

Proleptic Reasons

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The teacher of a music appreciation class is frustrated with those students who are taking her class, as she puts it, “for the wrong reasons.” In her view, the class offers students access to the intrinsic value of music. Students who are taking it for “the right reason” will be taking it for this reason. But only those who already appreciate music appreciate musical appreciation. Or, at any rate, only they appreciate it correctly, for the reason for which (she believes) one should appreciate it—namely, intrinsic musical value. The problem is that if the intrinsic value of music is a reason you respond to, you don’t need to take her class. You already appreciate music.

She wants students in the class who care about music. But she’s supposed to be teaching them to care about music. Is she being unreasonable? The problem does not go away once we admit of degrees or kinds of caring—it does not help to characterize her job as that of getting people who care a little (or who care in this way) to care more (or in that way). So long as someone enters the class satisfied with his level or type of music appreciation, whatever that may be, the teacher will impugn his motives, whatever they may be. The teacher is looking for students who want to care about music more than, or in a different way than, they currently do. But, again, she doesn’t want them to want this for some extra-musical reason. So it seems that what she wants is for them to respond to musical value exactly to the extent that they’re not yet able to.

This is a paradoxical way of putting an ordinary demand for the kind of reason that is my topic. It is possible to have an inkling of a value that you do not fully grasp, to feel the defect in your valuation, and to work towards improvement. The reason for doing that work is provided by the value in question, but the defect in your grasp of that value also shapes the character of the activity it motivates. For consider what kind of thinking motivates a good student to force herself to listen to a symphony when she feels herself dozing off: she reminds herself that her grade, and the teacher’s opinion of her, depends on the essay she will write about this piece; or she promises herself a chocolate treat when she reaches the end; or she’s in a glass-walled listening room of the library, conscious of other students’ eyes on her; or perhaps she conjures up a romanticized image of her future, musical self, such as that of entering the warm light of a concert hall on a snowy evening. Someone who already valued music wouldn’t need to motivate herself in any of these ways. She wouldn’t have to try so hard.

The paradox arises from a dilemma concerning two kinds of reasons that a potential student of such a class could have for taking it. There is, first, the intra-musical reason, the having of which seems to mark the fact that the class has come to a successful *close*. There is, second, any extra-musical reason, the recourse to which seems to condemn someone to subordinating the value of music to what the teacher would call “an ulterior motive.” In the first case, the reason is not the reason of a *student*; in the second case, it’s the reason of (what the teacher would call) a *bad* student. I will argue that this dilemma is specious, because there is an agent—the good student—who manages to combine extra- and intra-musical reasoning. Like the musiclover she will become, she is genuinely oriented towards the intrinsic value of music. For instance, if offered some way

of attaining good grades, chocolate treats, etc. without coming to appreciate music, she would reject it. And yet grades and chocolates are integral to the rational explanation of her action of listening to music: she would be asleep without them. “Bad” reasons are how she moves herself forwards, all the while seeing them *as* bad, which is to say, as placeholders for the “real” reason.

One characteristic of someone motivated by these complex reasons, by contrast with the simpler reasons of the bad student, on the one hand, and the established music lover, on the other hand, is some form of embarrassment or dissatisfaction with oneself. She is pained to admit, to herself or others, that she can only “get herself” to listen to music through those various stratagems. She sees her own motivational condition as in some way imperfectly responsive to the reasons that are out there. Nonetheless, her self-acknowledged rational imperfection does not amount to akrasia, wrongdoing, error or, more generally, any form of irrationality. Something can be imperfect in virtue of being undeveloped or immature, as distinct from wrong or bad or erroneous. (There is something wrong with a lion that cannot run fast, but there is nothing wrong with a baby lion that cannot run fast.) When the good student of music actively tries to listen, she exhibits not irrationality but a distinctive form of rationality.

Her rationality is not, however, of the familiar, clear-eyed kind. Anscombe’s *Intention* placed the ability to answer the “why?” question at the heart of philosophical discussions of agency. The agent who can give an account of what is to be gotten out of what she is doing grasps the value of what she will (if successful) achieve through her action. Her answer to the “why?” question might not satisfy every interlocutor, but it is at least satisfying to the agent herself: she takes herself to know why she is doing whatever it is she takes herself to be doing. Of course, not every agent will be able to satisfy herself in this way: some agents are not paying attention to what they are doing, or are being impulsive,¹ or experience a moment of forgetfulness, or have simply failed to think things through sufficiently. In some of these cases, the agent’s behavior is *arational*, since her ignorance is profound enough to disqualify her from acting intentionally; in other cases, her action is intentional, but irrational. The good student of music likewise fails to be able to articulate, to her own satisfaction, what she expects to get out of her music class. In her case, however, this marks neither the absence of intentionality nor the absence of rationality.

If an agent finds her own answer to the “why?” question satisfying, she must ascribe to herself a certain knowledge of value. Such an agent takes herself to know both that some form of value is on offer, and that it is one she herself does or will enjoy, appreciate, or find meaningful. And such a person is often correct—agents often *do* have such knowledge. How did they acquire it? Since knowledge of value is itself valuable, it stands to reason that one way we acquire such knowledge is the way we acquire many

¹ Some, but not all, impulsive agents will take themselves to fail in respect to the “why” question. “Just because I feel like it” might strike one agent as a perfectly good answer, and another as no answer at all.

other valuable things: by acting in order to bring about that acquisition. The problem is that unless one is equipped with an ulterior motive,² the value of knowledge of some value is not a different value from that value itself. Therefore, those seeking to acquire the knowledge cannot take themselves to know why they are doing so. And yet—I will argue—it is a fact of life that we act not only *from*, but also, at other times, *for the sake of acquiring*, knowledge of value.

If those actions are to be rational, then rationality cannot require accurate foreknowledge of the good your rational action will bring you. Thus I will defend the view that you can act rationally even if your antecedent conception of the good for the sake of which you act is not quite on target—and you know that. In these cases, you do not demand that the end result of your agency match a preconceived schema, for you hope, eventually, to get more out of what you are doing than you can yet conceive of. I'll call this kind of rationality, "proleptic." The word "proleptic" refers, usually in a grammatical context, to something taken in advance of its rightful place. I appropriate it for moral psychology on the model of Margaret Little's phrase "proleptic engagement" (2008: 342), by which she refers to an interaction with a child in which we treat her as though she were the adult we want her to become.³ Proleptic reasons are provisional in a way that reflects the provisionality of the agent's own knowledge and development: her inchoate, anticipatory, and indirect grasp of some good she is trying to know better. Proleptic reasons allow you to be rational even when you know that your reasons aren't exactly the right ones.

A reason for action is a consideration in favor of acting in some way; if the agent in fact acts in the way in question, she will be able to offer that reason as an explanation of why she so acted. Sometimes we do something for more than one reason: I might go to the store both in order to get milk and for the exercise. Proleptic reasons are double in a more fundamental way. The good music appreciation student is listening to the symphony assigned for her class because music is intrinsically valuable, and because she wants a good grade. If she merely cited the first as her reason, she would be pretending to a greater love of music than she currently has; if she merely cited the second, she would be incorrectly assimilating herself to the bad student. But her motivational condition is also not one in which she has merely added the first reason to the second, because that situation would describe a music lover who is (strangely) taking a music appreciation class. The fact that music is intrinsically valuable and the fact that she wants a good grade somehow combine into *one* reason that motivates her to listen. The reason on which she acts has two faces: a proximate face that reflects

² As in Frankfurt's example of the doctor who treats drug addicts: he wants to understand the appeal of drug addiction without actually wanting to become addicted.

³ Likewise Bernard Williams (1995) speaks of a "proleptic mechanism" by which he takes at least some instances of blame to function. Williams asserts that a blamer's pronouncement that the blamee "ought to have ϕ -ed" can serve not as a description of the blamee's current set of reasons, but rather as a way of both anticipating and bringing about the future state of affairs in which the blamee will be in a position to be motivated by the reasons now being ascribed to him.

the kinds of things that appeal to the person she is now and a distal face that reflects the character and motivation of the person she is trying to be. Her reason is double because she herself is in transition.

I will show, by generalizing the paradox described in my opening, that it is not only the rarefied context of music education that calls for a proleptic analysis. I argue that we must acknowledge the reality of proleptic reasons, else we be forced to classify as irrational a large swath of human agency— agency that is purposive, self-conscious, intelligent, and truth-sensitive, and which constitutes a kind of building block of or prelude to everything else that we do. I end with a discussion of the currently dominant moral psychological thesis that what practical reasons we have depends on what desires we have (internalism). I consider a few variants of internalism, and argue that none of them can, as they stand, make room for the existence of proleptic reasons.

6.1 Large-scale Transformative Pursuits

I adopt the phrase “large-scale transformative pursuits” to describe such significant life changes as: attending college, moving to a foreign country, adopting a child, becoming a painter or a philosopher or a police officer, achieving distinction in athletics or chess or music, becoming a sports fan, an opera lover or a gourmet, befriending or marrying or mentoring someone, etc. The two features uniting this class of pursuits are that one cannot know beforehand all that one is to get out of them, and that they require years of sustained effort, both in the form of preparation and in the form of the work attending the completed state. They are both transformative and large in scale.

Some ends are transformative but not large in scale: riding a roller coaster for the first time or trying a new flavor of ice cream. In these cases, I don’t know quite what I’m getting myself into. I ask the world to, as we say, “surprise me.” When we seek to be surprised in this way, we open ourselves to having our tastes revised on the basis of new experiences. We will only be able understand the value of these experiences after the fact and not while we pursue them. It is because the set of actions we do “for the thrill of it” or “to see what that is like” do not require years of intensive preparatory or consequential effort that our reason for engaging them can simply be to try something new. The value of novelty or surprise suffices to motivate and rationalize only small-scale transformative pursuits. Becoming a police officer, or adopting a child, is also “something new,” but we would not view that as a sufficient reason to adopt such an end. It would often be irresponsible to take up even a hobby, if one’s only grounds for doing so were the whimsical attraction to new experience. When it comes to the kind of reasons that might rationalize a transformative pursuit, scale matters.

Not many pursuits are large in scale without being transformative, but some may be. Under some circumstances, making a lot of money might qualify, especially if the motive were, for example, to secure the financial future of one’s descendants. Craft-hobby activities such as assembling a huge puzzle or adding pieces to one’s hand-built model

railroad will also often qualify. I suspect that some of the appeal of the repetitiveness of such activities—restoring *another* classic car—is that they are virtually guaranteed to be non-transformative. The same holds for the effort people put into physical exercise done for the sake of maintaining fitness levels. The promise of a certain kind of ethical stasis can turn even intellectually or physically strenuous engagement into a source of relaxation.

Transformative ends are recognized as such not only by those who have succeeded in attaining them, but also by those who are on their way: one can see in advance that one cannot see in advance all of what is good about parenthood, or friendship, or scuba-diving, or emigrating to another country. Transformative pursuits aim at values, the appreciation of which is connected to the performance of the activity (or involvement in the relationship) in question. Indeed, this is because the pursuits themselves form a kind of value-education, gradually changing the agent into the kind of person who can appreciate the value of the activity or relationship or state of affairs that constitutes the end of the pursuit. In the course of becoming a teacher or a friend or a reader of ancient Greek, one learns to appreciate the values that are distinctive of teaching or friendship or reading ancient Greek.

But one does not fully appreciate them until one is at, or close to, the end of the process of transformation. For it is the end-state (teaching, parenting, translating) that offers up the actual engagement with the value on which any full appreciation of it must be conditioned. The joys of teaching are best known to teachers. Everyone goes to college “to become educated,” but until I am educated I do not really know what an education is, or why it is important. I may say I am studying chemistry in order to understand the “structure of matter,” but only a chemist understands what it means for matter to have structure (or, indeed, what matter really is). For the rest of us, that phrase is likely to be backed by little more than an image of a tinker-toy “structure” to which a mental label such as “molecule” is affixed.

The problem posed by large-scale transformative pursuits is this: they require us to act on reasons that reflect a grasp of the value we are working so hard and so long to come into contact with, but we can know that value only once we have come into contact with it. And yet the cost of granting that such ends are pursued for no reason, or bad reasons, would be to restrict the scope of practical rationality very greatly. For most, if not all, of the experiences, forms of knowledge, ethical and intellectual traits, activities, achievements, and relationships that we value are such that the pursuit of them is both large in scale and transformative. It is true that even if we were forced to characterize the choices by which we move ourselves towards all of those ends as irrational, we could still rationalize engagement with the ends once achieved. But if this is all there is to practical rationality, we should be disappointed. For every rational choice to continue ϕ -ing will be adventitiously predicated on a series of irrational choices to come to ϕ . We should expect more from our reasons than maintenance of a mysteriously attained status quo. I propose, therefore, to introduce a species of reasons to meet this expectation.

My music appreciation example built in a demand, on the part of the teacher, that we not separate the rationalization of the pursuit from that of the end. This kind of demand is generally appropriate for large-scale transformative pursuits. We do not want to understand the agent engaged in a large-scale transformative pursuit along the lines of someone who walks to the park for the exercise, but stays when she sees they're showing an outdoor movie. For in that case the agent was not, when walking, pursuing the end of seeing a movie. It is possible to rationalize both the walk and the movie-watching without rationalizing anything we could call the *pursuit* of the movie. By contrast, large-scale transformational pursuits are characteristically aspirational: when the agent gets where she's going, she realizes that she has what she was after all along.

6.2 Vagueness, Testimony, Competition, Pretense, Approximation, Self-management

We ought to demand a rational account of how someone can work her way to the valuation characteristic of the various end-states to which we aspire. Satisfying this demand, I claim, means postulating a set of reasons—I've called them "proleptic reasons"—tailor-made to rationalize exactly these sorts of pursuit. By way of argument for this claim, let us survey alternate contenders, reviewing the kinds of factors we typically cite in explaining such behavior: a vague grasp of the value in question, a precise grasp of a value in close proximity to the value in question, reliance on the ethical testimony of a mentor or advisor figure, imaginative engagement in a pretense of being as one aspires to be, casting success at some activity as a locus of social competition, recourse to self-management techniques of (dis) incentivization. I'll argue, case by case, that vague reasons, approximating reasons, testimonial reasons, reasons of pretense, competitive reasons, and reasons of self-management rationalize in the right way only insofar as we help ourselves to a dedicated subset of each genus of reasons. It turns out that in order to rationalize aspirational agency, we must invoke not vague reasons but *proleptically vague* reasons, not testimonial reasons but *proleptically testimonial* reasons, etc. In the attempt to avoid proleptic rationality, we find ourselves ushering it in piecemeal, through the backdoor.

6.2.1 Vague Reasons

Someone who has a "vague reason" for φ -ing φ -es with only a vague idea of the value of φ -ing. It is certainly true that I have a vague idea of the value of all sorts of pursuits in which I am not currently engaged. For instance, I think there are many valuable careers I did not choose, many valuable hobbies I don't pursue, many valuable books I'm not reading. One problem with such ideas is that they are often not very

motivating. I don't plan to read most of those books. Consider a *bad* student of music appreciation—one intent on merely going through the motions necessary for fulfilling a distribution requirement. He might happily grant that music appreciation is a “good and valuable end.” He has a vague idea that music appreciation is good. But that's not enough to get him to do the homework, show up to class on time, study for the exam, etc. A vague idea does not entail willingness to put in effort. So let us suppose that the vague idea is not *so* vague—in fact, let us posit that it suffices for motivation. There are many non-aspirational situations in which I have only a vague idea of the value I am motivated to get. I buy tickets to an opera I know I love, not knowing exactly what I will love about this production. Such an activity is not aspirational, because I'm satisfied with my vague idea. I don't now feel the need to work to make up the difference between the vague idea I have now and the sharp one I will have later; I don't experience that difference as a defect in my current state. I need only wait for the world and my interests to line up in such a way as to make it possible for me to do the enjoying or appreciating that I'm already fully capable of.

The aspirant's idea of the goodness of her end is characterized by a distinctive kind of vagueness—one she experiences as defective and in need of remedy. She is not satisfied with her own conception of the end, and does not feel that arriving at the correct conception is simply a matter of time. She understands her aspirational activity as work she is doing towards grasping this end. So, while vague conceptions of value do help explain how aspiration is possible, it is equally true that the phenomenon of aspiration helps us understand a distinctive form of vagueness—a kind of *eversharpening* vagueness. Large-scale transformation pursuits are done for those vague reasons that are *proleptically* vague.

6.2.2 Self-Management Reasons

My music student plans to reward herself with chocolate for getting through the symphony. I might make plans with a buddy to go running in the morning, so that she can “hold me accountable” for my plan. Reasons of self-management show up whenever I am trying to get myself to do something that I think I should do but may feel insufficiently motivated to do. Some forms of self-management can be very mild, such as simply resolving to (not) do something. In all these cases, I find some way to add motivational backing to a given course of action. Notice, however, that such self-manipulation comes in two forms.

Suppose that Sue worries that she'll be tempted to buy expensive holiday presents⁴ for her friends, despite her lack of funds. So she adopts one or more of such self-managing tactics as: choosing a thrifty friend as a shopping partner, leaving her credit card at home, resolving not to enter a certain expensive store. In the case I'm imagining, Sue does not see her temperamental generosity as problematic. She doesn't have a

⁴ I would like to thank Kate Manne for the example, and for helping me to see its importance.

systemic problem, she just happens to be very short of funds at the moment. Reasons of selfmanagement are, in this kind of case, directed only at *behavior* on a given occasion, or even a series of occasions.

A different kind of holiday shopper might, by contrast, be engaged in a long-term struggle to curb her chronic overspending by learning to think less commercially about how to make herself and those around her happy. In that kind of case, self-management is directed primarily at changing how the agent thinks, values, and feels. The music student described above would presumably see it as quite problematic if, years hence, she were *still* motivating herself to listen with chocolate. Or consider the case of moving to a new country. I may, at first, have to “force” myself into social situations. My hope is thereby to come to inhabit the new culture, language, etc. in such a way as to become disposed to engage eagerly in such socializing. I aspire to make this new place my home. This second kind of selfmanagement often goes along with a characteristically aspirational form of *practice*. In some cases, doing something over and over again changes the way I do it. And so by doing it, I hope to change my attitude towards it. Sometimes I manage myself precisely with the aim of managing myself less and less. And that is just to say: reasons of self-management, too, come in a proleptic variety.

6.2.3 Testimonial Reasons

We often invoke testimony to explain how someone’s rationally held beliefs can outstrip the cognitive resources that can strictly be called his own. There is some controversy over whether such testimony is possible in a moral context,⁵ but it certainly seems possible to heed the practical advice of your elders and betters—even against your own instincts and inclinations. It is also true that advisors or mentors often, even typically, figure in large-scale transformative pursuits. But the mentor’s role in the life of the aspirant is not an unproblematic one. Unlike in other testimonial contexts, the aspirant’s goal is nothing other than coming to see the value for herself. The fact that your role-model knows so much more than you that you are inclined to defer to her advice means that contact with her is a constant reminder of what you don’t have. You don’t aspire to do what she does; you aspire to do what she does in just the way she does it—namely, independently.

What would the music appreciation teacher think of a student who takes her class on the advice of his music-loving mentor? I think the teacher would be satisfied with this reason to the extent that she felt the student wasn’t. I’m happy to take someone else’s word on the truth of many of my historical or scientific beliefs. I’m not, similarly, *happy* with my reliance on my mentor. The species of testimonial reasons that figure in aspiration are special in just the way that the vagueness of an aspirant’s conception of her end is special. The testimonial element in aspiration is of a distinctively degenerative kind: the present legitimacy and authority of the mentor’s voice is conditioned

⁵ See Wiland (2014) and McGrath (2011).

on—indeed, anticipates—its gradual evanescence. And in characterizing this curious species of testimony, we have, once again, helped ourselves to a dedicated, aspirational species of the genus in question.

6.2.4 Reasons of Competition

Many large-scale transformative pursuits are, at some point or other, fueled by a desire to position oneself at the top of some group of people engaged in a similar pursuit. Wanting to be better than others at something is a very powerful motive. The mathematician G. H. Hardy writes that he initially “thought of mathematics in terms of examinations and scholarships: I wanted to beat other boys, and this seemed to be the way in which I could do so most decisively” (2005 [1940]: 46). We frequently encounter such competitiveness in athletic, musical, intellectual, and artistic pursuits. People even get competitive about their hobbies. But there are—again—two kinds of competitiveness.

In one kind of case, I compete in order to display my excellence or submit it for assessment. So: I would like my excellence to be praised, celebrated, renowned to others. Or I would like to know how good I am, perhaps to be reassured that I really am as good as people say I am. Competition can be a way of gauging one’s excellence, by measuring it against the excellence of others, or flaunting it, by demonstrating its superiority to the excellence of others. Such flaunting can itself spring from a variety of motives—for instance, I might want to flaunt my excellence as a physicist in order to inspire other young women to become physicists. Whatever the ultimate motive, competition of this kind is characterized by a desire to make known to others or to myself a virtue that I *already* have.

In another kind of case, the point of competition is to allow me to strive for excellence in an open-ended way. The thought of being better than the people around me is a powerful motivator for making something of myself when I don’t know exactly *what* it is I want to make of myself. Hardy recounts:

I found at once, when I came to Cambridge, that a Fellowship implied ‘original work’, but it was a long time before I formed any definite idea of research. I had of course found at school, as every future mathematician does, that I could often do things much better than my teachers; and even at Cambridge, I found, though naturally much less frequently, that I could sometimes do things better than the College lecturers. But I was really quite ignorant, even when I took the Tripos, of the subjects on which I have spent the rest of my life; and I still thought of mathematics as essentially a ‘competitive’ subject. (1940: 47)

If the motivations driving Hardy to become one of the twentieth century’s greatest mathematicians were competitive in nature, this competitiveness must have been of a

singularly hungry kind. In this kind of case, competitiveness is a way of holding open a door for the person I'm trying to become. I'm competing *in order to become* excellent, rather than in order to show that I already am. When the prize arrives it turns out to be not what I really wanted; I am already preparing for the next competition. The value for the sake of which I compete is not one on which I have a good grip. I compete for the sake of a future or anticipated value that I, as of now, only incompletely understand. This form of competitiveness is *proleptic* competitiveness.

6.2.5 Reasons of Pretense

David Velleman (2002) has proposed that we emulate ideals by *pretending* to satisfy them. He offers as an example of pretense his own experiences of mock-aggression in his martial arts class. He then analyzes a case of quitting smoking as one in which the subject pretends to be a non-smoker and then gets “carried away” (2002: 100 *et passim*) with the pretense. Velleman acknowledges that, on his conception of it, such behavior is somewhat irrational: “when a smoker draws on an ideal for motivation to quit, his behavior is in some respects irrational” (2002: 101). He characterizes such agents as “hav[ing] reasons to make themselves temporarily irrational.” Velleman seems to think that the irrationality in question is only of a harmless, temporary kind. I find it to be neither harmless nor temporary. The whole idea of such an account is to sever someone’s “outer” reasons for adopting the pretense from the reasons as they appear to him once he’s inside it. Velleman’s thought is that the agent thereby makes a new set of reasons available to himself, which he can leverage into personal change. But once one adopts an account of this kind, one cannot rely on the rationality of the outer reasons to vouchsafe that of the inner ones. Consider that one can have all sorts of reasons for “pretending” to be some way—someone can pay me money, I can do it on a lark, I can be an actor in a play. If I get “carried away” and fail to snap out of it, I seem to exhibit some kind of mental illness. I’ve become trapped inside my own game. Velleman offers no principled reason why we should not understand the smoker, and emulation in general, as (possibly)⁶ luckier victims of the same deep and permanent irrationality.

In aspirational cases, the failure to shed the pretense is salutary rather than pathological. But this is connected to the fact that it is not mere pretense. When I pretend or engage in make-believe, I close my eyes to the world around me, sometimes literally, the better to imagine a world that isn’t actually there. It is crucial to my willingness to engage in such activity that I see it as temporary. Large-scale transformative projects—including that of quitting smoking—are not like this. If I aspire to become a non-smoker, I am not pretending to be one already. Rather, I want to come to see the world in the way in which a non-smoker does, because I think that is the right way to

⁶ Only possibly luckier, because there are both bad ideals and (morally) good roles for actors.

see things.⁷ I'm not closing my eyes, I'm fighting to open them and to *keep* them open. Velleman's conception of aspiration corresponds to Iris Murdoch's description of humanity in general: "man is the creature who makes pictures of himself and then comes to resemble the picture" (1996: 252). I think the aspirant makes pictures of himself *in order to* resemble the picture.

Pretending is different from trying, but I don't want to deny that trying can involve pretense of a special kind. Imagination does not function only as momentary escape from reality; I can, perhaps, imagine my way into becoming someone. Here the function of the imagination is not to fashion a substitute world, but to help us move ourselves closer to some reality we already have some grip on. I might, for instance, adopt the mannerisms of the kind of person I'm trying to be. If this were an act of aspiration, it would pain me somewhat to do so, because it is not enough for me to act like that person when what I want is to be that person. We cannot analyze aspiration in terms of pretense because the kind of pretense we would need to invoke is an aspirational kind.

6.2.6 Approximating Reasons

Perhaps the value under which the pursuit is conducted is close, though not identical, to the value of the end. At the end stages of a transformative pursuit, I may have access to something close enough to the final value to justify pursuit. So, for instance, I might appreciate Mozart's light operas, and this gives me reason to listen to his symphonies, and this leads me to Bach. We might try to make up a kind of series of progressively approximating values to lead the music student from music she likes to the music that the class is designed to get her to appreciate. Highlights of such a series might look like this: Taylor Swift, the Beatles, Rogers and Hammerstein, Gilbert and Sullivan, Puccini, Mozart, Bach. The question is: does this series represent a subtle shift in value over time, or does it represent one single value getting progressively clarified and approximated to? Does she say, at the end, "now I see what I was after all along?"

In the first case—subtle shift—we should imagine the value transition as analogous to a move from yellow to blue along the color spectrum by imperceptibly different shades. But this is a variant of the "go for the exercise, stay for the movie" scenario. For the reason grounding the aspirant's activity when she's in the yellow region diverges from the reason in the blue region in such a way as to break up her pursuit into a series of rationally disconnected activities. From the fact that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins, it does not follow that there is no difference between the two. If it's a progressive clarification, there's no such worry: the gradual shift in

⁷ I should note that not every would-be non-smoker *aspires* to quit. It is possible to have a simpler goal of modifying one's behavior, as in the case of Sue the overspender (see above, p. 137). The aspiring non-smoker is marked by the fact that she wants not only to behave differently, but also to come to see things differently, to cease seeing smoking as attractive.

value would be guided throughout by the agent's sense that some target value is being approximated, like an image gradually coming into focus. But this is just what we mean in speaking of proleptic reasons. For a proleptic reason just is a reason by which an agent grasps, in an incomplete and anticipatory way, the reason that she will act on once her pursuit is successful.

Recourse to other reasons, be they approximating or vague or testimonial reasons, or reasons of pretense or self-management or competition, does not obviate the need for introducing a distinctive proleptic species of reason. I don't claim that my list exhausts all possible alternatives, but I do think it covers much of the rational territory. Moreover, there is a certain pattern that repeats itself, indicating a general strategy which the champion of proleptic reason should adopt in the face of some additional contender. If someone says that large-scale transformative pursuits can be rationalized by familiar, X-ish reasons, the proleptic reasons theorist will try to demonstrate that only a (proleptic) subspecies of X-ish reasons can hope to rationalize a distinctively aspirational pursuit.

Proleptic reasons are—I conclude—*the* reasons that rationalize largescale transformative pursuits. A proleptic reason is an acknowledgedly immature variant of a standard reason. It has the built-in structural complexity of that which is, in essence, parasitic. A proleptic reasoner is moved to φ by some consideration that, taken by itself, would (in her view) provide inadequate reason for φ -ing. But she is not moved by that consideration taken by itself; rather, she is moved by that consideration (be it competitive, testimonial, approximating, etc.) as a stand-in for another one. The proleptic reasoner uses the only valuational resources she has at her disposal—namely, her current desires, attachments etc. both to mark the inadequacy of those very resources and to move herself towards a better valuational condition.

The reader may wonder why I invoke a new species of reason rather than speaking of a proleptic grasp of a (standard) reason. I do not think that much hangs on whether we attach the property of being proleptic to a reason itself, as opposed to the quality of someone's apprehension of that reason. My interest is in a set of thoughts, actions, desires, choices, and projects that neither exhibit a standard form of rationality, nor are to be discounted as irrational. The distinctiveness of proleptic rationality is my topic, whether we spell this out as a distinctive way of grasping reasons, or a grasp of a distinctive kind of reason. But there are considerations that speak in favor of the latter formulation. One context in which we might speak of proleptic reasons is to explain why someone did what he did. In this kind of case, a proleptic reason lends intelligibility to some bit of behavior. If we choose to speak of a "proleptic grasp" of a reason, then it will turn out that in proleptic cases, reasons do not explain behavior—rather, grasps do. And it is awkward to speak of actions as being explained by grasps, and natural to speak of them as being explained by reasons.

We also invoke reasons when we recommend a course of action. Suppose a mentor tells her student to φ in such a way as to be making a proleptic reasons statement: she can see, on the basis of what she knows about him, and her expertise in φ -ing, that

he ought to aspire to φ . She cannot be read as saying that he *has* a proleptic grasp, for her point is to inform him about something he is missing. Nor is she confessing to such a grasp—for, presumably, she grasps that same reason non-proleptically. We could describe her as asserting that he ought to have a kind of grasp that he doesn't yet have; but the more natural thing to say is that she is alerting him to the presence of a special kind of reason.

6.3 Internal Reasons

I have argued that proleptic reasons don't fit into any of the categories of reasons we are antecedently inclined to recognize; if I am right, there is a lacuna in non-technical, ordinary thought about the kinds of reasons people have for doing the things they do. My contention is that philosophers and non-philosophers alike would do better to acknowledge that proleptic reasons are a distinctive, but genuine, way to be rational. Elsewhere,⁸ I discuss the ethical import of such acknowledgement. I take as my example an infertile woman who wants children, and show how certain characteristic failures of empathy towards such a person are the product of our tendency to turn a blind eye to such a person's strong, though merely proleptic, attachment to the project and values of motherhood. Thus I believe that proleptic reasons represent a philosophical contribution to everyday ethical thought.

I also believe that they represent a philosophical contribution to philosophical theorizing about ethics—specifically, to decision theory and moral psychology. Edna Ullmann-Margalit (2006) has argued that decision theory does not have the resources to account for the rationality of large-scale transformative projects, because the decision theorist can only analyze the rationality of decisions in which preferences, or at the very least core preferences, remain fixed. As she correctly acknowledges, agents who become parents, emigrate from their homelands, or take up new careers not only experience fundamental shifts in preference, but often embark on these projects precisely *in order to* experience these shifts. Since she takes decision theory to be our only hope in this regard, she concludes that it is impossible to pursue such projects *rationally*. Laurie Paul (2014) has offered a similar argument, to the effect that it would be irrational to pursue these projects on the basis of a projection as to what it will be like to be at the endpoint.⁹ Though I am in broad agreement with the thrust of both arguments, I think, as should already be apparent, that it *is* possible to pursue these projects in

⁸ Callard (MS: conclusion).

⁹ Paul does not share Margalit's skepticism, because she thinks that we can make these decisions in a way which is rational at a second-order level: by determining whether we prefer preference change, or preference stasis. I argue elsewhere (Callard MS: ch. 1) that if this method were valid, it would, absurdly, entail that someone who has a reason to embark on one large-scale transformative pursuit—say, to have children—also, therefore, necessarily has a reason to embark on any other large-scale transformative pursuit—say, to travel the world or, for that matter, to have herself sterilized.

a rational way. I argue elsewhere¹⁰ that the rationality of large-scale transformative projects is essentially extended in time, by contrast with the synchronic (momentary) rational structure characteristic of decisionmaking. Ullmann-Margalit and Paul ask what it would take to be justified in the *decision* to take a music appreciation class, go to college, embark on some career, become a parent. I think this is the wrong question. The rationality of these pursuits only becomes visible to one who examines the agent over the extended period over which she is learning to become a music lover, a college student, a professional, a parent. The upshot of my discussion is to remove a burden from the decision theorist: it is not his job to explain how one rationally becomes a mother, or a music lover. It is the theorist of aspiration who, armed with proleptic reasons, is in a position to tell us what it is for these large life transitions to be made rationally. Thus proleptic rationality narrows the explanatory scope of, and thereby contributes to our understanding of, formal decision theory.

I want to devote the remainder of this chapter to developing the moral psychological implications of the theory of proleptic reasons. Proleptic reasons constitute a new challenge to the thesis of *internalism* about practical reasons.¹¹ Internalism is a thesis about what it takes for someone to have a reason to do something. Internalists hold that an agent's reasons must in some way be relativized to what she desires, where that term is construed broadly to include interests, commitments, attachments, preferences, etc. First espoused by Bernard Williams (1981), internalism has since found wide acceptance, though at the same time many of those who call themselves internalists are inclined to reject some element of Williams' characterization of the position.

Consider the following internalist theses:

- (m) motivation condition: if R is a reason for S to φ , S is such as to be able to be moved by R.
- (j) justification condition: if R is a reason for S to φ , R can be arrived at by subjecting S's set of desires to a rational procedure.

Internalists have traditionally held both (m) and (j), and expressed their combination in some formulation such as this:

¹⁰ Callard (MS: ch. 1).

¹¹ Externalists such as Parfit (2011) go beyond negating internalism when they assert that not only are there external reasons, but *all* reasons are external—that is, not relativized to motivation. Thus there is space between the two views, which is where the proleptic reasons theorist must reside. For in proleptic cases, whether you have reason to become a mother or a philosopher, take up knitting or piano, etc. does depend—though not in the way an internalist can capture—on whether you are motivationally such as to be able to come to enjoy the end-state. For it is in the activity of enjoying the end that you derive meaning from the activity in question, and, at least some of the time, what makes a project good or valuable just is the meaning that the agent derives from it.

(mj) R is a reason for S to φ iff, were S to deliberate in a procedurally rational way from his current set of desires, he would come to be motivated to by R.¹²

Internalists have wanted both to deny that someone could be in the condition of being barred from access to his own reasons, and to insist that reasons for action justify those actions in the light of the agent's desires. In short, I have whatever reasons would move me, if I were fully rational. Recently, some philosophers have called into question whether internal reasons can do both of these jobs. (mj) lends itself to the "conditional fallacy," which amounts to a kind of blind spot for reasons that depend on one's irrationality.¹³ Richard Johnson (1999) describes someone who has a reason to see a therapist, because he is deluded into thinking that he is James Bond. "James Bond" cannot arrive at this reason himself: for if he were in a position to reason correctly on this point, he wouldn't (so the story goes) have any need for therapy. Likewise, Michael Smith (1995) describes a sore loser so incensed by his defeat that he is inclined to punch his opponent at the end of the game. Given this inclination, he doesn't have a reason to approach his opponent at the end of the game for a handshake, though that is exactly what his fully rational, and therefore less irascible, counterpart has reason to do.

Johnson has argued that the only way around the conditional fallacy is to give up (mj) by giving up either (m) or (j); and Julia Markovits (2011a) has recently made the case for the former option. She argues that we have independent reason to give up (m), since there are circumstances in which we aren't, and shouldn't be, motivated to φ by the best reason for φ . For instance, a pilot executing an emergency landing might be well advised not to act for the sake of saving hundreds of lives, because being motivated by this reason might put so much psychological pressure on him as to interfere with his performance of the task.¹⁴ She advocates for a weaker version of internalism based only on (j).

¹² By omitting reference to beliefs I elide the difference, here immaterial, between *subjective* and *objective* reasons. A subjective reason would be one arrived at by deliberation from the agent's current set of desires *and current set of beliefs*, whereas objective reasons would presuppose deliberating from a belief-set corrected for falsity and supplemented with any missing (and relevant) true beliefs (see Markovits (2011b) for this way of formulating the distinction).

¹³ Though Markovits (2011a) argues that one can broaden the class of counterexamples to include ones—such as Kavka's toxin puzzle, or cases where one has pragmatic reasons to hold a belief—in which the agent's inability to access the relevant reason is due not to her irrationality, but rather to certain strictures that rationality places on us.

¹⁴ I do have a worry here, however: in another paper, Markovits (2010) argues that an action is only morally worthy if the agent is motivated by the reasons that morally justify the action. It is not clear to me how weak internalism is consistent with that view, given that Markovits presumably wants to claim that the pilot in this example is to be (morally) credited with saving all those lives. Moreover, it seems to me that the considerations she rightly adduces in favor of the conclusion of her 2010 paper—such as pointing out that we are not always aware of the considerations that motivate us—cut against those she uses, in Markovits (2011a), to argue in favor of *not* being motivated by the justifying reason.

I will argue that internalists—even weak internalists—are guilty of selling proleptic rationality short. But first some preliminaries. The weak internalist takes it that the reasons we have *depend rationally* on our desires. Internalists might spell out this rational dependence in a variety of ways: in terms of instrumental rationality (Hume, as understood by Williams 1981), of the presence of a sound deliberative route (Williams 1981), of the absence of rational defects (Korsgaard 1986), of procedural rationality or the reasoning of an ideally rational agent (Markovits 2011a and 2011b); of satisfying norms of consistency and coherence in such a way as to be “systematically justifiable” (Smith 1995: 114). All of these ways of cashing out the dependence point at some analog to *formal* validity: the method in question does not add any content to one’s ends, but rather takes the content already present in them and shows what reasons follow from it. The idea is: given that “James Bond” has an interest in his mental health, and also has some form of mental illness, it follows that he has reason to seek help—even if he, himself, is not in a position to appreciate this reason. Seeking mental help is the kind of behavior that would be consistent with the aim of mental health, when it is combined with the presence of mental illness. We might also speak of actions that answer or correspond to one’s ends. The weak internalist might put his point thus:¹⁵ you have the reasons that an impartial third party observer would take you to have, if he were reasoning about what reasons you have in a procedurally rational way from your desires.

One more quick point of clarification: internalists can—and do—offer us internalist accounts both of *pro tanto* reasons and of *all-things-considered* reasons. Take Williams’ (1981) example of Owen Wingrave, whose family insists that tradition gives him reason to enlist, in spite of his deep hatred of all things military. When Williams says that Owen has *no reason* to enlist, does he mean that Owen lacks even a *pro tanto* reason to do so? It is hard to imagine someone who, in Owen’s circumstances, sees literally nothing speaking in favor of enlisting: surely the fact that his family strongly wants him to enlist is at least a (very weak) consideration in favor of doing so? Presumably, even if he allowed that Owen saw some (minimal) reason to enlist, Williams would still want to resist the family’s insistence that enlisting is what he has an all-things-considered reason to do. For whatever glancing respect he harbors for tradition, or whatever weak desire he has to please his parents, is dwarfed by his powerful hatred of the military. In what follows, we will set *pro tanto* reasons aside: “S has a reason to φ ,” means, henceforth, that φ -ing is what S has a reason to do, all things considered.

The problem is that the proleptically rational agent has a reason that not only she, but even a fully rational third party observer, will have trouble extracting from the content of her antecedent desires. Suppose the good student of music appreciation has a choice between spending an hour of her evening listening to a symphony, or devoting

¹⁵ Markovits puts the point in this way in a footnote (13) of her 2011b paper, though the footnote appears only in the online version of the paper, available at <https://sites.google.com/site/juliamarkovits/research>; as she points out there, both Smith (1994: section 5.9) and Railton (1986: 174) offer re-formulations of internalism in the same vein.

that hour to a hobby she thoroughly enjoys. Let us assume that listening to music will not serve any end of hers apart from her (still weak) interest in enjoying music for its own sake. The internalist must direct her to pursue the hobby she already enjoys a great deal over developing her nascent love of music. For that action coheres better with her current set of desires and interests. But if this were always good advice, we would hardly ever have reason to develop new interests, values, relationships, etc., for there is virtually always something else we could be doing that we enjoy more than, and which satisfies our other ends better than, the new form of valuation we have yet to acquire fully.

The problem is not merely that *she* does not, from where she currently stands, have a rational line of sight to the end whose value justifies her activity. For weak internalists are willing to grant that agents have more reasons than they can see their way to acknowledging. The problem is that unlike in Johnson's "James Bond" case or Smith's sore loser case, the impartial rational spectator is no better off than the agent herself. If he could somehow reason from the person's *future* condition, in which (let us suppose) love of music has become the central aesthetic pleasure of her adult life, it would be clear that she ought to listen to the symphony. But the internalist is restricted to *extracting* what the agent should do by applying a procedurally rational method onto her antecedent desires, cares, interest, loves, etc. The internalist must counsel us to stick with immediate and available pleasures over embarking on the arduous process of developing a sensibility for new and perhaps higher ones. He seems to be giving us a form of advice that would have irked no one so much as Bernard Williams himself: be philistines!

My claim is that the internalist cannot capture the affective difference between the person I have called the "bad student," who is satisfied with her minimal appreciation of music, and the person who likewise harbors a minimal appreciation but aspires to become a music lover. I want now to consider some responses on the part of the internalist—some desires that he could point to in order to explain why the second has reason to listen while the first might lack it.

First, consider the desires that correspond to what I have called the reason's "proximate face." The aspiring music lover has promised herself chocolate for making it through the movement, and sustains her listening by imagining making a dramatic entrance in a concert hall on a snowy moonlit evening. The bad student lacks these forms of motivation. Will the internalist be able to point to these differences in their ends as accounting for the differences in their reasons? No. In order to motivate oneself successfully through some mechanism such as appetite or fantasy, the subordinate reason's *motivational* force must outstrip that of one's ultimate aims—but its justificatory force cannot do so. So, for instance, if I am trying to motivate myself to lose weight by promising to buy myself a nice dress, but losing weight will in fact frustrate more of my ends than it will satisfy, then my desire for a dress cannot be a source of good reasons. For the very fact that it is irrational for me to be trying to lose weight

entails that it is irrational for me to be setting up incentives for myself to facilitate that project.

Alternatively, consider the class of desires that pertain, in a higher-order way, to the distal face—for example, a desire to desire to listen to music more than one does, a desire to see what all the fuss is about, music-wise, or a desire to become a music lover. Even if it is true that the good student has these desires, and the bad one lacks them, pointing to that difference cannot help the internalist explain the fact that the good student has a reason to listen. For the rational ground of these higher-order desires lies not in any extraneous benefit that having a stronger desire to listen to music, understanding the source of the fuss, or becoming a music lover would afford her. At least not in the case I’m imagining: someone who wants to become a music lover in order, for example, to please her parents raises no problem for the internalist. For her “additional desire” plugs into independent motivations that can indeed rationalize her choice in a straightforwardly internalist way. But in the case of the good student, the rational ground of her higherorder desires—the reason why she has them—is once again simply the intrinsic value of music. And this is a value she is, currently, ill-placed to appreciate. So *all* of these desires bottom out in a valuation of music that is (I posit) too weak, as it stands, to underwrite an internalistic justification of doing much of anything in its service.

Perhaps, instead of claiming that the aspirant’s reasons are based in her desires, we should allow that they might be based in her beliefs. There is a kind of internalist¹⁶ who holds that one of the things that can rationally ground a desire (or a desire to have a desire) is a belief in the value of the object that you desire (to desire). Why couldn’t an agent’s *belief* that music is intrinsically valuable be justified independently of, and therefore underwrite, her project of changing her affective response to music? If this is possible, and I think it is, then there is a version of this agent that is fully analyzable in terms of internal reasons.

The person who believes that music is valuable, but doesn’t enjoy music or doesn’t enjoy it very much, comes in two varieties. The first takes herself to know *perfectly well* the value of music, despite the fact that she takes less pleasure in listening to music than she thinks she could. She might work on herself to try to get herself to enjoy music more (or at all), simply for the reason that her life could contain more aesthetic pleasure than it does. Her music listening is, indeed, rationalizable by way of internal reasons—but those reasons are not proleptic, because she does not take herself to have anything to learn, value-wise.¹⁷ Manipulating one’s affective responses so that they match the way one independently knows they should be is a real phenomenon, but it is not the one I seek to explain here.

¹⁶ Namely, the kind of internalist who thinks that beliefs can give rise to desires. See Nagel (1970: ch. 5) for the canonical statement of this view.

¹⁷ I discuss this phenomenon at greater length in Callard (MS: ch. 6), where I call it *ambition*.

If, on the other hand, she takes her own belief in the value of music to be in some way a defective appreciation of its value, since full appreciation would presuppose enjoyment of music, her belief will not suffice to rationally ground her attempts to access it. For she does not take her belief already to afford her (full) rational access to the value she is working to come into (better) contact with. This second case is the proleptic one that I claim internalists cannot accommodate. Such a person is willing to work harder to enjoy music than her belief can, by the logic of internalism, rationally support. Her willingness stems from her sense that there is more value out there than she has yet been able to take account of either cognitively or conatively.

Why can't the internalist simply allow that the good student has, in addition to any of the desires mentioned above, an *aspiration* to appreciate music? Internalists are famously open minded about exactly what forms of motivation or ends or conation might constitute the ground of one's reasons. I have claimed to use the word "desire" broadly—as internalists themselves often do—to cover all this whole class. They might suspect that, in this discussion, I have actually used it more narrowly, in such a way as to exclude unfairly the one kind of pro-attitude relevant to differentiating the good student from the bad one. But this is not the case. I do not want to deny the internalist recourse to the concept of being disposed to be motivated in a way that outstrips the reasons derivable from their current motivational set. The problem is that she cannot make room for the fact that any of those motivations is *rational*. For the internalist, letting "aspiration" into one's subjective motivational set simply means letting in a tendency to be motivated in an incoherent and procedurally irrational way. What the internalist cannot do is to derive the good music student's reasons not merely from her aspiration but from her *rational aspiration*. For her theory, as I've been arguing, gives us no way to see how that phrase could be anything but an oxymoron.

At this point, we may feel some nostalgia for old-school internalism. Markovits ascribes reasons to me on the basis of what a third party, impartial, perfect reasoner would take as answering to my present motivational condition. Williams, by contrast, is interested in what reasons I, with all my imperfections, could arrive at. It is true that Williams must understand what I "could arrive at" in a way that includes the concept of rationality—that is, as "could *rationally* arrive at"—but he nonetheless has a broader and in a certain way softer construal of what it means to arrive rationally at some conclusion. He doesn't seem interested in specifying a procedure that could be vouchsafed as formally valid, and therefore employed in an identical form by *any* rational agent. Rather, he seems to want to claim that an agent must be in a position somehow or other to see her way to any reason we are to count as her own. Hence his famously—to some, aggravatingly—open-minded conception of what such "deliberation" consists in: "practical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one, and there are no fixed boundaries on the continuum from rational thought to inspiration and conversion" (1981: 110).

Williams' followers have tended to be much more restrictive than he was in what they are willing to count as rational deliberation. It has seemed to some that without

such restrictions it is not clear what the theory means to rule out, and thus what the contrast with externalism is meant to amount to. Others have harbored substantive worries about some of the forms of reasoning that Williams wants to admit. For instance, Smith objects that “the imagination is liable to all sorts of distorting influences, influences that it is the role of systematic reasoning to sort out” (1995: 116).¹⁸ Finally, as I observed above, the conditional fallacy has driven still others, such as Markovits, to place at the heart of internalism the idea of what can be deduced by a valid procedure from a given set of desires.

Whatever the disadvantages of Williams’ internalism, it might seem to be in a better position to accommodate proleptic reasoning than weak internalism. Indeed, I believe Williams himself may have thought that by emphasizing the role of the imagination in reasoning, he was skirting the worry about philistinism I’ve been pressing here. When Williams warns against an overly narrow conception of what a “sound deliberative route” may consist in, reminding us that “the imagination can create new possibilities and new desires” (1981: 104–5), he may have large-scale transformative pursuits in mind. For it is true that we use our imaginations to grasp the value that a radically new form of life has to offer us. The problem is that we cannot do so well enough to generate an internal reason. The music student uses her imagination to generate a fantasy about a snowy evening, and this imaginative work may well be crucial to her forward progress. But she cannot, in fantasizing in that way, foresee the *real* value that music will bring for her. Imagination simply doesn’t have that power. No matter how loosely we hold the reins, deliberation will not plot a course from the agent’s present condition to what I have called the distal face of her proleptic reason. We cannot attribute to the aspiring X-er imaginative or heuristic resources that so far outstrip her current motivational condition that she is able to imagine her way into the intrinsic value of X.

Internalists may respond to this line of reasoning by beginning to doubt whether they *want* to accommodate proleptic rationality. There is no knowing whether an agent’s course of action *will* end in ϕ -ing until the course has, in fact, ended. Are we to ascribe proleptic reasons only retrospectively, on the basis of successful ϕ -ing? Internalists may raise the same kind of objection to recognizing proleptic rationality that Smith raises to Williams’ idea of the imagination as a source of reasons. They may doubt whether there is a fact of the matter as to whether what an agent does in the service of such an indeterminate goal is, or is not, proleptically rational. They may question whether it is even possible to ascertain that someone who takes herself to have a proleptic reason in fact does not, or vice versa.

I grant that in the early stages, proleptic rationality may indeed be tenuous enough to be immune to rational critique. Aspiration begins as something like wish or hope, and we would tend not to tell someone she “shouldn’t” have such and such a long-term wish, or that her cherished hopes for her future self are “irrational.” Rational criticism

¹⁸ This for a variety of reasons.

does, however, eventually become appropriate. At some point on the way to her goal, the agent enters a space in which it becomes fitting for someone—though, perhaps, not just anyone—to say either “try harder, you can do this” or “give up, this isn’t working for you.” These are the kinds of locutions by which we key someone in to the presence or absence of proleptic reasons. We can see the direction someone is heading, assessing her trajectory on the basis of the work she has done so far. We gauge whether she has it in her to make it to the endpoint, whether it is reasonable for her to proceed, or more reasonable for her to try something else. Or, rather, those of us with the relevant expertise and the relevant familiarity with the aspirant do this.

Though proleptic reasons are amenable to rational critique, the character who is in a position to offer this critique is not Markovits’ impartial, detached, perfectly rational observer. This observation may further incline the internalist to reject the rationality of proleptic reasons, but I think it should instead lead her to question the unargued-for assumption that the “perfectly rational agent” is the perfect arbiter of all practical reasons. If it were true that excellence with respect to procedural rationality alone—a kind of analytical prowess—puts someone in a position to determine what reasons a person has, philosophers would be much better at offering advice on any sort of practical topic than we in fact are. It is important to keep in mind that the set of examples with which we, philosophers, discuss practical rationality does not represent a random sample. Philosophers tend, quite reasonably, to gravitate towards examples that provide immediate spectatorial access. The “impartial rational observer” can determine without wanting anything, doing anything, or having any special expertise that breaking an egg is a rational means to the end of making an omelet, and that leaving the egg intact is not a rational means to the same end. In order to make the relevant determination, all one needs is an understanding of what eggs are, and what omelets are. When speaking to an audience—philosophers—without any special practical competence, it is useful to avail oneself of examples that *can* be assessed by any rational observer.

But we should guard against taking such armchair assessability to be a feature of practical rationality itself. For instance, consider the difficulty of determining whether it is an intensive course, years of casual listening, or a season of concert-attendance that represent the rational means, for the would-be music lover, to realize her aspirations. One doesn’t know the answer to this question merely by knowing what the relevant items *are*. And not even a master of procedural rationality should, I think, venture to answer this question if she has never had any interest in music.

At least some forms of practical rationality or irrationality may only be evident to those whose sensibilities—desires, emotions, intellects—have been shaped by the practice in question. In addition, such judgments often call for personal acquaintance with the subject whose proleptic rationality is being called into question. And even when an expert is assessing a subject she knows well, she will often be unable to judge whether the aspiration is rational or not until she has some actual extent of practice before her. Thinking about whether or not something will work out is not always a

reasonable substitute for trying to work it out. It does not tell against the rationality of aspiration that a judgment as to whether someone has a proleptic reason is likely to be made on the basis of something like a trial period, or evidence of similar past attempts, and that it is likely to call for personal acquaintance with and personal affection for both the subject in question and her aspirational target. Judgments of practical (ir)rationality sometimes call for practical experience.

We acquire most, perhaps all, of our practical knowledge by responding to past experience. My interest has been in those cases in which the experience that we respond to is one that we ourselves have sought out; moreover, we sought it out for the (proleptic) reason that it produces this response. In those cases, we have guided ourselves to the new values or desires or commitments that our experience engenders. That process of selfguidance is a kind of practical learning. Because a process of learning some new form of valuation is not the same as a process of articulating or rendering consistent the values one already has, proleptic reasons break every internalist's mold.

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