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Intention, Plans, and Ethical Rationalism

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ACCORDING TO MICHAEL BRATMAN'S influential theory of intending, the intention to ϕ is a distinctive practical attitude marked by its pivotal role in planning for the future. Intention involves desire, but even predominant desire is insufficient for intention, since it need not involve a commitment to act: intentions are "conduct-controlling pro-attitudes, ones which we are disposed to retain without reconsideration, and which play a significant role as inputs to [means–end] reasoning" (Bratman, 1987, p. 20). The plans for action contained in our intentions are typically partial and must be filled out in accordance with changing conditions as the future comes. Intentions are subject, in turn, to distinctive norms of practical rationality: norms of consistency and means–end coherence.

One of the virtues of this conception, and a source of its remarkable influence, is its apparent modularity. Bratman presents his theory of the nature of intention, and of its rationality, as a supplement to the belief–desire model, on which

> an agent's desires and beliefs at a certain time provide her with reasons for acting in various ways at that time. What practical rationality requires is that her intentional action be at least as strongly supported by these desire–belief reasons as any of its proposed alternatives. (Bratman, 1987, p. 15)

He argues convincingly that the belief–desire conception is incomplete and that its revision presents a puzzle in the philosophy of practical reason. It is this puzzle, among others, that his theory is meant to solve. Strikingly, however, both problem and solution are independent of the belief–desire model.[1]

The problem, in brief, is that intentions place rational pressure on thought and action, but not as reasons to act. What role can they play? The solution takes the form of a structure of psychological states and rational norms that fits on top of the belief–desire model and could be imposed on other intention-free conceptions of practical thought. It looks, then, as though the problem is a problem for everyone and that the solution is one that anyone can adopt. Whatever your general theory of reasons for action—belief–desire, value-based, virtue-theoretic, internal, external—Bratman's picture is for you.

In what follows, I raise doubts about this view. In particular, I argue that Bratman's theory of intention can explain the rationality of means–end coherence only if it takes a distinctively rationalist form. It must derive the principles of practical reason from the nature of agency or practical thought. I argue, further, that there obstacles to any local or partial form of ethical rationalism. Once we are rationalists about an aspect of practical reason, there is pressure to be rationalists about practical reason, as such. There is thus an argument from Bratman's theory of intention, as an explanation of means–end rationality, to a comprehensive form of rationalism in ethics. Bratman is not himself a comprehensive rationalist.[2] He does not embrace this line of thought. The question is how he can avoid it. How can he explain the rationality of means–end coherence, except in rationalist terms?

My treatment raises a more general issue and has a larger aim: to set out the case for ethical rationalism. This project may seem perverse, since I have argued against rationalism, at length, elsewhere.[3] But there is no inconsistency. The point of my argument here is to explain why rationalism deserves sustained attention. Its project strikes many as implausible or obviously flawed. If I am right, however, there is an argument for rationalism from premises few reject. This argument can be made to work on conceptions of agency even weaker than the planning theory; it avoids the problem of defective action; and it explains why rationalism is an exclusive or imperialist view. As I will argue, the challenge is not to motivate ethical rationalism but to resist its claims.

The essay has five parts. In the first, I sketch a puzzle about reason and intention that motivates Bratman's 1987 book, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*. In the second, I describe one aspect of his solution—an appeal to "wide-scope" norms of practical rationality—and contrast two ways in which these norms could be explained. The more promising explanation takes a rationalist form. In section 3, I develop this approach, showing how the explanation works and why it cannot be limited in scope. Section 4 takes up the

risks and defects of comprehensive rationalism, sketching an alternative view. Finally, having explored the space of possibilities, I ask where Bratman's own position falls.

1. *A Puzzle about Means–End Coherence*

In chapter 2 of *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*, Bratman asks how we are to understand the normative role of intention for the future. How do "prior intentions provide considerations that are directly relevant to the rationality of derivative intentions and plans?" (1987, p. 23). In some way or other, forming an intention imposes not only psychological but rational constraints on practical thought. As Bratman notes, this point is especially vivid when I decide between two options that are equally desirable. Should I go to the movies or cook a relaxing dinner at home? Both would be fine ways to spend the evening; but I have to choose. Once I decide on the movies, there is rational pressure for me to take the necessary means, such as buying a ticket, rather than steps toward cooking dinner, especially when the means to the alternative are incompatible with the means to what I now intend. If there is no time to shop for groceries and make it to the movie on time, there is something rationally problematic in deciding on the former, given my intention.

What Bratman showed is that a natural explanation of this phenomenon is wrong.[4] According to this explanation, intentions provide additional reasons to act: in this case, an additional reason to go to the movies, instead of cooking dinner at home. As he argues, this proposal is in one way too weak and in another way too strong. It is too weak in that it treats the fact of intending E as just one reason among many, a consideration that must be balanced against others. In contrast, when I reason from intended end to means, I treat the end as fixed. It is, of course, revisable, but while it remains in place, I do not simply have reason to take the means; it is something I am required to do. Means–end coherence is a strict or peremptory demand.

At the same time, however, the proposal is too strong, since it allows for a form of illicit bootstrapping. If intentions in general provide reasons for action, an irrational decision could transform an action that I should not perform into one that I should by tipping the balance of reasons. But this is not the case. Note that, if we respond to the first objection by conceiving of intentions as decisive or compelling reasons, which automatically determine what one ought to do, we make the problem of bootstrapping that much worse. Intention-based reasons would win out not only when the balance is close, but in every case: one would always be acting as one should in doing what one intends to do.

We are left with some difficult questions. If not by providing reasons, how do prior intentions serve as rational inputs to practical reasoning? What normative pressure do they exert and why? Answers can be found in Bratman's theory of intention and practical reason.

2. *Two Kinds of Solution*

Begin with an element of Bratman's thinking that has been stable through its gradual evolution:

> Central to the planning theory is the idea that intentions—in contrast with ordinary desires—are both embedded in characteristic regularities and are subject to distinctive rational pressures for consistency and coherence. There is, in particular, a rational demand that one's intentions, taken together with one's beliefs, fit together into a consistent model of one's future. There is, further, a rational demand that one's intentions be means–end coherent in the sense, roughly, that it not be true that one intends E, believes that E requires that one intend means M, and yet not intend M. (Bratman, 2009a, p. 29)[5]

In recent work, Bratman identifies these demands as wide-scope norms of practical rationality.[6] Two contrasts are involved in this description. First, the norms at issue take wide scope in that they "enjoin or reject certain combinations of attitudes" (Bratman, 2009b, p. 412). In the case of means–end coherence, which will be our primary focus throughout, the requirement is: not to intend E, believe that intending means M is necessary for E, and not intend M, all at once. It does not follow that, if one intends E and believes that intending means M is necessary, one should then intend M, as opposed to giving up the end, or less plausibly, one's belief about the necessary means.[7] One can meet the requirement in any of these ways. Second, the norms at issue concern the practical rationality of the agent, not theoretical rationality, nor—at least not directly—what there is most reason for him or her to do. The distinction between reasons and rationality is evinced by simple cases of practical reasoning in conditions of false belief. To give an example, adapted from Bernard Williams (1979, p. 102): suppose I am confronted with a glass of what I take to be cool, refreshing water. In fact, the glass contains poison. Is the fact that I am thirsty a reason to drink what is in the glass? Surely not,

though, given my false belief, it would be practically rational to do so and perhaps irrational to refuse. Once we distinguish reasons from rationality, there is room for a substantive investigation of the scope and strength of reasons to conform to rational requirements.[8] (Perhaps there is reason to be rational even in responding to false beliefs; perhaps not.) Bratman's view is that the norms of consistency and means–end coherence are, in the first instance, norms of practical rationality. That there is reason to conform to them is a distinct, but still significant, claim.[9]

How far these revisions solve the problem of bootstrapping, from section 1, is a matter of some dispute.[10] But it is not our main concern. Supposing Bratman is right about the kind of normative pressure intentions place on practical thought, through wide-scope norms of practical rationality, we can still ask *why* this pressure occurs. What explains the requirements of consistency and means–end coherence? Bratman tries to answer this question, too, drawing on pragmatic and rationalist themes. We will explore these prospects in turn, beginning with pure forms of pragmatism and ethical rationalism. In the final section, I investigate the present shape of Bratman's view.

According to the first proposal, rational norms of consistency and coherence in intention turn on the practical benefits of conformity: "Their satisfaction is normally required for plans to serve well their role in coordinating and controlling conduct" (Bratman, 1987, pp. 31–32).

> Practical reasoning, then, has two levels: prior intentions and plans pose problems and provide a filter on options that are potential solutions to those problems; desire–belief reasons enter as considerations to be weighed in deliberating between relevant and admissible options. This two-level structure is an essential part of the way in which intentions and plans play their coordination-facilitating role, and so part of the way in which intentions enable us to avoid being merely time-slice agents—agents who are constantly starting from scratch in their deliberations. So this two-level structure of practical reasoning has a pragmatic rationale, one grounded in its long-run contribution to our getting what we (rationally) want—given our limits and our complex needs for coordination. We need not leave a broadly instrumental conception of practical reason in order to allow intentions to have direct relevance to the rationality of action. (Bratman, 1987, p. 35)

Passages like this can be interpreted in different ways. On a modest reading, they stress the advantages of being coherent in one's intentions, without

meaning to explain the wide-scope norms. That is how I understand a more recent essay, "Intention, Practical Rationality, and Self-Governance," which finds intrinsic value in conforming to norms of coherence while denying the ambition to "reduce [the requirement of means–end coherence] to [a] claim about reasons" (Bratman, 2009b, p. 421, n. 32).[11] To employ a distinction introduced above: although he argues that the virtue of self-governance supports means–end coherence and, in that sense, justifies it, Bratman's topic in the later essay is why there is *reason* to be coherent, not why it is practically rational. Assuming that means–end coherence is a requirement of practical reason, Bratman argues that there is reason to conform to it in almost every case.[12] In contrast, the pragmatic argument of the book seems more ambitious: an attempt to explain why the requirement of coherence applies to planning agents at all: why coherence is a condition of practical rationality for creatures like us.

In any case, the substantive question is whether an explanation of this kind could be right. Can we derive the rationality of means–end coherence from reasons for conforming to it, in general? On the whole, things go best if we tend to be coherent, in the following sense:

> *M–E*: If you intend E and believe that intending means M is necessary for E, intend M.

No doubt there are occasions on which the reasons for the practice, if applied to the particular case, would recommend violating *M–E*.[13] If we follow Bratman in appealing to the satisfaction of desire, a relevant example would be one in which my desires would be more fully satisfied, in light of my beliefs, if I were to intend E without intending M, despite my belief that intending means M is necessary for E. According to the pragmatic, two-level theory, there is a rational requirement of means–end coherence, even in this case, because there is sufficient reason for the general practice of conforming to *M–E*, a practice in which I already engage. The reasons for the practice, although they do not cover every instance of *M–E*, explain why its satisfaction is rationally required.

What this explanation needs is a "transfer" principle by which reasons for a practice transmit their force to the strict application of its rules or the reasons for a disposition transmit their force to its specific manifestations.[14] We find this structure in classical utilitarian accounts of the justification of punishment and promising, influentially renewed by John Rawls in "Two Concepts in Rules." What Rawls proposes is too strong: "Where a form of

action is specified by a practice there is no justification possible of the particular action of a particular person save by reference to the practice" (1955, p. 32). This implies that a rule-defined practice is insulated from reasons not certified by its rules, regardless of whether the practice is in any way good! As Michael Thompson notes, in defending this principle Rawls seems to confuse normative with motivating reasons. One engaged in a practice can intelligibly cite its rules as the grounds on which he is acting; it does not follow that he is justified in acting as he does.[15] More plausible, and more relevant to us, would be a principle like this:

> *Transfer*: If there is sufficient reason to engage in a practice with certain rules, and I engage in this practice, its rules are for me requirements of practical rationality.

In the present context, we assume sufficient reason for the practice of conforming to *M–E*. It follows by *Transfer* that, as agents who engage in this practice, we are subject to a rational requirement that demands that we conform, even to instances of *M–E* where the reason does not apply.

The problem is that *Transfer*, while more plausible than the doctrine of justification in Rawls, is nonetheless false. It is not rational to follow the rules of a practice in which we have sufficient reason to engage when it is perfectly clear that the reasons in question count against it here and now.[16] Suppose that I am playing a game defined by certain rules. At a certain point I realize that following the rules when I could secretly break them would have some terrible consequence, as would ceasing to play. Although there is sufficient reason for me to play the game, and I am doing so now, I am not rationally required to obey the rules in this particular case: in fact, it would be irrational to do so.[17] What is more, we cannot save the *Transfer* principle by insisting that, when I break the rules, I am no longer playing the game—at least not without depriving it of interest. For the point of *Transfer* is to speak to the violation of rules by those who participate in a practice. Violation must therefore be consistent with participation.

It might be said, in response, that the practice that interests us is not a game in which we engage from time to time but something more pervasive. Maybe so, but that is a difference of degree and does not affect the form of explanation involved. Things might change if the practice were essential to being an agent, as it is for the ethical rationalist, but then we are dealing with a different view. If we ask whether *Transfer* explains the rational requirement of means–end coherence—can this requirement be understood through a general account of the normativity of practice or disposition?—the answer is no, since the relevant account is false. Nor does it help to advert to the wide-scope character of means–end coherence or to ask whether it is subject to counterexamples of the kind we have just observed. The argument is not that *Transfer* goes wrong in connection with *M–E* but that since it goes wrong elsewhere, it cannot explain what needs to be explained.

Although he does not deal with this directly in his book, Bratman would likely agree.[18] At any rate, the pragmatic account that he sketches there does not rely on *Transfer* and so preempts the objection above. Bratman's key idea is that we must distinguish "internal" and "external" perspectives on the agent's deliberation (1987, §3.5). The internal perspective is informed by demands for consistency and coherence that belong to the practice of intending. The external perspective is not: it looks only to the reasons supplied by our beliefs and desires. Thus "an option that is rational relative to the internal perspective of deliberation may fail to be rational relative to the . . . external perspective" (p. 45). The picture is not that the deliberating, intending agent has false beliefs about what is rational or what she ought to do or that she is prevented from recognizing when it is irrational to conform to *M–E* from the external perspective.[19] Instead, there are two concepts of rationality, or "two kinds of ought judgments" (p. 46). When the reasons for conforming to *M–E* in general recommend violating it in this specific case, the verdicts of internal and external rationality diverge. In the internal sense of "ought," I ought to conform to *M–E*; in the external sense, I ought not. Both judgments are "objective"; "Nor should we suppose that one generally takes precedence over the other. Rather, each has its distinctive role to play in our complex practices of deliberation and rational assessment" (p. 46). In effect, then, *Transfer* is ambiguous. Reasons to engage in a practice cannot make it externally rational to do so when those reasons count against conforming here and now. Instead, they make strict compliance internally rational: it is what one ought to do from the internal perspective.

How far does this distinction go in solving the problems of *Transfer* and saving the pragmatic view? Nor far enough, I think. Once we admit that the deliberating agent can make judgments from the external perspective, she may find herself thinking, correctly, "It is internally rational for me to do one thing, externally rational to do another." Is she not then compelled to ask, "What should I do, *all things considered*, taking account of both internal and external rationality?" If her question makes sense, the problems with *Transfer* reemerge as problems about this more embracing "should." If it does

not make sense—as Bratman suggests in speaking of what is rational "all considered" from *both* internal and external perspectives (p. 46)—we face a baffling fragmentation of practical reason. The deliberating agent may choose to follow the internal or external ought, but her choice is arbitrary. There is no content to the question, which should win out in the end, only the trivial fact that each ought to be followed in the sense of "ought" keyed to its own perspective.

We can extend the puzzle further. If the pragmatic account is to explain the (internal) rationality of conforming to *M–E* through the advantages of the practice, it must draw on a general claim about the transmission of normative force. When a practice is justified from the external perspective of belief and desire, it generates its own norms of internal rationality. This applies to any practice, not just the practice of conforming to *M–E*. It follows that there are not two senses of "ought," but many. As one who participates in worthwhile practices of various kinds, I am confronted with a proliferation of internal "oughts." How am I to navigate this? It is not that practices do not involve their own prescriptive concepts—"You have to move the castle in a straight line"; "You should take his knight"—but it is natural to think of these as marking what the rules require or how best to achieve the aims by which the practice is defined, not as normative concepts in their own right. The rules of a justified practice do not generate species of rationality, "ought," and reason but social facts that may or may not be reasons for action in the sole normative sense.

Our conclusion is that the rationality of means–end coherence cannot be explained in pragmatic terms, either by way of *Transfer* or through the more subtle line of *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*. There may be sufficient reason to conform to *M–E* in general and in each ordinary case—as Bratman argues more fully elsewhere[20]—but this does not explain why conformity is rationally required.

The distinction between internal and external perspectives on rationality that figures in Bratman's book is absent from his later work, and while pragmatic themes remain, their explanatory burden is less clear. What we find beside them are hints of a rationalist account, one that draws standards of practical reason not from practices in which we have reason to engage but from the nature of practical thought. Roughly put, the disposition to conform to *M–E* is special—it corresponds to a norm of practical rationality—because it is constitutive of intention itself.

The prospect of this alternative comes out in a transitional paper, "Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical," in which Bratman returns to

earlier themes. The immediate provocation is a revival of "cognitivism" about means–end coherence: the view that its requirements are a matter of theoretical rationality, fixed on the beliefs involved in intending to act.[21] Bratman makes powerful objections to this approach,[22] but he also confronts its motivations and sketches a constructive view. Here his principal foil is the work of David Velleman, who asks how the demands for consistency and coherence in intention are to be explained, if not in cognitivist terms (2007). Bratman's response begins with Velleman's own account of truth as the aim of belief. For Velleman, belief aims at truth in both normative and descriptive ways. It does so normatively in that "a belief must be true in order to be correct" (Velleman, 2000, p. 17). It does so descriptively in that "[belief] is constitutively regulated by mechanisms designed to ensure that it is true" (pp. 16–17). Velleman had claimed that belief aims at truth in the normative sense *because* it aims at truth descriptively and that "indicators of truth count as reasons for belief because they are considerations in response to which belief is designed to be regulated" (p. 18). Bratman's thought is that such claims can be adapted here.

> If we are willing to appeal to the aim of belief in supporting norms on belief, we should also be willing to make an analogous appeal to the (or, an) aim of intention. And if we are trying to specify such an aim, it is plausible to suppose that intentions aim at coordinated control of action *that achieves what is intended*. Further, it is a fundamental fact about agents like us that such effective control normally depends on a process of filling in partial plans with intentions concerning needed means. (Bratman, 2009a, pp. 53–54)

> Given that the agent knows relevant facts about his own causal powers, means–end *in*coherence of his intentions will normally undermine the aim of effective control. So if we can see norms on belief as grounded in the aim of belief, we can, in an analogous way, see a norm of means–end coherence as grounded in the aim of intention. (p. 54)

The upshot is an account of the demand for means–end coherence that is rationalistic in deriving a norm of practical rationality from the nature of agency: from the functional role of intentions as plans.

It is this kind of rationalism that is developed in section 3, where its details and implications are explored. It is, in my view, more promising than the pragmatic approach. I should say, however, that it is not straightforwardly

endorsed in "Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical," despite the passages above. For one thing, Bratman's formulations there are largely conditional: *if* we can say that belief aims at truth, we can make a parallel claim about intention. Bratman is cautious about the antecedent. Second, he notes Velleman's recent doubts about the explanation of truth's normative by its descriptive aim (Bratman, 2009a, pp. 50–51). If all that we have is a package of "associated" dispositions and norms, not an explanation of the latter by the former, we do not have a rationalist view. Finally, Bratman denies that planning agency is strictly "inescapable" since there "agents who are not planning agents." (2009a, §IX). If there are agents who act intentionally or for reasons without making plans, we cannot hope to derive the norm of means–end coherence from the nature of agency as such. We need some other approach: a more qualified form of rationalism or a synthesis of pragmatic and rationalist ideas. As I argue at the end of this paper, it is hard to see how this approach could work. For this reason, and for its intrinsic interest, we begin with a more purely rationalist view.

3. *Comprehensive Rationalism*

What is ethical rationalism? In my perhaps unconventional usage, it is the project of deriving standards of practical reason from the nature of agency or practical thought. This project is ethical in the widest sense. The rationalist need not make claims about morality or ethics as concern for others, but his subject is practical: how we should live and act. His treatment is a form of rationalism in that it generalizes a familiar reading of Kant's *Groundwork*, section III.[23] On this reading, it belongs to agents, as such, to act "under the idea of freedom" and so to be responsive to the moral law. Not that every agent does respond, but the propensity to do so is contained in the capacity to act. Its realization is thus an aspect of practical rationality. The generalization of this approach leaves room for species of rationalism on which we act intentionally not under the idea of freedom but under the guise of the good, or on which we aim at self-knowledge or the satisfaction of desire, so that it is the object of practical reason to achieve the good, to gain self-understanding, or to get whatever you want.[24]

The rationalist project moves from metaphysical premises to normative conclusions, from the metaphysics of agency to norms of practical reason. What accounts for this transition? If it were taken as primitive, the promise to *explain* what is involved in being rational would not have been kept. We know the answer, in outline. Where the pragmatic approach relied on claims

about the normativity of practice, rationalists appeal to the normativity of *what things are*. But how does this appeal go through?

There are hints to be found in the formulations sketched above. For Velleman, intentional action has self-knowledge or self-understanding as a "constitutive aim."[25] Agency is, in effect, a functional or teleological kind, defined by an end or goal. Something similar holds if it is in the nature of agents to aim at perfect autonomy or at the highest good. We can insert such claims into a function argument inspired by Aristotle. Recall that, for Aristotle, human beings have a defining function or activity, which is the use of reason, and whatever has a function finds its good in performing that function well. There are standard objections. Is it right to speak of a human function? Does the argument conflate what is good *for* an *F* with being good *as* an *F*? Even if they are sound, however, these arguments do not undermine the principle we need.

> *Excellence*: When *F*s have a defining function or activity, a good *F* is one that performs that activity or function well.

If part of what it is to be an agent is to aim at autonomy, or self-knowledge, or whatever, part of what it is to be good as an agent is to aim at these things effectively. Since practical reason is the virtue of agency, one is to that extent practically rational. The rationalist account goes through.

We can spell out the demands of this argument more slowly. First, it relies on a certain structure in the function of agency: not just that agents are defined by an activity—doing things for reasons—but that agency has a target, like happiness or means–end coherence, of which it can fall short. It belongs to the nature of agents to be directed by, or tends toward, an aim that they may not realize even when they succeed in acting for reasons.[26] The achievement of this aim does not sort behavior as intentional or not; it offers an ideal to which intentional action may or may not conform. It is not a condition of acting for reasons that one hit the target in question, only that one aim at doing so. This structure allows for defective action in the framework of ethical rationalism: the capacity to act for reasons can be exercised imperfectly, in ways that do not fully achieve its end.[27]

The idea of an aim or function that figures in the rationalist argument need not be mysterious. Since rationalists hope for standards of practical reason that apply to agents, as such, regardless of their biological form, they do not appeal to specifically biological function.[28] Instead, they turn to dispositions that constitute agency or to rules and principles that guide us if we act for reasons

at all. There is room to be flexible here. If we think of the aim as fixed by a disposition of every possible agent, we end up with what is called "internalism about reasons": agents have the capacity to be moved by any reason to which they are subject.[29] Alternatively, to be an agent is to *approximate* the possession of dispositions whose target is thereby constituted as the aim of agents, as such.[30] When agents fall short of full possession, internalism fails. Either way, one can manifest the dispositions that constitute agency, to the extent that one has them, either imperfectly or in full. Intentional action is the product of such dispositions, which set a target for agents to meet in what they do.

The second assumption of the rationalist argument is what I have called *Excellence*. It is worth stressing how modest this principle is. Not only does it not require the more contentious elements of Aristotle's function argument, it does not purport to be a general account of *good*. That "good" has a functional use is quite consistent with its being used in other ways, too, as when we speak of "good outcomes," what is "good for" an individual, or even what is "good" *simpliciter*.[31] The applications of *Excellence* are harmless enough. If the function of clocks is to tell the time, a good clock does so both legibly and reliably. If the defining activity of a thief is to steal others' property, a good thief is one who gets away with the loot.

Putting the first two steps together, when the nature of a kind is defined in dispositional terms and where it has a target of which it can fall short, to be good of that kind is to manifest that disposition in full. It is not enough for the application of *Excellence* that the disposition can fail to be exercised altogether: there must be such a thing as its imperfect or incomplete manifestation. Where an object meets these conditions, it can operate well or badly as the kind of thing it is. Thus, if being an agent is being disposed to a certain end, at least by approximation, and one can exercise this disposition, to the extent that one has it, more or less well, to be good as an agent is fully to achieve that end.[32]

In its final step, the argument identifies practical rationality with being good qua agent. This premise draws on a compelling thought: that judgments of practical reason are assessments of agency, not some other aspect of our lives. To say this is not to presuppose the truth of rationalism; one can accept it even if one doubts that the nature of agency is the source of rational norms. If standards for being good qua agent do not flow from the nature of agency as such, their grounds must lie elsewhere, perhaps not in the function of anything. Still, they are standards of practical reason.[33]

Understood along these lines, the argument for rationalism strikes me as formidable. It begins with dispositional claims about agency that many will accept. They are in the spirit of "functionalism" as a theory of mind but without its reductive ambitions.[34] While there may be dispute about the shape or extent of the dispositions involved in being an agent, it is tempting to suppose that there are dispositions that we must approximate and that they can be cast as dispositions to conform to an ideal. How can we then deny that the ideal is one of practical rationality? Only by doubting *Excellence* or that defects of agency are defects of practical reason. But these premises seem true.

My purpose in pushing this line is not to embrace the rationalist view—far from it—but to draw out its latent imperialism. We can explain in rationalist terms why there is a requirement of conformity with *M–E*. The disposition to conform is part of the functional role that defines intention and thus belongs to the constitutive aim of agency. To be good qua agent and, therefore, practically rational, one must possess and manifest this disposition in full. But if this explanation works, *all* requirements of practical reason must be explained in the same way. The dispositions involved in agency are the exhaustive source of rational norms. Why so? Because the principles that underwrite the explanation in any given case are general and leave no room for "hybrid" views. According to *Excellence*, when *F*s have a defining function or activity—as we are supposing agents do—a good *F* does *nothing more* than perform this activity or function well. That is what it is to be good as an *F*; there are no further conditions. We may, of course, be subject to standards other than those of agency, as for instance those for being a good thief. But as we saw in the argument's final step, if one falls short of some standard without being defective as an agent, there is no failure of practical reason. To be practically rational is to be good qua agent, not in any other way. One cannot challenge these moves, which are in any case plausible, without ruining the desired account of *M–E*.

How can the planning theorist explain the demand for means–end coherence? We have looked at two possibilities, each of which draws on a practice or disposition involved in having intentions and each of which reflects an element of Bratman's work. Appeal to *Transfer* or to the more subtle pragmatism of *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* would give us a modular view. Reasons for a practice, understood in whatever way we like, are the source of further requirements. The problem is that *Transfer* fails and that distinguishing internal and external perspectives on practical rationality makes more trouble than it solves. In contrast, there is nothing obviously wrong with the rationalist account, which takes us from the functional role of intention in agency to rational norms. But it is not modular. If the

explanation works here, it works everywhere: the content of practical reason is quite generally so explained.

In what follows, I take up the principal questions of anti-rationalism: why and how? I will bring out the most disturbing aspect of ethical rationalism—a threat to the generality of moral reasons—and I will explain the commitments of any opposing view.

4. *Problems and Prospects*

Assume a simple form of rationalism on which the constitutive aim of agency turns on dispositions had by every possible agent. To be practically rational is to manifest these dispositions in full. Now suppose that facts about the rights and interests of others provide us all with reasons to act. In this sense, moral reasons are categorical. Since it is a defect of rationality to be unmoved by a reason of which one is aware, it follows that an agent who is practically rational, one who manifests in full the dispositions constitutive of agency, will be moved by the rights and interests of others.[35] Since these are constitutive dispositions, any possible agent must have them. One cannot act for reasons without being disposed to respond to reasons of these kinds.

In the context of ethical rationalism, the categorical standing of moral reasons thus depends on the impossibility of utter selfishness, of someone who acts for reasons but has no tendency at all to defer to others. Or if we complicate things by allowing for approximation, it turns on this tendency being among those one must approximate in order to be an agent. If one's other dispositions are sufficiently flawed, there is a limit to how selfish one can possibly be: too selfish and one falls below the minimal threshold of agency.

Now, dispositional claims are weak, since dispositions can be "masked" or prevented from manifesting by interference of various kinds.[36] Claims of approximation are weaker yet. Still, ethical rationalism is a threat to moral reasons. To hold that such reasons are categorical, in the rationalist framework, is to undertake a heroic task in the metaphysics of agency: that of showing why agents, as such, must be susceptible, perhaps indirectly and approximately, to the claims of others. Some philosophers accept this charge, but most have doubts—and Bratman is among them.[37]

There is a possible solution. Even if the disposition to give weight to the rights and interests of others is not among those that one must approximate to be an agent, not among the conditions of agency as such, we could reconcile ethical rationalism with the generality of moral reasons by identifying

such reasons not with facts about rights and interests but with facts about the good. If it is good to respect the rights and interests of others and the disposition to pursue the good is one that we must possess in order to be agents, moral reasons may be universal after all. The picture of agency invoked in this argument derives from Plato and Aristotle and persists in more recent work.[38] But it is controversial, and I have argued against it elsewhere.[39] In short, while it may be true that representations of the good are essentially practical, we can say what it is to be an agent without them. The disposition to be moved by appearances of the good is not one that we must possess or approximate to act for reasons at all.

On this assumption, the previous verdict holds: ethical rationalism puts pressure on the scope of moral reasons. Such reasons are categorical only if the disposition to respond to them is one that we must approximate in being agents. And yet it seems that we can live without it. While those who lack moral sensitivity are no doubt flawed, they do not seem impossible, nor does their indifference cast doubt on their standing as agents, as certain forms of incoherence might. The ethical rationalist who believes in moral reasons must show otherwise.

It is because it makes the status of morality so precarious that we should hope to avoid being led to rationalism. The puzzle is how. What we found in section 3 was, in effect, an argument for ethical rationalism, in its comprehensive form, from minimal premises: that practical rationality is a matter of being good qua agent, that *Excellence* is true, and that intentions are defined by their functional role in constituting plans. Which premise can we deny? Not the first or second. As I emphasized above, to identify practical rationality with the excellence of agency is not to assume the truth of rationalism but to say that practical reason is concerned with our performance as agents, not by other lights. Whatever their basis, the standards of practical reason are standards for being good qua agent. Likewise, although the application of *Excellence* to agency is controversial, the principle itself is not. What we must dispute, if we are to resist comprehensive rationalism, is the theory of intentions as plans.[40]

In doing so, we should ask which feature of the planning theory gives rise to ethical rationalism. The theory may otherwise seem impossible to deny. Can we doubt the involvement in agency of the intention to act? That when one intends to ϕ one is disposed to ϕ, perhaps through the mediation of belief? That agency therefore counts as a functional kind, defined by a constitutive aim? We need not do any of these things. What allows the ethical rationalist to exploit the planning theory as a foundation for practical reason is that it

specifies an aim that we can fail to meet, even as we act for reasons. Intention "aims to make its content true *as an element in a coordinated realization of one's system of intentions*, in the world as one believes it to be" (Bratman, 2009a, p. 52). Planning agents are thus disposed toward coherence, a standard that they achieve, across their profile of intentions and beliefs, only to some degree. Coherence is the measure of practical rationality, an ideal of which we may fall short. Within this framework, there will be intentional actions that manifest incoherence or practical irrationality, things that we would not otherwise do. There is room for defective action.[41]

What we need to describe, as an alternative to the planning theory, is a conception of agency on which its aim is less robust: on which it is achieved by every intentional action and thus affords no test for rational defect. Our starting point is shared with Elizabeth Anscombe.

> What distinguishes actions which are intentional from those which are not? The answer I shall suggest is that they are the actions to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application; the sense is of course that in which the answer, if positive, gives a reason for acting. (1963, p. 9)

We can grant that reasons attach to action through intention. But let us not assume, with Anscombe, that intentional action involves "knowledge without observation" or that the question "Why?" is answered by the agent itself. The application of the question "Why?" may or may not require self-knowledge. Most significant, let us suppose that while the minimal agent can act on the ground that *p*—"because he killed my brother" or "because I promised"—it cannot act for teleological reasons: it cannot do one thing in order to do another. In this sense, it is capable only of "basic" action. The minimal agent never performs an intentional action, A, by intentionally doing B, although the process involved in doing A may have subintentional or automatic parts. It is, if you like, a simple or "atomic" agent. Of course, there are complex or "molecular" agents, too. But if atomic agents are possible, the planning theory does not apply to them: it is not essential to being an agent that one be able to conform to principles like *M–E*.

Anscombe might protest. She asks: "Would intentional actions still have the characteristic 'intentional' if there were no such thing as expression of intention for the future, or as further intention in acting?" (Anscombe, 1963, p. 30). And she answers no. If her claim is that there could not be intentional action without intentional teleology, it is a denial of atomic agency. But as far as I can tell, she has no argument for this. The closest we get is her remark that, without intention for the future, there is little point in "[arguing] against motives" (p. 31). Even if we grant this point, it is not clear what follows. Why is the range of nonteleological answers to the question "Why?" not enough to give sense to intentional action? Why should it matter to the possibility of atomic agents what it is worth saying to them? In any case, atomic agents can plan for the future so long as their plans are concerned with basic action, not with taking means to ends.

There is more to say here on both sides.[42] Those who doubt the possibility of atomic agents must find some hidden incoherence in the conception of agency sketched above. I do not see what that could be. It is sometimes said that explanation by desire and means–end belief is "constitutive" of intentional action. Thus, Michael Smith holds that we need instrumental reason to solve the problem of "causal deviance."[43] But that cannot be right. In basic action, motivation is possible without any belief about means: guidance by intention is enough.[44] What prevents an atomic agent from forming and acting on the intention to ϕ in just this way? Or from acting on the ground that *p* without an end to which the belief that *p* presents its action as a means?[45] Let me emphasize, however, that my task is not to argue against the need for means–end structure in intentional action but to indicate how we must think of agency if we are to give no purchase to the rationalist approach. The intentions of atomic agents aim at their own execution. When that happens, there is intentional action; otherwise, not. Since every intentional action achieves this aim, it cannot be a standard for what we intentionally do. Nor can principles of instrumental reason get a grip on atomic agents, who never intentionally take means to their ends or act from further desires.

A final step is needed for the minimal conception. If it were essential to being an agent, even an atomic agent, that one be disposed to act on specific grounds—a disposition one can manifest in full or in part—this fact would constitute a premise for the rationalist argument. Indeed, it would be enough that one must approximate this disposition, one that responds to reasons with a given content or of some distinctive kind. Accordingly, we must deny this claim: the nonteleological reasons of atomic agents are not thus constrained. It follows that there is nothing in the nature of agency to which the rationalist can appeal, no material for the productive application of *Excellence*. Agency may be defined by dispositions, but they are not ones whose exercise can be imperfect or incomplete. If one manifests these dispositions, one acts intentionally, perhaps on the ground that *p*; if not, not. There is no room

to manifest them but only to some degree. The nature of agency thus yields conditions of intentional action and of acting for a reason, not standards for being good qua agent in what one intentionally does. It cannot engage with *Excellence*, and the argument for ethical rationalism cannot begin.

Like earlier claims, the clause that waives constraints on the grounds of action is disputable, although I think it is likely true.[46] Again, it is not my aim to demonstrate this possibility, but to say what needs to be said to resist the argument for comprehensive rationalism. We must deny a "constitutive ideal of rationality" on which it is essential to being an agent that one is disposed toward rational norms, at least by approximation. This leaves room for related views, as for instance ones on which it is constitutive of concept-possession to be disposed to employ a concept in approximately rational ways. A view of this kind might equate rationality with good psychological functioning, the sense of "function" being that of functionalism in the philosophy of mind. But if it appeals to dispositions external to agency, it cannot be supported by the argument of section 3.[47]

What do these reflections show? First, if atomic agency is possible and agents need not be disposed to act for specific reasons, the case for rationalism fails. Second, it fails only if this condition is met. We thus confront a dilemma: agency as minimal, atomic, or as sufficient to compel a form of rationalism that threatens moral reasons. Some will be happy to go one way and some the other, but many will resist the choice. They need to explain how.

5. *On Pluralism*

Where does Bratman stand on the issues that we have explored? It is not in the spirit of his approach to take for granted the practical rationality of conforming to *M–E*. So how is it to be explained?

If the argument of section 2 is right, Bratman does not and should not embrace a pragmatic account of means–end reason that relies on *Transfer* or on the distinction between internal and external "oughts" that appeared in his earlier book. More recently, he has argued that there is reason to be coherent in one's intentions for means and ends, whenever it is possible to govern oneself.[48] In that sense, the requirement of coherence has "normative force." But our question remains: not why there is reason to be coherent, but why it is practically rational. Why are we required to conform to *M–E*?

The problem is that, despite appealing to the "aim of intention," Bratman does not accept a purely rationalist view. He does not believe that planning agency is essential to agents as such. Thus, in several places, he admits or

emphasizes the existence of primitive agents, ones who do not form intentions as plans. Near the beginning of his book, he writes:

> As planning agents, we have two central capacities. We have the capacity to act purposively; and we have the capacity to form and execute plans. The latter capacity clearly requires the former; but it is plausible to suppose that the former could exist without the latter. (Bratman, 1987, p. 2)

We might ask how acting purposively relates to acting intentionally: being subject to Anscombe's sense of the question "Why?"[49] In a later essay, Bratman is more explicit. He sets out a model of primitive agency without intention and says of his primitive agent, "its desires and beliefs at the time of action determine what it intentionally does" (Bratman, 2000, p. 251). The capacity to act for reasons does not entail the capacity to make and regulate plans.

Bratman's primitive agents take means to their desired ends: they are not atomic. It is not clear, however, what prevents that possibility. If planning agents form a distinctive kind with enriched capacities, why not instrumental agents, too? The picture is one of overlapping spheres: agents as such, some of them minimal, atomic; those who act for teleological reasons; planning agents—perhaps with others coming afterward or in between. Means–end coherence does not apply to atomic agents, and the requirement of coherence cannot derive from agency as such. Instead, it draws on the special capacities of planning agents, capacities that go beyond what is required for intentional action.

In light of this complication, how could the explanation of means–end rationality go? It might still draw on rationalist themes. The thought would be that it is an aspect of practical rationality, for planning agents, to possess and manifest in full the dispositions that they must approximate in being what they are. This more pluralistic rationalism would adapt the argument of section 3, without excluding primitive agents. According to a modified version of this argument, kinds of agency are defined by the approximate possession of relevant dispositions, ones that aim at standards we can fail. By *Excellence*, being good as an agent of some kind consists in achieving this aim. And by an adaptation of the final step, practical rationality is not the excellence of agency as such, but of the kind of agency one has.

Does the pluralist argument work? Since it is rarely made explicit, this argument is difficult to discuss. But I think that we can see a gap. The pluralist

owes an answer to a basic question: "When does a difference in agency and the dispositions involved in it count as a difference in kind?" According to the final premise of the argument, to be practically rational is to manifest in full the dispositions that define the kind of agent that one is. It is crucial to the plausibility of this claim that not every disposition counts. Suppose that I care about what happens in the future, with one peculiar exception: I am disposed to be indifferent to future Tuesdays. By *Excellence*, part of being good as an agent-who-is-so-disposed is to be future-Tuesday-indifferent. But it is not a requirement of practical reason, even for me![50]

What distinguishes the dispositions of agents that sort them into kinds and thereby fix the standards of practical reason from dispositions that do not? According to pluralists, the mark is not that they are essential to being an agent. It might be thought that dispositions constitute a kind when they are essential to the agent who has them. They are part of what makes him what he is. But this fails for planning agency: I was once an infant, incapable of making plans. And it is in any case obscure why the difference counts. The argument of section 3 explains why practical reason would be sensitive to the nature or function of agency as such; why should it be sensitive to the nature of particular agents?

Alternatively, we may turn to dispositions for which there is prior reason or which play a central role in our lives. Such dispositions matter in a way that others do not. Perhaps they constitute kinds. Although its framing is rationalist, this idea goes back to the pragmatic strategy of section 2. To make it work, we will need a transfer principle that takes us from reasons to rationality, from the practical significance by which a disposition marks a kind of agency to the practical rationality of manifesting this disposition in full. While it may be more complicated than *Transfer*, this principle will be doubtful in just the same way.

In general, the pluralist must say what distinguishes the dispositions that qualify kinds of agency from ones that do not and why dispositions that fall on the first side of this contrast constitute measures of practical reason. Without answers to these question, the pluralist argument is basically incomplete.

If this is right, our earlier conclusion stands, and the challenge to Bratman remains. If the planning theory applies to agency, as such, we are compelled to comprehensive rationalism and the problem of moral reasons. If we reject the planning theory in this form, we are not compelled, but we lose the explanation of *M–E*. We can no longer explain, with the planning theory, why means–end coherence is rationally required.[51]

Notes

1. As Bratman himself observes; see Bratman (1987, pp. 21–22).
2. See, for instance, his influential reviews of David Velleman and Christine Korsgaard (Korsgaard, 1996; Velleman, 1989; the reviews are reprinted in Bratman, 1999).
3. In *Reasons without Rationalism* (Setiya, 2007a).
4. Here I summarize the arguments of Bratman (1987, §2.5).
5. See also Bratman (1987, chapter 3).
6. See, especially, Bratman (2009b, §I).
7. For the idea of a wide-scope norm and the related issue of "detachment," see especially Broome (2000, 2004).
8. See, especially, Broome (2005) and Kolodny (2005).
9. It is supported, with qualifications, in Bratman (2009b). Note that Bratman and I differ on the relationship between rationality and reasons; see Bratman (2009c) and Setiya (2009, pp. 535–537).
10. As in Setiya (2007b, 2009), Bratman (2009b, 2009c), and Way (2010).
11. It is harder to classify the treatment of reasons for coherence in "Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical" (Bratman, 2009a, pp. 55–57). I return to this paper below.
12. Accordingly, the "myth" theorist in question is one who denies this claim (Bratman, 2009b, pp. 417–419). As I understand them, "myth" theorists like Joseph Raz and Niko Kolodny are more radical: they deny not only that there is reason to be coherent apart from reasons for the particular ends involved but that coherence is a requirement of practical rationality (Kolodny, 2008; Raz, 2005). If this is right, Bratman's essay gives only part of his response to Kolodny and Raz. In the same way, it is misleading to cite his claim about the reasons for means–end coherence as an alternative to "cognitivism about instrumental reason" (Setiya, 2007b). For the relevant sort of cognitivist, the requirement of coherence belongs to theoretical reason; it is not a requirement of practical rationality. It is consistent with this that we have practical reasons to conform to the requirement of means–end coherence of just the kind that Bratman describes.
13. As Bratman would agree; see Bratman (1987, 2009b, p. 433).
14. For the idea of a "transfer" principle and the parallel treatment of practice and disposition, see especially, Thompson (2008, part 3). For arguments from the rationality of dispositions to the rationality of their expression, see Foot (1958) and Gauthier (1986, 1994). In the present context, practice and disposition may be conflated: dispositions count as practices of individuals, not social groups.
15. This objection is developed more fully in Thompson (2008, pp. 177–179), discussing Rawls (1955, p. 27).
16. The argument in the text is close to the accusation of "rule worship" leveled by Smart (1956) against "restricted utilitarianism." But there are differences. First, restricted utilitarianism appeals to the hypothetical effects of adopting a rule;

Transfer is concerned with the actual practice. Second, Smart's most famous example, of the nautical almanac that is 99 percent reliable—should we follow it, absurdly, when our careful calculations disagree?—is of what Rawls (1955) would call a summary rule, not a genuine practice that defines activities of its own. Hence the shift in the text to a conventional game. Finally, Smart is opposed not only to the transfer of normative status from a practice to what falls under it but to accounts of what it is for an action to be right or wrong that have a parallel structure. I would treat these differently. While reasons for a practice do not generate requirements of practical rationality, it is an open question whether the metaphysics of rationality, or right, or virtue, turn on the effects of adopting a principle or trait, understood not as reasons for doing so but as that in virtue of which it is ethically sound. Nothing in Smart's discussion counts against this view.

17. Could it be *pro tanto* irrational to violate the rules, although not irrational, all things considered (see Bratman, 2009b, 2009c, pp. 516–520)? No, it is not at all irrational to break the rules in the circumstance described. In any case, what we hoped to explain is a strict or peremptory demand of practical reason, not one that is defeasible (Setiya, 2007b, p. 653); and there is room for doubt about the intelligibility of *pro tanto* norms (Setiya, 2009, pp. 536–537).
18. See, for instance, Bratman (2009b, p. 418), which refers sympathetically to Smart (1956).
19. This is made explicit in Bratman (1987, p. 51). For a contrasting view, see Morton (2011, p. 578).
20. See Bratman (2009b).
21. In particular, Wallace (2001).
22. Bratman (2009a, §§I–VII), building on Bratman (1981, p. 256, n. 4).
23. Kant (1785).
24. See *Reasons without Rationalism* (Setiya, 2007a, pp. 14–15), citing Korsgaard (1996), Railton (1997), Velleman (1989, 2000), Williams (1979), and Dreier (1997).
25. See, especially, the introduction to Velleman (2000).
26. For this requirement, framed as an objection to Velleman, see Clark (2001, pp. 581–585).
27. On the apparent difficulty here, see Railton (1997) and Korsgaard (2009, chapter 8).
28. A point that is made explicit in Smith (2010, pp. 124–125).
29. This connection is worked out more fully in Setiya (2012).
30. The role of approximation is emphasized by van Roojen (1995, pp. 46–48), Dreier (1997, pp. 89–91, 97–98), Wedgwood (2007, p. 171), and Smith (2009, pp. 66–69).
31. Compare the discussions in Geach (1956) and Setiya (2007a, part 2, §2).
32. Does *Excellence* apply to the dispositions of objects that are not artifacts or living things? In principle, yes, but only when the conditions in the text are met. If a magnet is by nature disposed to orient itself in certain ways, and this disposition is operative when it orients itself in *roughly* the right way, it is functioning well as a magnet so far as it manifests its disposition to the highest degree. If this sounds odd, the problem is not with the application of *Excellence*, but with the conception of magnets on which it rests. Magnets are defined by their intrinsic properties, not by dispositions that they manifest more or less well. If there are physical kinds that do have a suitable nature, it will make sense to evaluate their functioning—although doing so will not have implications for practical reason, as the function of agency does.

33. Note that the norms most directly in view here are ones of practical rationality, not of doing what there is most reason to do. These standards come apart in contexts of ignorance and false belief. Thus, one could fully manifest the dispositions involved in being an agent—the disposition to be means–end coherent, say, or to intend what one takes to be conducive to self-knowledge, desire-satisfaction, or the good—while making mistakes about the circumstance that one is in. In doing so, one manifests practical rationality without necessarily acting as one should.
34. Wedgwood (2007) is a nonreductionist about the normative and the intentional but a functionalist in the modest sense at issue here.
35. It is essential here that "defect of rationality" be understood inclusively. It applies to any failure of practical reason, not only to the special fault that we sometimes mark with the word "irrational." I discuss this contrast, and the confusions to which it gives rise, in Setiya (2004); see also Setiya (2012, p. 8).
36. For the terminology of "masking," see Johnston (1992, pp. 231–233). If masking turns on interference from outside, or must be occasional or intermittent, there will be a limit to how far rationalists can use it to explain the appearance of moral indifference. For arguments against entrenched and intrinsic masking, see Fara (2005) and Choi (2005) and, in defense of them, see Clarke (2010).
37. See, again, the discussion of Korsgaard in Bratman (1999). In a recent essay (Smith, 2010, pp. 135–138), Michael Smith is unaccountably relaxed about the burden on ethical rationalists. He notes that there are two ways to respond to the truth of rationalism: we can argue from premises about practical reason to conclusions about the nature of agency or the reverse. Smith "find[s] it difficult to say which of these two responses is correct" (2010, p. 136). As a logical point, this is fair enough: valid arguments can be constructed in both directions. But to hold that, since moral reasons apply to everyone, there is a hidden incoherence in conceptions of agency that deny the need to respond to them, is not to show where the incoherence lies. If we cannot find it—this is the challenge—then something has to give: the doctrine of rationalism or the universality of moral reasons.
38. For variations, see Railton (1997), Raz (1999), and Tenenbaum (2007).
39. In part 1 of *Reasons without Rationalism* (Setiya, 2007a) and more recently in Setiya (2010).
40. At least, if intentions-as-plans are meant to be essential to agency. More on this in section 5.

41. On the need to allow for this, see, again, Railton (1997), Clark (2001), and Korsgaard (2009, chapter 8).
42. Anscombe's argument has been revived by Candace Vogler, in *Reasonably Vicious* (Vogler, 2002, pp. 135–146, appendix A), although I doubt that she improves on it: the questions in the text remain. See also Thompson (2008, pp. 106–112). It is worth stressing that what is at issue here is the *possibility* of basic action and atomic agency, not the doctrine that every intentional action is ultimately performed by basic means. It is consistent with this possibility that some agents are radically nonatomic: their intentional actions are always nonbasic.
43. Smith (2009, pp. 66–67). For a similar, although perhaps more qualified claim, see Dreier (1997, pp. 95–98).
44. A point I have made before, in Setiya (2007a, pp. 31–32; 2009, pp. 533–534).
45. On the motivation of action by belief alone, see Nagel (1970), Wallace (1990), and Setiya (2007a, pp. 100–106).
46. Setiya (2007a, pp. 61–67, 93–98; 2010, §3).
47. This paragraph amplifies an earlier discussion (Setiya, 2009, pp. 534–539), which objected to the present view on ethical grounds. It also marked the contrast between norms of psychic functioning and ones of practical and theoretical reason. That the aspects of psychology in question are inessential to agency allows for this distinction in the practical case.
48. Bratman (2009b).
49. Bratman suggests that spontaneous actions may be purposive but not intentional (Bratman, 1987, p. 126).
50. My example is adapted from Parfit (1984, pp. 123–125), although the claim that I make about it is very much weaker: not that future Tuesday indifference is irrational, but that it is not rationally required, even for those who are disposed to it.
51. For reactions to this material in earlier forms, I am grateful to audiences at Berkeley, at the Central Division Meeting of the APA, and at the New School for Social Research. Special thanks to Michael Bratman for much discussion of these topics and for years of encouragement, inspiration, and support.

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