

PHIL 5983: Hume and Practical Reasoning
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VPR, Chapters 11–13

“Choosing Ends”

- Against Instrumentalism, Schmitz will argue that final ends can be rationally justified.

- His definition of ‘ends’ is descriptive:

One could define ends as items we *ought* to pursue, but I define ends descriptively, as items we do pursue. (237)

- There are 3 frequently recognized types of ends: final, instrumental, and constitutive. Schmitz adds a fourth: *maieutic* ends: ends “achieved through a process of coming to have other ends.” (239).

- Distinction: choosing an end and pursuing an end.

... the distinction between pursuing a final end (which by definition we do for its own sake) and choosing a final end (which we might do for various reasons). By definition, final ends are pursued for their own sake, not for the sake of maieutic ends. Yet, even if Kate pursues an end purely for its own sake, it can still be true that there was, in Kate’s past, a process by which she acquired that end. It can also be true that going through the process (of acquiring the new goal) served ends she had at the time. The supposition that the choice process is a means to an existing end leaves open whether the outcome of the process, the chosen end, will be pursued as a means to the same end. The new end may well be something Kate subsequently pursues for its own sake. The distinction between reasons for choosing and reasons for pursuing an end thus allows us to speak coherently of choosing a final end for the sake of further ends. (240).

- The decision to adopt something as end often has the effect, all by itself, of producing a change in our attitudes toward that object.

My own understanding is that an act of adopting something as an end often changes our attitude toward it. If so, then it is a mistake to assume that our future grounds for pursuing X will be like our present grounds for adopting X as an end. My student may feel ambivalent about each of the subjects in which she might major, but if she anticipates coming to view the study of philosophy as good in itself, then her anticipation of this new attitude can be grounds for choosing to study philosophy in the first place. Similarly, part of the point of choosing a career is that we want — *and do not yet have* — the set of attitudes that goes with pursuing a particular career in a wholehearted way. We might have reasons to choose an end in part because of reasons we expect to develop for pursuing that end. (241)

- Maieutic ends are psychologically real.

Maieutic ends are not merely a theoretical postulate. They are real. The drive to find a career or a spouse can be powerful, even painful, and such drives are drives to settle on a particular career or a particular person. Recall what it was like to choose a major subject in college or to choose a career. One way or another, we had to choose something, and, for some of us, not having done so yet was an occasion for considerable anxiety. Some of us had hardly any idea of what we really wanted, but it felt better to settle on some end or other than to let that part of our lives remain a vacuum. (244)

- So, final ends can be rationally justified in the following sense.

That, then, is my theory about how an end, pursued as a genuinely final end, could nevertheless have been rationally chosen. There are ends — I call them maieutic ends — to which a final end could be chosen as a means.

- Some of our ends are unchosen; we simply have them. One might think, as does Frankfurt, that we must have unchosen ends if we are to successfully deliberate on final ends. Here is a candidate for our most generic unchosen end:

If we have a single overarching and maybe unchosen maieutic end, I would say it is the end of finding things to live for. The various maieutic ends (settling on a major subject in college and then a career, defining ideals, choosing a spouse, finding ways of contributing to the community, and so on) are all species of a generic and overarching maieutic end of finding things to live for, ends to which one can devote oneself. (246)

- Schmidtz puts forth a model of reflective rationality that is supposed to allow for the rational evaluation of even final ends.

First, the model posits particular maieutic ends. Insofar as settling on final ends is our way of achieving maieutic ends, the choice is rational if it serves the purpose. Second, we pursue particular maieutic ends (like the end of choosing a career) as constitutive ends relative to the overarching maieutic end of finding something to live for. Getting a career is a way of getting something to live for. (248)

Q: Are final ends rationally evaluable in any *robust* sense, though, according to this model?

Further, there is still at least one unjustified final end, M, on this model.

- Has Schmidtz argued for deliberation about ends in any robust sense of ‘deliberation’?

Aristotle said we deliberate not about ends but about ways and means. But I believe we have maieutic ends. And if we deliberate about means to maieutic ends, then by that very fact we deliberate about ends. (254)

“Deliberation Is of Ends”

- Kolnai presents a passage from Aristotle in which he claims that we do not deliberate about ends because ends are constant (at least relative to a profession or function).

◦ The passage discusses physicians, orators, and statesmen. Kolnai denies that all statesmen have a common end. And he denies that doctors deliberate about means. Rather, they engage in straightforward theoretical reasoning:

...he does not deliberate but performs the theoretical activities of recalling to mind his 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. (260)

Further, doctors do not, except in a “schematic sense” have a common end. At least, they do not have the common end of curing the patient.

- Kolnai contends that deliberation arises from the multiplicity of ends, not means.

Deliberation, then, arises not in virtue of the multiplicity of conceivable and available means but in virtue of the multiplicity of *other ends* as affected by the envisaged use of means in the service of *one given end*, and partly at least as implicit in the *conception* of that one end here and now endowed with a thematic primacy. (261)

- Kolnai restricts the category of deliberation. E.g., it does not include merely gathering facts and causal knowledge, even if this is aimed at securing some end. This restriction is supposed to establish a closer connection between deliberation and the exercise of free will.

That the technical preamble to action — the quest for means as such — is intrinsically different from deliberation is expressed in the fact that the former does not, whereas the latter does, constitute a field for the exercise of free-will. (263)

- Ends can conflict not only causally, but also intrinsically. This point gives reason and reflection a larger role in directing action than Hume, for example, would allow.

Thus, a man with dominant spiritual interests may control his penchant for gluttony not merely because in a consequential sense it is apt to interfere with his studies but because he is pained by a sense of essential incompatibility between these two passions; again, a traditional textbook example I think, an eminently sociable person will all the more tend to deliberately cultivate his taste for wine as a temperate enjoyment of good drinks not only promotes the forming of social ties but to some extent enriches and ennobles companionship. In view of the active, sanctioned pursuit and sustained cherishing of certain goods we may not unnaturally, if somewhat loosely, speak of ‘ends’ here, but the language of ‘ends *and means*’ is plainly inadequate. (265–266)

- There is a very nice passage in which, following Ross, Kolnai denies the conception of action as typically guided by a pre-established end. See the middle of p. 266.
- Kolnai has a very nice paragraph — p. 267 — on mistakenly identifying the value of something with the pleasure to which it is (supposedly) a means.
- Q: If deliberation is a comparison of ends, by what standards do we choose?
 - We compare ends with respect to the further ends they will likely promote. But somehow, Kolnai claims, this is not to treat our ends as means.

...do we then, after all, consider the ends between which we have to choose as if they were means to something else? No, for we feel inclined to pursue them for their own sake, without any logically necessary or previously given reference to further ends; again, these further ends or some of them may not be at all ‘higher’ or more important; again, some of the preferences that may ultimately play a part in our choice will perhaps only come to light, develop, mature and get more or less firmly established in the process of our deliberation. (268)

- Kolnai claims that ultimate ends are varied and not rationally discoverable.

Moreover, ideals are not only in need of being implemented by personal acts of choice but are themselves chosen, not imposed by nature or rational self-evidence; and however defensible, commendable and extensive in scope they may be, they inevitably fall short of representing the totality of the worthy purposes of man. Whoever identifies the ideal of his choice with the ‘ultimate end’ of the universe or history or God in a sense exclusive of other points of view or experiences of value, is a prey to fictitious judgement and cramped pretension. (271–272)

- The Paradox of Practice:

If deliberation was not of ends but of means, i.e. if it were reducible to rational computation — which in my view merely belongs to its forecourt, as a technical auxiliary — no such paradox would arise; there is nothing paradoxical about the possibility of inaccurate knowledge or miscalculation. But again, if choice was a purely gratuitous affair, a display of the freedom of indifference, a willful act of ‘engagement’ no matter for which cause or in what course; if significant choice bore on questions like ‘Which boot shall I put on first when dressing?’ then too we should be baffled by no paradox. (272)

Note the role that free will is supposed to play in this issue.

“Deliberation and Practical Reason”

- Wiggins introduces us to an apparent change in Aristotle’s understanding of deliberation from *NE* Book 3 to Books 6–7. Wiggins will argue against the claim that there is such a change.

- The ambiguity of “toward the end”: means and constituents.

It is a commonplace of Aristotelian exegesis that Aristotle never really paused to analyze the distinction between two quite distinct relations: (A) the relation x bears to *telos* y when x will bring about y , and (B) the relation x bears to y when the existence of x will itself help to constitute y . . . The expression *toward the end* is vague and perfectly suited to express both conceptions. (282)

Example of A: a pill that takes away the pain.

Example of B: an occupation that yields happiness.

- Wiggins sees Aristotle as trying to understand B-type deliberation through consideration of A-type deliberation, which is better understood.

Optimistically he is hoping that he can use the intelligibilities of the clear means-end situation and its extensions (how to effect the construction of this particular figure) to illuminate the obscurities of the *constituents-to-end* case. In the latter a man deliberates about what kind of life he wants to lead, or deliberates in a determinate context about which of several possible courses of action would conform most closely to some ideal he holds before himself, or deliberates about what would constitute eudaimonia here and now, or (less solemnly) deliberates about what would count as the achievement of the not yet completely specific goal which he has already set himself in the given situation. For purposes of any of these deliberations the means-end paradigm that inspires almost all the book 3 examples is an inadequate paradigm, as we shall see. (282)

- Aristotle's comments about practical wisdom, from Book 6, seem to allow for deliberation about more than just means.

Aristotle is saying here, among other things, that practical wisdom in its deliberative manifestations is concerned both with the attainment of particular formed objectives and also with questions of general policy — what specific objectives *to* form. (286)

- But it is difficult to understand how such deliberation would proceed, and the geometer comparison is not helpful.

The trouble with both paradigm and comparison is this. It is absolutely plain what counts as my having adequate covering or as my having succeeded in drawing a plane figure of the prescribed kind using only ruler and compass. The practical question here is only what means or measures will work or work best or most easily to those ends. But the standard problem in a nontechnical

deliberation is quite different. In the nontechnical case I shall characteristically have an extremely vague description of something I want — a good life, a satisfying profession, an interesting holiday, an amusing evening — and the problem is not to see what will be causally efficacious in bringing this about but to see what really *qualifies* as an adequate and practically realizable specification of what would satisfy this want. (286–287)

- An alternative interpretation holds that Aristotle comes to distinguish actions that are judged to fall under a rule from actions that are chosen as means to ends.