

The Eclipse of Instrumental Rationality

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[T]he ideal of usefulness permeating a society of craftsmen—like the ideal of comfort in a society of laborers or the ideal of acquisition ruling commercial societies—is actually no longer a matter of utility but of meaning. It is ‘for the sake of’ usefulness in general that *homo faber* judges and does everything in terms of ‘in order to.’ [...] [But] utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness.

—Arendt (1958: 154)

Introduction

Many philosophers of practical reason assume that practical rationality is partly constituted by the suitable coordination of means and ends—i.e., by *instrumental rationality*.¹ This assumption is clear in much of the literature on requirements of rationality, in which means-end coherence remains a standard example of what rationality requires, alongside coherence between one’s normative beliefs and one’s intentions (‘Enkrasia’), and consistency between one’s intentions. The assumption is also clear in much of the literature on practical reasoning: while many reject the instrumentalist view that practical reasoning is always of means and never of ends, many also grant that coordinating our means to our ends is a central case of practical reasoning.²

Instrumental rationality was argued to be a myth in Raz (2005). But the objections he raised to the normativity of instrumental rationality turned out to be special cases of broader worries about the normativity of coherence explored by Kolodny (2005, 2007) and Broome (2005, 2007).³ Hence, it seems fair to say that most in the current literature see no *special* problem about instrumental rationality. Most agree that *if* there are any fundamental requirements of coherence, an instrumental principle is among them; those who follow in the footsteps of Raz—e.g., Kiesewetter (2017) and Lord (2018)—are better cast as denying the antecedent.

In this paper, I want to question this lingering consensus. I think there are *special* problems about the normativity of instrumental rationality which don’t merely reflect broader problems about the normativity of coherence requirements. But I think we needn’t fret, since the patterns of reasoning that the instrumental principle is used to underwrite should never have been regarded as instrumental in the first place. Hence, I will be arguing that we can and should live without instrumental rationality. This eclipse of instrumental rationality is, I believe, good news for the unity of reason. I have argued elsewhere that epistemic rationality is wholly non-instrumental.⁴ The story about practical rationality I give here contributes to a unified picture of the epistemic and practical.

It is worth emphasizing that I will defend this view while accepting that practical rationality has a significant *structural* component not reducible to either (i) the pressures of *apparent reasons* (*pace* Kiesewetter (2017), Kolodny (2005), and Lord (2018)), (ii) requirements of theoretical

¹ It used to be common to hold that practical rationality is *wholly* constituted by instrumental rationality. See Gauthier (1987) and Dreier (1996) for examples, and Nozick (1993: 133) for an illustration of the felt need to reckon with this view. The view is often pinned on Hume, but Sayre-McCord’s contribution to this volume shows that this may be wrong. In the literature on rational requirements which grew out of the pioneering work of Broome (1999), it has become far more common to hold that there are both instrumental and non-instrumental requirements of rationality. Still, it is unusual for people to hold that there are coherence requirements but to deny that instrumental coherence is one of them. For a thoroughly non-instrumental view, see Hampton (1998), and see Korsgaard (2009) for the view that the instrumental principle is merely an aspect of a categorical requirement of rationality.

² See, e.g., Audi (2001), Broome (2013), Dancy (2018), Millgram (1997), and Vogler (2002) for figures who grant that there is non-instrumental reasoning but hold or assume that instrumental reasoning is still a central case of practical reasoning. See Kolnai (1962) and Williams (1981) for the view that all genuinely practical reasoning is of ends. These figures occupy an interesting space in agreeing with cognitivists about practical reason that instrumental reasoning reduces to theoretical reasoning, while then insisting that it is not practical at all for this reason.

³ For more discussion in this volume, see the Introduction and the contributions by Lord and Morton and Paul.

⁴ See, e.g., Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020).

rationality (*pace* cognitivists like Setiya (2007) and Wallace (2001)) or (iii) to a categorical imperative (*pace* Hampton (1998) and Korsgaard (2009)). I agree with Vogler (2002) that there is a fine-grained order to practical reasoning that is omitted on views which regard all practical reasoning as reasoning of ends. I merely deny that this order is a *calculative* order, as Anscombe (1957) said. In particular, in place of the calculative structure established by ‘in order to’ relations holding between intentions and acts, I substitute an order of meaning better captured by ‘for the sake of’ relations holding between intentions and values.⁵ I dispense with ends in favor of values which are not merely ‘to be promoted’, and replace means-end relations with relations reflecting the internal structure of the values for whose sake one acts. Hence instrumental structure is eclipsed by subjective axiological structure, with the latter understood in a non-consequentialist way.⁶

With these ideas in mind, here is the plan. I will begin in Section 1 with some terminological clarifications and a more precise statement of my main claims, together with some disclaimers. I will then turn in Section 2 to give special reasons for skepticism about instrumental rationality, in support of my claim that it should be eclipsed by a non-instrumental form of structural rationality. Section 3 will show that the practical phenomena commonly assumed to be underpinned by instrumental rationality can be better explained by non-instrumental structural rationality. Section 4 will sketch a more specific non-instrumental account which better captures the order that the instrumental principle was meant to capture. I will conclude in Section 5 by showing how this picture fits nicely with a wider strategy for vindicating the normativity of rationality that I’ve developed in other work.

1. Instrumental Rationality: Some Preliminaries and Disclaimers

1.1. *The Face-Value Understanding of Instrumental Rationality and Reasoning*

What is instrumental rationality? I work with a face-value understanding that takes the word ‘instrumental’ in its ordinary sense, not as shorthand for an intuitively broader concept or a technical concept.⁷ As a result, I assume that if a form of reasoning does not conclude with the reasoner’s *intending to use something as a means* in any pretheoretically recognizable sense of ‘means’, we lack good reason to call it ‘instrumental’. As we will see, there are many patterns of reasoning which don’t conclude in such instrumental intentions that ought to be distinguished from instrumental reasoning. By correctly distinguishing these forms of reasoning from instrumental reasoning, the face-value understanding helps to carve rationality at its joints.

To be more precise, the face-value understanding assumes that instrumental rationality is characteristically manifest in reasoning which moves toward the intention to use an apparent means to bring about an end, where the end is treated by the agent as having a value that is ‘to be promoted’

⁵ The approach may also have been implicitly accepted by some Continental thinkers who were critical of what they called ‘instrumental reason’ (especially Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1979), Arendt (1957), Gorz (1989), Horkheimer (1947, 2012), Marcuse (1964), and Weber (1921/1968)). The paper stalks these figures in its footnotes, and its title is an allusion to Horkheimer’s books *The Eclipse of Reason* and *The Critique of Instrumental Reason*.

⁶ My understanding of subjective axiological structure also distinguishes my approach from *teleological* approaches as normally understood. Whether it differs from properly Aristotelian approaches is another matter. Note that a better translation of the Greek phrase which unpacks the idea of final cause—‘*to hou heneka*’—is *that for the sake of which*. It is possible that Aristotle shouldn’t be regarded as a teleologist if being a teleologist means explaining normativity in terms of *aims* which are fundamentally to be *promoted*; cf. Johnson (2005). While Johnson calls Aristotle’s approach ‘teleological’, that word is stretched misleadingly if ‘that for the sake of which’ can be understood in a paradigmatically non-teleological way.

⁷ Vogler (2002: 163) provides an illustration of a broader characterization that elides distinctions I would want to draw: ‘The view I have been laying out isn’t exactly that calculative or technical practical reasoning is entirely a matter of finding ‘causally efficacious means’ by which to attain determinate ends. This is one form such reasoning might take, but it could just as well trace constitutive part-whole relations, or else involve straightforward demonstrative inference....’ As we will see, I think practical reasoning founded on constitutive relations is often fundamentally different from means-end reasoning. I agree with Audi (2001) that it is unhelpful to obscure this difference with the technical notion of a ‘constitutive means’.

(i.e., to be brought about for its own sake).⁸ The understanding hence takes the premise-attitudes of properly instrumental reasoning to be

- (i) intentions to bring about certain states of affairs (the agent's ends),

and

- (ii) beliefs that performing certain actions or using certain resources (the agent's means) would help to bring about these states of affairs,

and it takes the conclusion-attitudes to be

- (iii) *instrumental intentions* to perform certain actions *in order to* bring about the states of affairs targeted by the premise-attitudes.

A simple example would be reasoning from (i) the intention to bring about peace and (ii) the belief that disarmament would help to bring about peace, to (iii) the intention to pursue disarmament in order to promote peace. Here the conclusion-intention apparently has a kind of structural rationality relative to the premise attitudes. This apparent structural rationality is instrumental rationality.

1.2. *Some Contrasting Phenomena*

Surprisingly enough, the face-value understanding is more fine-grained than many in the literature and helps to contrast instrumental rationality with several phenomena often conflated with it.⁹

To begin to see why, note that the instrumental intentions with which instrumental reasoning ends are a special case of *derivative pro-attitudes*. To carve at the joints of practical reasoning, we should pay attention to forms of reasoning which end in other kinds of derivative pro-attitudes. For in line with a distinction that can be drawn between non-instrumental value and fundamental value (which matches a more familiar distinction between instrumental and derivative value),¹⁰ we should allow for valuing which is non-instrumental but derivative. Reasoning guided by such valuing is not 'calculative'.

To see non-instrumental but derivative pro-attitudes in action, consider an example inspired by Korsgaard (1988). I assign special value to the scarf you gave me, even though I rarely wear it and I have other scarves that keep me warmer. My valuing is not instrumental valuing. But it is derivative. I don't treat the scarf as having *ultimate* value. Instead, I value the scarf *because* it is a token of your friendship. It is just that the 'because' here is not an instrumental 'because'. To use a different example which applies a model from Hurka (2001), I value art-appreciation, and my valuing of it is not instrumental. But this valuing is also not bedrock. I value art-appreciation *because* I value art and I think appreciation is the fitting response to art.

Intentions are pro-attitudes that can manifest non-instrumental ways of valuing. Hence they can be derivatively yet non-instrumentally rational in the same way. This point matters, because it allows us to see that many processes of reasoning that have been *modeled* instrumentally may be better understood as concluding in different kinds of derivatively rational intentions.

Another contrast that the face-value understanding supports is between instrumental reasoning and what I will call *constitutive* reasoning and what Millgram (2001) called *specificationalist* reasoning. Suppose I think I should respect your privacy. I think about what would be involved in doing this now. I decide not to enter your room without knocking and hearing you say it is OK to enter. Here it would misrepresent me to regard *promoting respect for privacy* as an end that I have,

⁸ Hence the ultimate ends of an agent's reasoning will appear from their perspective to have *final value* of the kind consequentialists use to explain rightness; see Pettit (1989) and Scanlon (1998: Ch.2) for this characterization of consequentialism, and Scanlon for an argument that not all fundamental value is final value in this sense.

⁹ Instrumental reasoning is often merely portrayed (a) as starting with the belief that Y-ing is *necessary* for X-ing rather than the more specific belief that Y-ing is a *necessary means* to X-ing, and (b) as ending with an intention to Y which is not qualified as an *instrumental intention*. See Brunero (2020) for a striking illustration of this tendency.

¹⁰ See Korsgaard (1988) for one example, and Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020) for discussions of the importance of this distinction for understanding the value of epistemic rationality.

and to regard knocking and waiting as a *means* to bringing about this end. I just intend to respect your privacy, and I intend to knock because that is what it is to respect your privacy on this occasion.¹¹ To be sure, I will bring about the state of affairs in which your privacy is respected. Hence we can *model* my action as a ‘constitutive means’ to bringing about this state of affairs. But we would not correctly describe *my reasoning* if we portrayed it in this way.¹²

If this is right, we should not think that patterns of reasoning such as the following necessarily involve instrumental rationality:

I intend to X
I believe that Y-ing would constitute X-ing in this case
So I intend to Y

If the background belief which leads me to the intention to Y is the belief that I ought to respect your privacy, then it would be a misrepresentation to portray me as thinking that privacy is an end to be promoted, with my action understood as a means to bringing about this state of affairs. For there must be a form of reasoning that enables one to properly respond to values to be respected, by determining what respect consists in on the occasion and then leading me intend to do that thing.

This is not yet to pass judgment on consequentialism or the consequentializing project,¹³ or to stack the deck in favor of non-consequentialism.¹⁴ All I am saying so far is that it is possible to think like a non-consequentialist, and to arrive at an intention by reasoning that reflects a non-consequentialist way of valuing. This is a modest claim. It is consistent with this claim that this way of thinking doesn’t track the objective norms, and that I shouldn’t be thinking in this way. It is also consistent with this claim that this way of thinking is right because it promotes the good. All I claim so far is this: (1) it is possible to value something as a value to be respected and not (or not merely) as a value to be promoted, and (2) there is a form of reasoning from a more general intention to a more specific intention which embodies valuing in this way.¹⁵

Even if X is an end to-be-promoted, the move to a more specific intention also won’t be an instrumental move if it only involves specification. To use a kind of example from Richardson (1994: 77), suppose that at the restaurant, I want something light and vegetarian, see that there is only one option (the salad), think that it would actually be quite nice, and form the intention to have it. If I think it would be nice, I won’t be eating it as a means to the more general end of eating something light and vegetarian. I will want to eat it for its own sake. Still, I came to the practical conclusion that I will eat it on the basis of practical deliberation, and I moved from a more general intention to a more

¹¹ See Hurley (2018: 32) for the same point.

¹² Under this heading, we might also think about the early responses to Smith (1994)’s claim that *de dicto* moral concern is fetishistic. Some commentators (e.g., Lillehammer (1997)) noted that starting with a non-instrumental desire to do what is right *de dicto* is compatible with arriving at non-instrumental desires to do particular right things *de re*. To avoid fetishism, we can avoid representing the reasoning from the general *de dicto* desire to the *de re* desires as instrumental reasoning, and avoid representing the *de dicto* desire as a desire to promote rightness as such. Following Dreier (2000), we could imagine that a person begins with the second-order desire that *if X-ing is right*, they desire to X-ing for its own sake, and then comes to desire X-ing for its own sake on the basis of the recognition that X-ing is right. This person also derives a more specific intention from a more general intention, but again the derivation should not be represented as a transition from end to means. Still, it could be represented by the following transition:

I intend to do what is right for its own sake.
X-ing would constitute being right in this case.
So I intend to do X for its own sake.

We cannot, then, assume that reasoning with this form is best understood as instrumental reasoning to a constitutive means: this would too quickly invite the charge of fetishism.

¹³ See Dreier (1993) and Portmore (2007) for defenses, and Schroeder (2007b) for a critique.

¹⁴ As Hurley (2018) emphasizes, it is only to *avoid* stacking the deck *in favor of* consequentialism.

¹⁵ I agree with Raz (2011, 2016) that *no* values are fundamentally to be promoted. But this view isn’t required for the view I defend here. Only briefly in Section 2 will I mention how to piece together this Razian view with the myth view of instrumental rationality. (Note that Raz didn’t explicitly connect these ideas, and still allowed for instrumental value in Raz (2005).)

specific intention. If I merely wanted to eat *something* vegetarian and the salad seemed fine, perhaps we could imagine that I order it as a means to eating something vegetarian. But my reasoning is not *always* correctly portrayed in this way. That would remain true even if this other way of reasoning were more faithful to the objective norms. We are not trying to understand those norms, but just the rational possibilities for transitions. On the face of it, there are many acceptable ways of transitioning from intention and belief to a further intention which are not instrumental.

1.3. *Face-Value Instrumental Reasoning and Rationality in More Detail*

With those contrasts made, let's consider a fuller statement of the face-value understanding:

Instrumental reasoning is reasoning from an end to-be-promoted and the belief that X-ing is a means to promoting that end to the intention to do X at least partly for the reason that it would help to promote the end. Ends-to-be-promoted are naturally embodied in intentions, but other motivational pro-attitudes within our rational control could embody ends-to-be-promoted (e.g., desires). But as we have seen, it is essential that the reasoning ends with an at least partly *instrumental pro-attitude*. It cannot end with an intention to X just for the sake of X-ing. It also cannot intend with an intention to X for the sake of Y, where Y is not understood as a value to be promoted. It also cannot end with an intention to do an action that includes an instrument (a piano) but constitutes a larger intrinsically valuable activity (playing beautiful piano music). It must end with an intention to use a means in order to bring about an end.

We can then distinguish between (i) a sufficient means, which is just an X-ing that will on its own produce the end, (ii) a partial means, which is an X-ing that will *help* to produce the end, and (iii) a necessary means, which is an essential step in the process of producing the end-state. (iii), it is worth noting, excludes *preconditions*, since they are undertaken *before* the process of producing the end-state starts. Eating breakfast is not part of writing a paper in the afternoon, though it may be a causally necessary precondition. The distinction here seems right. Preconditional actions are distinct from means in the same way that enabling conditions (e.g., oxygen) are distinct from causes (e.g., fire). To take another example, when I say that I am going to the park to fly a kite, I don't regard going to the park as a *means* of flying the kite. I rather regard being in the park as *putting me in a position* to fly a kite.

An *instrumental requirement of rationality* will then be any 'iffy' principle that says that you are rationally required to have a certain instrumental intention *if and because* you have a certain end-to-be-promoted and a certain instrumental belief. A *pressure of instrumental rationality* will be any *apparent reason* to have an instrumental intention which is generated by the appearance that certain instrumental facts hold and one's having an end-to-be-promoted.¹⁶

Although it is not normally stated in the literature on requirements of rationality, it is crucial to add the 'and because' clause to a candidate principle of instrumental rationality. We must allow that there might be *other* reasons why you could be rationally required to have an instrumental intention given certain other mental states on some occasion, and these reasons *might not support belief in any instrumental requirement*. Here we should compare principles of rationality with other explanatory normative principles. Can compare an unexplanatory principle which says that it is right to do X if C with an explanatory principle which says that it is right to do X if C *because* C. It is, for example, right to be nice to the people next to you if you are on a plane. But it is not right to be nice to these people *because* you are on the plane.

Finally, I leave open whether instrumental requirements are to be formulated in a wide-scope way or a narrow-scope way.¹⁷ But I do assume that coming to have an instrumental intention *on the basis of* an end-to-be-promoted and an instrumental belief which coheres with that instrumental intention counts as *complying* with some instrumental requirement.

1.4. *Claims and Disclaimers*

With these definitions in the background, I can now state the two main claims I will oppose:

¹⁶ I endorse Fogal (forthcoming)'s claim that rationality involves responding to pressures, not just requirements.

¹⁷ For discussion, see Errol Lord's contribution to this volume.

The Status Explanation Claim: In the cases which can be *modeled* instrumentally, the fact that the conclusion-intentions are rational is *explained* by the fact that they comply with requirements or pressures of instrumental rationality.

The Necessarily Glue Claim: Rational practical reasoning, intending, and acting are necessarily held together, at least in significant part, by instrumental reasoning and responsiveness to apparent instrumental pressures.¹⁸

In opposition, I will argue that (1) apparent instrumental relations don't do the explanatory work that they are commonly assumed to do, contrary to the first claim, and that (2) we needn't fret, since we don't need them to confer a sufficiently fine-grained order on thought and action.

Along the way, I will also be defending some contrasting positive claims:

The Valuing Claim: In the cases which some have modeled instrumentally, the fact that the conclusion-intention is rational is much better explained by the fact that it manifests a derivative but non-instrumental way of valuing (parts of) the event that is intended.

The Non-Instrumental Order Claim: Rational practical reasoning, intention, and acting exhibit a fine-grained order in which many attitudes and acts have *derivative rationality* that is inherited from their occurring for the sake of certain non-instrumental values.

These claims distinguish my rejection of instrumental rationality from other approaches that dispense with fundamental instrumental coherence requirements, such as reasons-first approaches (Kolodny (2005), Raz (2005), Kieseewetter (2017), Lord (2018)), cognitivist approaches (Setiya (2007), Wallace (2001)), and the most familiar Kantian approaches (Korsgaard (2009), Hampton (1998)). Indeed, I see this paper as a further installment in a wider rejection of instrumental ideology that would also target instrumental *value* and *reasons*, which are not targeted by some of these other theorists. Kieseewetter, Kolodny, Lord, and Raz, for example, don't deny that there are instrumental reasons.

Although a wider anti-instrumentalist agenda is in the background, this paper is still only explicitly about rationality in what Scanlon (1998) called 'the narrow sense'. Hence, as a final disclaimer, I stress that this paper is not directly opposing views about reasons like Schroeder (2007a)'s Humeanism or Portmore (2011)'s consequentialism. Some arguments might extend against these views. But some would be more questionable. For example, the argument from alienation I give in §2.2 would seem too quick against Humeanism or consequentialism about reasons, for reasons made clear in Schroeder (2007a: Ch.2) and Railton (1984). But alienation matters more directly for the theory of rationality.¹⁹

2. Against the Status Explanation Claim

I will now turn to give five arguments against the Status Explanation Claim.

2.1. *Argument from the Explanation of Canonical Examples*

¹⁸ Few explicitly make these claims; the one clear example is Vogler (2002)'s insightful defense of instrumental reason. But I assume that the fundamental requirements of rationality are justified by the fact that they *explain* the rational status of certain attitudes or combinations of attitudes. Hence, anyone who takes the instrumental principle to be a fundamental principle of rationality implicitly accepts the first claim. It is hard to see why one would believe the first claim unless one believed the second. But for a defense of the second, see Anscombeans like Vogler (2002) and Schwenkler (2019), who take it to capture Anscombe's suggestion that action exhibits a 'calculative order'.

¹⁹ The importance of alienation for the theory of action was noted in Lavin (2013). But I will be defending the near opposite of Lavin's claim. Lavin suggested that if there were *basic* actions, they would necessarily involve alienation, and he was doubtful about basic actions for this reason. I will be arguing that if there were *instrumental* actions, they would necessarily involve alienation, and I am doubtful about instrumental rationality for this reason.

The first argument involves looking at the kinds of examples that might seem best modeled instrumentally, and then maintaining that the rationality of the derivative intentions that hold these cases together is not instrumental on the face-value understanding.

I take it that if instrumental rationality is going to be on display anywhere, it will be in an extended course of action which can be divided into steps or phases, where the course leads to completion. If it is worth its salt, instrumental rationality should be leading us from one step to the next, leading up to the literal end. The trouble, however, is that the steps in many courses of action really do not seem best described as *means* to the completion of the action. Instead, they seem to be *parts* of the action-in-progress, where the action-in-progress just is the process of completing itself. The intentional doing of any of the steps at a given time *just is* the intentional doing of the action, albeit incomplete at the time but in the process of being completed. Consider building a toy house out of blocks for fun. Each block-laying is a step in this activity. But I am not laying the block as a means to building the house. My laying the block is part of my building the house. I am already in the business of performing some of the action which is my end.²⁰

It seems better to understand what is going on here as a case in which I intend a whole non-derivatively, and then intend the parts derivatively, because their unity *is* the whole intended as an end. While the intentions to do each smaller step are derivatively rational, and rational relative to the end, the relation of derivation isn't a paradigmatic instrumental relation.

If this is all correct, then if we can attribute the status of derivative rationality to my intention to lay this block, it does not seem that that status is *best explained* by an instrumental requirement or by instrumental pressures. Instead, it seems better to say that it makes sense for me to intend to lay this block because that is *part of what is involved in* building the house.

Of course, not all the things I do which are intelligible in light of my desire to build the house are parts of building the house. But those other things aren't means either: they are *preconditions*. Buying the blocks, or clearing space for them, for example, are not in themselves *means* to building the house.

If we work with the face-value understanding of instrumental rationality, then, it doesn't seem that the cases where instrumental rationality would be most expected to be in play are cases where it is needed to do any explanatory work. For we can divide our smaller activities into two groups: (1) the activities which lead up to one's undertaking some project, and (2) the activities which are parts of the progress of the project. The activities that most straightforwardly come to mind under each heading do not seem properly described as means to the completion of the activity. They are either preconditions or parts. Parts can be *modeled* from the outside as constitutive means. But the intentions which hold together a complex action are not best understood as instrumental intentions, and the thinking behind them is not instrumental.²¹

2.2. *Instrumental Treatment of One's Actions Is Not Fully Rational: An Argument from Alienation*

Having an instrumental intention which targets one's own actions is, I believe, anomalous on close inspection. I am not even clear that it is possible to wittingly sustain such an intention, at least for very long. For, as I will argue, having such an intention would involve a sort of *alienation* that structural rationality should frown upon, not require.²² And it is worth stressing in advance that the

²⁰ For a longer defense of this picture, see Thompson (2008). Curiously, Thompson (p.89) says that he is interested in "instrumental" or "teleological" rationalization, and that his model of naïve rationalization offers a better picture of this. As I will suggest below, it may be fine to describe some rationality as *teleological*, but this should be sharply distinguished from anything *instrumental*, as well as from anything 'calculative'.

²¹ Audi (2001: 84) puts the point well in a discussion of pleasure: '[W]hat we intrinsically want *for* pleasure is not properly said to be wanted as a means to pleasure. Wanting something for pleasure is wanting it for the (presumed) intrinsic qualities of it that make it attractive to one *as* pleasurable; it is not wanting it as a causal or other contingent producer of pleasure. To want something for pleasure is to want it in the anticipation of pleasure *in* realizing it.'

²² The alienation at issue is a generalization of what Marx (1988) discusses in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. As Benhabib (1994) usefully summarizes, a central concern of the Frankfurt school was to generalize Marx's points about alienation to life under capitalism in general to yield (using Horkheimer's phrase) a 'critique of instrumental reason'; see especially Horkheimer (1947, 2012), Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), and Marcuse (1964). As I see it, this project was incomplete and never quite lived up to Horkheimer's label. It focused only on instrumental reason *under capitalism* instead of giving a critique of instrumental reason in general, which is on display

familiar consequentialist tool for circumventing alienation from Railton (1984) won't help here: for here we are not dealing with objective norms but rather subjective principles.

Before I give the argument, a word of caution is in order about the kind of example I will use and my strategy in using it. I will consider cases in which instrumental motivation seems *most transparently* to be on display. Instrumental motivation may be less transparent in other cases if it is present. But I think that is because there will also be non-instrumental motivations working alongside instrumental motivations in other cases. What I assume is that if there is such a thing as instrumental rationality, it is possible for it to be fully manifest in the most transparent cases of instrumental motivation. I will then suggest that these cases are cases of alienation and that what makes them alienating is the fact that they involve instrumental motivation. I will also assume that genuine rational requirements should not be such that complying with them transparently *constitutes* alienation. Of course, one might be inclined to say in the kinds of cases I have in mind that there is more going on in the psychology of the agent which contributes to their alienation. But I will want to say that the crux of the alienation is the instrumental motivation.

Let me proceed. The literature on requirements of rationality has gotten people used to the idea that our *actions* can be means. A standard statement of the most often discussed instrumental principle, after all, has the simple form:

IP-Simple: It is a rational requirement that if you intend to A and believe that B-ing is a necessary means for A-ing, then you intend to B,

where A-ing and B-ing are actions.²³

After reading those words many times, they can sound like they pick out something familiar. But I think we need to take a step back and reflect on how strange it would be to transparently conceive of a possible action of yours as a *means*, and to intend that action *because* you believe it to be a means to a further end, which is what you would do on one way of complying with this requirement.

I allow that we are familiar with means in ordinary life, but the means with which we are familiar are not actions: they are mere things, such as forks and paintbrushes. We use these things, and our usings are actions, and these actions perhaps have 'instrumental value'.²⁴ But it doesn't follow from these claims that we regard the actions themselves as means and intend them for that reason. Instead, and in line with the previous section, we normally will these actions as parts of some larger undertaking. One's use of the paintbrush is part of one's activity of painting, for example.

A vertigo creeps in when we start to conceive of our smaller activities as themselves means which don't share in the value of the project to which they were meant to be contributions. Conceiving of them in this way detaches them from the larger meaningful activity in which they were formerly installed. It could detach them from our agency. If I could think of possible movements of my hand as tools that I could use to achieve some other end, and I could get those movements to happen with that objective in mind, the movements might rightly seem to be puppetry. Partly for this reason, it is hard to get myself to conceive of my acts in this way.

in non-capitalist social structures and in the solitary life of Robinson Crusoe (a favorite example of neo-classical economists (see Grapard (1995: 36-43)).

There are independent lines of Continental thought which get closer to targeting instrumental reason as such. As Ridley (2017) sees it, this project may have been in the background of Nietzsche's central contributions to the philosophy of action. Arendt (1958: Part IV) ought to be the *locus classicus*. Weber (1921/1968), Heidegger (1954/1977), and Gorz (1989) also get closer than the Frankfurt school to a wider critique of instrumental reason. ²³ See Bratman (1987), Hill (1973), Kiesewetter (2017), Korsgaard (1997), Scanlon (2007), Schroeder (2005) and Way (2012) for examples of this way of thinking about the means covered by the instrumental principle. Brunero (2012), Harman (1976), Kolodny and Brunero (2018), and Lord (2018) give formulations that instead cast one's *intentions* as means; the arguments in this section apply even more strongly, I think, to this formulation. Owing to background views about the nature of intention, Broome (1999, 2013: 157) gives a more unusual formulation in which what is intended is an *event*, which represents a different approach discussed in Section 3. At least in translation, Kant (1785/2012) varies between the first and last formulations.

²⁴ I assume for the moment that there is instrumental value. But see Prichard (1937/2002: 214) for doubts about the category of instrumental value which complement the view here. (Thanks to Jonathan Dancy for drawing this to my attention.)

I can think of cases in which this feeling is more familiar. But they fail to involve full rationality, at least if rationality is something of value. And it is plausible that what *makes* them fall short is the fact that they involve treating one's actions as means. Some examples might be cases in which I have to *get myself* to do something in which I see no value, but which has a good chance of producing some unspecified later advantage (e.g., writing a funding bid), or cases in which I'm merely working on the basis of incentives (e.g., factory labor). In such cases, I can get myself to do the required act only by manipulating myself in some way, as in cases in which I try to respond to pragmatic reasons for belief. This self-manipulation involves a sort of incoherence. Yet it also seems these are the kinds of cases in which I am most transparently responding to instrumental pressures, by treating my action as a means. In cases in which I can fit the action into some larger meaningful project, it is more appropriate to think of my action as part of something larger which I intend as an end. It gets a share of the same value that this larger thing has as an end.

2.3. *Technical Knowledge Doesn't Mark Out a Distinct Field of Practical Rationality*

One might suspect that what this shows is that the instrumental principle should never been stated in a way that portrayed *actions* as the relevant means. A different option would be to push the idea of a means back into the world, where it belongs. This option would better capture the Baconian idea that technical knowledge enables us to be masters of nature rather than parts of the machinery through which nature is controlled. But this view leads to a different problem for the Status Explanation Claim.

The problem centers around the fact that it is unclear why there would be a distinctive sub-compartment of practical rationality which comes into play just when one is using tools or treating other worldly entities as instruments. A form of rationality should not be marked off from others just because it covers actions which involve certain kinds of objects (tools), or certain kinds of dealings with objects (treatment as tools). We can subsume distinctive forms of object-treatment under a more general principle equally applicable to non-instrumental cases. This broader principle is the subjective analogue of the principle that there is reason of the right kind to respond to X in the way that is fitting to X (e.g., to desire the desirable, to esteem the estimable, to envy the enviable):

The Fitting Treatment Principle: If you believe that X is fittingly treated in way W, then there is subjective reason of the right kind to intend to treat X in way W.

This principle captures our understanding of how to treat tools as a special case of our understanding of how to treat any objects of action. If I conceive of something as a toaster, I conceive of its function as being to toast. Hence it is sensible for me to intend to put it to use according to its function, by putting bread in it. But there is no new or distinctive kind of rationality in play here. The rationality in play is the same which is in play when I envy people that I believe to be enviable, or when esteem people I believe to be estimable.

Conceiving of something as an instrument does involve conceiving of it as being fittingly treated in a certain way. And so the belief that something is an instrument can be sensibly heeded by acting in certain ways. But the rationality which is on display in such cases is not distinctive. Servicing the apparently serviceable is a special case of X-ing the apparently X-able. Indeed, some cases of using instruments may involve no instrumental intentions: playing piano is most often done for its own sake, though it obviously involves using the piano.

Perhaps one could claim that there is a distinctive field of knowledge—technical knowledge—which is invoked by the practical reasoning that others have described as instrumental. But this fact still doesn't give rise to a distinctive form of practical rationality. The core point here is not new, and was made before by Kolnai (1962), Wiggins (1975) and Williams (1981). Kolnai (1962: 187) put it especially well:

So far as the physician confines himself to the determination of suitable curative means...he does not deliberate but performs the theoretical activities of recalling to his mind relevant knowledge, looking up textbooks for more information, considering the peculiarities of the case in hand, weighing probabilities, comparing the average efficacy of various methods in

similar cases, and so forth. He does what a consulting physician, not responsible for any decision, might do just as well for him. The knowledge he brings to his practical task is ampler and more exact but not of a logically distinct nature than my wholly unpractical knowledge....

To be sure, knowledge of the instrumental properties of objects may play a partial role in helping one to acquire know-how. And know-how is distinctively practical. But properly understood, these points just put us on the other horn of my overarching dilemma. When a person manifests knowledge how to A by B-ing, her B-ing constitutes her A-ing and is known to do so in virtue of her know-how: her B-ing is a *way* of A-ing in a constitutive sense, not a means. In this case, the agent does not treat her B-ing as a means to A-ing: the only thing treated as a means is the object.

Knowledge of the instrumental properties of the object is not on its own sufficient for practical knowledge, as Kolnai noted. Even if intellectualism about know-how were true, it is not *this* propositional knowledge which guides one's action: it is knowledge of a *way* of acting that is presented to one as potentially constituting one's intentionally A-ing.²⁵ My knowledge that *this* is how to open a door might have been partly causally generated by my knowledge of the instrumental properties of the handle. But it is not that knowledge which is playing the explanatory role when I know how to open the door.

Having resolved these issues, we can now combine the point in this section with the point in the last to yield a larger argument against the Status Explanation Claim:

1. We can either take the means of means-end coherence to be (a) *actions* (the implicit view in the literature), or (b) *mere things* which are treated in a certain way through one's acting.
2. If (a), the instrumental principle is false (and hence the Status Explanation Claim is false).
3. If (b), the Status Explanation claim is false: the rationality of one's use of the thing is better explained by a combination of fittingness and the constitutive rationality of action guided by know-how.
4. Hence the Status Explanation Claim is false.

2.4. *Arguments from Subsumption and Embeddedness*

I turn to a fourth argument that is similar in spirit to the first, but consistent with a larger concession to instrumental thinking. It involves looking at a kind of rational activity that seems to have a face-value instrumental structure, and then arguing that the fundamental explanation of one's rationality in these cases doesn't flow via instrumental relations. This time, the claim will be that the apparently instrumental relations in play have significance only as special cases of a more general non-instrumental relation, and are froth on the waves if we are interested in the fundamental explanations. The argument involves a twist on the point about instrumentalist thinking in the epigraph from Arendt (1958), and is a generalization of the point that substantivist economists following Polanyi (1944, 1977) make about economic rationality.²⁶

It seems clear that we often do one thing *in order to* do another thing. I go to the park in order to feed the ducks, or to the store in order to get groceries, for example. It also seems that an intention to X can be linked to an intention to Y via a practical basing relation which is expressed by 'in order to'. This basing-relation is at the very least a *teleological* relation, where Y-ing is the *aim* and X-ing is part of the process of fulfilling the aim. But it also *appears* to be instrumental. To be sure, I want to explain away this appearance, and did so earlier: I would say that going to the park isn't really a *means* of feeding the ducks, but rather a precondition for feeding them, and I would say that going to the store is either also a precondition, or is *part* of getting groceries understood as a more expansive activity. Still, once we are face-to-face with a description of an activity which uses the

²⁵ It is telling that different stripes of intellectualists like Stanley and Williamson (2001) and Bengson and Moffett (2012) were inclined to appeal to ways rather than means, so that canonical intellectualism reduces knowledge of how to A to knowledge of a way W that W is a way to A, rather reducing it to knowledge of a means M that it is a means to producing some state of affairs.

²⁶ For a discussion of the overlap between Arendt and Polanyi, see Gorz (1989).

phrase ‘in order to’, we may be less inclined to explain it away. We might at this point be more inclined to say that our face-value understanding at the beginning was too narrow.

Suppose, then, that we concede that point, and we simply agree that there is a practical basing relation which is instrumental and picked out by ‘in order to’. Does it follow that we must accept the Status Explanation Claim? No, and for two reasons. The first reason is that the Status Explanation Claim concerns the *fundamental* story about why an intention is rational. We have conceded that an instrumental basing relation may be part of the superficial story. But we are not forced to claim that it is part of the fundamental story. For the ‘in order to’ relation is plausibly a special case of a more general relation, and there might be good reason to prefer a fundamental explanation which appeals to this more general relation.

Let me explain what I have in mind by considering the relationship between the two constructions Arendt mentions: ‘in order to’ and ‘for the sake of’. It is clear that ‘X-es for the sake of Y’ does not entail ‘X-es in order to Y’, because ‘for the sake of’ can relate an action to (a) non-actions (e.g., persons for whose sake we act, or values for the sake of which we act) and (b) actions which are not fundamentally cases of bringing about states-of-affairs (e.g., the action of respecting the law). Hence, we should not try to reduce ‘for the sake of’ facts to ‘in order to’ facts. To do so, as Arendt (1954: Part IV) emphasizes, is to over-extend instrumental reasoning. But what is interesting is that we *can* reduce ‘in order to’ facts to ‘for the sake of’ facts. Consider, for example, the sentence ‘He went to the fridge to get some milk’. We can, I suggest, translate this sentence into the ‘sake’ ideology as follows: ‘He went to the fridge for the sake of getting some milk’. This second sentence is not as elegant, but it is not false and not nonsense. It is true if the first is true, and vice versa.

These facts suggest that the ‘sake’ locution is *more general* than the ‘in order to’ locution. But there are good reasons why we might want a fundamental explanation of the rational status of an intention or action to invoke more general ideology. Compare physics. There are different kinds of physical forces; there are, for example, *contact forces* such as frictional forces, and *non-contact* forces such as gravitational force. Suppose we want to explain why some object with a constant mass has accelerated. We could give an ordinary explanation that appeals to a specific kind of contact force, and it would normally be more elegant to do so—e.g., ‘The ball moved because I kicked it’ is more elegant than ‘The ball accelerated because I applied a force to it’. But the fundamental explanation will go via a force law that doesn’t discriminate between contact and non-contact forces, such as Newton’s first law; we shouldn’t invoke the idea of a contact force if we want the most fundamental explanation of why the ball accelerated. If we are interested in the fundamental laws of rationality, I think we should also be appealing to the most general features of our actions that *can* be used to do the work. Doing so illuminates the deeper similarities between otherwise different-seeming cases, in much the way that Newton’s laws illuminate the similarities between the motions of balls and planets.

We should not believe that ‘in order to’ explanations are fundamental if they can be subsumed under ‘for the sake of’ explanations in a way that reveals the similarity between cases properly described with ‘in order to’ and cases which are only properly described with ‘for the sake of’. If so, we should not accept the Status Explanation Claim even if we agree that ‘in order to’ explanations are face-value instrumental.

But this is not all that we can say to put ‘in order to’ in its place. A second point is that ‘in order to’ explanations are tolerable only given background assumption that the agent to whom they apply has some irreducibly ‘for the sake of’ values. This point is hard to see only because considerations of charity require us to trust that a background story is available unless we have overriding reason to treat the agent as maniacal.

Here the ‘sake’-based translation is illuminating. Suppose that I am going to the fridge for the sake of getting some milk. Unless I am a maniac, this cannot be the only thing I can say about what I am doing. Suppose I ask myself why I am going to the fridge for the sake of getting milk, and there is literally no further story I can conjure. If that happens, then either the vertigo of alienation will set in at least temporarily, making me feel lost, or it will become clear that I have lunatic values, which exhibit the kind of narrow irrationality that Parfit (1984) marked with the beloved example of ‘Future Tuesday Indifference’.

One might, of course, try to respond to this point by saying that we can just appeal to *other* values which are not irreducibly ‘for the sake of’ values. But here I think Arendt had an insight that needs recognition, which is briefly put in the epigraph but expanded in her neglected discussion of

work. She suggests that any attempt to terminate the regress which appeals *only* to values-to-be-promoted will merely amount to kicking the can down the instrumental road. Stopping with anything which is conceived of by the agent as ‘to be promoted’ in the way that nourishment is ‘to be promoted’ will either lead to alienation or reveal Future-Tuesday values. To be sure, it might initially appear better to invoke happiness, but that is only because happiness is also a value *for the sake of which* we act, not *just* something that we strive *in order to produce in ourselves or get*. Conceiving of it in the latter way puts us on the hedonic treadmill. It would be worse than Future-Tuesday-indifference to have jogging on the hedonic treadmill as one’s ultimate end. So, in saying that we want happiness for its own sake, we are *not* saying that we want to have it in order to have it. ‘In order to’ is irreflexive while ‘for the sake of’ is not. It is partly for this reason that we can end the ‘sake’ regress while remaining within the sphere of values-for-the-sake-of-which.

At the very least, this is what we should say if ‘in order to’ is to be taken at face-value as expressing an instrumental relation. If ‘in order to’ means ‘as a means to’, it must be irreflexive. Ends are not things which are means to themselves. Ends stand outside of the chain of in-order-to relations and can only terminate the regress of purposive action by doing so. Perhaps for this reason, the longer phrase Aristotle used to explain the notion of a *telos* (*to hou heneka*) is properly translated as ‘that for the sake of which’, not ‘that end as a means to which’.²⁷ If ‘in order to’ has a reading closer to ‘to hou heneka’, we have no reason for concessions to instrumental rationality. For that would show that this meaning isn’t instrumental.²⁸

2.5. *Argument from the Value of Rationality*

So far, my arguments have been *internal* to theory of practical reason. I have been arguing that rationality and reasoning understood on their own terms don’t support the Status Explanation Claim, and hence that we don’t have a sufficient direct reason to believe that the instrumental principle is a core principle of rationality. But there is also an external argument that we can give if we assume that rationality matters, which parallels some arguments I have given before for rejecting attempts to explain epistemic rationality in instrumental terms in Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020). Although I think it is the most important argument, I give it last because it does require buying into the background assumption that rationality matters in its own right.

The argument rests on the following assumptions about the significance of rationality:

The Necessary Value Claim: Necessarily, if a mental state manifests rationality, that fact as such makes that mental state *pro tanto* better than it would otherwise be.

Derivativeness: Although necessarily possessed by a mental state, the value which inheres in a mental state in virtue of being rational is *derivative*, relative to a more fundamental value (it is just that this *derivative* value will turn out to be *non-instrumental*).

These are claims about the value *simpliciter* of rationality; note that in other work, I instead defended the idea that epistemic rationality necessarily has a special, non-instrumental kind of derivative *epistemic* value relative to the more fundamental *epistemic* value of truth. It would also be possible to give a narrower argument from the assumption that rational *action* necessarily has a certain kind of intrinsic value *for the agent*: namely, it makes the agent’s action *meaningful* for the agent. Indeed, I think these arguments are related, since meaningfulness for the agent is not only good for the agent, but good *simpliciter*. The fundamental value relative to which structural practical rationality has derivative value might be meaningfulness.

²⁷ See Johnson (2005).

²⁸ In discussing whether the themes of this paper are compatible with his (2019) reading of Anscombe, John Schwenkler pointed out to me that the most general phrase needed to understand the structure of action is not the one expressed by ‘in order to A’ but rather simply by ‘to A’, and he observed that the latter is far from being clearly instrumental. He hypothesized that the core relation is one of *directionality* rather than *instrumentality*. This hypothesis would render his picture of the structure of action compatible with the view that non-instrumental forms of intentional directedness might underwrite action rather than ones properly labeled ‘calculative’.

Given these assumptions, if we want to explain the value that any token instance of rationality has for any particular mental state or action, what we need to do is appeal to some relation R that this mental state or action bears to fundamental value such that:

Constraint on R: Necessarily, if a mental state bears R to a more fundamental value, this fact as such makes that mental state better than it would be if it didn't bear R to V.

In previous work on epistemic rationality, I had argued that R cannot be an instrumental relation to promoting true belief (or to any other plausible fundamental epistemic values), partly by extending a point from Jones (1997) and Zagzebski (2000). Both had suggested that the fact that justification necessarily makes a belief better is incompatible with justification having value merely as a product of an instrumentally valuable process, where the underlying non-instrumental value is true belief. Zagzebski made this point through her famous coffeemaker analogy: if a cup of coffee is already good, the fact that it was produced by reliable coffeemaker does not make it any better. Inverting a thought from Carter and Jarvis (2012), I added in Sylvan (2018) that the fact that a bad cup of coffee was produced by a reliable coffeemaker also doesn't make it any better, and I suggested that this was a general point about products of instrumentally valuable processes, though *not* a general point about *derivative value*, since there are non-instrumental forms of it which aren't subject to this reasoning. Hence, I suggested that R must be a non-instrumental relation, such as the relation of *being a fitting response* to more fundamental value. I added to this point in Sylvan (2020) by suggesting that we need a non-instrumental model to explain why rational beliefs have epistemic value even in worlds where rational belief-forming processes are not truth-conducive (e.g., skeptical scenarios).

What I didn't appreciate before is that this point casts more general doubt on the Status Explanation Claim, and on the instrumental principle itself. If complying with the instrumental principle were to give rise to any degree of rationality, this property of rationality would have to have necessary but derivative value, at least if we grant the assumptions I had already used in earlier work. Yet it seems clear that complying with the instrumental principle *as such* could only have instrumental value; if there are cases in which instrumentally rational intentions also seem to have some other sort of value, that is not due *just* to the fact that these intentions comply with the instrumental principle, but to other facts (e.g., the fact that these intentions are intentionally directed at actions that would be performed for the sake of fundamental value, which would be fitting). But if rationality as such confers some necessary value on a mental state, then it would also seem to follow that instrumental relations cannot suffice to make a mental state rational.

Note that it is no good to respond to these points by insisting that instrumental rationality necessarily has instrumental value. Perhaps one could argue instrumentally rational belief-forming processes as a type necessarily have instrumental value, though it is not plausible in skeptical scenarios that they will have *real* rather than *merely expected* instrumental value. But the token property of being instrumentally rational does not itself necessarily have instrumental value. It will not have such value if one's end is not achieved. And if one's value is achieved, there is no longer any good in keeping the mental state around.

Hence the swamping problem seems to generalize. This fact was noted in passing by Arendt (1957: 154-155): 'an end, once it is attained, ceases to be an end and loses its capacity to guide and justify the choice of means'.²⁹ And as Arendt was mainly observing, this point reveals that instrumental relations don't ground a kind of *rationality* at all. Whatever rationality is, it is necessarily something of intrinsic but derivative value.

3. Against the Necessary Glue Claim

I turn now to a briefer discussion of the Necessary Glue Claim, since much of the work needed to appreciate its falsity has already been done.

²⁹ At this stage of her argument, she used this point to defend the other side of Prichard's thought that alleged instrumental value is not a kind of value: alleged value as an end-in-itself is also not a kind of value. Granting Prichard's point, her conclusion is a corollary: for ends are the subordinate business partners of means.

It is worth noting first that this claim is weaker than the Status Explanation Claim. The Status Explanation Claim attempts to limn the *grounds* of the rationality of the attitudes which are conclusions of certain patterns of reasoning. The Necessary Glue Claim merely holds that apparent instrumental relations and transitions *necessarily hold together* these patterns of reasoning, which is consistent with their rationality having some deeper non-instrumental explanation. Hence, not all good arguments against the Status Explanation Claim will generate good arguments against the Necessary Glue Claim. But some of the foregoing points will help, as we will see.

To refute the Necessary Glue Claim, it is enough to show that there are rational patterns of reasoning open to us which are not held together by apparent instrumental relations and instrumental transitions which could lead us to all the same conclusions to which instrumental reasoning could lead us. This would show that we *don't need* instrumental reasoning. Notice that it is not necessary to refute the Necessary Glue Claim to show that we in fact don't rely on instrumental reasoning. Perhaps, for example, the Frankfurt School were right to make the sociological claim that practical life under capitalism is *in fact* held together by instrumental reasoning. I am not doing sociology, but just considering whether we can get to the same conclusions by non-instrumental reasoning. I will, however, be more concerned later to argue that we might need to replace our currently existing reasoning with more specific forms of non-instrumental reasoning to avoid the kind of alienation Marx discussed or the disenchantment of which Weber despaired.

Although the Necessary Glue Claim is weaker than the Status Explanation Claim, some of the points that we have already made provide a sufficient case against this weaker claim. In the previous section, I drew attention to the following styles of non-instrumental reasoning:

Constituents and Preconditions Reasoning: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic³⁰ desire to do a complex activity and (2) a belief about the constitution of that activity and the preconditions for doing it, to (3) non-fundamental but intrinsic desires for the constituents of this activity and (4) non-fundamental and extrinsic desires to establish the preconditions.

Specificationist Reasoning: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire to do a generic or vaguely conceived activity-type and (2) a belief about what a desirable token of that activity would look like, to (3) an intrinsic desire to do that token.

Tool-Aided Reasoning: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire or intention to do X, (2) the belief that tool T would be serviceable for one's X-ing, to (3) a derivative but intrinsic desire to X *with the help of tool T*.

'Sake'-Based Reasoning: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire for X or intention to Y and (2) the belief that Z-ing is suitably related to X or Y-ing, to (3) a non-fundamental but intrinsic desire to Z for X's sake or to Z for Y-ing's sake.

The first and third styles are structurally the closest to alleged instrumental reasoning, and it would be easiest to undermine the letter of the Necessary Glue Claim by appealing to them together with the view, already defended, that these forms of reasoning are not worth calling instrumental.

The third style easily replaces alleged instrumental reasoning. It is so close, however, that one might not see it as grounding a sufficient case against the *spirit* of the Necessary Glue Claim. To get that case, one would need to rely heavily on (1) Kolnai's claim that deliberation about the effectiveness of possible means is merely theoretical deliberation, and (2) the further assumption that only reasoning guided by a view about the serviceability of an object for one's own doings is

³⁰ By 'intrinsic desire to X', I mean *desire to do X for its own sake*. Combined with my case for separating the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction from the non-instrumental/instrumental distinction in Sylvan (2012, 2018), the discussion here brings out that we really need a *threefold* distinction in valuing and value: (i) the for-its-own-sake/for-the-sake-of-something-else distinction, (ii) the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction, and (iii) the non-instrumental/instrumental distinction. Threefold distinctions have been defended by others (see Tannenbaum (2010)), but the one here is a bit different from anything that has yet appeared in the axiological literature.

genuinely practical. Hence, I am least confident about this option: it feels too close to instrumental reasoning to represent an interesting alternative.

Properly appreciated, the first style is a more promising replacement. The attitude that this style of reasoning takes toward actions which are parts of a larger course of action is genuinely different from the attitude that instrumental reasoning takes toward such actions. It makes good sense to regard a person's desire for the constituents of an intrinsically worthwhile activity to itself be an intrinsic desire, and to think of a person as enjoying the parts in the same way that they enjoy the whole; indeed, the whole is on this view enjoyed through the enjoying of the parts. Eating each bite of a sandwich *as a means* to the completion of eating the sandwich is very different from eating each bite as parts of the eating of the whole sandwich. The first would not be enjoyable, barring bizarre values. The second would be enjoyable if the sandwich is good.

We can, I think, easily enough imagine replacing instrumental reasoning with either of these styles, though only the spirit of the second constitutes a different attitude toward life. A transition to either of these styles would more represent a change in our sense of what we are doing with practical thought than a change in the *format* of practical life. The transitions would be like the transition from greyscale to color, with the image otherwise remaining the same, not like the transition from photographic representation to representation through painting or sound. By contrast, a transition to the second or fourth styles would be a change in the medium of practical thinking.

Partly for this reason, it is harder to see how these transitions would work. The transition to the second cannot be done without a loss of practical granularity, as far as I can see. While there are some brilliant re-imaginings of practical reasoning in Kolnai (1962), following him in regarding specification as the sole fundamental form of practical reasoning replaces the bones of action with meat. Practical reasoning needs a skeleton to move—this is Vogler (2002)'s insight. Specification doesn't give practical reasoning a skeleton. Desiring to experience the *denouement* is not a more specific way of desiring to enjoy the story. We would need to combine this second style with the first. But the first alone captures what we might want from the second. For parts are not the only things we can regard as constituents of practical activities: a specification could itself be regarded as a constituent of a token of an activity type.

Replacing instrumental reasoning with 'sake'-based reasoning is an easier task, involving a single act of find-and-replace. But it will involve a reformatting of practical reasoning, and probably a shift in values. Note that the only simple way to replace an instrumental intention with a 'sake'-based intention will be to represent one as acting for the sake of bringing about the activity toward which the instrumental intention is directed. Yet acting for the sake of bringing about will often seem perverse. Hence these intentions may need to be dropped once their meaning is laid bare by the transition to 'sake'-based reasoning. To replace them with intentions with (as it happens) a similar upshot, one will need to find something of value within the states of affairs intended for the sake of which one acts, or widen one's view toward a state of affairs which does contain something of value. But I we must trust that this can be done to find a way of representing the agent's activity as meaningful from her point of view (which I think is required for the activity to be fully rational).

In the next and final major section, I will say more about how I think this replacement should go. But I think we can rest assured that there are several ways to replace instrumental reasoning with non-instrumental reasoning which will not involve too much loss of structure. Hence, I think we can reject the Necessary Glue Claim: there are other ways to hold practical reasoning together.

4. The Non-Instrumental Structure of Practical Rationality

Suppose one agrees that we can and should do without instrumental rationality. How then should we understand the non-instrumental structure of practical rationality? Our answer should be guided by some constraints from the previous sections:

Non-Alienation: Transparent manifestations of practical rationality should not be alienating as such.

Necessary Intrinsic (but Derivative) Value: (1) Necessarily, each manifestation of practical rationality should confer something of intrinsic value on the attitudes or actions that manifest

it. (2) But this intrinsic value should not be *fundamental*, since rationality is not of *fundamental* value: it should be derived from a relation to a more fundamental value—just a *non-instrumental* relation.

Sufficient Generality: The principles or pressures that underwrite the rationality of transitions should have sufficient generality: they shouldn't be so specific as to obscure rational similarities between different styles of transitioning.

Sufficient Granularity: The principles or pressures that underwrite the rationality of transitions should not be so general as to render the fine structure of these transitions epiphenomenal.

Existing views which dispense with principles of instrumental rationality at the fundamental level violate some of these constraints.

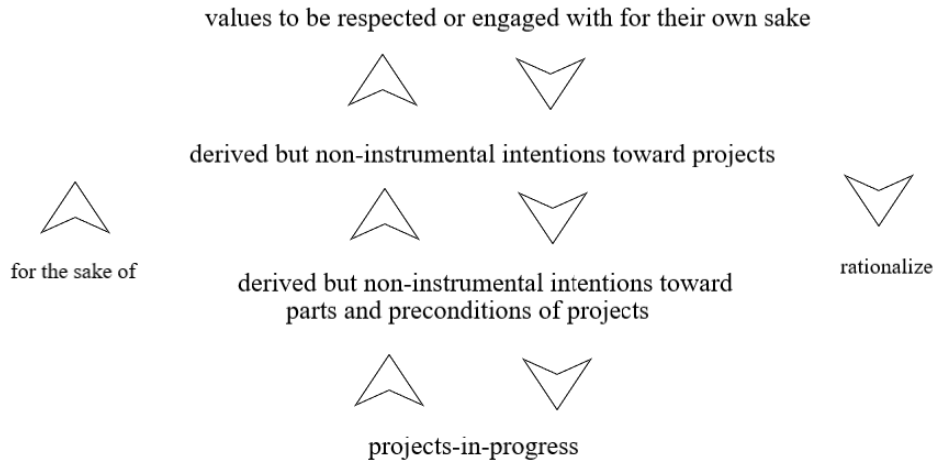
On the one hand, views such as Raz (2005)'s, Lord (2018)'s and Kieseewetter (2017)'s which seek to explain all facts about rationality by appealing to the *substantive* normativity of reasons most immediately threaten to disrespect the fourth constraint. While these writers have error theories to explain away the apparent significance of structural relations, it would be nice to have a view which doesn't require adopting such an error theory. A similar point would apply to other views which seek to ground rationality in purely substantive terms, such as Anderson (1993)'s fitting attitude account of rationality. The point would also apply to views which seek to privilege some specific forms of structural rationality, such as Kolodny (2005)'s 'transparency account', which renders the Enkratic Principle the supreme principle of structural rationality.

On the other hand, the other more structural alternatives that appear in the literature on practical reasoning and action theory violate other constraints. As I have already discussed, the specificationism of Kolnai (1962), Millgram (2001), Richardson (1994), and Wiggins (1975) violates the fourth constraint, depriving practical reasoning of its skeleton. As I have not already discussed, I think the constituents-and-preconditions view (perhaps this is Thompson (2008)'s view) doesn't make clear sense of the first or second constraints. Here I would want to invert a thought from Wallace (2001) about cases in which one skillfully executes activities one doesn't value. Wallace thinks a theory of rationality should explain the 'cleverness' that an agent can display in these cases. The reverse seems true to me. For if rationality has the value I assume it has, I don't see why we should want to call this 'cleverness' an exercise of practical rationality. If the activity is meaningless from the agent's perspective and is not a reflection of her values (e.g., is wage work for the capitalist), I see no practical rationality in intending the constituents of the activity. And I don't see anything *practically* clever here, though the agent may exhibit considerable theoretical rationality of the sort Kolnai discussed. There may also be great practical *skill* on display, but practical skill is not our topic here. Notice finally that the complaint here isn't a substantive complaint: there might be conclusive substantive objections to an agent's values, but an act might still be rational in the sense at issue here relative to those values.

Although I don't think the constituents-and-preconditions approach will work on its own, I do suspect that this style of reasoning will do some work when embedded in a better alternative. As I have hinted, my preferred approach replaces instrumental relations with 'for the sake of' relations. What is at the end of the chain of such relations is some ultimate value one holds dear; following a different strand in Raz (see his (2011)), I think values are never values-to-be-promoted. In a good person, such values might include equality, liberty, truth, happiness, wisdom. But for the moment, I leave it open whether a bad person might be practically rational, governing their life through bad values like domination, hierarchy, and machismo.

A person's values will *directly* rationalize final intentions to do certain actions, where these actions are regarded as ends in light of some conception of the values. The values of equality and liberty taken together might, for example, directly rationally require an intention to relate to others as equals as in a democracy, where some background conception leads one to regard democracy as the social arrangement that best embodies these values. While these intentions are final, they are also directed at the acts *for the sake of* the ultimate values. To continue the example, one intrinsically intends to relate to others as democratic equals *because* it respects equality and liberty.

Practical reasoning doesn't end with these intentions: this is the structural insight which we must preserve from instrumental reason. But the relationship between these intentions and *derived* intentions to do more specific actions will not be instrumental. It is here that I think the constituents-and-preconditions style of reasoning should come into the picture. But I think it should come into the picture in a subordinate role. The fundamental rationalizing relation will remain a 'for-the-sake-of' relation, but this relation will hold between one's ultimate intentions and one's very specific intentions *through* the structure of parts and preconditions. In a diagram, the view suggests that a rational agent's practical mind will be structured as follows:³¹



With this picture in mind, let's walk through the checklist of constraints.

Firstly, I take it that this picture satisfies the Non-Alienation constraint *unless* one thinks there are further constraints on the values that must be held to avoid alienation; I will return to that question. Having one's practical thought held together by this kind of structure is sufficient to give it a meaning that confers value by the subject's own lights.

Secondly, I take it that the fact just mentioned gives us as much of a vindication of the value of structural rationality as we could expect. The for-the-sake-of relation is, I suggest, capable of transmitting the meaningfulness of the values at the top to the lower levels of practical thought (e.g., intentions directed at parts and preconditions). Such meaningfulness has some ultimate value, and the lower levels share in it by bearing the for-the-sake-of relation to the top level.

Finally, I think the picture has a 'goldilocks' level of generality which satisfies the third and fourth constraints. Although there might be special cases of the for-the-sake-of relation needed to understand the structure of some specific values, a general account of rationality can omit these details. At the same time, we don't want to omit the intermediate steps that take us from the top to the bottom level. Perhaps, if Dancy (2018) is right, we could imagine an agent who moved directly from the top level to the bottom level through one exercise of *phronesis*. I don't want to disagree that actions are rationalized in the very same way as the intentions, but I do want to suggest that very often rational practical thought essentially includes extra steps.

The one question that remains is a relative of Parfit (1984)'s question about whether some desires are intrinsically irrational in Scanlon (1998)'s narrow sense of 'irrational'. One might wonder whether some values would be necessarily of deficient meaning *in a narrow sense* (i.e., meaningfulness from the subject's overall perspective). Smith (1994) and Markovits (2014) would

³¹ One important thing not included in the picture will be non-normative beliefs about the relations that must be in place for an attitude or act to be carried out for the sake of a value. These beliefs will replace the beliefs about instrumental relations that figure in the 'standard story of action'.

I should also not that I leave open whether the values and intentions that appear in the picture are cognitive or conative states. I would hope that the picture is consistent with both a cognitivist view about practical reasoning (of the kind that goes back to Harman (1976)) as well as a divided view that features both cognitive and irreducibly conative states. But at least if 'Humean' implies 'instrumentalist', the divided view would need to be divorced from the Humean theory of motivation.

have us believe that values which are contrary to morality will be blocked. Although I am a Kantian about both objective practical reasons and epistemic rationality, I am not sure about this claim, which is about structural practical rationality. At the same time, I am also not confident that there *aren't* some values which are excluded. I find it tempting to opt for constitutivism and hold that being a being of a certain kind necessarily comes along with values of a certain cast. I've already made this commitment by giving the 'for the sake of' relation its role. For there are values for the *ultimate* sake of which we cannot meaningfully act. If Arendt was right, *usefulness* is an example.

My only suspicion is that moral requirements will not themselves follow from the structural constraint on practical reason imposed by the 'for the sake of' relation. This is my spinoff on Velleman (1992)'s thought that full-blooded agents aren't necessarily 'squares'. I would deny that morality is *at odds* with practical reason. But I don't yet see that morality in the narrow sense will be *required*. An Aristotelian story might be more plausible, or there might be better constitutivist pictures, such as Katsafanas (2013)'s Nietzschean picture, or the neo-Aristotelian picture that Wood (1999) and Hurka (1993) ascribe to Marx. All of these *and* the Kantian pictures are consistent with my overall view, barring further arguments. The disagreements can be seen as disagreements about what can fully coherently be at the end of a 'for-the-sake-of' chain. It is beyond the scope of this paper to resolve these disagreements.

5. The Non-Instrumental Unity of Reason

I conclude by drawing attention to a final virtue of the view, which further distinguishes it from views that incorporate a fundamental instrumental requirement: it allows us to see reason as unified across its practical and epistemic manifestations. As I argued in Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020) and several others have also argued,³² instrumentalist views do not provide a tolerable unification of the epistemic and the practical. Hence, if one rejects instrumentalism but still accepts a fundamental requirement of instrumental rationality, the outcome will be disunity: since epistemic rationality is never instrumental rationality, it will be fundamentally unlike half of practical rationality on standard views. Thankfully, there is a non-instrumentalist unification that is just as powerful as the attempts at instrumentalist unification of pragmatists like James (1896/1979) and Rinard (2015/2017), instrumentalists like Foley (1987, 1992), and consequentialists like Pettigrew (2016).

But before turning to this unity, I first want to emphasize a different unity that has already emerged but not received explicit comment, which will help me to better explain the symmetry of practical and epistemic rationality. As I said earlier, a key insight of Vogler (2002) is that most practical reasoning is not reasoning about ultimate values (*pace* the specificationists) but rather an ordered sequence proceeding from fixed big-picture values to small-picture intentions and actions. What norm governs the ordering of this sequence? For Vogler, it is the instrumental principle. But unless one is either an instrumentalist or a proponent of the view that all ultimate value is 'to be promoted', this norm will seem fundamentally unlike the norm that governs the embrace of ultimate values. Hence, one will get separate hypothetical and categorical imperatives, reflecting a fundamental tension in practical reason.

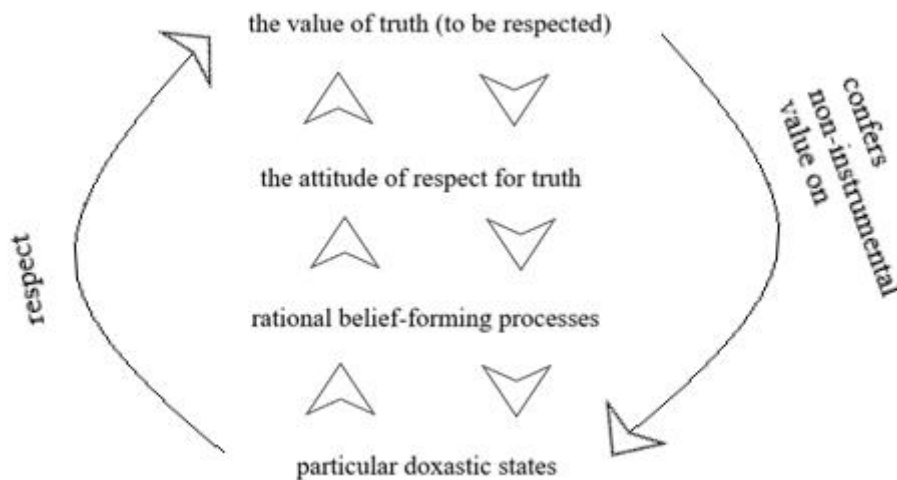
I upheld Vogler's basic insight but claimed that the norm that orders the sequence from ultimate values to small-picture intentions and little actions is of the same kind as the norm that governs the embrace of ultimate values. Ultimate values are to be embraced with fitting attitudes and what makes it fitting to embrace a value is the same as what makes it fitting to *manifest* one's embrace in practice, by acting for the sake of the value. Hence the structure of practical reason is the structure of embracing, thinking, and acting for the sake of value (which is carried out in the messy empirical realm, and hence a messy matter with many steps). On this view, both structural rationality in the narrow sense (i.e., rationality *relative* to other attitudes) and the rationality that attaches to one's values have the same normative ground.

Although practical reason is in this way unified, it is worth distinguishing two kinds of values that can structure one's practical mind. On the one hand, there are values to be *respected*, where we follow Kant in thinking of respect as imposing a *deliberative constraint* not to disrespect the value by

³² See Fumerton (2001), Kelly (2003), and Berker (2013). See Foley (1987, 1992) for the clearest example of an attempt at instrumental unity, and the primary target of Fumerton and Kelly.

acting in certain ways (e.g., in the case of personhood, by violating rights). But not all value is value to be respected in this negative sense. Much value is to be engaged with, where engagement is positive.³³ By creating or taking pleasure in art, for example, we engage with aesthetic value. Some value to be respected also merits engagement: persons are not just to be respected but also to be loved, as Kant emphasized in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Engagement and its constitutive norms are the answer to alienation and the instrumental attitude to value embodied in the relation of promotion or production. Respect alone is an inadequate source of meaning, unless one is as stuffy as philosophical legend portrayed Kant.

With this distinction in values in mind, we can now better explore how the view in this paper combines with the account of epistemic rationality from Sylvan (2012, 2014, 2018, 2020) to yield a unified picture. In those earlier works, I suggested that rational belief derives its epistemic value in virtue of manifesting *respect for truth*. This view generates a picture like the one above, though it inserts a specific value (truth) in place of the placeholder.³⁴



So far, this view is Kantian in a stereotypical way, deriving everything from respect; hence I called it ‘Epistemic Kantianism’. But Kant reserved a place for positive forms of valuing (e.g., love). Where in the theoretical domain might one expect to find a positive valuing? Not at the heart of epistemic rationality in the narrowest sense, I think. Narrow epistemic rationality—i.e., the constitutive rationality of belief and other stative theoretical attitudes—is fundamentally negative, though positive requirements might be *derived* if one is seeking to settle a question with some doxastic state.³⁵

Yet besides occupying states like belief, we engage in the activity of inquiry. Once we appreciate this point, we may find a place for something more positive, which would yield fuller symmetry between the epistemic and the practical. Plausibly, inquiry is an attempt to *engage with reality*, by opening one’s mind to the facts and seeking to perceive them aright. If there is a reason of the right kind to engage with truth for its own sake—a hypothesis which would help to justify the criticism of *uninquisitiveness*—then truth will merit engagement as well as respect.

One might wonder whether these commands of engagement and respect might conflict, or represent norms of different kinds, as Friedman (forthcoming) suggests in discussing the epistemic and the ‘zetetic’. But I suspect we can bring them in harmony if we model the *zetetic* *not* on instrumental practical rationality (as Friedman assumes), but on non-instrumental structural

³³ I take the term ‘engagement’ from Raz (2002), who has defended a similar view about value.

³⁴ The value at the top level is one to which I think we are essentially committed in virtue of being cognizers; hence ‘value’ is used in an internal sense, to mean a value *of the cognizer*.

I am unsure whether we believe *for the sake of* truth (see Sosa (2000, 2015: Ch.2) for worries). But we do constrain our doxastic attitudes for the sake of accuracy. Hence a doxastic attitude could manifest something which is for the sake of truth (respect). Here it might be better to say that our theoretical reason manifests respect for truth through our belief (adopted non-voluntarily). These points suggest that some adjustment to the interpretation of the arrows on the left might be needed.

³⁵ See Nelson (2010) for the first point, and Sylvan (2016) for the qualifier.

rationality. Truth is not something to ‘acquire’ or to have as an ‘objective’ or ‘goal’. It is something to appreciate, by seeing it properly (and of course something to respect). Friedman’s argument relies on the assumption that inquiry is an act that generates instrumental pressure. One can block it by purging the practical of anything instrumental.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to establish that the zetetic has the same structure as practical rationality as I’ve understood it. But the challenge to the unity of the theoretical exists only if the zetetic is governed by instrumental rationality. I think we should follow Friedman in thinking that the study of theoretical reason goes beyond the study of the narrowly epistemic (i.e., the constitutive norms of stative theoretical attitudes). Once we do, the picture sketched above together with the picture I’ve already defended in epistemology leads to a unification of rationality.³⁶

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