases, the failure to save one group or the other group is imputable to the lifeguard: the limitation making it is impossible to save both groups. However, in the ordinary

---

[175] This complexity is due to the fact that the demeaningness of the reasons for which we act can make the acts themselves demeaning: Sponsor's demeaning reason for making the donation spreads to the donation itself. It would be natural, I think, to describe the donation as demeaning.

case this limitation is due to facts about the physical capacities of a human being; in the latter case, however, this limitation is the lifeguard's fault because it is due to a night spent drinking alcohol. Thus, in *Hung-over Lifeguard*, the responsibility for the inability to save both groups is a responsibility that is borne by the lifeguard. Since the failure to discharge the obligation to save the one is the lifeguard's fault, that obligation gets *breached* when the one drowns. Thus saving the five is required insofar as the lifeguard must save the five, but it remains morally wrong insofar as in doing so lifeguard breaches the obligation to save the one.[176]

In *Hung-over Lifeguard*, since the obligation to save five lives is greater than the obligation to save a single life, A is required to save the five. As the number of victims grows, the tendency to say that A is required to save them should grow stronger. If we agree that A is required to save the five instead of the one, then *Hung-over Lifeguard* represents a case where saving the five is both required and breaches an obligation. Similarly, the rescue could be merely permissible and morally wrong: if the number of victims on either side of the dock each number one, then presumably it is permissible to save either victim.[177] Hence, although it is permissible

[176] In *Hung-over Lifeguard*, A's inability to discharge both obligations is due to some prior action of A's. But a distinct type of obligation breach can occur in cases where A's action contributes to the very existence of that which requires a remedy. Consider *Reckless Lifeguard*: both A and the one are standing on a dock when A shoves the one off of the dock and into the water. At just that moment, a speedboat carrying the five zooms by and strikes the one who begins to drown as a result of the injury. But as the speedboat strikes the one, it capsizes and flings the five across the dock where they begin to drown. Again, A can only save the one or the five but not both. (Simpler and more boring alternative: A just pushes both groups.)

[177] A similar point can be made about *Reckless Lifeguard* with the following caveat: A seems most responsible for the fact that the one is drowning and hence that obligation may be stronger as a result. But this is merely an artifact of the specific case, the circumstances of which can be altered: suppose that A pushes two individuals off the dock, both of whom then begin to drown. Since A's competing obligations are of equal weight, it is permissible for A to save either; but since A's failure to save the other is A's fault (after all, A is responsible for creating this mess) A breaches the obligation to save the other victim.

to save either victim, an obligation to the victim that eventually drowns will be thereby breached.[178]

Hung-over Lifeguard differs from an ordinary dilemma because only in the former is the fact that the dilemma exists is the lifeguard's own fault. In *Lifeguard*, recall, the rescue is dilemmatic due to the unfortunate distance between victims along with the limited speed and stamina of any normal, human lifeguard. In the other cases, however, the rescue is not dilemmatic because of the limitations any normal human lifeguard faces, but rather because of a distinct limitation that was introduced by something the lifeguard previously decided to do. In such cases (where breaching an obligation is required), the circumstances in which the obligations cannot be discharged is the agent's own fault.[179]

Agents can also face culpable dilemmas between competing negative obligations. Suppose that A greets an old friend, B, near the end of their high school reunion. They decide to continue their conversation the next day. A and B promise to meet the next evening at their childhood hangout: on the tracks at the entrance to the town's abandoned coalmine. However, A knows that interest in the coalmine has been renewed and that contractors sometimes send one-car trains down the tracks. A does not inform B of this, even though A knows that B is ignorant of this fact since B has been living in another country after graduating high school. The next

---

[178] As something of an aside, there are inclined to say that the permissible or required breach of an obligation to be due to a salient character flaw rather than say that it is due to some specific, prior action. Consider: *Racist Lifeguard*: swimmer one is east of the dock and swimmer two is west of the dock. However, each swimmer belongs to a different race and A is bigoted against members of swimmer one's race. Although A watches both sides of the dock for signs of trouble, A tends to pay greater attention to wherever members of A's own race are swimming. As a result, in this case, there is a prolonged delay between when swimmer one begins to drown and when A recognizes that swimmer one is drowning. At that moment of recognition, swimmer two begins to drown as well. Suppose that A cannot now rescue both individuals, although there would have been sufficient time to rescue both individuals had A been paying better attention to each side of the dock equally.

[179] The same result follows for permissible actions. Permissible obligation breaches are generated by the same kind of examples, except that the conflicting obligations are of equal strength.

evening, just as A approaches B, who is standing on the tracks, a train shoots out of the entrance to the coalmine. B is shocked and unable to move from fright.

A is under two relevant obligations: the obligation to save B and the obligation against interfering with, i.e. against pushing, B. But surely, if A's pushing B out of the way is the only way to save B from being hit by the train, then A is morally required to push B out of the way. If A pushes B off of the tracks, then A does what is morally required and discharges the obligation to save B and thereby fails to discharge the obligation against interfering with B. What should we say about A's interfering with B? It is required, in the sense that it is what A has most (moral) reason to do. But it is also true that A should have previously informed B of the danger—indeed, this failure is why A is at fault for being in circumstances in which A must interfere with B in order to save B. Hence, A's obligation against interfering with B has been breached.[180]

4.6 Humanity and the moral significance of the practical activity standard

Once an ethical theory unhinges the concept of morally wrong practical actions from examples of overt performances of behavior that occur in a shared physical world, a number of reinterpretations and less conventional applications of traditional moral concepts begin to appear. The prior account, for example, yields a distinctive elaboration of what it means *to treat humanity* as an end in itself. Although I do not intend to make an interpretative claim in historical Kantian scholarship, I do believe that the preceding discussion suggests an interesting way to reinterpret Kant's Humanity Formula. In his Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant's Formula of Humanity states:

[180] The fact that A discharges one obligation to B and breaches a different obligation to B shouldn't cause us to worry about the result. Add a second misled friend to the case, C, who is standing between A and B such that A can save B only by pushing C out of the way; now A has to breach an obligation to C in order to discharge an obligation to B.

> Always treat rational nature, in yourself or the person of another, never as a mere means but always as an end-in-itself (Kant, Wood, & Schneewind, 2002).

Familiar readings of his Humanity Formula interpret it as demanding that we never treat other people as mere means. But Kant's own formulation refers to our use of rational *nature*, not our use of rational people, as the object of treatment. I take this difference as the mark of a significant moment. Surely there is a significant difference between using something and using its nature. If I use my chair by taking a seat in it, how do I use the nature of my chair? If I use my imagination by imagining something, how do I use the nature of my imagination?

My proposal is that we use a thing's nature by using the abstract principles or standards of a thing's kind. Recall the discussion in Chapter III about the carpenter who used a carpenter's square to measure right angles. The carpenter's square is a concrete particular that has been shaped into the figure of a right triangle. So it would be natural to say that the carpenter uses a right triangle, or the shape of a right triangle, to measure various angles. We might also say that Pythagoras discovered the nature of a right triangle, since the Pythagorean Formula expresses a formula that all right triangles must satisfy. My suggestion is that it would also be natural to say that a carpenter who uses the Pythagorean Formula is using the nature of right triangles.

We use an agent's rational nature, according to this analogy, by using the abstract standard of its kind—which we do, if my view is correct, by using the standard of practical activity. Since the practical activity standard expresses a demand that all rational agents must satisfy, an agent who uses the practical activity standard is using the nature of rational agents.

By extension, the carpenter who uses the Pythagorean Formula to determine whether this carpenter's square is good for determining right angles uses the nature of a right triangle in this carpenter's square to determine its goodness. We use a thing's nature as an end, moreover, by

using the abstract standard of its kind as the standard of goodness in accordance with which we determine what to do. I propose that to treat rational nature as a mere means, in other words, is to determine what to do in accordance with using a standard that conflicts with practical activity standard. We treat the rational nature in someone as a mere means, therefore, by using a standard whose determinations about that individual's goodness conflict with the determinations made by practical activity standard.

On this interpretation, therefore, Kant's Humanity Formula makes a moral demand that agents can meet, in other words, in a moment of practical deliberation. It requires practical agents to make their determinations about what to do by using the standard of their rational nature (which is the standard of practical, on my view) as their standard of goodness. This demand cannot be satisfied by agents who make their determinations based on standards that are inconsistent with the practical activity standard. On familiar interpretations, the Humanity Formula primarily targets a practical agent's interaction with other agents and places a demand on how we use them. On my interpretation, by contrast, the Humanity Formula primarily targets a practical agent's practical deliberation and places a demand on how we use the standard of their nature as rational. Our treatment of the humanity in others occurs takes place within the deliberative register.

Let me first try to illustrate how this works in a familiar example, and subsequently talk about how it works in a more complicated example. On this reinterpretation, the humanity formula demands that we always treat the standard of practical activity as valid, both ourselves and for others. It demands that we never use this standard merely as a means (by using it to make determinations about goodness), without also treating them as ends-in-themselves (without using it as a valid standard of goodness for own determinations about what to do). We have already

seen one example of violating this demand, viz. Freud's schadenfreude fantasy about murdering Carl Jung.[181]

Consider now the false promise: someone (the promisor) needs to borrow money and knows that a friend (the dupe) will lend money only on the condition that the promisor intends to return it. The promisor has no intention to return the money, but professes otherwise in order to secure a loan. On a traditional reading of the humanity formula, we might say that the promisor uses the dupe as a mere means. Put in the terms of the account on offer, however, we should say that the promisor treats the standard of the dupe's humanity as a mere means.

The promisor's goal, to receive money from the dupe, can be successful only if the dupe agrees to loan the promisor that money. In the particular circumstances at hand, however, the dupe has decided to lend money only on the condition that the promisor intends to repay it, and the promisor has no such intention. Thus, the promisor's goal to acquire the money can be successful only if the dupe acts in such a way that the dupe's own condition for lending the money – namely, that the promisor intend to repay it –remains unmet.[182] For the promisor's false promise to succeed, therefore, the promisor has to bring it about that the dupe's action is not a means to the dupe's end; hence, that the dupe fails to act as a self-determined end. But then the promisor's practical activity requires the promisor to accept that a practical agent's failing to act

[181] What is more, this is precisely the kind of result to be expected of Kant's work, in particular, since his texts have been especially subject to patterns of misinterpretation (Herman, 1993).

[182] Indeed, this much should be evident from the fact that the promisor knows that the dupe will agree to loan the money on the condition that the promisor intends to repay it and so the promisor knows exactly what to say to the dupe to secure a loan.

as a self-determined end is good. But then the promisor is rationally committed to the judgment that the promisor's practical activity requires acting in a way that the promisor shouldn't.[183]

On the revised interpretation, the humanity formula's demand is directly about how we treat principles. It is about how we treat persons only indirectly, through our treatment of principles. On this reading, what it is to treat humanity as an end is to use the principle that captures or expresses our humanity as a valid standard of goodness.[184] On this view, the Kantian demand for the humane treatment of others as ends runs deeper than facts about what we do and say to them together with facts about our mental states when such things are done and said. In particular, it has to do with the conceptions of other people we use in evaluating our choices concerning practical activities. My idea is that since the principle of another person's humanity is captured by the standard of practical activity insofar as it is applied to that person, practical agents must treat the standard of practical activity like an end in itself. From the discussion about morally wrong fantasies, we can make a first hypothesis about what it is to treat the standard of

---

[183] The argument can also be put in terms that are suggestive of the Formula of Universal Law. The promisor can't make the false promise and conceive of the dupe as a self-determined end at the same time. That's because, to conceive of the dupe as a self-determined end is to conceive of the dupe as acting from self-determined conditions. But that's precisely what the promisor proposes to falsify – the promisor proposes to do the one thing ensuring that the dupe fails to act from self-determined conditions. Hence, the promisor can't act from a conception of the dupe as a self-determined end. At the same time, however, the promisor relies on a conception of the dupe as a self-determined end; indeed, it is this very fact that the promisor seeks to exploit by falsely communicating the intention to repay. Hence, making the false promise involves a contradiction in conception. (This is a way to spell out how the false promise precipitates a contradiction in conception. I take that to be confirmation that we're on the right track, since the duty against false promising is supposed to be perfect, i.e. produce a contradiction in conception according to the Formula of Universal Law. Articulating the equivalence between the Humanity Formula and the Formula of Universal Law, however, is beyond the scope of this paper and my project).

[184] On this view, therefore, the fantasizer who fantasizes about the mutilation of a real person is failing to treat the principle of that person's humanity as an end. Put in morally salient terms, we might say that the fantasy is inhumane or demeaning.

practical activity as an end: a practical agent treats the standard of practical activity as an end if and only if no rational inconsistency results from making the standard of practical activity a valid ground of judgment in that practical agent's practical activity.

If this much is correct, it yields a vision of morality that goes "all the way down," its authority pervading the way that agents direct their mental lives. It requires that we take standards associated with others and to use them alongside the standards associated with our ends, i.e. the standards that are the final regulators of what we do. On this account, morality is not a side-constraint: it isn't like a barnacle, clung to the side of a ship bound for better ports. Instead, by emphasizing the practical agent's point of view in pursuing ends, this account suggests a picture of morality as seamlessly integrated into the very way that we think about our ends.[185]

[185] For this I am indebted to the work of Barbara Herman (1993 & 2007).

Bibliography

American Psychiatric, Association. (2010). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders : DSM-IV-TR*. Arlington, Tex.: American Psychiatric Association.

Currie, Gregory. (1995). The moral psychology of fiction. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 73*(2), 250-259.

Darwin, Charles. (1871). *The descent of man and selection in relation to sex*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Downie, Robert S. (1963). Hope. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 24*(2), 248-251.

Freud, Sigmund, Jung, CG, McGuire, William Ed, Manheim, Ralph Trans, & Hull, RFC. (1974). The Freud/Jung letters: The correspondence between Sigmund Freud and CG Jung.

Gendler, Tamar Szabó. (2000). The puzzle of imaginative resistance. *The Journal of Philosophy, 97*(2), 55-81.

Grube, George Maximilian Anthony, & Reeve, CDC. (1992). Plato: republic.

Herman, Barbara. (1993). *The practice of moral judgment*: Harvard University Press.

Kant, Immanuel, Wood, Allen W, & Schneewind, Jerome B. (2002). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: Yale University Press.

Keys, Ancel, Brozek, Josef, Henschel, Austin, Mickelsen, Olaf, & Taylor, Henry L. (1950). The biology of human starvation, Vols. 1 & 2. *The Biology of Human Starvation, Vols. 1 & 2*.

Kries, Johannes von. (1886). *Die Principien der Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung, eine logische Untersuchung*. Freiburg i.B.: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck).

Meyers, Jeffrey. (1990). Interview-THE ART OF FICTION NO. 117. *Paris Review*(115), 117.

Mullin, Amy. (2004). Moral defects, aesthetic defects, and the imagination. *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism, 62*(3), 249-261.

Nagel, Thomas. (2002). *Concealment and exposure : and other essays*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Newton, Isaac. (1687). *PhilosophiÊ naturalis principia mathematica*. Londini: Jussu Societatis Regiae ac Typis Josephi Streater. Prostat Venales apud Sam. Smith ad insigna Principis Walliae in Coemiterio D. Pauli, aliosq, nonnullos Bibliopolas.

Parfit, Derek. (2011). *On what matters: volume one* (Vol. 1): OUP Oxford.

Person, Ethel Spector, Fonagy, Peter, Figueira, SÈrvulo A., Freud, Sigmund, & International Psycho-Analytical, Association. (1995). *On Freud's "Creative writers and day-dreaming"*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Roman, Eric. (1975). Will, Hope, and the Noumenon. *The Journal of Philosophy, 72*(3), 59-77.

Scanlon, Thomas M, & Scanlon, Thomas. (2008). *Moral dimensions*: Harvard University Press.

Simpson, Phil. (2012). Lacaille: Abbe and Astronomer *Guidebook to the Constellations* (pp. 723-807): Springer.

Woudenberg, René. (2006). Introduction: Knowledge Through Imagination. *Metaphilosophy, 37*(2), 151-161.