

PHIL 5983: Hume and Practical Reasoning
Prof. Funkhouser
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Millgram, Chapters 6–8

Chapter 6

- In this chapter Millgram considers the premises of practical inductions. What ultimately justifies these premises? One possibility, the topic of this chapter, is *practical observation*.

- Millgram will argue that practical observation is commonplace and that practical observations aren't simply desires as conceived by the Instrumentalist.

- Pleasure is the hallmark of a practical observation.

- Example: Diana and the tree. Diana supposedly acquired new ends with satisfied backward-directed commitments.

Through her experience, Diana came to want to care for trees, and to have a more general desire for the challenges and rewards of bringing living things back to a state of health. That is, in the course of the experience, Diana acquired new ends; ends, moreover, for which she was able to adduce reasons. (108–109)

- Millgram understands pleasure to be a feeling, as opposed to a sensation.

When one finds a task pleasant, one engages in it willingly, even eagerly; there is no need to force oneself to it, even when it is difficult. It is this feeling that I will call *pleasure*, and I will treat this kind of case as the central or paradigmatic instance of pleasure. (109)

- An Instrumentalist's objection, again:

Diana, the objection would go here, is out to attain pleasure, and learns inductively that certain things give her pleasure. Her decision to pursue these things is the conclusion of instrumental

reasoning; now that she knows that tending trees is a way to get pleasure, she decides to tend trees. Diana hasn't acquired any genuinely new ends; she has learned ways to address an end she already had. (110)

- Here is the key to Millgram's response.

What Diana wants to do is tend trees, which she has found to be pleasurable — not to obtain pleasure *by* tending trees. (110)

- The possibility of practical judgment requires us to make desirability judgments.

If inferences proceeding from a practical judgment are to be defeasible, they must involve some understanding of how its object is desirable; if you don't see why something is important, you won't be in a position to determine whether, in particular instances, it's more important than something else. And defeasibility, we saw, is required for unity of agency. So a practical judgment commits one to a view as to the desirability (or undesirability) of its object: that object must be taken to be desirable (or undesirable) in some way or other. (112)

- Millgram introduces the concept of a rock-bottom conviction. He claims that pleasure is the rock-bottom desirability judgment of an experience.
- Millgram argues, against hedonism, that pleasure is merely an indicator of desirability. Pleasure often is not our desired end.

Hedonists assume that because desires and goals change in response to experienced pleasure and displeasure, these must be the actual goals. But this view is naive: pleasure and displeasure are indications and signs of desirability we use in determining what our goals should be. Diana did not become devoted to trees as a way of pursuing pleasure (if she were only interested in pleasure, she would not have genuinely cared about the trees); rather, her pleasurable experiences helped her decide that one of her ends ought to be tending trees. Ellen did not, she says, abandon waitressing in order to avoid pain or unpleasantness; rather, she took the pain and unpleasantness as an indication that waitressing was not desirable, and was not in itself worthwhile. Similarly, time spent with my friend is, by and large, pleasurable; and were this not the case, eventually we should cease being friends. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to construe the friendship instrumentally — to conclude that I befriend him solely in order to obtain pleasure. (117–118)

- A summary of Millgram’s observationalist alternative to Instrumentalism:

On the observationalist account, however, while ‘It’s pleasant’ does indeed terminate explanation, it does so in much the way ‘That’s just how it looks to me’ terminates explanations in the theoretical realm. ‘It’s pleasant’ more or less amounts to: ‘In experiencing it, I find it desirable’. One is not adducing a further goal, but affirming that the goal one has just mentioned is desirable. Notice that there is no need, on this account, to force the locution into some other form like ‘I get pleasure from it’. The instrumentalist, by contrast, needs to identify some further item (the pleasure itself), distinct from the thing in which one takes pleasure. (120–121).

- Millgram argues that the pleasures do not share a common ingredient — e.g., the pleasure itself.

- An objection to Millgram: Pleasure is not an observation. One could argue that the lack of agreement on practical, as opposed to theoretical, matters supports the claim that there is not a common object of observation.

- Millgram responds:

1. There is some convergence of opinion on practical matters.
2. Some people may be less reliable observers than others.
3. We tolerate nonconsequential disagreements in both practical and theoretical matters.

- Practical observations, unlike the Instrumentalist’s desires, involve backward-directed commitments.

Our practical observations are, and must be, distinguished from the instrumentalist’s desires, or from mere reactions, by involving backward-directed commitments. Being able to meet these commitments is essential to maintaining unity of agency. (134)

- The mark of an observation is simply its ability to function in inferences.
- Millgram considers specificationists, like Kolnai and Wiggins. Millgram argues that this type of reasoning also relies on practical observation.

But consideration of a concrete situation in which the demand arises makes it obvious how such premises *are* obtained: I can *go* to McCarter, and discover, by observation, whether Mummen-schanz is entertaining or not. That is, specification of ends can

be understood to be a form of rational deliberation, but one that, like the practical analog of induction, relies essentially on practical experience. If this is right, then there is more than one kind of empirical practical reasoning. (138)

- Millgram's empirical theory of practical reasoning demands a similarly empirical moral theory.

Chapter 7

- This chapter deals with testimony as a source of practical judgments.
- Millgram claims (argues?) that our first inductions depended on accepting beliefs acquired from our parents (or others) and accepted as testimony.
- The best design stance to deal with novelty is for creatures to accept testimony.

If one is to design a creature to cope with novelty, it makes far more sense to specify, as part of the design, that it will have informants able to tell it what it needs to know to get started, and then equip it to take advantage of that fact by relying on them. (144–145)

- Distinguish two kinds of testimony: reducible and primitive.
- Millgram argues that primitive trust in testimony is a legitimate source of practical judgments.

Now we have just seen that practical inductions presuppose the availability of a pool of practical judgments acquired by accepting others' testimony on trust. One's practical inductions are legitimate only if such trust is; if it is misplaced, our practical inductions will go bizarrely haywire. And so, one is warranted in supposing, within the context of practical deliberation, that such trust *is* legitimate. (148–149)

- Millgram argues that we can trust the practical judgments of our friends.
 - Aristotle said that a friend is another self. What is it for something to be part of myself? For one, a mental state that is mine can be directly used as a premise in practical reasoning.

In short, a mental state or attitude's being *mine* is in large part a matter of its being a possible basis for inference. I will say that the relation one has toward one's own attitudes or mental states is *inferentially direct*. (153)

- Millgram claims that the mental states of our friends can also directly function as premises in our practical reasoning.

If Jones is my friend, the fact that Jones wants *p* is often a direct (if not necessarily overriding) reason to bring about *p*. The fact that he takes pleasure in such-and-such has immediate consequences for my motivations in much the way that the fact that *I* take pleasure in such-and-such does. For example, the fact that Jones would enjoy a subscription to *Philosophical Anecdotes* is a reason to get it for him when his birthday rolls around. No *further* intermediate reasons are needed. (153–154)

This is to put primitive trust in the mental states of friends.

- Some may object that the friend's desires motivate only indirectly. Millgram has a nice response here:

That is, if I am to account for my responsiveness to *his* desires by positing a background desire that they be satisfied, why must I not account for my responsiveness to *my* desires by positing a background desire that *my* desires be satisfied? But it is clear enough that in my own case such a desire can explain nothing: if my responsiveness to my own desires is not intelligible on its own, invoking a further desire, one to which I must be responsive if it is to serve any explanatory function, will not help. Why suppose that more explanation is needed when the desire is my friend's rather than my own? (155)

- Friendship can explain how we come to adopt end-intrinsic reasons.

What it is for a friend to be 'another self' is for such things as the ends, attitudes, and so on, which jointly make up his 'self', to be treated in the same way that one treats the analogous items that make up one's *own* 'self'. This allows us to explain the mediating role of friendship in the acquisition (or abandonment, or modification) of ends justified by end-intrinsic reasons: insofar as one treats one's friend's views in the way one treats one's own, they have the same kind of status that one's own views do. That is, one is willing to use them as bases for inference. But this puts one in a position to see the force of the end-intrinsic reasons that support the novel end under consideration; if one already *has* — in a perhaps tentative way — the end needed to render the reasons for it intelligible as reasons, one can then consider whether they are in fact *good* reasons; and if they are, one can then adopt the end in a full-fledged way, as entirely one's own. (157–158)

- If a friend's desire does not cohere with yours, it is like having an internal conflict between 2 of your desires.
- Q: Should we then seek out friends who share most of our practical judgments?
- One cannot have too many close friends, because it would likely not be possible to treat all their desires as if they were your own.
- There are rationality constraints on friendship, given that take our friends' desires as premises for practical reasoning.