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THE SPECIAL STATUS OF INSTRUMENTAL REASONS

ABSTRACT. The rationality of means-end reasoning is the bedrock of the Humean account of practical reasons. But the normativity of such reasoning can not be taken for granted. I consider and reject the idea that the normativity of instrumental reasoning can be explained – either in terms of its being constitutive of the very notion of having an end, or solely in terms of instrumental considerations. I argue that the instrumental principle is itself a brute norm, and that this is consistent with a Humean account of practical reasons.

Most of the debate between Humeans and anti-Humeans concerns how practical rationality is possible: whether it is possible to reason about final ends, whether there can be non-instrumental principles of rationality, and whether reason itself might directly motivate action. Anti-Humeans characteristically maintain that Humeans cannot account for such non-instrumental roles of reason.¹ When it comes to instrumental reasons, however, Humeans and anti-Humeans have traditionally agreed that their normativity is unproblematic. Given that we have certain ends, it seems to follow that we have reason to pursue certain means to these ends. Surely at least one way in which we can be rational is to be instrumentally rational: that we have reasons to pursue the means to our ends seems at least partly constitutive of rationality. It is unclear what could count as a reason if there are no reasons to pursue the necessary means to one's chosen ends. The bone of contention has generally concerned whether this is all there is to rationality, which is to say whether practical reason requires anything more than instrumental rationality. Principles of prudence and of morality present themselves as

candidates that apparently go beyond instrumental rationality. Much of the literature on practical reason is devoted to discovering the source of their normativity, and to the closely related question of their justification as principles of rationality.

In the last decade or so, however, questions have been raised about the normativity of means-end reasoning itself, and about whether a Humean can provide an adequate account of it. To the extent that one thinks that there *is* any such normativity, the problem of explaining it is a general problem, and not one confined to Humeans. However, Hampton (1996), Korsgaard (1997), and others argue that the most plausible solution to the problem will be incompatible with Humeanism. The surprising idea is that the Humean will be undone on her own turf, namely, instrumental rationality. Now, I do agree that there is a substantive question here, and that the normativity of means-end reasoning requires explanation. The source of the normativity of the instrumental principle has to be uncovered if we are to ensure that Humeans are not a victim of their own attack on anti-Humeans. Not much will have been gained in denying the existence of non-instrumental principles of rationality if one's reasons for doing so equally threaten the normative force of instrumental rationality.

According to a familiar Humean account of practical reason, prudential, altruistic, and other such intrinsic reasons are constituted by one's noncognitive states (desires and other pro-attitudes). Because noncognitive states are themselves paradigmatically *contingent* states, the classic trouble for the view is that it can't capture the element of necessity which, according to Kantians and others, is embodied in such practical reasons. Be that as it may, I will argue in what follows that the view just described cannot account for the rationality of means-end reasoning itself. In particular, it cannot account for derivative reasons, those that result from instrumental reasoning. Initially, this may seem like a shocking claim for a Humean to make; it seems to risk giving a huge concession to rival theories' alternate conceptions of normativity. But I will

also argue that there is no such risk. A Humean can maintain that all non-instrumental practical reasons are constituted by noncognitive states. But a non-instrumental (“structural”) justification of instrumental reasons is needed for a general theory of practical reason. Why this is so, how the solution is to be elaborated, and what this means for a Humean account of practical reason, are the special foci of this paper.

1. THE INSTRUMENTAL PRINCIPLE

Let’s start with the following characterization of the instrumental principle:

M/E If you have an end, E, and believe that doing M is a necessary and available means to bring about E, then you have a pro tanto reason to do M.

This definition has been left deliberately vague. For instance, ‘having an end’ needs explication, and ‘being a means’ needs considerable qualification. Additionally, some prefer to speak of an agent’s having an end as providing a reason to take what is believed to be the *best* means (in some sense of ‘best’). I will stick to the less controversial reference to merely necessary and available means. This should be understood to include means that are disjunctively necessary for achieving the end.² The point of the ‘pro tanto’ qualifier is to allow that one’s reason for doing M can be overridden by other reasons. One can conform to M/E either by doing M (unless the reason for doing so is overridden), or by dropping E. If there are no overriding reasons, it would be *irrational* not to do M as long as one has E.

It is important to distinguish Humeanism from Hume’s position. According to the Humean position I will be defending, M/E is *normative*, a principle of rationality. Many Humeans will object to this – they do not hold that M/E is a normative principle. Neither did Hume himself. Consider the ambiguity in the following well known passage.

Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. (1739, 415)

Hume is taken to be saying that rationality lies only in facilitating one's ends, which are determined by one's passions. But this is ambiguous between (i) that rationality consists only in figuring out the means to one's ends, and (ii) that rationality consists only in promoting one's ends. The former reading concerns epistemic rationality, the latter concerns practical rationality.³ Only (ii) entails M/E. That claim, that we rationally ought to promote our ends, is not what Hume means to say. Rather, he seems to be endorsing (i). In the paragraphs preceding the passage quoted, Hume seems clearly to say that reason influences action only by enabling us to know the facts and what would determine the means to various ends. Later on, he puts the same point thus:

It has been observ'd, that reason, in a strict and philosophic sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion. (1739, 459)

So it is plausible to think that Hume does not take M/E, the instrumental principle, to be a norm of rationality. This is in keeping with his purported skepticism about practical reason in general.

Most Humeans reject Hume's purported skepticism about practical reasons. They are called 'Humeans' in virtue of their agreement with Hume that one's ends are determined by one's passions, or noncognitive states. Reasons for action are constituted by these noncognitive states. But the sort of Humean I will defend also holds M/E to be a principle of rationality. The instrumental principle governing means-end reasoning has its own special status for this Humean; its normativity is something over and above the normativity of non-instrumental reasons. The final section of this paper will touch on the question whether M/E can be the sole principle of practical reason. Our central task is

to find an account of the apparent normativity of M/E . *How can M/E be justified as a norm of practical reason?* In what sense do we have instrumental normative reasons?⁴ To find some answers, we will weave our way through various attempts to justify M/E . The first task is to see why a standard Humean, hypothetical, justification of M/E is inadequate.

2. HYPOTHETICAL JUSTIFICATIONS & NON-INSTRUMENTAL REASONS

It is often said that the Humean holds that all practical reasons are instrumental. But, on one common understanding of ‘instrumental reason’, this cannot be right. Consider the following reason. If you have an end or goal A , you have a reason to do B , where B is a necessary and available means to A .⁵ The reason to do B is an *instrumental reason*. But this is not the only sort of reason that the Humean can accept. For instance, the Humean should be able to answer the question, “What is your reason for having A as your end?” by saying: “ A is desirable for its own sake.” (The Humean will here be expressing the fact that she desires A for its own sake.) This reason is a different sort from the instrumental reason. It might be called an intrinsic reason, or an end-reason, or a non-instrumental reason. In any case, we don’t want to say that this reason to adopt A as an end is an instrumental reason.⁶ The Humean can accept that one’s intrinsic desires constitute intrinsic reasons. To think she cannot is to make the mistake of thinking the Humean must say that an agent’s desires give her reason to satisfy them in the sense that satisfying the desire is the *object* of the reason. My reason for adopting A is not that I desire that my desire for A be satisfied, and believe that A is the means to that! So the Humean can accept intrinsic as well as instrumental reasons.

There is, however, another non-instrumental sense of reason that the Humean cannot accept. One might call it a ‘categorical reason’: its presence and justification have nothing to do

with one's contingent subjective states. In both this and the sense of non-instrumental just considered, something is aimed at for its own sake. This is what makes each distinct from instrumental reasons. But only the strict Kantian type of categorical reason has a *justification* that is itself *categorical*: such reasons are required by objective requirements of practical reason, and are not dependent on an agent's subjective states. In contrast, the justification of the intrinsic reasons identified above is contingent on a subject's desires, and thus counts as 'hypothetical'. Here is a hypothetical justification of the principle of prudence: that *x* is in an agent's future best interest is a reason for that agent only if she cares about her future best interest. Caring for her future best interest constitutes having a non-instrumental reason, but in this case, the justification given for this reason is hypothetical.

Both instrumental and non-instrumental reasons may have hypothetical justifications. In what follows, I will reserve the term 'hypothetical' to apply to a type of rational justification, and will use 'instrumental' to qualify reasons.⁷ The debate between Humeans and anti-Humeans concerning the normativity of the instrumental principle is at bottom about the existence of a certain sort of justification. The Humean denies that there are categorical justifications. As we will see (it will take most of the paper to show this), this too is a misleading characterization of what is distinctive of the Humean position.

3. THE PROBLEM, AND A FEW 'SOLUTIONS' THAT WON'T WORK

Traditionally, the reason for performing the means to an end has been supposed to derive from the reason for the end in question. But how is this derivation supposed to work? Thomas Nagel considers a case in which a desire, thirst, is among the antecedent conditions for rational motivation. (1970, 33) A desire to put a coin into a vending machine is caused by a desire to have a drink and a set of factual beliefs (concerning the operation of vending machines, the posses-

sion of the money required to get a can of soda, and so on). Moreover, the connection between the two desires is a *rational* one; it is not arbitrary or accidental. We assume with Nagel that some desires provide reasons: the desire to quench thirst provides a reason to drink. So another way of describing the case is that the reason one has to quench one's thirst gives one a reason to insert the coin.

Nagel draws attention to the fact that there is a puzzle of how thirst, a certain desire to drink, can combine with beliefs to produce an action which is not drinking, but a means to it. Nagel argues against what he takes to be the most common answer, that a desire for the means yields an instrumental reason. Postulating a further desire to put the money in the slot will not explain the presence of the instrumental reason. Simply adding the desire for the (necessary and available)⁸ means cannot explain the instrumental reason one has for performing the means, because it cannot explain how the instrumental reason exists in virtue of the desire for the end. Here is Nagel's reason for thinking this:

It is of course true that when one sees that the only way to get a drink is to put a dime in the slot, one then wants to put a dime in the slot. But that is what requires explanation: it is a desire *motivated* by thirst plus certain information. If we simply add it on as a further motive, we shall not do justice to its peculiar appropriateness; for *any arbitrary* desire might be added on in *that* capacity.

For example, it is imaginable that thirst should cause me to want to put a dime in my pencil sharpener, but this would be an obscure compulsion or the product of malicious conditioning, rather than rational motivation. We should not say that thirst provided me with a *reason* to do such a thing, or even that thirst had motivated me to do it.

A theory of motivation is defective if it renders intelligible behaviour which is not intelligible.... (1970, 33–4)

The fact that the desire for the end causes the desire for the means is not sufficient for the former's giving one a reason to bring about the means. Nagel is right that not just any causation of a desire by another desire will be sufficient to

explain the rationality of the instrumental principle. Then what is it about the relation between a desire for the means and a desire for the end that makes the connection rational, and not merely causal?

We might try the following. Desires caused by beliefs in normal means-end-sensitive causal relations are rational (or produce reasons), and desires caused by beliefs in non-normal links are not, period. There's nothing more to say by way of explanation. But this doesn't seem quite enough. Nagel thinks he can explain how a desire for an end makes a desire for the means rational by reference to a more general and brute property of reasons.

3.1. *The 'means-desire'*

Before we get to Nagel's response, it is worth mentioning that there is another problem with the suggestion that a desire for the end, the end-desire, is sufficient to account for the normative force of a desire for the means, the means-desire. I want to argue that a 'standard Humean' justification of M/E will not work. Take the Humean account of prudential reasons: we have a reason to promote our future well-being if and only if we now care about our future well-being. Without that current noncognitive state, we have no reason to promote our future well-being. This account, like all standard Humean accounts of practical reasons, assumes the rationality of instrumental reasoning itself.

Whatever you may think of the account just sketched, the following analogous account of the rationality of the instrumental principle fails immediately: you have a reason to bring about the means to your end if and only if you now desire to bring about the means as such. This would be strange. On the one hand, to the extent that a means-desire could provide a reason to bring about the means, it is *because of the end-desire*. It is *in virtue of* having a desire for the end that one desires the means.⁹ In that sense, these means-desires are intuitively otiose.

On the other hand, if it is not motivated by the end-desire, the higher-order means-desire comes from nowhere, so to

speak. Why desire that one take the means to one's ends? If the ends themselves are not sufficient to give you a reason, how can this unmotivated further desire give one anything other than an *arbitrary* reason? The intuitive answer is the one I provide below in section 4, which I call 'the practical man's answer'.

3.2. *Refining the question*

Nagel argues for the possibility of explaining M/E through a derivative account of reasons. Here is his explanation how reasons "transmit their influence over the relation between ends and means" (34):

If there is a reason to do something on a particular occasion, it must be specifiable in general terms which allow that same reason to be present on different occasions, perhaps as a reason for doing other things. All such general specifications... will never limit the application of the reason to acts of one sort only, but will always include other acts which promote those of the original kind. And in some cases the general specification will simply assign the reason to all acts that promote some end which is not itself an act. Intuitively, this means that when a person accepts a reason for doing something he attaches value to its occurrence, a value which is either intrinsic or instrumental. In either case *the relation of means to ends is involved in the evaluative conception*: if the value is intrinsic it attaches derivatively to what will promote the likelihood of the act; if instrumental, the act is valuable as a means to something else, and the same value attaches to other means as well. (35, emphasis mine)

Nagel appeals to the universalizability of reasons and to the evaluative conception of the end. He says that instrumental reasons derive from the reason to achieve the end in question, and that other means to this end are equally valuable. This means that any reason for attaining an end is *thereby* a reason to perform the means to that end. But how is this an explanation? Calling the normativity of instrumental reasons derivative seems to label the problem rather than explain it. As we noted at the end of section 3, M/E *could* be simply intrinsically rational, with no further explanation. That is what Nagel is saying, I think, though he does so in cognitive terms, rather than in the noncognitive terms offered above

(concerning the rational relations between desires). For him the brute relation is framed in terms of the structure of reasons alone: If you have reason to do an end, you thereby have reason to perform the necessary means to that end. This is an important possibility to which I will return.

But there are other plausible avenues of explanation. In the passage quoted, Nagel speaks as if the reason for the means is the *same* as that for the end. But this can't be taken literally. The "same value" cannot automatically attach to the means and the end, for three reasons. One, the likelihood of attaining the end in question varies in probability with the various means available, and two, these various means have effects *other* than the attainment of the end. Both factors are likely to affect the strength and sort of reason that "attaches" to the means in virtue of the end.¹⁰ A third reason for thinking that the reasons for the end and means cannot be the same is that the relation is (explanatorily and justificatorily) asymmetrical: having a reason for the end thereby provides a reason for the means to it, but having a reason for the means to some end does not necessarily thereby provide a reason for the end. So even if the reason for the end is "transmitted across means-ends relations", the resulting reason for the means, while it has its *source* in the reason for the end, cannot be identical with it. How can the reason generated by the desire for an end produce a *separate* reason to perform the means to that end? This is our question. In a somewhat different context, Jean Hampton appears to describe the problem as follows:

...on closer examination, the contingency of the directives of a hypothetical imperative on a certain desire does not, by itself, explain why we *ought* to follow the directive.... [H]ow does this hypothetical imperative give the agent a reason for action that is different from the desire assumed by the imperative? (1996, 93)

We want to know whether a reason to achieve an end generates a reason for pursuing the means to that end. Since we can safely assume at this point that end-desires produce reasons (this assumption needs defense, but it is not at issue

here), we can ask whether an end-desire, along with the judgment that *M* is a necessary and available means, thereby gives one a pro tanto reason to do *M*. This is a question about rationality, concerning the reason-givingness of *M/E*.

4. A MORE PROMISING SORT OF HYPOTHETICAL JUSTIFICATION: THE PRACTICAL MAN'S ANSWER

It might be easier to provide a Humean justification of *M/E* if it were the case that we desire to conform to *M/E* for its own sake. Then the reason to do so might be grounded in the intrinsic desire. But it is obvious that we do not desire to conform to *M/E* for its own sake; we do not appeal to such a desire in practical reasoning. Such a desire-based strategy is not open to the Humean.

There is another way of trying to provide a hypothetical justification of the instrumental norm of practical reason. It involves giving a pragmatic justification of *M/E*, by showing that following *M/E* serves one's ends. After presenting this justification, I will raise several problems the Humean might have in adopting it.

Consider the following natural account of *M/E*'s normativity: "What's the problem? The answer is trivial. If anything is true, if you want an end, you need to do what is necessary to get it. What needs explaining about that?" This may be unpacked in several ways. Perhaps the objector means (a) that the normativity of *M/E* is brute; *M/E* is intrinsically rational. We'll return to this in section 7. Perhaps our respondent is saying (b) that it is part of the very idea of having an end that one has reason to do the means to it. This suggestion will be considered in section 6.

But more likely the objector might mean (c) that the question answers itself. He might add the following, by way of explanation: "I have reason to pursue the means to a given end because I *want* the end in question." Call this "the practical man's answer". His idea is this: "I have certain objectives, or ends. More than anything, I want to be a pianist. I

have the aptitude, skill, and character to do so. I have an excellent teacher, free time, access to a fine piano. There's a very good chance that I'll satisfy my desire if I practice. And there is no pressing reason to do anything else. Do I have a reason to practice? I gave you the reason: I want to be a pianist." So far, the practical man's answer has this form:

I desire some end, E.

M is the necessary and available means to E.

Therefore, I have reason to do M.

It is important to note that the first line should not be taken as an assertion but as an *expression* of a desire.¹¹

This answer applies to instances of M/E. The practical man may continue: "I want to promote my own ends. In general, I will promote my objectives if I act according to M/E, given that my instrumental beliefs are true." The key point is that doing the means to one's ends increases the likelihood of achieving one's ends. This makes the justification for instrumental reasons itself instrumental or pragmatic. Conforming to M/E will increase the likelihood that one will get more of what one wants. Here, the question, "why ought I be instrumentally rational?" is a practical question, and the question answers itself. Being means-end rational is a necessary condition of satisfying my desires. The normative force of M/E is trivial.

The Humean may encounter trouble endorsing such a natural, pragmatic, proposal. One sees that this form of reasoning begs the question. It itself is an instance of instrumental reasoning. Because of the circularity, some have thought such a justification to be problematic. I will return to the question whether it is offensively circular in section 6, where we will consider again whether the practical man's answer can be adopted by the Humean.

I want now to raise a different difficulty. Even if we accept that the practical man has provided a justification of sorts for M/E, it is still, I will argue, inadequate to our purposes. Put

aside worries about question-begging for now. A deeper problem with the practical man's justification is that it fails to capture the robust sense in which M/E is a norm of rationality. We are looking for an answer to this question: "Why do we find deviations from the instrumental principle less than rational?" We mean deviations not just by ourselves but also by others. For example, if a person fails to implement what he believes to be the necessary and available means to his chosen ends, then – all else being equal – I think he is being irrational. But what is the source of my normative judgment that he is irrational? This judgment of mine cannot be practically justified: for that to work, it would have to have its source in *my* ends, and I may not share the person's ends, nor need I have a desire that *he* satisfy his desire for E. It is important to note that even when this is the case – when it does not serve any end of *mine* that *he* be means-end rational – I still think he is irrational not to satisfy his desire for E, given that it is what he wants more than anything, and given that means M is readily available to him. Thus, flouting the instrumental principle leaves one open to normative criticism. This is true whether or not one's ends are endorsed from the third person perspective.

This phenomenon of third-person criticism provides prima facie reason for thinking that there's more to the justification of M/E than purely instrumental justification. We do make third-person judgments of subjective irrationality. We cannot justify them all on instrumental grounds. Another way of putting this point is to say that in this case, the "ought" in the question "why ought one be instrumentally rational?" is itself unconditional, or categorical. It applies to all agents, regardless of their particular desires.

An obvious response is to suggest that we justify the third person normative judgment by reference to the desires of the agent whose rationality is being assessed. It is often assumed that this can be done unproblematically. Perhaps we can simply transpose the first person reasoning of the practical man's answer so that it generalizes to the third person case. A person can be justified relative to her desires, and another person

could recognize this. I will argue in the next section that this approach won't work. The practical man's justification, if it works at all, *can only work from the first person perspective*. As it stands, it cannot answer the question of why M/E is normative from a third person perspective. It cannot account for third-person criticisms of those who fail to conform to M/E.

5. THE JUSTIFICATORY GAP

Let us look at the first-person/third-person distinction as it applies to the relation between reasons and motivation. Consider the instance of practical reasoning from the first person perspective given above. The major premise there is a *desire* (an end-desire); it is not the proposition that one has a certain desire. Such a "premise" – the desiring – makes sense only from the first person perspective. In the above syllogism, the practical man is not going from a judgment *that* he has a desire to a normative conclusion. Rather, the normative conclusion is itself in part a product of the projection of his desire. The norm is endorsed from within, as it were. He doesn't have to jump up a level and view himself from the third person perspective in order to reach the conclusion. To do so would be to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. But from the first-person perspective, he can judge that there is a normative reason to take the necessary means to E, given his unconflicted desiring of E, without jumping across the is-ought divide.

But look at the situation from a third person perspective. If I judge that the man unconflictedly desires E, then there is a *gap* between that belief and my judging that there is a normative reason for him to take the necessary means to E. I may agree that, given what he desires, he has such a reason – but 'reason' in this sense is a psychological notion, not normative. I can easily recognize the existence of reasons which are relative to an agent's desires. But to criticize the agent for failing to act on this reason, I must regard the

reason as normative (though of course I needn't want the agent to act on that reason or think that it's best for him to do so). If I were to judge (from my perspective) that he has a normative reason to M, based simply on the understanding that he has a desire for E, then I would, in effect, be jumping across the is-ought divide. I would be deriving a norm from a fact. It is only because this gap exists in the third person case that there is a (third person) question about justifying M/E . There is no such gap in the first person case. There, the wanting or desiring is the premise, so the inference to a normative conclusion remains within the noncognitive realm. Of course, one can disagree with this account of the first person case. My main objective here is not to defend this particular non-cognitive account, but to show that even if such an account were plausible, the Humean incurs a *further* problem in accounting for third-person normative judgments.

It looks unlikely that a hypothetical justification will work to ground the normativity of M/E from a third-person perspective. Perhaps we should consider non-hypothetical justifications of M/E . One might think that M/E is plausible, to the extent that it is, because of our deep conceptual apparatus, according to which it seems constitutive of having an end that one be committed to pursuing the means to it. The best way to solve our problem may appear to be through conceptual analysis. Let's look at this now, before turning to the non-hypothetical approach that I favor.

6. A NON-HYPOTHETICAL JUSTIFICATION: CONSTITUTIVENESS

The most popular answer to the third-person question is that M/E is constitutive of having ends. It seems constitutive of *having an end* that one pursue the necessary and available means to it.¹² Of course, this is too fast, for we must acknowledge cases of weakness of will, but the thesis of constitutiveness can be loosened up to allow for it. Accounts of the normativity of M/E that appeal to what is constitutive of

our concepts have the advantage of being non-hypothetical – and thus, not dependent on the contingent ends of the agent in the way that the practical man’s answer was. However, accounts of this sort represent a dangerous course: it has been argued that either the constitutive understanding of M/E strips the principle of its normativity or it goes beyond Humeanism.¹³

In an intriguing argument, Christine Korsgaard (1997) seeks to show that the Humean position is internally incoherent. She argues that

the instrumental principle cannot stand alone. Unless there are normative principles directing us to the adoption of certain ends, there can be no requirement to take the means to our ends. The familiar view that the instrumental principle is the *only* requirement of practical reason is incoherent. (1997, 220)

She begins her argument for this by maintaining that the Humean has no choice but to embrace a constitutive understanding of M/E , and then uses this to argue that the Humean cannot account for the normativity of M/E . Her reasoning is developed and complicated, but I take the bare form to be as follows:

1. The Humean is committed to constitutiveness.
2. Constitutiveness is *prima facie* incompatible with normativity.
3. The only way the Humean can get out of this is to concede that the instrumental principle requires a further normative principle.

I will raise questions about each of the first two premises. There are at least two ways in which M/E might be constitutive of having ends: what I will call ‘strict’ and ‘loose’. After sorting out these differences, I will fill out the version of Humeanism that I find most plausible. The main point is to show that the Humean can accept a non-hypothetical justification of M/E , and that she can do so, moreover, without threatening the coherence of her position. I will argue that the Humean is, as everyone must be, committed to a loose

sense in which it is constitutive of the notion of having an end that one has reason to perform the necessary and available means to it. But this leaves ample room for M/E to be a normative principle. Acknowledging the normativity involved in the instrumental principle does not threaten the coherence of the Humean view with respect to other purported principles of rationality.

6.1. *Two types of constitutiveness and the notion of having an end*

Hume wrote,

The moment we perceive the falsehood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means our passions yield to our reason without any opposition. (1739, 416)

Korsgaard (1997, 228–9) takes this claim to show that Hume thinks that we cannot violate the instrumental principle. She suggests that there is an important difference between Hume's method of rejecting prudence as a principle of rationality, and what she sees as his rejection of instrumental rationality. In the former case, Hume acknowledges that it is *possible* to act imprudently, while he claims that it is not irrational to behave imprudently. But in the latter case, it seems that Hume must say that we *cannot* fail to take the means to our ends, and that the instrumental principle is not a principle of practical rationality because no one can ever fail to conform to it. This would be because M/E is constitutive of having ends, in what I call the *strict* sense in which it would be conceptually impossible to fail to conform to it. This thesis of strict constitutiveness would preclude normativity. As Korsgaard explains, if one cannot possibly violate the instrumental principle, "then it cannot guide us, and that means that it is not a normative principle." (1997, 231–2)

I do not believe the quotation from Hume above can serve as evidence for Korsgaard's interpretation. As I read him, Hume is making the mundane point that we will not perform

actions that we do not believe to be means to our ends *as a way of realizing our ends*. He is not saying that we never perform actions which thwart our ends, or that we never fail to perform actions that we believe to be necessary to achieving our ends. Be that as it may, Korsgaard may provide a fair assessment of Hume's skepticism about the normativity of M/E. I am not here concerned with Hume's actual position. Rather, I would like to argue that the Humean need not – and should not – hold the position Korsgaard attributes to Hume. We think that failures to instantiate M/E in our actions are irrational, and this is part of the phenomenon we are concerned to explain. So we want to keep in mind that it *is* possible to violate M/E.

Is the Humean committed to the sort of strict constitutiveness that Korsgaard attributes to Hume? No. To see why, let's look at Korsgaard's diagnosis of what she thinks is wrong with Hume's account. She says:

The problem is coming from the fact that Hume identifies a person's *end* as what he *wants most*, and the criterion of what the person wants most appears to be what he actually *does*. The person's ends are taken to be revealed in his conduct. If we don't make a distinction between what a person's end is and what he actually pursues, it will be impossible to find a case in which he violates the instrumental principle. (1997, 230)

This leads to the following thought. One way in which a Humean might recover the normativity of the instrumental principle is to distinguish between a person's ends and what she actually pursues. But now, Korsgaard argues, the Humean is in a real pickle. For the only way to make such a distinction, according to Korsgaard, involves going beyond instrumental reason, and thereby abandoning Humeanism. (230) "Absent a principle determining which ends we should prefer, such as the principle of prudence, a person will follow his stronger desire because it is stronger." (1997, 227) Let me lay out the central features of her reasoning. First, Korsgaard attributes the following view to the Humean.

1. What one actually does reveals what one wants most to do.

2. One's ends are identified with what one most wants to do.
3. Therefore one's ends are revealed by what one actually does.

If one wants to resist conclusion 3, Korsgaard suggests, then one must deny 2. But to deny 2, one has no choice but to admit that one's ends can be determined by something other than one's desires, such as a non-instrumental principle.

I agree that the Humean must be able to make a distinction between an agent's ends and what action is performed. She must reject strict constitutiveness. Moreover, Korsgaard is right in saying that the instrumental principle can be practical in its issue only if we have some idea of what an *end* is. (1997, 223) And she is right that Humeans take ends to be determined by an agent's desires, or pro-attitudes broadly construed. But it does not follow from these points that a Humean cannot make a distinction between an agent's ends and her actions. The easiest way to see this might be to consider Buridan's ass: surely it would be false to say that, since he did not move, he had no desire to move, and no end that wasn't realized in his behavior. Surely a Humean can acknowledge the phenomenon that is the undoing of Buridan's ass. Korsgaard seems to make the Humean into a behaviorist. But the structure of desire and related states, in a realistic psychology, will allow for the complexities of human perversity. Thus, I suggest that it is open to the Humean to reject 1 above. One can then endorse 2 without being committed to 3.

I think the source of the mistake I am attributing to Korsgaard can be found in the following passage, in which she argues that the Humean cannot hold that M/E is the sole principle of practical rationality.

...if you hold that the instrumental principle is the *only* principle of practical reason, you cannot also hold that desiring something is a *reason* for pursuing it. The principle: 'take as your end that which you desire' is neither the instrumental principle itself nor an application of it. If the instrumental principle is the only principle of practical reason, then to say that something is your end is not to say that you have a reason to pursue it,

but at most to say that you are *going* to pursue it (perhaps inspired by desire)... If we allow reason a role in determining ends, then the instrumental principle will be formulated this way: ‘if you have a *reason* to pursue an end then you have a reason to take the means to that end’. But if we do not allow reason a role in determining ends, then the instrumental principle has to go like this: ‘if you are *going* to pursue an end, then you have a reason to take the means to that end’. Now that first formulation – if you have a *reason* to pursue an end then you have a reason to take the means to that end – derives a reason from a reason, something normative from something normative. But the second formulation – if you are *going* to pursue an end, then you have a reason to take the means to that end – derives, or attempts to derive, a reason from a fact. (1997, 223)

In this passage, Korsgaard seems to be conflating ‘having a reason’ with ‘endorsing a principle of reason’. This is suggested in the part of the passage where she says, “The principle: ‘take as your end that which you desire’ is neither the instrumental principle itself nor an application of it.” The claim is true enough, but we must be on guard against thinking that the Humean need endorse such a normative principle at all. What else could our ends – our final ends – be but what we want ultimately and intrinsically? The Humean holds that something counts as having a practical end-reason only if it is desired. Korsgaard’s “Humean” principle “take as your end that which you desire” is too normative in form, as if one might be *guided* by it. The Humean view of desires as reasons is an account of what *constitutes* reasons, what counts as the having-of-a-reason, and is not itself a guiding principle, or a principle of practical advice. We should understand M/E thus: “If you have an end-desire, then you have a pro tanto reason to pursue what you believe to be a necessary and available means to the end desired.” This trivially implies that desires give you reasons, without endorsing a normative meta-principle that desires should give you reasons.

So, what sort of constitutiveness is the Humean committed to? My answer is that the Humean is committed to a thesis of loose constitutiveness that everyone, including anti-Humeans, must recognize. Conformity to instrumental reasoning is a necessary condition of having beliefs and desires, that is, modulo the complications I’ve mentioned above. This yields a

notion of rationality that comes out of the functional constraints on the relevant concepts.¹⁴

Suppose we hold that the loose, open-ended, version of constitutiveness can't be denied. Then it may seem that Korsgaardian anti-Humeans are in a bind. For if constitutiveness and normativity are incompatible, then by Korsgaard's lights *they* cannot hold that there are special "norms of practical reason". However, this sort of constitutiveness, I will argue, *is* compatible with normativity. Indeed, the supposed conflict between constitutiveness and normativity is a red herring. If we are to count a creature as having beliefs and desires, it must have some minimal rationality. But unless common sense is internally inconsistent, that sort of constitutiveness must be compatible with our inclination to find conformity to M/E rational and deviations from it irrational.

6.2. *Resolving the tension between constitutiveness and rationality*

Again, the intuitive idea is that a principle cannot be a norm unless it is conceptually possible to violate it. It is possible to render the alleged tension between constitutiveness and normativity moot if we take 'making sense of' others to be the core notion of rationality. This will allow for the conceptual possibility of violating M/E. But we will also see that, even so, appeals to constitutiveness do not help to answer the original problem of normativity with which we began. First, let's look at the appeal to what is involved in 'making sense' of others.

One might make the following suggestion, involving the idea of projection.¹⁵ I might make sense of others by projecting from my own case, applying the norms I recognize for myself to others. To the extent that others deviate considerably from what we project, we 'cannot make sense' of them. Then it is hard to see how we can ascribe wants or beliefs. So the 'sense-making' interpretation of rationality seems committed to the loose version of the constitutiveness thesis. The harder it is to make someone intelligible, the harder to see her as having beliefs and desires.

But there are also degrees and varieties of intelligibility, with no sharp line dividing rationality from irrationality. So it is in the grey area that we can embrace both constitutive conditions on agency as well as robust judgments of rationality. If we take the core notion of rationality to be ‘making sense of’, the supposed opposition between rationality and constitutiveness is illusory. This is, in effect, how Peter Railton proposes to resolve the tension. His solution involves a “dynamic, holistic” cluster conception of what constitutes having an end. Here is how he describes it:

When deliberating about what to do, a rational person takes her ends into account. But to have an end paradigmatically involves possession of a complex bundle of attitudes and dispositions, involving action, perception, sentiment, belief, and so on.... [I]nterpretive charity will often license attributing an end to a person even though some of these elements are missing, or inconsistently present. An agent who arranges a considerable part of her life in order to promote a long-term goal will from time to time find herself in contexts in which she is attracted to other things, feels alternative pressures exclusively, or even lacks interest in her life. In such cases, even though she may see the bearing of her long-term goal, and even though she may remain disposed to avow it, she may none the less find herself giving it no weight in certain deliberations. Do we say she no longer has the end? Or that she has the end but isn’t at the moment being fully rational with respect to it? The agent herself – at least, if she is like me – will sometimes opt for the latter description. (1997, 72–3)

Railton suggests that some forms of practical irrationality are best explained as “instances of incomplete-yet-nearly-complete approximation of ... having an end.” (73)¹⁶ The loose notion of constitutiveness need not preclude normativity.

But then, neither can it serve as an adequate explanation of the normativity of M/E. Constitutiveness is not going to *entail* norms of rationality. There seems to be more to normativity than making sense of in this minimal sense. Consider those who are more or less intelligible but fail to conform to M/E. Appealing to the complexity involved in attributions of rationality, and showing how these intersect with constitutive conditions on agency, does not seem to help justify the particular attribution of irrationality to such people. We are still left with our problem about third person normative judgments.

Even though the irrational person satisfies what is *constitutively* necessary for having wants, ends, and so on, she is still *irrational* when violating M/E. In raising the question of the instrumental principle, we are looking for the grounds for such judgments of irrationality.¹⁷ The instrumental principle then cannot be explained constitutively. It is a non-constitutive norm, and it is the normativity of that norm that needs explaining.

Here is another way of putting the same point. There is a different use of ‘making sense of’ than that just invoked. According to this different notion, when someone is being irrational, we may well be able to make sense of them because we can imagine what it is like to be in that state. When we imagine that, we know that the conditions for having beliefs and desires are met, and that we are deviating from M/E rationality. That seems a robust psychological phenomenon, and a plausible theory of what is constitutive will have to accommodate it.

Is there a way to provide a non-hypothetical justification of the instrumental principle without reverting to constitutiveness? I will offer one proposal that may plausibly be such a candidate, though there is no reason to think that it is the only one.¹⁸ I will propose a third person account of M/E that presupposes merely that people are often lacking in means-ends resoluteness, and that makes the norms substantive, not analytic. Let’s start by returning briefly to the practical man’s justification, the first-person account presented at the beginning.

7. AN ALTERNATE NON-HYPOTHETICAL EXPLANATION OF THE RATIONALITY OF M/E

In the first-person case, justifying the rationality of M/E is difficult to distinguish from engaging in instrumental reasoning itself. We saw this above: the pragmatic question answers itself. But there are suspicions about the legitimacy of the circularity involved. Let’s consider these now.

Prima facie, to say that instrumental utility justifies M/E seems confused, for the only way in which mentioning the end is a reason for the means is if the agent already wants to take the means to her end.¹⁹ But there are two forms a circular justification can take.²⁰ Premise circularity occurs when the justification proceeds using as a premise the very rule for which a justification is sought. This sort of circularity patently begs the question.²¹ In rule circularity, the rule in question is not presupposed, but rather, it is used in reasoning to the conclusion.²² Consider a justification of M/E which is not premise-circular, but is rule-circular – of the sort offered above by the practical man, e.g., “It is good to reason according to M/E because doing so gets me what I want.” The reasoning goes as follows.

I desire the satisfaction of my ends.

Conforming to the instrumental principle is the necessary means of achieving my ends non-accidentally.

So I have reason to be instrumentally rational.

Does this circularity invalidate the justification? If we answer that rule circularity is no problem, then we have succeeded in giving a first-person justification of M/E on completely instrumental grounds. If we respond that it is a problem, then the practical man’s reasoning provides not a justification at all, but rather presupposes a brute judgment that M/E is rational.

Regardless of what we think of the legitimacy of rule circularity, we can build on the first-person case to address the third-person question before us. Whether or not the practical man’s justification is successful, there is a third-person norm that appears to be brute, in the sense of underived. I have argued that the accounts canvassed (both pragmatic and constitutive) fail to yield a normative sense of M/E. By process of elimination, the conclusion I draw is that the normativity of the instrumental principle is brute. There is no answer to the question in virtue of which M/E is justified. If you have reason to do an end, you thereby have pro tanto reason to perform

what you take to be the necessary and available means to that end. There's nothing more to say by way of explanation. It's a brute fact that the desire for an end produces a reason for the means.

But in what sense is M/E brute? What reason is there for its being a norm of rationality? Where does this norm come from? We can attempt to explain why we have such a brute norm, though this would not be to yield a justification of the norm. Here's a suggestion. For whatever reason, we want others to conform to M/E . There are then two independent ways to develop this thought. One proceeds in terms of *empathy*, the other proceeds via the notion of *cooperation*. Each attempts to provide a further explanation of our brute acceptance of the normativity of M/E . We may be built to have an empathic response to our conspecifics. On the basis of our endorsement of M/E for ourselves, we (empathically) endorse a norm that everyone conforms to M/E . This is a way of building up the first-person explanation provided in the practical man's answer, in such a way that it might serve as the basis for a third-person account.

But we may also value others' obtaining their ends because their doing so is essential to getting what we want. This is a speculation about the genesis of the societal norm; it is not a claim about our actual daily motives (if it were, of course, counterexamples to such a hypothesis abound). We benefit from living in a society, and this benefit might rely necessarily on the implementation of M/E . Cooperation may not be possible without it. This could be true even if it is the case that we sometimes have reason to hope that others are means-end irrational. On this view, endorsing M/E as a norm of rationality is a product of the importance of social cooperation. These speculations could show the instrumental principle to be a higher-order norm that is categorical in the sense that its justification is not dependent on a *further* end. The instrumental principle can be brute, and a matter of our psychology, without being constitutive except in the relaxed sense that we have seen.

Let me head off a possible misunderstanding. My conclusion is not that, for the most part, following *M/E* is built into our psychology. This we can pretty much all agree upon. Nothing normative follows from such a claim. Rather, I am saying that *valuing* the instrumental principle is built into our psychology.²³ This supports a sense in which *M/E* is normative. It would be a fallacy to suppose that the explanation I'm suggesting yields anything normative. Rather, the explanation offered – of why the instrumental norm is psychologically brute – explains also why we can't identify the source of normativity. The normativity hasn't been explained, it is true, but then, neither has it been explained away.

I take this to show that a Humean can be open to non-hypothetical accounts of *M/E*. I wanted to make plausible a picture according to which the instrumental principle is non-hypothetical, in the sense that its justification is not relative to a further end. Moreover, it is a brute fact about our psychology.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR NON-INSTRUMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The above account of the normative force of instrumental reasons does not imply that all reasons must have a similar non-hypothetical grounding. Instrumental reasons have special normative status, not shared by intrinsic or end-reasons. We've already looked at Korsgaard's argument to the contrary. I want now to consider another method of arguing for a similar Kantian conclusion. Thomas Nagel has wanted to extend the force of instrumental reasons to prudential reasons. He argues that both sorts of reasons, prudential and instrumental, are required by reason alone.²⁴ Since his view of practical reason is, like mine, based on a conception of the normativity of *M/E* as brute, it is worth considering whether the position I have adopted commits me to Nagel's conclusion about other purported non-instrumental principles of rationality.

Is there anything in the foregoing treatment of instrumental reasons to suggest that prudence is a requirement of

reason? Nagel seems to ground his intuitions about what is rational in his understanding of what it is to be ‘means-end rational’. Reasons are transmitted from ends to means in virtue of the structural relationship between means and end. To have a reason to pursue the means to some end E, it is sufficient that one has reason to pursue or promote E (given that those means do not thwart other ends). One does not also need a desire to pursue the means – a desire for the end is enough. Nagel describes the “privileged status of the relation between ends and means” thus:

We may say that if being thirsty provides a reason to drink, then it also provides a reason for what enables one to drink. That can be regarded as the perfectly general consequence of a perfectly general property of reasons for action: that they transmit their influence over the relation between ends and means. (1970, 34)

As we noted in section 3.2, Nagel’s formulation is equivalent to the idea that M/E is a brute norm. No explanation has been given here.

He then goes on to claim that reasons for *future* ends transmit their influence to present means of satisfying those ends. ‘Future ends’ refers to ends that are not desired now. They are ends a future self will have, but that one’s present self may or may not share, although one may see what is necessary now to satisfy those future ends. The ordinary relation between means and ends is thus taken to apply across time, so that even ends which are had only by a future self provide reason to pursue the means to those ends now.

I want to argue that this is a non sequitur, and to block this widening of the means-end relation. But it is important first to recall that a Humean can accept that reason has this much structure. Desires are not needed to account for the transmission of reasons across the means-end relation. She can accept that reasons are structurally transmitted from present ends to means. It is the present desire of the ends that matters.

Normally we do acquire a desire for the means – although that desire does not play a normative role in generating the

instrumental reason. In a different context, the means can acquire the status of an end, and so generate a reason for a further end. And sometimes ends get demoted to means. Suppose you want to help someone in trouble. In the course of doing your best, the task proves to be very difficult. Your original end of wanting to help may become a means of proving that you can surmount the odds. Ends are adventitious: they often come up accidentally, out of the blue, and they can disappear in the same way. A means becomes an end when, say, a wasp flies onto the coin slot of the vending machine. You want to get rid of the wasp as a means of clearing the way to insert the coin. But you get so wrapped up in this, that doing so becomes an end in itself. There will be some measure of satisfaction in managing to distract the wasp, even if this does not produce a drink because the machine happens to be broken. The desire to insert the coin may no longer be motivated (to use Nagel's word) by thirst. But one nevertheless has a reason to satisfy this new end – it has become a challenge.

However, even though desires do not account for the transmission of reasons across the means-end relation, they may be necessary for an account of the normativity of the end-reasons themselves. If they are, then the explanation of the normativity of prudential reasons, and of reasons for final ends, can be coherently given a different Humean explanation than that of the normativity of M/E . The Humean would not be required out of consistency to extend the bruteness of M/E to these other reasons. Moreover, if intrinsic reasons are constituted by noncognitive attitudes, then Nagel's use of the instrumental principle to ground norms of prudence would be properly blocked.

Whether a Humean account of non-instrumental reasons is plausible I have not undertaken to prove here. The central claim I have argued for is that M/E is a non-instrumental principle of rationality, if it is a principle of rationality at all. That is, the justification of M/E itself is not dependent upon an agent's particular desires, and is thus categorical in the Kantian sense described above. That is why it is misleading

for Humeans to say there are no non-hypothetical imperatives. They can cheerfully admit that practical reasoning has this much structure.²⁵

NOTES

¹ See for example, Part I of Thomas Scanlon's *What We Owe to Each Other* (1998), Derek Parfit's *Rediscovering Reasons* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), David Brink's *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (1989), and Joseph Raz's *The Morality of Freedom* (1986), to name just a few.

² Moreover, I say nothing about the rationality of taking the sufficient means to one's ends, since failing to do so would not be irrational.

³ Jean Hampton (1996, 88–9) suggests another way that reason can operate as “the slave of the passions”: it can be used to *discover* the content of one's ends.

⁴ The question can also be posed in Kantian terms: How is the hypothetical imperative possible?

⁵ Here it will become important how we define ‘means’. I am using the term in the intuitive sense that is restricted to the (contributing) *causes* of some distinct end, and I am presupposing that causes can be distinguished from their effects, and means from ends. However, if one defines ‘means’ in such a way as to include constitutive means, as well, then one will count more considerations as instrumental reasons. In that case, one might disagree with what I have identified as instrumental. However, the disagreement would be mainly terminological, since we could still agree that the Humean can provide only hypothetical justifications (as described in the text, below). Moreover, such a person would not, in the first place, attribute to the Humean the mistaken conception I am here concerned to forestall.

⁶ But again, see previous footnote.

⁷ For examples of the use of ‘categorical’ and ‘hypothetical’ as applied to reasons and to justifications, see the introduction by Garret Cullity and Berys Gaut, as well as Railton's and Dreier's papers, in Cullity and Gaut, eds. (1997).

⁸ For ease of exposition, I sometimes drop the reference to the qualification ‘necessary and available’, though it is to be assumed. Likewise for the ‘pro tanto’ qualification.

⁹ Such means-desires would be ‘motivated’, in Nagel's sense.

¹⁰ Nagel (1970) does not take this into account in his general characterization of such reasons, cf. p. 35 – though he correctly notes that the relation of means to end cannot be explicated solely via probability, p. 51. I assume that such considerations will not substantially change the points

made – though they would considerably complicate the discussion. I therefore merely note them here.

¹¹ George Schueler (1995) argues against taking the practical syllogism to be a paradigm of practical reasoning. But he does not consider the non-propositional reading I present here, according to which a desire is expressed, rather than the assertion that one has a desire. In fact, most of the trouble he finds with this schema can be traced to his taking the major premise to be a statement *about* desire (97–108). In any case, I intend my use of a version of the ‘practical syllogism’ to be heuristic.

¹² This discussion is restricted to arguments that take such claims to be logically or analytically necessary. I have not the space to consider another sort of necessity claim, according to which being instrumentally rational is thought to be constitutive of being *autonomous*. This is the sort of Kantian justification that is offered by Korsgaard (1997). We must also distinguish both being constitutive of autonomous action and being logically necessary from being *causally* necessary. We will see below that Korsgaard argues that for Hume all necessity is causal.

¹³ This is not just a problem for Humeans. There is a growing literature of Kant’s views on hypothetical imperatives. Regarding M/E, Kant famously wrote, “Whoever wills the end, wills (so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) also the means that are indispensably necessary to his actions and that lie in his power” (Ak. 417). To the extent that this claim is analytic, Kant’s view may encounter similar difficulties in recognizing the normativity of M/E. Some have argued that he escapes the problem by focusing on willing, rather than desiring. Be that as it may, the *prima facie* problem is not an exclusively Humean one.

¹⁴ This is analogous to the reasoning of the classical functionalist, according to which conformity to certain logical inferences is a necessary condition on having beliefs and desires. Cf. David Lewis, “Psychophysical and Theoretical identifications”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 50 (1972). There are parallels here with theoretical reason. Railton (1996, 1997) and many others take epistemic norms as a model for practical norms. Railton notes that one can think of the relation of belief to truth as teleological (instrumentally justified) or as constitutive (1996, 129). He opts for constitutiveness:

On the constitutivist account, the motivational efficacy of deeming something to be evidence follows from the nature of the attitude of belief itself: necessarily, someone who *believes* that *p* will be epistemically “moved” when she judges that she has conclusive reason to believe *not-p*; this is so even if she lacks any independent “desire for truth” to which Humean reason is supposedly a slave, or any non-Humean, motivationally potent “Faculty of Reason.” In this sense, the regulative connection between

belief and truth (or rather, between belief and what-one-takes-to-be-truth-or-to-be-evidence-thereof) is “nonsubjective” or (more awkwardly) “external” or (even?) “categorical”. (1996, 132)

Railton adopts an analogous account of having practical ends, which I discuss in the next section.

¹⁵ This is of course not the only option. One can accept the loose notion of constitutiveness while rejecting a projective account of rationality judgments.

¹⁶ Cf. also Dreier’s resolution of the tension between constitutiveness and rationality (1997, 98).

¹⁷ Some working in the Humean tradition would disagree with this project. Simon Blackburn, for example, is willing to forgo the use of the word ‘rational’ that I have in mind here. Rather than irrationality, say, he suggests that we might speak of hidden conflicts. And conflicts are not necessarily a bad thing. He is willing to embrace constitutiveness, and if that means he cannot recover a sense of normativity, then “the loss of normativity may be a cost one would be willing to pay” (in conversation). Fred Schick, too, is willing to go a similar route. In fact, for Schick, *M/E* is not a normative principle (in conversation).

In contrast, I am seeking to *join* the argument with the Kantians, and not simply to walk away from it. People who talk about rationality in the sense I am trying to capture in the text are not hard to understand, and I want to argue that the Humean can account for one kind of rationality, at least: means-ends rationality. And, moreover, she can do so in a robust sense. There is no reason to throw out intuitions unless one is forced to.

¹⁸ My account is consistent with a Humean (desire-based) theory of practical reason. There are accounts of the normativity of instrumental reason that are not consistent with Humeanism. (Hampton 1996 offers a taxonomy of the possible forms of justification of the instrumental principle.) Unfortunately, I have not the space here to address these, or to show with which sort of justification my proposal has affinities. But I would like to note that the justification I offer is not of the sort that Hampton (1996, 99–107) calls “Humean” – though, again, mine is consistent with a desire-based account of practical reason.

¹⁹ As Railton puts it, it would be using the instrumental principle as a premise. (1997, 60 and 76–78) As far as I can see, he shows that the instrumental principle cannot be justified non-circularly from the first person perspective. But I do not think his reasoning extends to the third person judgment that we are interested in.

²⁰ This parallels the discussion of the possibility of providing an inductive justification of induction. Cf., for example, Chapter II of Brian Skyrms’ *Choice and Chance* (1986). In fact, the difficulties involved in justifying induction mirror, in many respects, those involved in justifying

M/E. As will be evident, my response to each problem is similar, and involves a leap of faith, outside the bounds of justification properly speaking.

²¹ Lewis Carroll (1895), and many others since, famously showed that one cannot identify a rule of inference such as modus ponens, for example, with a premise in an argument on pain of generating an infinite regress.

²² So, for example, this illustrates a case of rule circularity:

1. Induction has worked in the past.
2. Therefore, induction will work in the future.

²³ Furthermore, I am not arguing that M/E is justified because following it contributes to our survival. I am suspicious of such evolutionary justifications (and, in any case, am not convinced that the factual claim is true). Rather, I am saying that because we are hard-wired to value social cooperation, we want people to be able in general to follow the means-end principle. This results in the expression of M/E as a norm of rationality.

²⁴ One might argue that the intuition that prudence is a rational requirement stands on its own. But Nagel seems to want to ground the principle of prudence on more plausible considerations. One can discern two such possible grounds; these provide two distinct possible diagnoses for the intuitive force of his position. The first appeals to the nature of instrumental reasons, and is the focus of this section. The second concerns the nature of the self as a temporally extended individual. Briefly, my response to the latter ground is that (a) such a conception of the self is one that we can live without, and (b), in any event, it is one that is open to the Humean to adopt as well. So, the fact that Nagel's account entails this conception of the self gives no reason to think that his theory is correct.

²⁵ Many have commented helpfully on previous drafts of this paper; thanks especially to Ruth Chang, Stuart Rachels, and Eric Wyland. Thanks also for a close reading and generous discussion to Michael Stocker, Chris Gowans, Jeff Blustein, and Jonathan Adler.

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