**Pre-publication Draft**

**Against The Tyranny of Outcomes**

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Book Abstract: The book canvasses two sets of seemingly powerful arguments, the first that outcome-centered ethics cannot be wrong, the second that it cannot be right. It proceeds to undermine the arguments that outcome-centered ethics cannot be wrong, in the process providing additional support for the arguments that it cannot be right. Rooting out the mistaken grounding for outcome-centered ethics, it argues, involves rooting out the outcome-centered accounts of value, attitudes, reasons, and actions upon which the case for outcome-centered ethics depends, together with the considerations that have been offered to support them. The ethical and intuitive arguments for outcome-centered ethics are implausible (chapters [2](#_Chapter_2_The) and [3](#_Chapter_3:_The)), the outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons and actions that form the cornerstone of the non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics are implausible (chapters [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) and [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against)), and the considerations offered to shore up such outcome-centered accounts either themselves turn on the same equivocations that undermine the ethical arguments, or depend upon highly controversial positions in metaphysics and the theory of action ([chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The)). The result is a comprehensive argument for rejecting these outcome-centered accounts, in the process stepping outside of this toxic outcome-centered circle. The final chapter points to only a few of the many significant implications of this comprehensive rejection of the tyranny of outcomes, with particular focus upon our democratic and legal practices. It demonstrates that outcome-centered accounts leads agents away from the quest for good reasons of the right kind, and towards appeal to the wrong kinds of reasons, and to bad reasons of the right kind.

Book Keywords: Consequentialism, Outcome-Centered Constraint, Desire, Action, Consequentializing, Deontic Evaluation, Standard Story of Action, TCR, Compelling Idea, Propositionalizing, Evaluative Outlook, Value-based Rationale, Direction of Fit

*For Joe and Paul*

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# **Preface**

My topic is the tyranny of outcomes, of the outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons, actions, values, ethics, and social practices that have come to function more and more as a default in our understanding of who we are and what we should do. To give a sense of the profound costs of adopting such an outcome-centered framework, consider the disorienting experience of a fictional student who encounters the tyrannical rule of outcomes wherever she turns.

**Rational Agency:** Our fictional student is pretty clear what is involved in thinking and acting well—what is involved in functioning well as a rational agent. Clearly, we should strive to determine what we have good reasons to believe, and to believe these things for these good reasons, and we should strive to determine what we have good reasons to do, and to perform such actions for these reasons. What could be more obvious? As rational agents, we, in striving to determine the good reasons to act, are striving to determine the reasons for which we should want and intend to act, and should intentionally act, just as, in striving to determine good reasons to believe, we are striving to determine the reasons for which we should believe.

But outcome-centered theorists in many disciplines point out that if, as theory dictates, we have good reasons to do what brings about the best outcome, and hence to bring it about that we are motivated to act in ways that bring about the best outcome, then the best reasons for acting will be the reasons that lead us to act in these ways that bring about the best outcome. We should strive, then, to act for the reasons that it brings about the best outcome for us to take to be good. Our student is not convinced; she is pretty sure something has gone wrong here. How can the project not be to act for good reasons, but for the reasons it is best to (mistakenly?) take to be good? But she is damned if she can identify where things have gone wrong.

**Ethical Theory:** Because she is pretty clear what is involved in thinking and acting well, our student is also pretty clear what she is looking for in an ethical theory, a theory of what is involved in acting well. If rational agents strive to determine good reasons for acting, and to act for those reasons, then a good ethical theory will be a theory of what the good reasons for acting are and what the values are that they reflect, and of how to habituate ourselves to identify these good reasons and to act for them. Aristotelian and Kantian theories are initially appealing to her because they both have this form. They strive to identify good reasons for action, the reasons for which we should act, and they provide accounts of how to cultivate our characters and habitats such that we discern what our good reasons are to act, and act for such reasons, just as we should strive to become thinkers who discern what our good reasons are to believe, and believe for such reasons.

But the outcome-centered ethical theorist, the consequentialist, counters that because it is always right to do what’s best, surely an ethical theory should be a theory of which actions bring about the best outcome, of which values should be taken into account in determining the relevant rankings of outcomes, and of how to habituate agents to perform actions that bring about the best outcomes. What actions the agent ought to perform, and what the agent’s reasons ought to be in performing them, are on such an approach two separate questions. He points out, in support of such a view, that an agent performs the right action even if he performs it for the most scurrilous reasons. Derek Parfit’s vicious, self-interested gangster pays for his coffee, and the virtuous person pays for her coffee. (2011, 216 and 231–2) Doesn’t each perform the right action, the action that brings about the best outcome, even though they act for very different reasons? Aren’t the best reasons for an agent to act the reasons that will reliably lead her to perform the actions that promote the best outcomes? The “good” reasons for an agent to act will be the reasons for acting such that, in taking these to be good reasons for acting, and acting for such reasons, the agent will bring about the best outcome. Isn’t the focus, then, not upon acting for good reasons, but upon what the good reasons are for agents to act? Again, she is pretty clear that something has gone terribly wrong here—that the point of an ethical theory should be to determine the good reasons for acting, the reasons for which agents should act, just as the point is to determine the good reasons for believing, and to believe for those reasons. But it is extremely difficult to capture what has gone wrong, and why.

**Desires and Preferences:** When she takes a class in the philosophy of mind, our student arrives with a pretty good idea of what a plausible account of mental attitudes will look like. To determine that I have decisively good reasons to intentionally act in some way just is to want and intend to perform such an action, and to determine that I have decisively good reasons to believe just is to have such a belief. Mental attitudes such as wanting and intending to act are constituted in part by the good reasons that we take ourselves to have to act, just as believing something is, ceteris paribus, constituted in part by the good reasons that I take myself to have for believing it.

But she will learn that on the default, outcome-centered account of desiring/preferring, desires and preferences to act are, strictly speaking, desires that I act and preferences that one outcome rather than another obtain. To want or desire to act is thus to want or desire that I act, and this is to have reasons to bring it about that I act, that an action of the relevant type by me happens. So to want/intend to act is to have good reasons to bring it about that my performing such an action happens, not to have good reasons to act and to perform the action for those reasons. In place of good reasons to actthat seem partially constitutive of our desire *to act*, the more perspicuous desire *that I act* focuses instead upon the reasons that I should cultivate in order to bring it about that actions of the relevant sort by me happen.

She will find this alternative account implausible and bizarrely complicated, but she will be assured that it is in fact elegant and simple, facilitating an understanding of beliefs and desires as attitudes of the same kind, propositional attitudes, sharply distinguished by the contrasting directions of fit between their propositional contents and the world: desires aim to make their propositional contents obtain in the world, and beliefs aim for their propositional contents to accurately represent the world.

**Democracy:** Our student is a concerned citizen, who takes herself to be fortunate to live in a functioning democracy. She is pretty clear that she and her fellow citizens each have a reason to vote; indeed, that citizens in such a democracy have a duty to vote. But outcome-centered theorists point out that according to the default theory of rational choice we should maximize utility. Because the marginal utility of any one of us voting is basically zero, that is, because our individual votes do not matter from the standpoint of utility maximization, there is typically insufficient reason for any of us to vote.

Undeterred, our student will surely point out that even if we accept utility maximization, a functioning democracy maximizes utility. Since democracy only functions if people vote, clearly we each have a reason to vote. But the outcome-centered theorist will pinpoint the fallacy in this reasoning. It may well maximize utility if most of us vote, but there is no reason for any of us to vote—the marginal utility of any one of us voting is still zero. That a functioning democracy maximizes overall utility may be a reason to cultivate the mistaken view that we each do have a reason to vote, or it may provide a reason to use law to change payoffs so that, in order to avoid a financial penalty, for example, we each do typically have a reason to vote. But justification for such policies is premised on the fact that we do not have reasons to vote, much less a duty to vote; it is not evidence that we do have such reasons. Our student is pretty sure that something has gone wrong here, but has a hard time saying exactly what it is.

**Tort Law:** When she goes to law school, our student will find herself taking torts. It seems pretty clear to her at the outset that the point of tort law is what it more or less says that it is—to provide victims legal recourse to hold those accountable who have wrongfully inflicted certain legally recognized injuries upon them. Moreover, she is pretty clear that some such legal practice is good for a just society to have. The practice takes actions to be wrongful, on such a view, because they wrong, takes those who are entitled by the practice to sue to be entitled because they have been wrongfully injured, etc.

But her class is taught by an advocate of the dominant outcome-centered approach to legal theory, instrumentalism. He argues that the best explanation of why we take certain actions to be wrongful, and take certain individuals to be victims entitled to recourse, is because it maximizes a socially beneficial outcome to do so, e.g. because doing so maximizes wealth. We accuse people of wrongdoing, judge that they have violated standards of reasonable interaction, etc., because it is socially beneficial to cultivate such a practice that takes such actions to be wrongful and unreasonable. We do not, after all, take such actions to be wrongful and unreasonable because they involve wrongful injuries to another person and because each of us has good reasons not to violate such terms of rightful interaction with others. Tort law does not enforce norms against wrongful interaction, it sets prices to incentivize socially optimal interactions.

Again, she has a sense that something deeply wrong is going on here; how can an entire practice function through appeal to cultivating commitments to taking things to be the case—to be wrongful, or reasonable, or to violate claims—not because they are the case, but because it is socially beneficial for people to take them to be the case? Yet with such instrumentalist explanations and justifications of tort law functioning more and more as the default, and more and more suffusing the practice of law, it becomes unclear how even to capture what this something wrong is.

In each of these cases there is a subtle shift from a quest for good reasons to act, the reasons for which I should act reflecting the relevant things of value, to a quest for the actions on my part that will promote the best outcome and reasons to bring it about that I perform such actions. We begin with a quest as rational agents for reasons that in fact bear upon our actions, the reasons for which we should act, but find ourselves instead looking not for the best reasons, but for the reasons that it is best for us to take ourselves to have, the reasons for which it is best to act. We start with desires to act, but find ourselves only with desires that our actions happen; we start with a duty as citizens to vote, but find ourselves with no justification for such a duty—or even for any good reasons—to vote; we start with reasons to hold accountable defendants who wrong any of us in the pursuit of their ends, but find ourselves deterring and incentivizing actions of those best positioned to achieve societal ends, cultivating practices of taking ourselves to have reasons to hold defendants accountable for acts that we take to be wrong, and taking plaintiffs to be victims entitled to recourse, and all because taking their to be such reasons achieves socially beneficial outcomes.

In each of these cases there is a subtle shift from looking directly at oneself, one’s reasons, the values they reflect, one’s actions, and the practices in which one is involved, to looking at these same things as if in a fun house mirror—the pieces are there, but somehow subtly, profoundly distorted. Moreover, in each case the suggestion by advocates of the outcome-centered framework is that despite this feeling that we are stepping in front of the fun house mirror, we are in fact clarifying, not distorting. Driven by theoretical reflection, we are in fact piercing the veil of appearance to get at how things really are.

This shift places us in the grips of the tyranny of outcomes, of the outcome-centered accounts that have become the default in our understanding of our attitudes, reasons, actions, ethics, values, and practices. It not only alienates us from our good reasons to act, it alienates us from our very actions—from our good reasons of the right kind for acting, replacing them with the wrong kinds of reasons, reasons to bring it about that we act—not for good reasons, but for the bad reasons that the theory tells us it is good for us to have.

This is not the tyranny of evil men; it is precisely the opposite: a tyranny perpetrated by good, intelligent, and well-intentioned people against themselves as well as others. It is a sublime form of Nietzschean self-annihilation, enlisting ourselves in the systematic undermining of our own agency, our own actualizing of our capacity to act for good reasons of the right kind. We are the objects of our own systematic manipulation, constantly bringing it about that what we take to be good and authentic reasons for action are not such reasons themselves, but whatever reasons, in taking them to be good, motivate us to promote the best outcomes.

My project in what follows is to take up the arguments that have been offered in establishing this tyranny of outcomes, and to demonstrate that they collapse as a set. Our fictional student’s disorienting experience already gestures at the enormous costs of being in the grips of such tyranny; I will close by demonstrating that freeing ourselves from the pervasive deformation of our practical lives that results from being in the grips of this tyrannical rule matters a great deal.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Chapter 1 Abstract: This chapter makes the case that outcome-centered accounts tyrannize not only in ethics, but in our theories of actions, reasons, and attitudes, and that this tyranny has a profoundly distorting effect on our self-understanding as agents and our approach to the explanation and justification of policies and social practices. It presents arguments, both ethical and non-ethical, purporting to establish that outcome-centered ethics – consequentialism – is completely unavoidable, and arguments, both ethical and non-ethical, that the same approach to ethics is completely unacceptable; moreover, it suggests that the case for consequentialist ethical theory is grounded outside of ethics, in the theories of action and mind. The chapter suggests that the arguments for an outcome-centered approach commit two conflations, and it outlines what these conflations are. To expose these conflations is to overthrow the tyrannical rule of outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, actions, reasons, ethics, and of our social practices and policies

Chapter 1 Keywords: Outcomes, Value, Consequentialism, Ethical Theory, Outcome-Centered Constraint, Value-based Rationale, Democracy

## **Section I: The Scope of the Tyranny of Outcomes**

Outcomes tyrannize over prevailing accounts of ethics, actions, reasons, attitudes, and social practices. The right action promotes the best outcome, the end of every action is an outcome to be promoted, reasons to act are reasons to promote outcomes, and preferences and desires rationalize actions that aim at the outcome of realizing their contents—making their contents true. This tyranny extends to the theory of rational choice that dominates social science and much of philosophy, and to the default (“Standard Story”) account in philosophy of what it is to act. Nor is this despotism benign; indeed, I will argue that it has a subtle but profoundly distorting effect upon how we value, reason, and act, both individually and collectively. Elizabeth Anderson provides a particularly useful example of this apparent distortion. When deciding whether to vote, each partisan of expected utility, the standard outcome-centered approach to rational choice, reasons that regardless of how others vote:

the chances that my ballot will make a difference to the outcome of the election are negligible. Therefore, if there is the slightest inconvenience to me (or—thinking altruistically now—inconvenience to others!) from my voting—I ought not to vote. (2001, 26)

On such an approach we lose a handle on whatever reasons we thought we had to vote. Whether someone is selfish, altruistic, or something in between, she does not have reason to vote, because each “correctly reasons that her marginal impact on the outcome . . . is negligible.” (2001, 21)

Such concerns provide but an opening salvo in debates concerning whether rational choice theory can account for the reasons that so many of us take ourselves to have for voting. But they are sufficient to suggest what is at stake, in particular both that and why the reasons that we take ourselves to have become mysterious on such an outcome-centered approach. The source of this mysteriousness, Anderson suggests, is that such “a principle of rational choice . . . has an act-consequentialist form,” (2001, 26) deploying an account of reasons to act and of the evaluation of actions that is centered on the outcomes of actions.

Perhaps we do not have compelling reasons to vote, but if we often do, as Anderson and I believe, her suggestion is that the outcome-centered account of the evaluation of actions invoked by the theory of rational choice at best distorts such reasons, and at worst completely elides them from view. Moreover, if she is right this distortion of relevant reasons is merely the tip of the iceberg. Many of the things that we most value—rights, freedom, persons, friendship, beautiful experiences—appear to be reflected in reasons to act and interact with others that are not reasons to promote outcomes. Insisting that their relevance must be captured in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted, e.g. in reasons to maximize friendship and minimize rights violations, results in viewing such things of value as though in our fun house mirror—the relevant things are there, but warped and distorted to varying degrees, often virtually beyond recognition.

Another striking example of the deforming effects of the tyranny of outcomes is provided by contemporary work explaining and justifying tort law. Torts is an area of Anglo-American law that seems distinctively non-outcome-centered in its guiding rationale. The focus is not upon better and worse outcomes, but upon whether some injury was the result of wrongful actions by another person—whether the interaction resulting in the injury was wrongful. And torts recognizes the distinctive status of the person wronged, the person with the interests unreasonably disregarded by the tortfeasor’s action, to hold the tortfeasor to account for the injuries that resulted from failing to fulfill his duty to take into account her protected interest. (Goldberg and Zipursky 2020; Coleman 2003)

Over the course of the past century, however, dominant theories of tort law “have been prone to insist that tort law is not what it appears to be.” (Goldberg and Zipursky 2020, 238–9) Their deeming conduct tortious “rests primarily on the social benefit that stands to be achieved by imposing liability for such conduct.” (2020, 239) On such “instrumentalist” views, “judges should acknowledge that their decisions . . . involve instrumental (means-ends) judgments as to which outcomes in which cases will promote deterrence, compensation, or some other goal.” (2020, 74) The dominant theories, in short, have become outcome-centered theories. The point is not that there are no non-outcome-centered accounts of torts available, but that outcomes so tyrannize over the accounts of values, reasons, and actions deployed in current approaches to law and policy, and that judges and legal scholars more and more take it to be a framing assumption that torts as a practice does aim, and should aim, at some beneficial outcome, focusing primarily on debates concerning which outcome-centered rationale guides and/or ought to guide the design of the practice.

The resulting deformation to the practice is profound. The links between standards of reasonableness in torts and what is reasonable, between doing wrong and being identified by the practice as a wrongdoer, and between who is wrongfully injured and who is entitled to hold others accountable, are severed on such instrumentalist approaches, compromising the integrity of the practice at its very core. Jules Coleman demonstrates that on economic instrumentalist approaches “the apparently transparent purpose of the tort law in each case is not the real purpose; and that the real purpose . . . has nothing to do with the fact that the injurer may have wrongfully harmed the victim.” Such instrumentalism, he concludes, “renders these obvious and intuitively transparent features of tort law mysterious and opaque.” (2003, 21; see also Goldberg and Zipursky 2020, 239)

Why then is our current legal culture pervaded by instrumentalism if the approach unmoors our deepest intuitions about the nature and value of tort law as a practice? The answer, I suggest, is provided by the widespread conviction that some such account, despite its apparent counter-intuitiveness and mysteriousness, must be right, because an outcome-centered approach must be right. It is the tyranny of outcomes that accounts for the pervasiveness of instrumentalism in tort law, and for the deformity to our legal practices that inevitably results, unmooring our deepest intuitions about these practices with accounts that create at best ad hoc simulacra of reasonableness, wrongful injury, and the entitlements of victims.

Even in debates in which outcome-centered alternatives do not completely tyrannize, they nonetheless loom over alternative views,[[1]](#footnote-1) operating as default positions in such debates that purport to assimilate alternatives, and towards which such alternatives are taken to be driven by what Tim Scanlon has characterized as the “difficulties about the foundations of these rival views.” (1982, 267) Students who are taught rational choice theory as a comprehensive framework for evaluating the reasons that they and others have to choose, and policy makers who adopt such a theory in evaluating policy, are rendered incapable of properly framing such choices—of taking into account, for example, some of the reasons that we have to vote and our deepest convictions grounding tort law.Moreover, when such students, armed with rational choice theory, take an ethics course, they will encounter Kantian, virtue ethical, contractualist, and consequentialist theories, but only the last of these straightforwardly adopts the act-consequentialist, outcome-centered form dictated by the most straightforward forms of rational choice theory, hence only consequentialism can readily be reconciled to the framework they have been provided for making rational choices. Such students may well recognize the pull of alternative theories, but Anderson’s diagnosis suggests that the ethical war is lost by the opponents of consequentialism at the non-ethical level before any particular ethical battle with opposing views is even joined.

Such examples highlight the importance of my project here, first to clarify the depth and breadth of this tyranny of outcomes and the range of mutually interconnected considerations that appear to legitimate it, and second to demonstrate that these considerations collapse as a set upon closer scrutiny, thereby overthrowing the tyrannical rule of outcomes and exposing its distorting effect on our valuing, reasoning, and acting. “Consequentialism” is the label philosophers use for outcome-centered ethical theories, theories that evaluate actions entirely through appeal to value captured in rankings of outcomes to be promoted:

**Consequentialist Evaluative Framework (CEF)**: Deontic evaluations of actions are determined and explained through appeal to the relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The consequentialist need not claim that the fundamental things of value are outcomes, only that whatever the fundamental things of value are, their relevance to the reasons for action that determine the deontic[[3]](#footnote-3) value of actions is captured perspicuously and without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted.[[4]](#footnote-4) Deontic evaluations of actions, e.g. as what agents ought or morally ought to do, what it is right or morally prohibited to do, are then properly determined through appeal to relevant rankings of outcomes.

## **Section II: Initial Cases for and Against the Tyranny of Outcomes**

Seemingly compelling arguments are widely on offer both that consequentialism is completely unacceptable and that it is upon reflection unavoidable. Critics stress that it is so unacceptable—so confining, alienating, monstrous, demanding, and destructive of our integrity—that it must be rejected despite its apparent unavoidability.[[5]](#footnote-5) They also often demonstrate that common forms of such an ethical theory suffer from deep incoherence and fundamental inconsistencies.[[6]](#footnote-6) Advocates refine and streamline the case for the unavoidability of consequentialism despite its apparent unacceptability, arguing that support for consequentialism only grows with reflection, and with efforts to locate normative ethics within plausible theories of reasons, action, and the mind. The tyranny of outcomes in ethics, they argue, is vindicated by considerations that can be marshalled within ethics, but it is also dictated by the default status of outcome-centered accounts beyond ethics, in theories of reasons, attitudes, and actions. Here I present in provisional form some of the considerations standardly marshalled in support of the conclusions first that consequentialism is unavoidable, and subsequently that it is completely unacceptable.

***Consequentialism Is Unavoidable***

Bracketing for the moment any non-ethical considerations, the intuitive and ethical considerations driving us towards consequentialism can by themselves appear decisive. First, it seems undeniable that it is always right to do what’s best, and that “best” is a property of outcomes. Doesn’t it follow that it is always right to do what promotes the best outcome?[[7]](#footnote-7) Second, any plausible account of acting rightly and wrongly must provide a rationale for such judgments: we need an account of why actions are right, morally required, or simply ought to be performed, and such an account must appeal to what we value. But isn’t goodness—value—a property of outcomes, or at least a property captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes? It is the goodness of outcomes, then, upon which the rationale for the rightness of actions is based; outcome-based ethics—consequentialism—follows from the requirement for an adequate rationale for deontic evaluation of actions.[[8]](#footnote-8) Third, don’t all actions bring about outcomes (what else could the aim of an action be?)? If actions all aim at promoting outcomes, reasons to act will be reasons to promote the outcomes at which all actions aim—agents will have better reasons to promote better outcomes, and the best reasons to promote the best outcomes.[[9]](#footnote-9) Fourth, can’t all plausible ethical theories be put in an outcome-centered form, such that the evaluation of actions is determined through appeal to the value of the outcomes that they bring about? If all theories can be thus “consequentialized,” shouldn’t they be, thereby facilitating effective comparison, and shouldn’t they all be recognized as forms of consequentialism? And if so, isn’t the real debate in normative ethics entirely within the outcome-centered, consequentialist approach?[[10]](#footnote-10) The burden would appear to land squarely and heavily on those who hold that we are sometimes not required to, and even sometimes required not to, bring about the best outcome.

To summarize: If it is always right to bring about the best outcome, and the rationale for right actions is provided through appeal to the value of outcomes, and every action aims to bring about an outcome and is rationalized through appeal to the value of the outcome that it brings about, and every ethical theory can be put without distortion in consequentialized (outcome-centered) form, providing a framework for effective comparison and contrast, then the most plausible form of any theory will be its consequentialized form, and any plausible theory will properly be viewed as a form of consequentialism. Aren’t we all consequentialists now? Isn’t such an outcome-centered approach to ethics indeed unavoidable?

These ethical and intuitive considerations can seem decisive, even overwhelming, in their own right. But the default status of outcome-centered ethics can seem to find powerful non-ethical support as well. After all, the default accounts in the theories of mind and action hold that actions are rationalized through appeal to an agent’s preferences/desires, and that these are propositional attitudes that rationalize bringing about the outcome that their propositional contents are true. Why do I flip the switch? I want the lights on. Strictly speaking, the objects of desires are propositional contents, in this case “that the lights are on,” and such attitudes aim at bringing about the outcomes that these contents are true—in this case that the lights are on. Desires rationalize actions, supplying the reasons for which agents act. All reasons to act supplied by such desires will be reasons to realize the objects of such desires—to promote outcomes. The actions rationalized by such reasons to promote outcomes will aim at promoting such outcomes. The default accounts of desires, reasons to act, and actions are all outcome-centered. Outcome-centered desires/preferences rationalize all actions as aiming to promote outcomes, aligning with consequentialist claims about the intuitive aims of actions. Such outcome-centered non-ethical commitments in turn dictate the adoption of some form of outcome-centered ethical theory—consequentialist ethical theory*.[[11]](#footnote-11)*

All of these non-ethical outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons, and actions are embedded in the default—“Standard”—story of action and in the default normative theory of rational choice. The Standard Story takes actions to be rationalized through appeal to desires or preferences that phi, as bringing about the outcomes that their objects are true.[[12]](#footnote-12) Normative rational choice theory takes the rational action to maximize the satisfaction of an agent’s preferences, bringing about the most preferred option. Policy analysis deploying rational choice theory determines the right choice to be that which maximizes benefits relative to costs—overall outcomes. Such application of outcome-centered accounts in public policy analysis and social scientific inquiry can seem only to reinforce the case for the tyranny of outcomes. All paths of reflection, both at the ethical and the non-ethical levels, can seem to lead ineluctably to adoption of the consequentialist evaluative framework in ethics. Outcome-centered accounts are the default at both the ethical and non-ethical levels, and the default status of each account bolsters the tyrannical rule of outcomes generally. Consequentialist ethical theory is unavoidable.

Problems with consequentialism persist, but in light of these mutually reinforcing arguments for consequentialism it can seem that our only choice going forward is to learn to live with them. Strategies for mitigating these difficulties include appeals to indirection, shifts in primary focus from evaluation of actions to evaluation of rules and/or motives, and broadening and multiplying the standpoint(s) from which relevant outcomes are ranked.[[13]](#footnote-13) The goal of such strategies is to demonstrate that the tyranny of outcomes is for the most part benign—that consequentialism is not nearly as confining, alienating, demanding, monstrous, or damaging to our integrity as persons as it initially appears. Advocates also often readily concede that arguments against particular forms of consequentialism are effective, but insist that these criticisms leave intact the fundamental intuitive, ethical, and non-ethical grounds for the general claim that any plausible ethical theory must nonetheless be consequentialist.

***Consequentialism Is Completely Unacceptable***

If the case for the unavoidability of the tyranny of outcomes seems overwhelming, the case for the apparent implausibility of such outcome-centered ethics can appear to be even more straightforward and decisive. Freedom matters. Equality matters. People matter. Friendships matter. Families matter. Beautiful objects matter. Outcomes matter. Integrity matters. This is only a very partial list of things that matter. I should be there for my friends, nurture my family relationships, take the time to contemplate beautiful objects, treat other people with whom I interact respectfully, avoid causing pain and suffering to others, promote valuable outcomes, and safeguard my integrity. That all of these things matter is another way of saying that all of these things are valuable. The value of each of these things is reflected in and/or reflects reasons for us to act and to interact with persons and objects. Often these things of value and the reasons that reflect them make conflicting claims upon us, and in many cases one or another reason is decisive. We cancel time with friends to deal with family emergencies, and forego beneficial outcomes for ourselves when they can only be achieved through manipulation and deception of others, etc. In particular, we often have sufficient reasons to perform actions that do not bring about the best outcome (whether best overall, best for me, or even best relative to me) as consequentialists determine it, and decisive reasons not to bring about the best outcome. The best action to perform is often not the action that brings about such a best outcome, either for me or overall. Friendship often requires me to be there for my friend, even if in so doing I fail to maximize my well-being, or overall well-being, or the quality and number of friendships (and of my friendships) overall. Promoting outcomes in this (or any other) way is simply not what most of the reasons that reflect what the value of friendship, or respect for persons, or beautiful objects, are reasons to do. Valuing persons often requires me to respect their rights and to interact with them respectfully even if doing so fails to bring about the best outcome—even understood as the outcome that minimizes disrespectful interaction overall or by me. We recognize these as objective moral requirements upon each of us to interact respectfully with each other person, e.g. not to lie to or coerce other persons, requirements that reflect the distinctive responsibility that each of us clearly has for our own actions and interactions. Any moral or ethical theory that takes what value there is in any of these things to be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted would seem pretty clearly to be a non-starter. But that is just what consequentialism does.[[14]](#footnote-14) It maintains that the relevance of everything that is valuable to our reasons for acting and interacting must be captured without distortion in the relevant rankings of outcomes as better and worse, such that we have greater reasons to act in ways that promote better outcomes.

It is important to appreciate just how wrong this seems. Because I value friendship, and in particular this friendship, I have reasons to support my friend, to act and interact in ways appropriate to being a good friend, even though doing so is not better for me or better overall. These are reasons to interact with my friend that are not reasons to promote outcomes. Similarly, I have reasons not to lie to someone because that’s what respecting people in one’s interactions with them requires, reasons that hold even if doing so will prevent a worse overall outcome, say two other equally damaging lies being told by two others. We should each treat each other person with respect, but that two others will otherwise fail to treat two other people with respect is not a sufficient reason for me to disrespect another person. It is a reason to hold these others accountable for disrespecting others, but not to disrespect others myself and not to minimize my own disrespectful interaction with others. The practice of truth telling may further overall good, but that isn’t why I and others tell the truth. Again, shouldn’t we vote because each of us has an obligation to do her fair share in securing the conditions of political legitimacy and exercising popular sovereignty? And aren’t these reasons typically decisive even if the marginal utility of each of our votes is close to zero, hence even if our voting does not contribute significantly to the best outcome for me or the best outcome overall? The value of democracy is reflected in reasons for us each to do our share in the exercise of popular sovereignty. That such reasons to vote cannot readily be captured—at least not without distortion—in rankings of outcomes (maximizing the satisfaction of our preferences or overall preference satisfaction) does not cast doubt on the reasons, it seems to demonstrate instead the obvious incompleteness of an approach that appeals only to reasons to promote outcomes.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Even when we value outcomes, for example the outcome that the number of public defenders be doubled, and even when valuing this outcome is reflected in reasons to act to bring it about, our reasons in many such cases often do not appear to be based in the value of outcomes. If we each should value interacting justly with each other, and we recognize that we currently do not have the conditions in place to facilitate such just interactions, we each have reasons to secure such conditions, e.g. to promote the outcome that the number of public defenders is doubled, or that every person has access to basic health care. Bringing about these outcomes secures conditions that facilitate the just interactions that we have reason to value. Are these outcomes better for me? Better overall? Better relative to me? The value of the outcome does not seem to be captured by its place in any such ranking or set of rankings, but by the values of justice and individual freedom reflected in our reasons to act and interact justly, hence to work towards securing the conditions that facilitate such just interaction. Our positive evaluation even of outcomes themselves thus often appears to appeal to reasons to act and interact that are not reasons to promote outcomes, reasons that reflect things of value the relevance of which cannot be captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Although the consequentialist may well be right that a plausible rationale for evaluating actions must appeal to other things of value, he seems wrong that this is always an appeal to the value of *outcomes*. The value of freedom, friendship, equality, and the dignity of persons provide rationales for the evaluation of actions as right or wrong, but such reasons cannot be captured in rankings of outcomes to be promoted. And although the consequentialist may be right that it is always right to do what’s best—what we have the best reasons to do—he seems mistaken in claiming that what it is *best to do* is always what brings about the *best outcome* on some relevant ranking or rankings. Again, although consequentialists may be right that every action brings about an outcome, if only the outcome that the action happens, they seem wrong to assume that the *aim* of every action is bringing about some outcome—that every *performing of an action* is the *promoting of an outcome*. In each case the consequentialist appears to slide from a plausible claim that provides no support for consequentialism to an implausible interpretation of the claim that does.

These obvious reasons to reject the tyranny of outcomes in ethics are seemingly reflected in equally straightforward reasons to reject outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes. All of our actions are performances—we *perform* actions—but only some of these performances are promotings of outcomes. The aim of every intentional action is its successful performance guided by our reasons for undertaking it, reasons that typically reflect what we value. That some of these performances of actions are promotings of outcomes merely serves to highlight the fact that so many others are not. The outcome-centered account of the aims of actions would seem to be implausible.

So too with the outcome-centered accounts of reasons and desires/preferences. All of our reasons to act are reasons to perform actions, but only some of them are reasons to promote outcomes. All of our desires have objects, but in many cases the objects of such desires are actions to be performed rather than outcomes to be promoted. The aim of such desires to act is to perform some action that is not the promoting of some outcome. Unlike beliefs, desires seem to have objects of many different kinds. We desire things like Harley Davidsons and baking scales; we desire to act—to go for a walk, keep our promise, or meet with students; we desire to be in certain states—to have courage, to be happy, to manifest integrity.[[17]](#footnote-17) In the case of such desires with actions, things, and character traits as their objects, the desire reflects reasons respectively to perform the action, to interact in relevant ways with the thing desired, and to cultivate and manifest the traits of character, not to promote outcomes. Only in some cases do desires seem to rationalize bringing about some outcome, hence only in some cases are the reasons supplied by such desires reasons to promote outcomes, and only in some cases are the actions rationalized by such reasons performances aimed at the promotion of outcomes. Plausible accounts of actions, reasons, and attitudes would not appear to be outcome-centered, hence would appear to present apparent obstacles to, not apparent support for, the tyranny of outcomes in ethics and policy.

Although what we have better and worse reasons to do can be plausibly understood as reflecting better and worse outcomes along various dimensions, such valuations captured in rankings of outcomes seem clearly to reflect only some of the things we value, and only some of the reasons reflecting others of the things we value. This by itself suggests why falling under the sway of the tyranny of outcomes is not merely unacceptable, but dangerous. Such tyranny invites us to ignore many of the relevant reasons that we seem clearly to have to act, reasons that reflect important values. Even to the extent that it captures these values, it does so only in a highly distorted way, i.e. to the extent that such values can be shoehorned into rankings of outcomes to be promoted. The mistake thus seems obvious, and it would seem to be straightforwardly remediable: simply put outcomes back into their proper, undistorted place, and evaluate actions taking into account all of the things of value and all of the relevant reasons to act and interact that they reflect and are reflections of.

I sketch this case for the implausibility of consequentialism,[[18]](#footnote-18) and of outcome-centered accounts generally, to provide a stark initial contrast with the breadth and depth of considerations that seem to support the view that consequentialism is both obvious and unavoidable. We have already seen that these latter considerations drive home the extent of the tyranny of outcome-based accounts not just in ethics, but beyond ethics, in theories of action and mind. The depth and breadth of these considerations can seem to leave us without a choice but to accept that we must be consequentialists. Within the context of such an assumption, the various intuitive and theoretical challenges to its acceptability that I have just rehearsed must somehow be recast as challenges to the acceptability of various forms of consequentialism as opposed to others, not to consequentialism itself.

## **Section III: Two Conflations That Rationalize Tyranny**

In chapters [2](#_Chapter_2_The) through [6](#_Chapter_6:_The) I offer a comprehensive argument against the tyranny of outcomes, an argument that the apparent unavoidability of consequentialism is an illusion, and that the illusion is a dangerous one. Much of the apparent force of the considerations offered in its favor, I will argue, rests on two subtle, mutually reinforcing conflations. I will briefly sketch them here, but will demonstrate their pervasive impact in subsequent chapters. The first conflation is between two senses in which actions can be said to bring about outcomes. The first is a constitutive sense in which any successful action brings it about that the action itself happens, i.e. in which, to repurpose a phrase from G. E. M. Anscombe, “I do what happens.” (2000, 52) The second is a rationalizing sense in which the aim of an intentional action is bringing about an outcome the value of which rationalizes its performance. The rationalizing sense is often treated simply as a restatement of the constitutive sense. If every action brings about an outcome (constitutive sense), isn’t the aim of every action bringing some outcome about (rationalizing sense)? But it is not; indeed, every action could bring about an outcome in the constitutive sense without any action bringing about an outcome in the rationalizing sense.

It is true that in the constitutive sense every action brings about an outcome, i.e. that in successfully performing an action guided by my reasons for undertaking it, I bring it about that my performance of the action for such reasons happens. In telling the truth out of respect, for example, I bring it about that my telling the truth out of respect happens. But that actions bring about outcomes in this sense provides no support for outcome-centered accounts—for the tyranny of outcomes. If, by contrast, all actions are taken to bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense, the sense in which intentional performances of actions aim to promote the outcomes that rationalize their performance, the tyranny of outcomes is unavoidable. But with the two senses disambiguated, it is as prima facie *implausible* to maintain that every action brings about an outcome in this second, rationalizing sense as it is prima facie *plausible* to maintain that every action brings about some outcome in the benign constitutive sense. The failure to disambiguate these senses runs throughout dominant accounts of ethics, reasons, actions, and attitudes. It is so difficult to detect precisely because it is so pervasive—to step back from ethical into non-ethical considerations is simply to have recourse to a more fundamental level at which this same mistake is made. I will refer to this mistake going forward as the *Conflation of Senses of Bringing About*.

The second mistake results from smuggling an outcome-centered constraint on value into interpretations of claims concerning the relations between deontic and non-deontic value. The constraint comes clearly into view with distinctions between plausible claims concerning the relationship between deontic and non-deontic value and interpretations of these claims that build in the outcome-centered constraint. These outcome-centered interpretations of the plausible claims are then presented as the initial plausible claims themselves. For example, it seems to be a virtual platitude that it is always right (deontic) to do what’s best (non-deontic). In addition, it seems plausible to expect that an adequate account of the deontic evaluation of actions will explain them through appeal to non-deontic values. If we let “goodness” stand in for non-deontic value here, this is to recognize a sense in which the good (non-deontic value) does seem to be explanatorily prior to the right (deontic value).

But the first claim, that it is always right to do what’s *best*, is standardly interpreted as the claim that it is always right to do what *brings about the best outcome*. And the second claim, that non-deontic value explains deontic evaluation of actions, is often interpreted as requiring an appeal not just to *non-deontic value*, but to *the non-deontic value of outcomes* (or at least to non-deontic value as captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted). The initial, uninterpreted claims can readily be endorsed by consequentialists and non-consequentialists alike. Kantians and Aristotelians, for example, can readily agree that agents ought to do, and that they are always acting rightly in doing, what it is best *to do*. Moreover, Kantians provide rationales for deontic evaluation of actions through appeal to non-deontic values such as freedom, the value of persons as ends-in-themselves, and the goodness of wills. Aristotelians appeal to the virtues, to the value of relationships such as friendship, etc. in their accounts of what acting rightly requires. But the outcome-centered “interpretations” of such claims concerning deontic and non-deontic value cannot be accommodated by such theories. If advocates of such theories are lulled into accepting such outcome-centered interpretations of the plausible claims *as* the plausible claims themselves, they find themselves in the awkward position of seemingly denying a platitude, that it is always right to do what’s best, and of claiming that acceptable rationales for the deontic evaluation of actions must be independent of the appeal to non-deontic value—that the right must be explanatorily independent of, and in this sense prior to, the good. But what then could a plausible rationale for deontic evaluation be? [[19]](#footnote-19)

Why, though, accept such outcome-centered interpretations of such plausible claims? I will demonstrate in what follows that they result from smuggling in an outcome-centered constraint on value:

**Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value:** The relevance of things of value, and of the reasons for action that reflect them, to the deontic evaluation of actions is captured entirely and without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted.

Once the Constraint is smuggled in to the interpretation of the platitude, the non-consequentialist finds herself committed to defending the deeply counter-intuitive position that it is often wrong to do what’s best. And once the Constraint is smuggled in to the plausible requirement that an acceptable rationale for deontic evaluation of actions will appeal to non-deontic value, the non-consequentialist finds herself unable to provide a rationale for deontic evaluation that does not collapse into some form of outcome-centered—consequentialist—value-based rationale.

But with the platitude and the plausible explanatory requirement for deontic evaluation distinguished from their outcome-centered interpretations, it will become clear both that such a Constraint straightforwardly begs the relevant questions against opponents of consequentialism, and that it is prima facie implausible. Like the slide from bringing about in the Constitutive Sense to bringing about in the Rationalizing Sense, these slides from claims about non-deontic value to claims about the non-deontic value of outcomes are unwarranted, and distort the debate between advocates and opponents of the tyranny of outcomes.[[20]](#footnote-20) They facilitate the hijacking of plausible claims that provide no support for outcome-centered ethics, and their redeployment as grounds supporting the tyranny of outcomes.

The first mistake, the conflation of senses of bringing about, dictates the second, the imposition of an outcome-centered constraint on value: if all actions bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense, and are rationalized by appeal to the outcomes that they bring about, the evaluation of actions will be through appeal to an outcome-centered non-deontic rationale. The second mistake, the slide from the requirement of a non-deontic rationale for deontic evaluation to the requirement for an outcome centered non-deontic rationale, dictates the first: if deontic evaluation of actions is rationalized through appeal to value captured in rankings of outcomes to be brought about, then all such deontically valued actions will plausibly be understood as having as their ends outcomes to be promoted, and as having as their aims bringing about outcomes in the rationalizing sense.[[21]](#footnote-21)

I will demonstrate that with the mistakes exposed, the apparent considerations in favor of consequentialism are turned on their heads. It is obviously true that all actions do bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense, but this sense provides no support for the tyranny of outcomes, and for consequentialism in particular. If all actions bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense, the tyranny of outcomes is unavoidable. But this sense, far from seeming prima facie true, seems clearly to be false. Similarly, exposure of the mistaken slide to an outcome-centered constraint upon the appeal to value reveals two different specifications of the claim that it is always right to do what’s best, one that it is always right to do what it is best to do—what is supported by the best reasons reflecting the relevant values, the other that it is always right to do what promotes the best outcome. The best action specification is plausible, but provides no support for an outcome-centered approach in ethics; the outcome-centered constraint specification would provide such support if plausible, but with the alternative specification in view it no longer seems plausible.

In general, the case for the tyranny of outcomes turns on a related set of outcome-centered *interpretations* of deeply intuitive claims that it is always right to do what’s best, that every action brings about an outcome, and that the good is prior to the right. The claims are intuitive; the outcome-centered interpretations are not themselves intuitive at all. The ethical case for consequentialism elides the distinction between these claims in each case, allowing the counter-intuitive interpretations to hijack the plausibility of the intuitively plausible counterparts. This ethical hijacking has succeeded in large part because the conflation between senses of bringing about, and the assumption that all non-deontic value rationales for action are outcome-centered, are thoroughly entrenched at the non-ethical level as well. The “neutral” framework of reasons, actions, and attitudes within which we frame the ethical debate begs the question in favor of a consequentialist resolution of the debate and consequentialist interpretations of the intuitive claims as the only plausible interpretations. To expose this conflation and this unwarranted assumption, then, is to undermine the case for these default outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes as well.

To summarize: I will demonstrate in the arguments to follow that the tyranny of outcomes in ethics is given its appearance of legitimacy by ethical arguments that trade on conflations that are obscured from view by appeal to non-ethical accounts that are in the grips of these very same conflations. To expose these mistakes and the resulting conflations is thus to unwind the entire superstructure of considerations that is typically marshalled to legitimate the rule of outcome-centered accounts despite their apparent implausibility. I will make the case that to operate within the tyranny of outcomes, as we more and more do, is indeed to live our lives as though reflected in that funhouse mirror, systematically distorting our understanding of what we value and our reasons for acting and interacting with others.

## **Section IV: Chapter by Chapter Outline of the Argument**

In chapters [2](#_Chapter_2_The) and [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) I take up many of the most common intuitive and ethical arguments for consequentialism. The focus of [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The) is the ethical version of the consequentializing argument for consequentialism, an argument that seeming alternatives to consequentialism can be consequentialized, converted without distortion into forms of consequentialism. If every purported alternative to consequentialism is really just an alternative form of consequentialism, we all find ourselves under the consequentialist umbrella.[[22]](#footnote-22) Focusing upon two traditional alternatives to consequentialism, Kantian ethics and Aristotelian virtue ethics, I demonstrate that even given the ethical consequentializer’s own criteria for success, faithful implementation of this consequentializing strategy upon even such standard alternatives fails spectacularly. Implementation of the strategy either leaves out features relevant to deontic evaluations on such alternatives, resulting in a systematic failure of deontic equivalence, or, if it is altered to include these features, fails to produce a substantive alternative version of consequentialism. Such failure of the consequentializing strategy to generate consequentialized forms of these alternatives reveals not only that such alternatives cannot be forms of consequentialism, but also the role of our two conflations in fostering the illusion that they can.

In [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The) I take up several other common intuitive and ethical (rather than non-ethical) arguments that purport to vindicate consequentialism’s distinctive outcome-centered constraint. The first argument appeals to a form of the aforementioned plausible claim that any adequate rationale for an account of right action must appeal to claims about non-deontic value; the second argument appeals to the deeply intuitive idea that it is always right to do what’s best; the third argument appeals to the alleged intuition that the aim of every action it to bring about some outcome. I demonstrate that insights gained from the failure of the consequentializing strategy undermine all of these arguments, leaving the burden of proof, at the ethical level, squarely against the tyranny of outcome centered ethics.

Each of the ethical and intuitive arguments turns on an outcome-centered interpretation of a commitment that ceases to be plausible once the non-outcome-centered alternatives are brought into view. But I demonstrate in [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The) that each of the controversial intuitive or ethical outcome-centered interpretations of the commitments cited as supporting consequentialism finds apparent support as a conclusion of arguments from widely held non-ethical premises. These premises are provided by mutually reinforcing outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes that are the default accounts in the theory of action and the theory of mind, accounts that are embedded in rational choice theory and the Standard Story of action.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Such accounts are taken in turn to be vindicated by their explanatory elegance and simplicity, by their metaphysical restraint (naturalism), and most importantly by the contrasting directions of fit that are themselves taken to be central to the distinction between beliefs and desires. On the default understanding of this contrast beliefs and desires are distinguished by their contrasting directions of fit, beliefs aiming for their propositional contents to fit the world, to take in the true, and desires aiming to make the world fit their propositional contents, to make them true. The contrast, thus understood, supports an outcome-centered accounts of desires, and hence outcome-centered accounts of the actions that they rationalize and the practical reasons that they supply in providing such rationalizations. To pick a fight with consequentialism is thus to pick a fight outside of ethics as well, with default accounts in the theory of action and the theory of mind that are taken to have independent support.

The arguments in chapters [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) and [6](#_Chapter_6:_The) undermine this non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics. I demonstrate that the same two mistakes undergirding the intuitive and ethical arguments for consequentialism, the conflation of senses of bringing about and the imposition of an outcome-centered constraint on value, account for the apparent appeal of the outcome-centered non-ethical accounts of attitudes, actions, and reasons that ground this non-ethical argument for consequentialism. I demonstrate in [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) that the case for an outcome-centered account of desires turns on a strategy of propositionalizing target desires, and that just as attempts to consequentialize target ethical theories fail, seriously altering and mischaracterizing the target theories in the attempt, so too strategies of propositionalizing target desires fail, profoundly altering and mischaracterizing the aims and objects of, rationales provided by, and evaluative outlooks partially constitutive of these target desires.

I then demonstrate that propositionalizing typical desires captures not the objects of such desires or the rationales for action that they provide, but the constitutive consequences of successfully acting as the agent desires. Propositional form captures what a belief takes to be true, and it captures what successfully acting on a desire makes true. But such a propositionalized form captures neither the objects of such desires, nor the rationales for action they provide, nor the evaluative outlooks under the guise of which their objects are taken to be good; it captures only the constitutive consequent of realizing the desire’s object. A plausible account of desires, hence of practical reasons and of actions, will not be outcome-centered, hence the non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics fails just as the intuitive and ethical arguments did.

Myriad considerations have been offered in support of such outcome-centered accounts of practical attitudes. In [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The) I highlight and argue against 3 of these considerations. First, I consider whether appeal to the contrasting directions of fit of beliefs and desires provides grounds for insisting, after all, on an outcome-centered account of desires—that desires are propositional attitudes distinguished from beliefs by the contrasting directions of fit towards the propositional contents that are the objects of all such attitudes. I demonstrate that it does not; indeed, that Anscombe’s actual contrast reinforces an account of desires that is not outcome-centered.

Second, I consider an argument from explanatory symmetry and simplicity. The account of desires as propositional attitudes identifies propositional contents as the objects of all desires, and the rationale provided by all desires as one of bringing about the outcome that makes the proposition true. In this respect it apparently provides a simple, symmetrical counterpart to the account of beliefs as propositional attitudes with propositional contents as their objects. The alternative would appear to be a significant asymmetry between beliefs and desires, and recognition of myriad objects of desires, including actions, things, character traits, and outcomes, and the myriad rationales that reflect them. In response, I demonstrate that such a multiplicity of objects of desires can be viewed instead as an implication of a simple, elegant account of the fundamental contrast between beliefs and desires: beliefs are guided by the truth; desires are guided by the good. This simple, symmetrical understanding of such attitudes as distinguished by their distinctive guidance—by the true and the good—results in the objects of all beliefs being purportedly true things the objects of which are naturally captured in propositional form, and the objects of desires being various purportedly good things, including actions, things, character traits, and outcomes.

Finally, I consider whether a reductionist metaphysical naturalism, and the account of the causal role of desires that it might seem to support, provides independent grounds for an outcome-centered account of desires, and demonstrate that although certain highly reductionist metaphysical positions may well support an outcome-centered account of desires, a wealth of other metaphysical positions, including many avowedly naturalist ones, do not. Such an appeal to metaphysical naturalism is thus far too contested and controversial to serve as the foundation upon which any case for consequentialism can rests.

In all of these chapters I draw upon the work of many philosophers who have developed powerful criticisms of outcome-centered accounts of values, ethical theory, reasons, actions, and/or attitudes—I stand throughout on the shoulders of giants. It is reasonable to ask what my own arguments add, besides pulling the arguments of my predecessors together. The answer varies. Many of the most insightful critics of certain outcome-centered accounts nonetheless continue to endorse others. If, as I will argue, such accounts stand or fall together, all such arguments will be compromised by internal tensions.[[24]](#footnote-24) To cite only one among many such examples, Thomas Nagel’s brilliant arguments against outcome-centered ethics (1986, chapter IX) are at cross purposes with his commitments to outcome-centered accounts of reasons and actions. Shortcomings in each of these arguments against particular outcome-centered accounts can only be addressed by locating them within the context of the others, as I do here. In other cases the arguments against outcome-centered accounts that I take up are also arguments in favor of specific alternatives that invite difficulties of their own. Michael Thompson’s compelling arguments that not all desires are propositional attitudes, for example, are seemingly arguments for a much stronger result, that no desires are propositional attitudes.[[25]](#footnote-25) I attempt to harness the elements of such arguments that undermine outcome-centered accounts while eschewing those that develop specific alternatives with their accompanying difficulties. Finally, many of my arguments here, although they build upon other arguments, move beyond them in important ways. Many elements of my arguments against consequentializing ethical theories and against propositionalizing desires, arguments revealing the shared structure of these criticisms, clear new ground in this way.

The arguments of the first 6 chapters make the case that we have been framing virtually every dimension of our practical lives within an unwarranted outcome-centered constraint. This has engendered a profound tension with many of our deepest ethical commitments resulting in the systematic deformity of virtually every dimension of our practical lives, from our actions, wants, and practical reasons to our ethical theories to our normative practices and public policies. In [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected) I begin the process of exposing these deformities and the strategies adopted by consequentialists to mitigate them, both in ethical theory and in our social practices. In particular, I will return to more detailed diagnoses of the deformations it produces to our democratic and legal practices. Harnessing standard distinctions between the right and wrong kinds of reasons, and between good and bad reasons,[[26]](#footnote-26) I demonstrate that adoption of the outcome-centered framework alienates us, both in our theories of agency and ethics and in our social practices, from good reasons of the right kind for acting and interacting, leading us to focus instead on reasons of the wrong kinds and bad—inauthentic—reasons of the right kind.

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# **Chapter 2 The Ethical Consequentializing Argument**

Chapter 2 Abstract: This chapter takes up the most ambitious of the ethical arguments for consequentialism, the ethical consequentializing argument. This ethical form of the consequentializing argument purports to provide a conversion of any plausible ethical theory into a substantive form of act-consequentialism that is deontically equivalent, yielding the same deontic verdicts as the target theory. The chapter demonstrates, however, that even standard alternatives, in particular Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian ethics, cannot be consequentialized. The consequentializing strategy, even when applied to these standard alternatives, fails on its own terms to produce consequentialized counterparts: It can either produce a substantive version of consequentialism or secure deontic equivalence with the target theory—but not both. Faithfully deploying the strategy even upon our standard alternatives to consequentialism demonstrates not only that such theories cannot be put in consequentialized form, but that they are not forms of consequentialism.

Chapter Keywords: Consequentializing, Reason Dependent, Reason Independent, Deontic Evaluation, Deontic Equivalence, Kantian, Aristotelian, Acting Rightly, Acting from Duty

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## **Section I: Consequentializing**

The most ambitious of the ethical arguments for consequentialism is the ethical consequentializing argument.[[27]](#footnote-27) If this argument is successful, it is game over in favor of outcome-centered ethics; no further support is necessary. This ethical form of the consequentializing argument purports to provide a conversion of any plausible ethical theory into a substantive form of act-consequentialism that is deontically equivalent, yielding the same deontic verdicts as the target theory. In its most ambitious form the argument claims to demonstrate that ethical theories can be captured without distortion in such consequentialized form, a form in which they can be effectively compared and contrasted. If all alternatives to consequentialism are thus captured without distortion as substantive forms of act-consequentialism, the rule of outcomes is not tyrannical after all.

Many critics, myself among them, have responded by arguing that the consequentialized forms of such apparent alternatives fail to capture the explanatory rationales these alternatives provide for deontic evaluation, and we are not wrong to do so.[[28]](#footnote-28) But we have typically also granted that deontically equivalent consequentialized forms of these standard alternatives can be produced. I will demonstrate in what follows that we have been mistaken to do so; moreover, I will demonstrate in [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The) that the grounds for rejecting such claims to deontic equivalence are grounds for rejecting other standard ethical arguments for consequentialism, grounds that trade on the two fundamental mistakes I highlighted in the opening chapter. Consequentializing is not game over in favor of the consequentialist, it is the beginning of the end for the default status of outcome-centered ethics.

The general strategy of consequentializing features that are intuitively relevant to the deontic evaluation of actions, by building them into the evaluation of outcomes, is almost as old as consequentialism itself. Does quality, not just quantity, of pleasure seem relevant to deontic evaluation? If so, simply build this feature into the evaluation of outcomes. Do rights seem intrinsically relevant to deontic evaluation? Promote the outcome that maximizes respect for rights overall.[[29]](#footnote-29) The expansion of consequentialism in recent decades beyond rankings of outcomes as better for me and better overall to rankings of outcomes better relative-to-me[[30]](#footnote-30) has unleashed a spate of arguments for the conclusions that any ethical theory, or at least any minimally plausible candidate, can readily be converted into consequentialized form, that all such plausible candidates can be most effectively compared and contrasted in this form, and/or that all such theories are best understood not as alternatives to consequentialism, but as alternative forms of consequentialism.

Evaluator-relative consequentialists make the case, for example, that one traditional hallmark of non-consequentialist alternatives, deontic constraints, can readily be incorporated through the consequentializing strategy into evaluator-relative rankings of outcomes, and that such incorporation can be achieved without recourse to indirection or problematic shifts in focal points from actions to rules, motives, etc. Commonsense morality insists that it is wrong for me to kill even to prevent three others from killing. We each have decisive reasons not to kill. The three others should of course be held accountable for acting contrary to such decisive reasons that each of us has not to kill, but preventing them from killing is not a sufficient reason for me to act contrary to the same reasons not to kill that they each have. Agent-neutral consequentialism, with its apparent focus on minimizing the killings that happen, might seem ill equipped to account for such dictates of commonsense morality—after all, three murders is a worse thing to happen overall than one. But when freed from such an agent-neutral constraint (at least as traditionally understood),[[31]](#footnote-31) consequentializing deontic constraints can result in a ranking upon which one murder by me is a worse thing to happen *relative-to-me* than three murders by others. Although the best agent-neutral outcome may be that upon which I murder, preventing three times the murdering from happening, the best outcome relative-to-me might be that upon which I minimize my murderings. The claim is that in similar fashion all other features of seemingly non-consequentialist theories can be consequentialized, built into the rankings of outcomes of different versions of consequentialism.

This clarifies why the ethical consequentializing argument purports not simply to win a significant battle against other moral and ethical theories, but to end the war entirely. If all plausible alternative theories can be captured without distortion in consequentialized form, won’t it be most illuminating to compare and contrast ethical theories in their consequentialized form; indeed, aren’t all plausible alternatives best understood as forms of consequentialism? Even many critics who answer this last question in the negative, however, typically grant that all plausible alternatives can be converted into consequentialized form.

But they cannot. Nor is the point that certain carefully configured alternatives resist consequentializing.[[32]](#footnote-32) Rather, I will show that even standard alternatives, in particular Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian ethics, cannot be consequentialized. To focus the issue I adapt from Douglas Portmore a standard account of the success conditions for implementing this consequentializing strategy, upon which the consequentialized form of any ethical theory must be “*a substantive version of consequentialism* that yields . . . *the same set of deontic verdicts* that it yields.”[[33]](#footnote-33) The two central elements of the successful consequentializing of any target theory are that the counterpart 1) must be a substantive version of consequentialism that fits the Consequentialist Evaluative Framework, and 2) must satisfy deontic equivalence, yielding deontically equivalent verdicts. In what follows I will argue that the consequentializing strategy, even when applied to these standard alternatives, fails on its own terms to produce consequentialized counterparts: It can either produce a substantive version of consequentialism or secure deontic equivalence with the target theory—but not both. Faithfully deploying the strategy even upon our standard alternatives to consequentialism demonstrates not only that such theories cannot be put in consequentialized form, but that they are not forms of consequentialism.

My argument proceeds in three stages. In the first stage, developed in the next section, the ethical consequentializing argument proceeds on the common assumption that fundamental deontic evaluation of actions is *reason independent*.[[34]](#footnote-34) The reason independent view determines the relevant deontic values of actions through appeal to the reasons there are for the agent to perform them, but *independently of the reasons for which the agent performs the action*. On such a reason independent view if there are decisive reasons to pay a barista for a cup of coffee, then because the virtuous agent and Parfit’s infamously vicious gangster (2011, 216 and 231–2) both intentionally pay the barista their actions will receive the same deontic evaluations, even though only one of them performs the action *for those reasons*.

I will demonstrate that both Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian ethics incorporate a central role for fundamental deontic evaluations of actions that are reason dependent, requiring the agent not just to perform an action of the type that she has decisive reasons to perform, but to perform the action *for those reasons*. These are fundamental deontic verdicts deploying deontic evaluative terms, e.g. duty and acting rightly, in evaluations of particular actions that are not reducible to other deontic or non-deontic verdicts. The agent’s reasons for performing an action are essential to such fundamental reason dependent deontic evaluations.[[35]](#footnote-35) If the consequentializing strategy assumes that the relevant deontic evaluations of target theories are all reason independent (Stage 1), it elides from view all of the reason dependent deontic verdicts central to these target theories. The result is a theory in consequentialized form, but not at all a consequentialized form of the target theory.

The second stage of my argument (section III) assumes that the consequentializing strategy not only abandons reason independence, but accepts reason dependence as essential to certain fundamental deontic evaluations. The consequentializer simply builds in to the ranking of outcomes whatever features the Aristotelian and Kantian take to be relevant to essentially reason dependent evaluation. Now there can be deontic equivalence, because in such cases the best outcome simply is the outcome that results from acting for what the alternative theory takes to be the right reasons reflecting what the alternative theory takes to be the relevant values. But the resulting ranking fails to yield a substantive version of consequentialism that determines and explains deontic evaluation of actions through appeal to outcomes; indeed, the best “outcome” in such cases simply is whatever results from acting for what the alternative theory identifies as the right reasons reflecting the things that the target theory takes to be of fundamental value. Thus, while on the reason independence assumption, the consequentializing strategy fails the test of deontic equivalence, on the reason dependence assumption it fails to provide a substantive version of consequentialism at all. The third stage, taken up in Sec. IV, explores whether there is a plausible middle ground available to the ethical consequentializer between complete reason independence and complete reason dependence that avoids the shortcomings of each. I will show that any such account also fails to secure deontic equivalence as the price for securing a substantive form of consequentialism. Finally I will demonstrate in section V that the ethical consequentializing argument fails precisely because standard Kantian and Aristotelian alternatives appeal to non-deontic value rationales for deontic evaluation, rejecting the outcome-centered constraint on value.

## **Section II: Consequentializing Assuming Deontic Evaluation of Actions Is Reason Independent**

Within the context of the assumption that all deontic evaluation is reason independent, both the consequentializing strategy itself and the test of deontic equivalence can seem straightforward. Such reason independence is a natural assumption for the act-consequentialist, for whom deontic evaluations of actions are typically taken to be a function not of the reasons for which the action is undertaken, but of the value of the outcomes that it brings about and the reasons there are to promote such outcomes. But it is also a standard assumption of many of the most influential critics of consequentialism, among them JJ Thompson (1986, 1999) and, more recently, TM Scanlon. (2008, 21 and 28) Within the context of the assumption that deontic statuses of actions are determined reason independently, the strategy need only identify the reasons there are for determining the deontic statuses of actions on the target theory and the actions that these reasons identify as right, wrong, etc., deploying those to determine a substantive ranking of outcomes. The claim is that the result is a substantive “consequentialist counterpart theory” that is deontically equivalent to the target theory. If, for example, the target theory identifies decisive reasons deontically requiring the agent not to commit murder even to prevent two others from murdering, the consequentialized counterpart will rank higher “the outcome in which two others commit murder to the one in which she herself commits murder.” (Portmore 2009, 329) The deontically required act on the target theory, not murdering, is the act that brings about the highest ranked outcome as identified by the counterpart form of consequentialism, the outcome that the agent has the most reason to bring about (her not murdering).[[36]](#footnote-36)

Kantian ethics requires us to keep a promise even when breaking it would prevent two promise-breakings by others, and Aristotelian ethics requires us to stand by our friend even though as a result three other people will betray theirs. If the deontic evaluations involved were only reason independent, the consequentialist counterparts to such theories could readily incorporate such requirements, ranking highest the outcomes constituted (at least in part) by the agent breaking her promise and standing by her friend. Am I morally required not to murder and to stand by my friend? I need only consult the relevant rankings of outcomes, hence the target theories will have been converted into forms of consequentialism.[[37]](#footnote-37)

But the reason independence assumption is false for these standard alternatives; they endorse reason dependent accounts of certain fundamental deontic evaluations of actions. Although the issue of whether either the Aristotelian or the Kantian account also incorporates reason independent deontic evaluations of actions is itself fraught, I grant going forward that there is some sense in which each does. The point is rather that each also incorporates reason dependent deontic evaluations of actions that are irreducible to reason independent counterparts or to other non-deontic evaluations. Because such fundamental deontic evaluations of actions are on these accounts reason dependent, but the relevant reason dependent features are not built into the rankings of outcomes on their consequentialized counterparts, such counterparts fail systematically to capture equivalents to these reason dependent deontic evaluations.

I will briefly elaborate upon each of these claims, demonstrating first that reason dependent features are central to evaluations of actions on the target theories, at least on standard interpretations. I will then elaborate upon the relevant features of such evaluations: that they are evaluations of *actions*, that they are *fundamental* evaluations of actions, in no way reducible to other reason independent deontic evaluations, and that they are, on any non-question-begging understanding of “deontic,” *deontic* evaluations of actions. I will only say enough here to make the case that on a plausible interpretation of each of our traditional alternatives, it incorporates such fundamental reason dependent deontic evaluations of actions.

Aristotelian virtue ethics takes eudaimonia, human excellence or flourishing, to be intrinsically good, and to be constituted by other intrinsically good things, e.g. virtuous traits of character and excellent relationships (friendship).[[38]](#footnote-38) These valuable things are reflected in reasons for acting, including for habituating ourselves in certain ways such that the right reasons for acting in any given situation become clear to us, and we act for these reasons. I will proceed on the understanding, endorsed by Julia Annas and G.E.M. Anscombe, that there is a place in Aristotelian virtue ethics for right actions as “the general, vague idea of actions that you should do.” (Annas 2014, 18)

Let us simply grant that such virtue ethics engages in such deontic evaluation of actions, moreover, that there is a role for reason independent deontic evaluations on such an account. Such a position seems to be supported by Aristotle’s account of just and (by extension) right action:

Acts are called just or temperate when they are the sort a just or temperate person would do. (1999, 1105b7)

It is not necessary to perform the action for the reasons that it is required in order to perform the just or right action, the sort of action that the just agent would perform. It is enough that the agent performs an act of the same “sort” that the just and virtuous person would perform for such reasons. But along with these reason independent deontic evaluations of just and right action, the Aristotelian also offers deontic evaluations of whether or not in performing some action the agent acts justly or rightly. In particular, Aristotle is clear that for actions that are just or right “to be done . . . justly” or rightly, “the agent must also be in the right state when he does them” (1999, 1105a30 and 32):

First, he must know [that he is doing virtuous actions]; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must do them from a firm and unchanging state. (1999, 1105a30–31; see also 1120a 24029)

The features of actions that virtue ethicists following Aristotle take to be relevant to their being instances of acting justly, or rightly, or as the agent ought, essentially include the reasons for which they are done—that they are done for good reasons, reasons for which a virtuous agent will perform them. That the agent performs the right action (reason independent), and that the agent, in performing the just or right action, acts rightly or justly (reason dependent), both utilize the same deontic terms to evaluate the actions performed. The former is a reason independent evaluation, the latter a reason dependent evaluation. The reason independent evaluation applies to actions of the same “sort” or type that someone acting justly or rightly would perform, suggesting that for Aristotle we identify what acting justly will involve, and label as just any actions of the same “sort.” If acting justly is paying for my coffee for the right reasons reflecting the relevant things of value, the relevant reason independent “sort” of action is intentionally paying for coffee, and the agent performs the just action if she intentionally performs an action of this type. Parfit’s gangster thus fails spectacularly to act rightly (reason dependent), but performs the same type of action on this description that someone acting rightly would perform, intentionally paying for his coffee, thereby performing the right action (reason independent). Judgments that agents act rightly or justly appear to be at the very least among the fundamental deontic evaluations. Indeed, for the Aristotelian a main point of identifying and performing right actions is to habituate ourselves into acting justly and rightly—performing actions for right reasons reflecting the relevant values.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The role of reason independent deontic evaluation in Kantian ethics is extremely nuanced. But on one compelling interpretation, articulated recently by Barbara Herman, Kant recognizes reason independent juridical duties of right, duties that are addressed only to the action willed rather than to the principle of willing, and that require only conformity to duty. Such duties contrast within his account with reason dependent ethical duties, duties to which an agent can only “stand . . . in the correct way if one’s principle of choice . . . integrates the deliberatively salient value of the duty in question.” (2021, 101) Such ethical duties, then, are not merely addressed to conformity of the action willed, but to the principle in willing an action. Failure to act from duty in such cases, even if one acts in conformity with the duty, is a paradigmatic deontic failure to act as such an ethical duty requires. Such fundamental reason dependent ethical duties require evaluation of whether or not an agent acts as duty requires (“necessitates”), out of respect for the moral law. (Kant 1997, 13)

Kantian ethics recognizes many interrelated things of value, including good wills, freedom, and the value of persons as ends-in-themselves.[[40]](#footnote-40) The value of these things is reflected in reasons to act, including reasons to structure through habituation our deliberative fields. The agent acts as ethical duty requires, out of respect for the moral law, when she performs an action for such reasons—from duty.[[41]](#footnote-41) The agent who performs the act that is required by duty, but who does not act “from respect for the law,” (Kant 1997, 13) fails to act as necessitated by duty—as duty requires. This is for Kant a *deontic* evaluation of the *action* as lacking a fundamental deontic status, that it is performed as duty requires, from respect for the moral law.[[42]](#footnote-42) Duty is, for Kant, the fundamental deontic concept, and “what constitutes duty,” he argues, is “the necessity of my action *from* pure respect for the practical law.” (1997, 16 [emphasis mine]) Such deontic verdicts are on such an account fundamentally reason dependent. We may well incentivize agents to perform an act of the same type as the action from duty, an action that is merely in accordance with duty, much as we may well incentivize agents to believe truly (to hold beliefs with the same propositional content as those of persons who know) in the absence of knowledge, in effect believing in accordance with truth. But knowledge on the classical view requires believing for the reasons that justify the belief, and Kantian duty, the quintessential deontic evaluative concept, requires action *for* the reasons that justify the action, “the necessity of action out of respect for the law.” (1997, 13) The shopkeeper who fails to act from duty, merely acting in accordance with duty, does not act as ethical duty requires him to, out of respect for the moral law.[[43]](#footnote-43) In failing to act from duty, as duty requires, he violates this fundamental deontic requirement on action. To avoid the relevant deontic censure, the action must be performed, as Herman emphasizes, not merely in accordance with duty but “from the motive of duty.” (2022, 64)[[44]](#footnote-44) For Kant, then, Parfit’s gangster may well, in paying for the coffee, both be acting in conformity with reason independent juridical duties, hence be performing the right action, and be violating his reason dependent ethical duties to interact with the barista for the right reasons, from “the motive of duty.”

Such characterizations of these alternative views, and of the reason dependent deontic evaluations that are central to them, are often dismissed either as not really, appearances notwithstanding, evaluations of *actions* themselves, but of the quality of will or character manifested in their performance, or as not really *deontic* evaluation of actions, but some other kind of evaluation, e.g. aretaic evaluations, or as not really a *fundamental, non-reducible form* of deontic evaluation. Just as evaluations of beliefs as true are fundamentally reason independent, and consideration of the reasons for which beliefs are held involves other non-alethic elements, the suggestion is that deontic evaluations of actions are fundamentally reason independent, and any consideration of the reasons for which the action is performed involves non-deontic elements.

To see why such a response misfires; indeed, why it falls prey to a tendency that Julia Annas warns against, of applying “theory-laden uses” of the relevant evaluative terms which “unsurprisingly do not fit virtue ethics,” (2014, 15) it is useful to highlight elements of certain relevant parallels between epistemic evaluation of beliefs and deontic evaluation of actions.[[45]](#footnote-45) Evaluation of a belief as true is a reason independent evaluation. If my belief is true, where our evidence for such a judgment is that there are compelling reasons to hold it, it is true whether or not I hold it for such compelling reasons. We have recognized evaluations of actions as right on our alternative ethical theories that are similarly reason independent. Actions are in this sense right regardless of the reasons for which I perform them.

But whether an agent who believes that p *knows* that p is also recognized as a fundamental form of epistemic evaluation of belief, and on the classical account knowledge requires 1)justified 2)true 3)belief. I want to highlight two features of such evaluations of belief as cases of knowing that p that are reflected in reason dependent evaluations of actions as cases of acting rightly or from duty. The first is a point about justification, the second a point about the beliefs justified. The first point is that knowledge thus understood essentially requires doxastic justification. In particular, the believer only knows that p if she believes that p for reasons that justify holding the belief. Epistemic evaluations of beliefs that p as cases of knowing that p, that is, are essentially reason dependent. This suggests that there are two kinds of fundamental epistemically relevant evaluations of beliefs, as true and as knowledge, one reason independent and the other essentially reason dependent, just as, on the Kantian and Aristotelian accounts, there are two fundamental deontic evaluations of actions, as right and as performed rightly or from duty, one reason independent and one fundamentally reason dependent.

The second feature of the classical account is that the person who knows not only believes for reasons that justify the belief, her belief itself differs in important respect from that of the person who does not hold the belief for such reasons. In developing this point, I will focus upon beliefs that are arrived at through rational inference, or at least that are based upon other beliefs for their justification. Beliefs, Robert Audi notes, “can differ both in their content and in their basis.” In each case “we believe one thing on the basis of, so in a sense *through*, believing another . . . beliefs are mediated by other beliefs.” (2010, 181–2)

To know that p, then, the belief must be mediated by beliefs that provide the right reasons for holding it. Crucially, if an agent believes for the wrong reasons, if, in Audi’s words, “a crucial premise of my inference . . . is one I am unjustified in believing,” then not only does my belief lack justification, but it is in important respects not the same belief as that held by one who knows that p. (2010, 183) It is mediated by a flawed inferential base as the belief of the knower is not. Such a true belief that p, mediated by an unjustified and false inferential base, in turn grounds unjustified and false beliefs and unjustified and deontically impermissible actions, as the properly justified belief will not. Our unjustified true believer may hold a belief with the same propositional content as one who knows that p, but because he does not believe for the right reasons, he does not know that p, and his belief differs importantly from that of one who in believing, knows that p. Tim Scanlon also emphasizes this aspect of belief:

. . . accepting a reason for or against one belief affects not only that belief, but also other beliefs and the status of other reasons. This can happen in many ways. (1998, 52)

Because both the agent’s reasons for taking the belief to be justified and the belief itself fall short of what is required for the belief to be a case of knowledge that p on the classical view, failure to satisfy the reason dependence requirement undermines two of the elements required for the central epistemic evaluation of believings as knowings.

Consider now the parallels to these points with the deontic evaluation of actions.[[46]](#footnote-46) Just as there is a fundamental epistemic evaluation of actions that essentially requires reason dependence on the classic account of knowledge, there are, on our alternative accounts, fundamental deontic evaluations of actions that essentially involve reason dependence. Similarly, just as the reasons upon which a belief depends alter in central respects the belief itself, so too the reasons upon which an action depends alter in central respects the action performed. Two intentional actions that fall under a similar description of their aims, e.g. two intentional actions of paying for coffee, are in important respects different actions if their performances are undertaken for different reasons reflecting different values. Like beliefs, such actions are mediated by the agent’s reasons for performing them, and two intentional actions undertaken for and guided by two very different sets of reasons may nonetheless be actions of the same reason independent “sort.” Just as beliefs can be characterized under a reason independent description, as attitudes towards contents as true, actions can be characterized under a reason independent description, as producers of certain outcomes. But just as beliefs are also appropriately characterized under reason dependent descriptions, so too actions are appropriately characterized under a reason dependent description, as performances guided by reasons. In this sense, two actions paying for coffee can be importantly different performances undertaken for and guided by completely different reasons. The reasons why we perform the action are an essential element in the determination of what action we are performing, and, on the alternative views, in the relevant deontic evaluation of the actions performed. It is in this sense, moreover, that elements central to the deontic value of the action most clearly come into view. After all, we typically follow Anscombe in taking intentional actions to be the “ones to which the question ‘Why?’ is given application,” (2000, 25) and the answer to the “Why?” question provides the *intention with which* the agent acts,[[47]](#footnote-47) the reasons guiding the performance of the action. To evaluate the performance undertaken is, in part, to evaluate the agent’s reason for undertaking it, the reasons that guide the successful performance of the action. It is this reason dependent sense that captures the intention with which she undertakes the performance—her reasons in acting. To act for bad reasons is to undertake a misguided performance.

The parallel with epistemic evaluation highlights that for the Kantian, the Aristotelian, and even for the Humean,[[48]](#footnote-48) we do find just such a distinction between reason dependent and reason independent deontic evaluations of actions. Reason dependent evaluations are fundamental deontic evaluations of particular actions, of acting rightly or as duty requires, as necessitated by duty out of respect for the law, just as reason dependent epistemic evaluations are fundamental epistemic evaluations of particular beliefs. The parallel suggests that acting rightly or from duty does not just add to evaluations of right actions that they are done for the right reasons. Rather, a right action with an unjustified inferential base, e.g. the gangster’s action of paying for his coffee, will, as a misguided performance, ground unjustified and wrong actions as constitutive and instrumental means to performing such an action. [[49]](#footnote-49) The reasons that guide the gangster’s performance of the action of paying for coffee will lead him to pickpocket the money necessary to pay for the coffee, performing a wrong action in order to perform this right action, or to failure to complete payment should circumstances change (he learns the surveillance camera is broken), abandoning the right action midway through, or to keeping excess change should he receive it, or to pay with counterfeit money, effectively not paying for the coffee at all. The reasons that guide the virtuous agent in acting rightly, by contrast, will guide her in a way that forecloses any such elements of the action: She will not pickpocket the money, she will complete the payment regardless of the functioning of the security camera, and she will not keep the excess change, insisting on completing the action mediated by reasons of justice and fair dealing.[[50]](#footnote-50) We can picture the gangster approaching the barista with dead eyes, clearly loath to fork over his money, and obviously checking the light on the security camera before doing so. In response to a claim that because the gangster performed an act of the right—paying for his coffee—type, he did nothing wrong, the barista can plausibly respond that how he paid was not right at all, that he did not act at all as any decent person ought to in such circumstances. The barista will understandably be offended by the gangster’s action, and appropriately experience such attitudes as outrage and resentment towards him for failing in Aristotle’s and Kant’s senses to act rightly, as required by duty.[[51]](#footnote-51)

On such accounts, one fundamental deontic evaluation of what an agent does, like one fundamental epistemic evaluation of what the agent believes on the classical account, is a reason dependent evaluation. Acting rightly is a fundamental ethical evaluation of actions for Aristotle, irreducible to right action, and acting as required by ethical duty is a fundamental deontic evaluation of actions for Kant, irreducible to reason independent right action. Such evaluations deploy deontic concepts such as acting rightly and acting as duty requires, and they are fundamental deployments of such deontic concepts in the evaluation of actions on such theories.

The consequentializer can of course stipulate that only reason independent verdicts concerning act types are “deontic” verdicts as he understands them, hence that he after all achieves deontic equivalence. But such a stipulation makes a mockery of any claim to equivalence of verdicts between the target theory and the consequentialized counterpart. It is not surprising that deontic equivalence can be achieved if the strategy rules out by fiat all of the deontic verdicts that don’t fit with the consequentialist’s own reason independent account of such verdicts.

Nor is the point that the consequentialist cannot reject the centrality of such reason dependent evaluations of actions, much as some reliabilists in epistemology can be understood as rejecting the centrality of reason dependent epistemic justification of beliefs to evaluations of whether someone knows that p. (Foley 2003, 314–16) The point is that this would be for the consequentialist to reject the account of fundamental deontic evaluations of actions deployed by these alternatives, as certain reliabilists reject the role of reason dependent justification in fundamental evaluations of belief as knowledge. It is the consequentialist’s focus on reason independent evaluation of actions as fundamental that departs from such alternative essentially reason dependent approaches,[[52]](#footnote-52) much as a focus by some reliabilists in epistemology on reliably tracking reason independent truth as sufficient for knowledge is a radical departure from standard epistemic evaluation. A consequentializing strategy that recognizes only reason independent deontic verdicts cannot capture deontic equivalents to the reason dependent verdicts rendered by these alternative theories. There cannot be deontic equivalence between a target theory for which reason dependent deontic evaluations are central, and a consequentialist counterpart that rejects them entirely.

Matthew Hanser captures the rationale, implicit in this analogy between evaluations of beliefs and actions, for the centrality of such reason dependent deontic evaluation of actions. Actions, like beliefs, are exercises of rational powers, constituted in part by the reasons for performing such intentional actions[[53]](#footnote-53) and holding such beliefs. The agent takes her reasons in acting and in believing to justify her performance of the action, ceteris paribus, and her holding the belief. If the reasons that she takes to justify do not, they are likely to lead her away both from acting rightly and from right action. In acting for reasons that she takes to justify her action and believing for reasons that she takes to justify her belief she is *mis*taken and *mis*guided. Because her acts and beliefs are constituted in part by bad reasons, such beliefs will lead to mistakes in her view of what other beliefs there are reasons to hold, and such actions will lead her to mistakes in the instrumental and constitutive means that she adopts to complete these actions.

Consider, with this backdrop, a reason independent proposal for “Kantsequentializing” Kantian ethics. The reason independent Kantsequentialist may take herself to agree with the Kantian ethicist that persons are intrinsically, fundamentally, non-instrumentally valuable, hence may take herself to share an account of the fundamental things of value that are reflected in reasons for action. The Kantian takes such values to be reflected in reasons to refrain from murdering even to prevent two others from murdering. It is contrary to duty to murder even to prevent two others from murdering. Deploying the consequentializing strategy, the reason independent Kantsequentialist takes relevant features to be reflected in the ranking of the outcome of refraining from murdering over the outcome of murdering (to prevent two murders). There are thus decisive reasons for the Kantsequentialist to refrain.

When an agent intentionally refrains, she performs the right action for both the Kantian and the Kansequentialist, and, because this is stipulated to exhaust the deontic verdicts on a reason independent Kantsequentializing theory, deontic equivalence is taken to be achieved. But we have seen that the Kantian theory of deontic evaluation is not merely reason independent. The Kantian agent only acts from duty, as duty requires, if she acts out of respect for the moral law—from duty, not merely in accordance with it. If the agent refrains but not for the right reasons, as does the dead eyed, begrudging gangster, she does not act as duty requires on the Kantian account, she only performs an action of the same type as that required by ethical duty, an action merely in accordance with such a duty. This is a fundamental form of *deontic* failure for Kant, but the reason independent Kantsequentialist counterpart fails to capture either such fundamental deontic evaluations of actions or the features relevant to them, hence she fails to provide deontic equivalents to such deontic failures. Whereas the Kantian issues two deontic verdicts concerning the self-interested shopkeeper, that he performs the right action, and that he fails to act as duty requires, from respect for the practical law, reason independent Kantsequentializing only captures right action, because it assumes that this is the only deontic equivalence to be captured. As a result, the reason independent Kantsequentialist counterpart will systematically fail to achieve deontic equivalence with the Kantian.

So even granting that both of our alternative theories provide reason independent deontic evaluations of actions as right and wrong, they also provide reason dependent accounts of whether agents, in acting, act rightly and as duty requires. The features relevant to such deontic evaluations, reason dependent features, are not built in to the outcomes on the reason independent assumption, hence such deontic verdicts have no deontic equivalents on the consequentialized counterparts—a striking failure of deontic equivalence. Entire extensions of fundamental deontic evaluations on the target theory go missing in their consequentialized counterparts.

If the ethical consequentializer responds that consequentializing works, but only for target theories that endorse entirely reason independent accounts of the deontic evaluation of actions, or that only such accounts are considered among the plausible alternatives, this is simply to concede that the strategy fails even for the most straightforward and obvious alternatives, precisely because they do not endorse such accounts of deontic evaluation, and are clearly among plausible alternatives. We are left within the context of the reason independence assumption not with an expansion of the consequentialist umbrella to comprehend such alternatives, but with an appreciation of its deep structural inability to do so.

## **Section III: Consequentializing by Incorporating Reason Dependent Deontic Evaluation**

We have seen that if the consequentializing strategy captures only features relevant to reason independent deontic evaluations of actions, counterpart rankings of outcomes will systematically fail to yield verdicts deontically equivalent to those rendered by even the standard alternatives. But it might seem equally clear how to avoid such failure. If the problem is that the approach fails to appeal to features relevant to reason dependent evaluations of actions in determining the counterpart ranking of outcomes, the obvious solution is simply to build such features in. After all, the strategy tells us to build the features relevant to deontic evaluation of actions into the consequences, and clearly among the features that our two target theories take to be relevant to deontic evaluation of action is performance of the action for reasons that decisively favor it, reasons reflecting the relevant things of value. If we build such reason dependence into the outcome, then what must happen, the outcome, is not only the agent’s refraining from murdering, for example, but her refraining for the right reasons reflecting the relevant values.

This move to incorporating reason dependent features yields rankings of outcomes that successfully avoid failure of deontic equivalence in cases like Parfit’s gangster. Because performance of the action for right reasons reflecting the relevant things of value is now built into the outcome, and the gangster’s reasons for acting are as far as possible from the right ones, his paying will not bring about the highest ranked outcome, and the failure of deontic equivalence on the reason independence assumption will be avoided. Similarly, the agent who keeps his promise only because it happens to be in his narrow self-interest to do so does not act for the right reasons reflecting such values as integrity and respect for persons as ends-in-themselves. Because the relevant outcome is the performance of the action for the right reasons reflecting fundamental things of value, his action will not bring about the best outcome. If we can avoid the failure of deontic equivalence by embracing reason (and value) dependence, perhaps the failure isn’t with the consequentializing strategy, but with the reason independent constraint on its exercise?

The Scylla of failure to secure deontic equivalence, however, is avoided here only at the price of falling into Charybdis. We have focused up to this point on the first of the two success conditions for consequentializing, that the consequentialized counterpart yields deontic verdicts equivalent to those on the target theory. The crucial second condition, however, is that the counterpart must be a substantive version of consequentialism, upon which it is the ranking of outcomes to be promoted that determines and explains the deontic values of actions. But the price of building the features relevant to reason dependent deontic evaluations into the outcomes is failure to produce such a substantive version of consequentialism. The occurrence of the action of the virtuous agent will be ranked highly, and that of the gangster will not, because the best “outcome” just is the successful performance of the right action for what the target theory identifies as the right reasons, reasons reflecting what the target theory identifies as the fundamental things of value. But this is not a substantive version of consequentialism; indeed, it does not seem to be a version of consequentialism at all.

To see why, it is useful to consider the application of the strategy to our Aristotelian target theory. The theory holds that virtuous agents have reasons to perform actions reflecting fundamental things of value. These reasons, when decisive, are the reasons for which the agent acting rightly undertakes the performance of the action. Such an agent’s aim in acting is not to bring it about that she performs the action for the right reasons (that such a performance by her happens), but to perform the action guided by her good reasons for undertaking it. Now consider the consequentialized version of such a theory, upon which the ranking of outcomes builds in all of these reason dependent features. The best outcome will be that the agent acts rightly, for the right reasons that reflect the relevant values. A substantive version of consequentialism determines and explains the deontic value of actions through appeal to the relevant rankings of outcomes, but the product of our reason dependent consequentializing does neither. It is instead the determination of what acting rightly requires, presupposing both Aristotelian reasons and the values that they reflect, that determines what the highest ranked outcome is—the outcome that results from performing such an action for such reasons reflecting such values. Moreover, it is such a determination of what acting rightly requires that explains why the outcome is ranked highest; it is ranked highest because it is the outcome of the agent acting rightly, from right reason reflecting a virtuous character. Building the features relevant to deontic evaluation into the outcomes requires building the entire target theory into the ranking of outcomes: the best outcome *is* the successful performance of the right action for the right reasons reflecting the relevant things of value.

The consequentialized counterpart now *is* the target theory, simply emphasizing the constitutive consequences of acting as the target theory requires. In successfully performing the action guided by her reasons for undertaking it she brings it about, as a constitutive consequence, that such a performance for such reasons reflecting such values happens. The best outcome is the constitutive consequence of acting rightly or as duty requires, the outcome that is the “happening” of the agent’s acting rightly or as duty requires on the target theory. It is determined through appeal to the target theory evaluations of actions reflecting the values recognized by the target theory, and the rationale for ranking this outcome the best is the rationale for acting rightly supplied by the target theory. In successfully performing the right action for the right reasons I bring it about, as a constitutive consequence, that my action happens, and what makes an outcome the best for such a reason dependent consequentializer is simply that it is the constitutive consequence of acting rightly or as duty requires.

The ranking of outcomes is determined entirely by, and explained entirely by, the target theory account of acting rightly reflecting the relevant values, hence the result is not a substantial form of consequentialism. It is deontically equivalent to the target theory because it *is* the target theory. Moreover, the ranking of outcomes is evacuated of substance by incorporation of the very features of the target theories that are necessary to secure deontic equivalence. Building the reason dependent features relevant to deontic evaluation of actions, including the values these reasons reflect, into the outcomes does produce a ranking with equivalent deontic verdicts. But it merely reproduces the same deontic ranking of actions that occurs on the target theory, embedded in the same explanatory rationale, reflecting the same fundamental things of value, simply viewed through the lens of the constitutive consequents of performing such actions: acting for the right reasons reflecting the relevant things of value is the best thing that can happen.

## **Section IV: A Middle Ground?**

It might seem, however, that there is a middle ground, a space for positions that can reject complete reason independence, allowing that the reasons for which agents act can play an essential role in many deontic evaluations of actions, while articulating a substantive form of consequentialism. Such a position, it might seem, can achieve deontic equivalence within the context of a substantive version of consequentialism, thereby successfully implementing the ethical consequentializing strategy. To see why such a space cannot be occupied, it is useful to look at Doug Portmore’s recent version of Kantian Consequentialism, his “Kantsequentialism,” which might seem to be a candidate to occupy such a space. (2023)

Portmore’s Kantsequentialism purports to recognize, with the Kantian, that people have value as ends-in-themselves.[[54]](#footnote-54) But he maintains that such value is “most immediately normative for non-propositional attitudes such as love and respect.” He suggests that “our most fundamental duty is to respect people,” (2023, 460) and understands such respect as a non-propositional feeling that disposes us to act in certain characteristic ways. Portmore’s view is a substantial form of consequentialism, because it holds that any duties to act must be derived from this duty to respect via the “intermediary duty to perform the act whose prospect you ought to most prefer.” (2023, 462) The resulting duty will thus not be simply to treat persons as mere means, but the duty, dictated by this intermediary duty, “to adopt the end of not treating them as mere means.” (2023, 461) This is an outcome-centered duty, e.g. to rank lower “the prospect of doing something that risks treating someone as a mere means.” Moreover, because we are required not only to perform actions the outcomes of which we ought most to prefer, but to form a non-voluntary attitude of respect that disposes us to act in certain ways, we are not only required to act in a way that brings about the preferred prospect of refraining from murdering, but also to do so from the non-propositional attitude of respect. This is a substantive consequentialist deontic requirement, but not a completely reason independent deontic requirement, hence it might seem to open the space for consequentializing that secures deontic equivalence within a substantive form of consequentialism.

Yet Portmore himself is clear that the resulting form of consequentialism neither purports to achieve nor achieves the deontic equivalence that is a success condition of the ethical consequentializing argument. Moreover, it is precisely the component that allows this form of Kantsequentialism to be a substantial consequentialist account, the duty “to perform the act whose prospect you ought most to prefer,” that precludes deontic equivalence. Kant clearly rejects such a duty, and with it the assumption that the reasons to act reflecting the value of persons as ends-in-themselves are all reasons to promote such outcomes/prospects. The relevant Kantian duties invoke deliberative frameworks reflecting the relevant non-deontic values, frameworks within which we recognize decisive reasons to act and not to act.[[55]](#footnote-55) We act as duty requires when we act from such reasons. Because the value for persons as ends in themselves is for the Kantian reflected in reasons to act that are not reasons to promote, the Kantian’s decisive reasons for acting will violate such a Kantsequentialist’s intermediary duty to promote prospects/outcomes, hence the reasons upon which reason dependent deontic verdicts depend will differ markedly from any that can be endorsed by the Kantsequentialist.

Moreover, although for the Kantsequentialist the best outcome to produce may well in some cases involve action for certain reasons, the relevant reasons will be those the inclusion of which promotes the best outcome. These will only be decisively good reasons for acting, hence this will only be action from duty (for the right reasons), if these reasons that it promotes the best outcome for agents to act upon also are decisively good reasons for acting, reasons that bear decisively on the question of whether to perform the action. But there is no reason to expect a coincidence of such reasons. On the Kantian account acting from duty is acting for the reasons that justify the action—for good reasons. On the Kantsequentialist account the reasons upon which deontic verdicts will sometimes depend are the reasons that it promotes a good outcome for the agent to act upon, regardless of whether they are in the reason dependent sense good reasons for acting. There is for this Kantsequentialist no presumption that the motives to act reflecting the feeling of respect, motives partly constitutive of the best outcome, are reasons that justify the action, but this is precisely what acting from duty requires.[[56]](#footnote-56)

The point here is not to criticize Portmore’s Kantsequentialist account,[[57]](#footnote-57) but to make vivid that his recent arguments harnessing consequentializing neither strive for nor achieve the deontic equivalence that is the mark of success of the ethical consequentializing argument. Instead, Portmore’s argument[[58]](#footnote-58) begins with a presumption in favor of the outcome-centered constraint and the act-consequentialist evaluative framework, setting as his task the production of consequentialist alternatives to our target non-consequentialist theories upon which any loss of deontic equivalence is compensated for by the ability of the consequentialized counterpart to accommodate elements of the target theory—its values, attitudes, and deontic evaluations—within an act-consequentialist framework. This is not the ethical consequentializing argument for consequentialism, it is an argument that deploys consequentializing as part of a strategy that presupposes independent grounds for adopting the outcome-centered constraint in ethics and the consequentialist evaluative framework, a strategy for mitigating the costs of accepting consequentialism such that they do not outweigh its presumptive benefits. The project of the next 4 chapters is to demonstrate that the arguments purporting to establish such grounds and such benefits fail as a set.

## **Section V: The Failure of Consequentializing Highlights Our Two Distinctions**

Consequentializing does not expand the scope of consequentialism to encompass alternative theories, it reveals that, and why, these theories limit the scope of consequentialism. These limitations highlight the two distinctions central to the mistakes I identify in the first chapter, and foreshadow the conflations that undermine other arguments for outcome-centered ethics.

Many consequentialists argue that unless an ethical theory is a form of consequentialism it cannot provide a non-deontic value-based rationale for the deontic evaluation of actions; indeed, the claim that the good must be prior to the right is often supported through such arguments.[[59]](#footnote-59) The suggestion is that without a rationale appealing to better and worse outcomes to be promoted, deontic evaluations must rely on bare appeals to intuition or question-begging appeals to deontic obligations themselves. The quest for a rationale for deontic evaluation drives us to a value-based rationale, but, the thought continues, this is to drive us to some form of outcome-centered rationale, hence to some form of consequentialism.

The process of attempting to consequentialize our standard alternatives, however, reveals not only that they provide non-deontic value-based rationales for deontic evaluation, but that 1)the consequentializing strategy presupposes that they do, and that 2)appeal to such rationales in no way drives us to consequentialism. Each of our two alternative theories 1)Identifies particular things of non-deontic value, 2)Takes such things of value to be reflected in reasons for action,[[60]](#footnote-60) and 3)Takes action for such reasons to be a central component of entire classes of deontic evaluations. For the Aristotelian eudaimonia, virtuous traits of character, and excellent relationships are reflected in reasons for action that determine the telic and deontic value of actions. When such reasons are decisive, the agent who acts for these reasons acts rightly.[[61]](#footnote-61) For the Kantian freedom, goodness of wills, and respect for persons as ends are reflected in reasons for action that determine fundamental deontic values of action. When such decisive reasons are unconditioned dictates of pure practical reason, the agent is required to perform them for these reasons, from duty.

The theories thus offer non-deontic value rationales for deontic evaluation of actions; moreover, the consequentializing strategy presupposes that they do. Kantsequentializing, for example, takes as its point of departure the Kantian appeal to persons as fundamentally, intrinsically valuable. The Kantsequentialist purports to share the Kantian’s fundamental values, and to endorse the claim that they provide a rationale for deontic evaluation. What the Kantsequentialist endorses in addition, and the Kantian denies, is the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value introduced in the first chapter. Although our two standard alternative ethical theories are distinguished from each other by the things that they take to be of fundamental value, and forms of consequentialism are distinguished from each other by the things that they take to be of fundamental value, consequentialism itself is distinguished from our alternatives by commitment to this outcome-centered constraint on acceptable value-based rationales. The Kantsequentialist and the well-being act utilitarian could not disagree more about what the fundamental things of value are; they are both consequentialists because they take the relevance of things of value to be captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be brought about. The Kantian and the Kansequentialist might seem to agree completely about what the fundamental things of value are; one is and the other is not a consequentialist because the latter takes the relevance of these things of value to reasons for action to be captured entirely in relevant rankings of outcomes to be brought about, and the former does not. [[62]](#footnote-62) That Kantian and Aristotelian ethical theories cannot be consequentialized demonstrates not that they reject non-deontic value rationales, but that they reject the Outcome-Centered Constraint on such value rationales characteristic of consequentialism. Once the consequentializing strategy brings this commitment distinctive of consequentialism clearly into view, the obvious question is whether there are compelling grounds for accepting it, and if so what they are.[[63]](#footnote-63) We will see in the next chapter that standard intuitive and ethical arguments taken to provide such grounds fail to do so.

In addition, certain lessons learned from the implementation of the consequentializing strategy, and in particular from its failure to extend the consequentialist umbrella, help explain why it is so easy to make the assumption that any non-deontic rationale must be an outcome-centered rationale. This in turn explains why it is so difficult to bring into focus the central question of whether, and if so why, the relevance of fundamental things of value to reasons for action is captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about. First, we have already seen that influential critics of consequentialism often share with consequentialists the claim that deontic evaluation is fundamentally reason independent.[[64]](#footnote-64) Acceptance by such critics of this characteristically consequentialist claim concerning the deontic evaluation of actions as a plausibility constraint on acceptable alternatives paves the way for generating deontically equivalent consequentialist counterparts to any such plausible alternatives, eliminating *ex ante* the most fundamental objection to ethical consequentializing arguments for consequentialism. Reclaiming the importance of reason dependent deontic evaluation on standard alternatives highlights both the limitations of the consequentializing project and the outcome-centered constraint that distinguishes consequentialist theories from many such alternatives.

Second, it is often assumed that an adequate ethical theory must provide an account of the relationship between actions and outcomes, and in particular of actions as bringing about outcomes. Such an adequacy constraint can seem to favor both consequentializing and consequentialism. But our implementation of the strategy taking into account reason dependent features and reason dependent deontic evaluation highlights the importance of distinguishing our two very different senses in which actions can be understood as bringing about outcomes, the constitutive and rationalizing senses. The former is all that is required as a structural feature of an adequate ethical theory, and all that our standard alternatives support. It is the unwarranted slide to the latter, rationalizing sense that provides the appearance of support for consequentialism and consequentializing.

The importance of this distinction has come clearly into view with recognition that even for Aristotelian and Kantian theories, successfully performing the deontically required action brings it about, as a constitutive consequent of such a performance, that the action for those reasons happens. More generally, it is a constitutive consequence of successfully performing any action for any reasons reflecting any values that the action for those reasons happens. Because this constitutive sense of bringing about holds for actions successfully performed for any reasons reflecting any values, without any outcome-centered constraint upon their relevance, it is in itself completely agnostic with respect to rival ethical theories.

But implementation of the strategy also has revealed a constraint distinctive of consequentialist theories that invokes the distinct rationalizing sense of bringing about. The outcome-centered constraint holds that the relevance of things of value to reasons for action is captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be brought about. Within the context of this distinctively consequentialist outcome-centered constraint on value rationales, reasons to act will all be (albeit perhaps indirectly) reasons to bring about outcomes to be promoted. It is acceptance of this constraint which dictates that all deontically required actions not only bring about outcomes in the first, constitutive sense, but also bring about outcomes in our second, rationalizing sense.

For consequentialist alternatives, but not for the others, in successfully performing the recommended action the agent not only always brings it about that her action happens in the constitutive sense, she also always brings about some outcome in the rationalizing sense, an outcome that provides the rationale for performance of the action. To highlight this distinction is at the same time to flag a tendency to run roughshod over it, to slide from the first sense, which provides no support for consequentialism against its rivals, to the second sense, which dictates the adoption of consequentialism in preference to its rivals. If, in keeping my promise, I bring it about that my promise keeping happens (constitutive sense), it can seem natural to slide to the claim that my aim, in keeping my promise, is to bring it about that my promise keeping happens (rationalizing sense). The illicit slide suggests that it is the value of the outcome, my promise keeping happening, that must rationalize my action—my keeping my promise.[[65]](#footnote-65) But this is precisely what the Aristotelian and the Kantian deny. The relevant reasons to keep my promise, they hold, reflect values that cannot be captured without profound distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The argument in this chapter entails no commitment regarding the legitimacy of the outcome-centered constraint, hence no position on whether deontically recommended actions do always bring about outcomes not merely in the constitutive sense, but in the rationalizing sense as well.[[67]](#footnote-67) My point is that our alternative theories reject this Outcome-Centered Constraint, that consequentialist alternatives endorse it, and that the tendency to slide between the two senses of bringing about obscures both the importance of this controversial Constraint and the need to focus going forward upon grounds for accepting or rejecting it. Clearly it is the plausibility of the consequentialist’s outcome-centered constraint, and of the claim that deontically recommended actions always aim to bring about outcomes in both the constitutive and the rationalizing sense, that should be our focus going forward.

In [chapter 1](#_Chapter_1:_Introduction) I distinguished consequentialism by its commitment to the consequentialist evaluative framework (CEF), upon which deontic evaluations of actions are determined and explained through appeal to the relevant rankings of outcomes. We have seen that the ethical consequentializer’s project of bringing alternative views within this framework fails. The source of this failure clarifies what we thought we already knew, that it is the commitment to an outcome-centered constraint upon rationales for action—not to a non-deontic value-based rationale for action, and not to the claim that all actions bring about outcomes—that distinguishes consequentialism from our standard alternatives. To vindicate the tyranny of outcomes in ethics is to provide grounds for this outcome-centered constraint. In the next chapter I will take up several intuitive and distinctively ethical arguments in support of such a commitment. We will see that when such a constraint upon an outcome-centered non-deontic rationale is clearly distinguished from the general commitment to a non-deontic rationale, these distinctively ethical arguments fail to provide such support. The lessons learned by the failure of the consequentializing argument, properly applied, undermine these ethical arguments for consequentialism as well.

# **Chapter 3: The Collapse of Other Intuitive and Ethical Arguments for Consequentialism**

Chapter 3 Abstract: The chapter takes up several common intuitive and ethical (rather than non-ethical) arguments for consequentialism. The first argument appeals to a form of the claim that any adequate rationale for an account of right action must appeal to claims about non-deontic value; the second appeals to the deeply intuitive idea that it is always right to do what’s best; the third appeals to the alleged intuition that the aim of every action it to bring about some outcome. It is argued that insights gained from the failure of the consequentializing strategy undermine all of these arguments, leaving the burden of proof, at the ethical level, squarely against outcome-centered ethics. Each of the ethical and intuitive arguments turns on an outcome-centered interpretation of a commitment that loses all plausibility once more plausible non-outcome-centered interpretations are brought into view.

Chapter Keywords: The Compelling Idea, Action Idea, Value-Based Rationale, Action, TCR, Aim of Action, End of Action, Non-Deontic Rationale

## **Section I: The Trunk of the Consequentialist Tree**

Consequentialist ethical theories have withstood the relentless criticism to which they have been subjected, indeed have thrived despite it, because such challenges have seemed merely to hack off branches of the consequentialist tree, leaving its trunk and roots intact. Our focus here is on the trunk rather than the roots of the consequentialist tree, distinctively ethical (vs. non-ethical) arguments for consequentialism grounded in three claims. The first is that it is always right to do what is best. This is conjoined to the claim that what’s best is what brings about the best outcome. The second appeals to a commonsense feature of actions, that every action has an aim such that successfully achieving it brings something about. This is conjoined to the claim that the aim of every action is to bring about some outcome—to make something happen. The third, already touched upon in the previous chapter, is that a plausible ethical theory must provide a rationale for the deontic evaluation of actions based in non-deontic value—that in this sense the good (non-deontic) is prior to the right (deontic). This is conjoined to the claim that the relevance of such non-deontic value is captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted.

Kantians, virtue ethicists, and consequentialists all maintain that actions are performances undertaken for reasons; the agent’s aim in acting is to complete the performance undertaken guided by her reasons for undertaking it, thereby bringing it about in the constitutive sense that the action happens.[[68]](#footnote-68) Consequentialists hold in addition that in performing any action, the agent’s aim is to bring about the outcome that rationalizes the action, hence that every performing of an action is, or is grounded in, the promoting of an outcome. The first claim appeals to the aim of every action and the constitutive sense in which actions bring about outcomes; the second claim appeals to the rationalizing sense in which actions bring about outcomes, collapsing performing actions into promoting outcomes. Our alternative theories maintain that intentional actions are performance which, if successful, bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense; consequentialist theories are distinctive in maintaining that all actions bring about outcomes in both senses, hence that all performings are promotings.

Kantians, virtue ethicists, and many consequentialists maintain that it is always right to perform the best action, and in this sense to do what is best; consequentialists hold in addition that the best action is the action that brings about the best outcome. Each maintains that reasons for action reflect and are reflected in fundamental things of value, and that such things of value and the reasons that reflect them provide a rationale for deontic evaluation; consequentialists hold in addition that this rationale is outcome-centered, that the relevance of fundamental things of value to reasons for action is captured completely and without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted/brought about.

What advocates of the alternative theories deny, then, is not that all actions bring about outcomes, that it is always right to do what’s best, and that there is a value-based rationale for right action, but the further particular outcome-centered interpretations of each of these claims put forward by the consequentialist, that the rationale must be provided entirely by values the relevance of which is captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, that the best that it is always right to do is promoting the best outcome, and that the end of every action is bringing about some outcome in the rationalizing sense, hence that every performance of an action is the promotion of some outcome. It will become clear that such interpretations beg the questions at issue among these rival theories, and that they are prima facie implausible. The central point of the next chapter is that the tyranny of outcomes in ethics rests upon additional, non-ethical arguments. That these non-ethical arguments also fail to be persuasive is the topic of chapters [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) and [6](#_Chapter_6:_The). But such non-ethical arguments, and the need for them, cannot come effectively into view, and their importance cannot fully be appreciated, until we have first dispatched with their ethical counterparts. It is to this task that I now turn.

## **Section II: Goodness and Rightness—Non-Deontic Rationales for Deontic Evaluation**

We have already seen in the previous chapter that our standard alternatives are most plausibly interpreted as providing rationales for deontic evaluation of actions that appeal to non-deontic value. But many consequentialists and their sympathizers assert that the appeal to outcomes both determines deontic verdicts and provides in addition an explanatory rationale for them: such actions are right because they bring about the best outcome.[[69]](#footnote-69) Their suggestion is that any plausible alternative account of deontic verdicts must provide an alternative explanatory rationale, and that attempts to provide such an alternative rationale collapse under scrutiny into rationales that also conform to the consequentialist’s Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value. The opponent who attempts to avoid such an outcome-centered rationale is then accused of appealing to mere intuition unsupported by any rationale, (Kagan 1989, 11ff) or of making bare appeals to principles and obligations, again unsupported by any plausible rationale. (Smith 2003, 587)

Many of these arguments that alternative explanatory rationales collapse upon closer scrutiny into outcome-centered rationales have the same general form. I should not murder. Why? Because murdering profoundly disrespects the victim. But isn’t this best understood as a claim that such a murder is a profoundly disrespectful thing to happen, and that I ought not to murder because that would be bringing it about that such a bad thing happens? [[70]](#footnote-70) If the wrongness of my disrespectful action is most plausibly explained through appeal to the disvalue (whether agent-neutral or evaluator-relative) of murders (and/or murders by me) happening, the rationale appealing to respect is after all an appeal to value captured in rankings of outcomes, such that the disvalue of murder is appropriately captured in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted or prevented. The opponent, the “deontologist,” is then characterized, often by advocates of the position themselves, as maintaining that rightness is prior to and independent of goodness—that a defensible alternative to consequentialism must eschew rationales that appeal to goodness and any other non-deontic values.

But such a characterization of the debate between consequentialists and Kantians and virtue ethicists begs precisely the question that is at issue between them. As we saw in the previous chapter, our alternatives take the reasons for action that determine deontic evaluation to reflect things of value that supply rationales for such reasons and such evaluations. The presence of such a rationale appealing to non-deontic value seems comparatively straightforward in the Aristotelian case, but we saw in the previous chapter that many Kantians also emphasize that Kant appeals to persons valued as ends in themselves, good wills, and freedom as providing rationales for the deontic and telic evaluation of actions. Indeed, they point out that if deontology is understood as eschewing such non-deontic value-based rationales, and if eschewing such rationales is central to the deontologist’s claim that the right is prior to the good, then Kant is no deontologist, and he rejects, in this sense, the priority of the right to the good. Thus, Barbara Herman cautions, in an essay pointedly title “Leaving Deontology Behind,” that properly understood “Kant’s project in ethics is to provide a correct analysis of ‘the Good’ understood as the ultimate determining ground of all action,” and cautions that without such a non-deontological understanding of Kant “the rationale for moral constraint is a mystery.” (1993, 210; see also 2021, 5)[[71]](#footnote-71) Allen Wood, like Herman, makes the Kantian rejection of deontology thus understood explicit, arguing that for Kant no deontological theory is possible if by deontology is understood an “ethical theory . . . that precludes grounding a moral principle on substantive values.” (1999, 114) For Kant, the relevant non-deontic values explain our reasons for action. Such reasons determine which actions are good and bad, which actions ought to be performed, and which actions are morally required. Fundamental things of value and the reasons that reflect them provide a non-deontic rationale for deontic evaluation of actions.

Characterizing alternatives to consequentialism as offering rationales for right action that are prior to and independent of non-deontic value thus profoundly distorts such views, and misconstrues their grounds for rejecting outcome-centered approaches. Our two alternatives do invoke non-deontic values in their rationales for deontic evaluation, they simply reject the consequentialist’s additional Outcome-Centered Constraint on the appeal to non-deontic value. Value-based rationales that cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted will naturally generate constraints upon subsets of reasons to act that reflect rankings of outcomes to be promoted.

Kantian and Aristotelian values are reflected for each of us in decisive reasons to keep our promises even in cases in which lying would promote overall well-being, or would minimize lying overall, or would even minimize my lying. We only act as we ought to if we keep our promises for the relevant reasons. For the Kantian, respect for persons is reflected in impartial reasons that we each have to keep the promises that we make to others, and in reasons to hold others appropriately accountable when they ignore such reasons. Such promise breakings are not, on this alternative, bad things to *do* because they are bad things to *happen*; instead, proper recognition of them as bad things to *happen* reflects the decisive value-based reasons that we each have not to break our promises.

In sum, the demand that any adequate account of the deontic evaluation of actions must provide a value-based rationale only appears to provide support for consequentialist theories if the argument illicitly slides from such a demand for a value-based rationale to the demand for an outcome-centered value-based rationale. But the demand that any such non-deontic rationale must be outcome-centered is precisely what is at issue in the debate between consequentialists and advocates of these alternative views. The need for a rationale appealing to non-deontic value provides no reason to adopt such an outcome-centered constraint on value, hence no reason in support of consequentialism. It might be argued in response that the Compelling Idea provides such intuitively compelling reasons. If it is always right to do what promotes the best outcome, this suggests both that it is right to perform such an action because it promotes the best outcome, and that any rationale fitting this intuition will be outcome-centered. It is to such considerations that I now turn.

## **Section III: Distinguishing the Compelling Idea from “The Compelling Idea”**

Consequentialists frequently appeal for support to the intuitively compelling idea that it is always right to do what’s best. Rightness is a property of actions, and consequentialist advocates of the Idea suggest that the obvious interpretation takes “best” here to be a property of outcomes. Thus, the idea that it is always right to do what’s best is interpreted as *The* Compelling Idea that it is always right to do what brings about the best outcome. If what’s best is what brings about the best outcome, this naturally suggests that what explains why the action is right is that it brings about the best outcome. Not only does the Idea, thus interpreted, rule out our standard alternatives to consequentialism, it also provides intuitive support for the claims both that an account of the deontic evaluation of action must have a non-deontic (indeed, telic) rationale, and that the rationale must be outcome-centered.

But this purportedly intuitive Compelling Idea is not, in fact, intuitive at all. There *are* intuitive ideas concerning the relationship of deontic to telic evaluation, but the consequentialists’ Compelling Idea is at best a counter-intuitive and prima facie implausible interpretation of such deeply intuitive ideas, not itself one of them. Because there is no deeply intuitive idea drawing us towards consequentialism, there is no initial burden of proof to be discharged by opponents of consequentialism. I will first take up appeals to the Compelling Idea that understand the appeal to the best outcome agent-neutrally and understand such agent-neutrality to entail the paradoxicality of deontic constraints. I will then briefly take up accounts that understand the best outcome evaluator-relatively, and that attempt to reconcile this outcome-centered interpretation with its action-centered counterpart.

Samuel Scheffler highlights the permissibility form of the agent-neutral compelling idea to distinguish this “deeply plausible sounding” Idea entailed by consequentialism from the theory itself. Scheffler suggests that the intuitive Idea at the heart of consequentialism, the Compelling Idea, is that we are *permitted* rather than required to do what brings about the best outcome.[[72]](#footnote-72) Other consequentialists have followed suit, arguing that it is this permissibility Idea that even many opponents of consequentialism admit to be intuitively compelling.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Acceptance of the agent-neutral Idea in this weaker permissibility form is sufficient to present a powerful challenge to our traditional alternatives. We have already seen that Kantian and Aristotelian alternatives maintain that in some cases acting rightly or as duty requires prohibits performance of the action that leads to the best outcome as determined from an impersonal, agent-neutral standpoint. Such theories incorporating direct commonsense deontic constraints against lying, killing, stealing, etc. can seem to be wrecked on the shoals of this agent-neutral Compelling Idea. After all, if it is a better outcome upon which only one lie is told rather than two, then the agent-neutral interpretation of this Idea suggests that lying in such a case is at least morally permissible. Acceptance of the Idea (and who, it seems, could deny it?) surrounds such commonsense constraints with an air of paradox, creating a burden of proof for critics of consequentialism that is difficult to discharge. Thus, although this permissibility form of the Compelling Idea does not entail consequentialism, consequentialism entails the Idea, while our traditional alternatives entail its rejection.

Previous arguments, however, have primed us to identify an outcome-centered interpretation that is already smuggled into the Compelling Idea as presented. Even if we grant the deeply intuitive appeal of the general idea:

**General Idea:** It is always morally permissible to do what’s best.

Is this deeply intuitive General Idea more plausibly specified, as the Compelling Idea specification simply stipulates, as the Outcome-Centered Idea:

**Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea:** It is always morally permissible to do *what brings about the best outcome*.

Or is it instead more plausibly understood as an Action-Centered Idea:

**Action Idea:** it is always morally permissible to do *what it is best to do*.

Such an alternative action-centered specification is elided from view by the standard presentation of the deeply intuitive Idea *as* its Outcome (“Compelling”) interpretation. But it is the Action Idea relating moral permissibility to what it is best to do that is recognized in other contexts as deeply intuitive and commonsensical; moreover, unlike the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea, it straightforwardly accommodates the intuitive appeal of deontic constraints. Each of our alternative ethical theories takes what it is best to do to play this role in the deontic moral evaluation of actions, whereas only consequentialist ethical theories insist, often in addition, that rankings of outcomes as better and worse play the role dictated by the Outcome Idea in the deontic moral evaluation of actions.[[74]](#footnote-74) Those of us working in normative ethics have too often been mesmerized by approaches that relegate telic evaluation to the realm of outcomes. But this has inhibited us from seeing that the relevant deeply intuitive idea in fact concerns the relationship between the deontic moral evaluation of actions and the telic evaluation of actions—between what morality permits and what it is best to do in the circumstances.

In what follows I will demonstrate that the Action Idea is widely recognized by consequentialists and non-consequentialists alike as deeply intuitive.[[75]](#footnote-75) Moreover, I will demonstrate that unlike the traditional agent-neutral form of the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea, such an Action Idea readily accommodates commonsense deontic constraints. Acceptance of this Action Idea not only does not provide support for traditional act consequentialism, it presents such a theory, when coupled with other features of commonsense ethics, with serious challenges that are not confronted by rival theories. Ironically, the most plausible interpretation of the General Idea provides distinctive challenges to, not distinctive support for, outcome-centered ethical theory.

***The Action Idea***

There is copious evidence of the central role of telic evaluation of actions and reasons for action. Gary Watson points out that just as theoretical deliberation aims at true belief, the aim of practical deliberation “is to make a commitment to a course of action by making a judgment about what is best (or good enough) to do,” (2004, 127) and Stephen Darwall identifies the aim of action as acting “as is best supported by normative reasons (and so, in this sense, as is best).” (2006, 279) A person has “good enough” reasons in cases in which she has sufficiently good reasons to perform an action in the circumstances. Accounts of practical reason typically allow that in certain circumstances the reasons that an agent has to act some way are not only good enough, but better than the reasons she has to act any other way. In such cases this will be the action that an agent has the best reasons to perform, and the course of action supported by such reasons will be the best available course of action. Within practical reason “good,” “better,” and “best” play a central role in the evaluation of actions and reasons for action.

To judge an action to be the best available in this every day, pre-theoretic sense that is central to practical reason and deliberation is to judge that the agent in question has not simply good enough reasons, but the best reasons to perform it. The course of action best supported by reasons, or perhaps by reasons relative to some particular ranking of outcomes as prudentially, morally, or legally best, will, when there is such a uniquely best course of action, be the best available course of action on any of these alternative theories—the best action. Moreover, there is a straightforward connection between this central, commonsense notion of the “best” action and the relevant sense of the deontic “ought.” Derek Parfit has articulated this connection: “most of us often use ‘should’ and ‘ought’ in . . . reason-implying senses,” specifically in “decisive-reason-implying senses.” To judge that we have decisively good reasons to pursue some course of action is to judge that “this act is what we *should* or *ought* to do.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Thus, I judge that I ought to perform some action when I judge that I have not just good or good enough reasons to perform it, but decisively good reasons to do so. Similarly, I judge some action best, in the sense central to practical reason and deliberation, whenever I judge that I have not just good, or good enough, reasons to perform it, but decisively good reasons to do so. To judge that I ought to perform some action in the everyday, decisive-reason-implying sense, is to judge that it is the best course of action in the everyday sense that is central to practical reason and deliberation. Decisively good reasons for acting imply both such deontic and telic evaluations of actions.[[77]](#footnote-77) Virtue ethicists from Aristotle on join Humeans in taking the project of morality and ethics to be, in Philippa Foot’s words, providing answers to questions “about good or bad action in particular circumstances.” (1988, 235) Do I have good enough reasons to pursue some course of action? Is it better for me to do this than to do that? Such telic evaluation of actions and reasons for action is central to our everyday practices of practical reasoning and deliberation, raising obvious questions about its relationship to various deontic evaluations of actions. We have already seen that there is one straightforward relationship, that between what agents ought simpliciter to do and what it is best simpliciter to do: What an agent ought to do is what it is best for an agent to do in the circumstances.[[78]](#footnote-78) The Action Idea provides an answer to another one of these questions, the question concerning the relationship between the deontic evaluation of actions as morally permissible or impermissible and the telic evaluation of actions as best. The general platitude that it is always permissible to do what’s best is parsed as the deeply intuitive idea that it is always morally permissible to do what it is best to do, to perform the action supported by the best reasons.

Philosophers working in other contexts on the relationship between deontic moral evaluation of actions and telic evaluation of actions commonly take this Action Idea alternative, that it is always morally permissible to do what it is best to do, to be deeply intuitive. Alfred Archer, for example, appeals to the intuition that “showing that an act was in line with what an agent has most reason to do seems sufficient to show that the act was not morally wrong.” (2014, 108) Stephen Darwall expands on this appeal to intuition, questioning whether it is even sensible to say “‘You really shouldn’t have done that,’ and then add ‘but you did have, nonetheless, conclusive reasons for doing it.’” (2006, 98) Alan Gibbard suggests that if I “came to agree that you in fact had perfectly good and sufficient reasons for doing what you did . . . , it would seem to show a lack of understanding of the relevant concepts to nonetheless continue to maintain that you are blameworthy.” (1990, 299) [[79]](#footnote-79) This is only a small sampling of the available evidence that the Action-Centered Idea is a deeply intuitive idea.

Moreover, in contrast with the consequentialist’s Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea, such a deeply intuitive Action Idea does not create an air of paradox surrounding deontic constraints. To see why, recall that advocates of the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea do not deny that such constraints find support in commonsense, or that there is at least a superficial rationale for such constraints grounded in the distinctive responsibility that we each have for our own actions. Their claim is instead that the deeply intuitive appeal of the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea surrounds any attempt to provide a fully articulated rationale for such deontic constraints with an air of paradox, driving the reflective inquirer towards act consequentialism, or some indirect consequentialist alternative. The Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea, augmented with the traditional agent-neutral specification of the good, does generate such an air of paradox.[[80]](#footnote-80)

But the Action Idea does not. Thomas Nagel has pointed out that it often appears to be the case that although “things will be better, what happens will be better . . . I will have done something worse.” (1986, 180) The commonsense appeal of deontic constraints suggests that in addition to whatever impartial reasons we might have to promote or prevent certain outcomes, each person has impartial reasons not to do bad things to others, e.g. to lie, steal, act disloyally, break promises, or violate their rights. Both of our standard alternatives to consequentialism provide supporting rationales for this aspect of commonsense. In typical cases fitting the standard schema for deontic constraints, e.g. a case in which unless I break my promise two others will break theirs, commonsense, reinforced by our alternative theories, suggests that my reasons not to do such bad things trump any reason that I have to prevent others from flouting the reasons that they have not to do bad things.[[81]](#footnote-81) That two people will act wrongly, flouting the impartial reasons they each have to keep the promises they have made to others, does not make it right for me to act wrongly, to flout the impartial reason that I have to keep the promise that I have made. That they will flout the reasons they have is of course a reason to blame them for violating their commitments, but not a decisive reason for me to flout the reasons I have and violate my commitment. What I have decisively good reasons to do—what it is best to do—is to keep my promise.[[82]](#footnote-82) The best thing to do in such cases will be to keep our promises even though this will result in a worse overall outcome, e.g. in more promises being broken overall. Deontic constraints are thus not cases in which it is wrong to do what’s best, they are a category of cases in which what it is *best to do*, hence what the agent ought to do, is apparently not what promotes *the best overall outcome*. Since keeping my promise is apparently the best thing for me to do, the action that I have decisively good reasons to perform, I ought, in the decisive reasons implying sense of ought, to keep my promise, and ought not to break my promise to prevent more promise breakings by others. Decisive reasons that are distinctively moral dictate that what it is best for me to do is not what promotes the best overall outcome. Such reasons reflect values that cannot be captured without distortion in impersonal rankings of outcomes.

Let us pause to take stock. The General Idea that it is always morally permissible to do what’s best does seem deeply intuitive, but it stands in need of specification. We have seen that action-centered specifications are typically ruled out in the very presentation of the consequentialist’s Compelling Idea, creating the impression that the outcome-centered specification—the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea—must be adopted by default, and inherits the appeal of the General Idea by default. But with the recognition that an action-centered specification—the Action Idea—is not only available, but deeply intuitive, and that unlike its outcome-centered counterpart, it can straightforwardly accommodate commonsense deontic constraints, the traditional Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea loses any claim to inherit the intuitive appeal of the General Idea. Commonsense and our alternative ethical theories suggest that what it is best to do, e.g. to tell the truth, is often not what contributes to the best outcome overall, e.g. the outcome upon which fewer lies are told. But this is to call into question whether the traditional agent-neutral specification of the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea is intuitive at all, or instead has only appeared to be because the deeply intuitive Action Idea has been elided from view by the outcome-centered hijacking of the Compelling Idea.

Indeed, because commonsense suggests that the best action is often not the action that promotes the best overall outcome, the most plausible interpretation of the Idea provides distinctive challenges for traditional forms of consequentialism, not distinctive considerations in its favor. Kantians and Aristotelians can accept as intuitive some form of the Action Idea, can all accommodate in some form, without recourse to indirection, the commonsense appeal of deontic constraints,[[83]](#footnote-83) and all reject the traditional Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea as implausible. Why, then, recognize as intuitive an Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea which, at least on the agent-neutral specification, cannot accommodate deontic constraints, and, with the intuitive Action Idea now in view, stands as a problematic alternative specification of the General Idea that flies in the face of commonsense?

Some evaluator-relative consequentialists explicitly adopt a modified version of the Action Idea, coupling the idea that agents ought to do what it is best to do with an outcome-centered interpretation of what it is best to do, upon which it is always best to perform the action that brings about the evaluator-relatively best outcome, the outcome the agent has the most reason to prefer. They thus accept variants of both the Action Idea and the Outcome Idea. Douglas Portmore, for example, endorses this modified form of the Action Idea, maintaining that “an agent objectively ought to perform some particular alternative if and only if it is, in fact, the *best* alternative,” where the best alternative course of action is “the alternative that she has the most reason to perform.” (2011, 12) But this best alternative action, he argues, is determined through appeal to an evaluator-relative ranking of outcomes:

it is only natural to suppose that what we have most reason to do is determined by which way we have most reason to want the world to go . . . such that what she has most reason to do is to bring about the possible world, which . . . she has most reason to want to be actual. (2011, 56)

Agents always ought to perform the best action, but the best course of action always promotes the evaluator-relatively highest ranked outcome. Thus, agents always ought to promote the evaluator-relatively highest ranked outcome.[[84]](#footnote-84)

On an evaluator-relative specification of the goodness of outcomes, the result is an account upon which the rightness (moral permissibility) of actions is determined by the goodness of actions, but the best action promotes the evaluator-relatively best outcome. The Action Idea, coupled with a specification of what it is best to do as what promotes the evaluator-relatively best outcome, yields the evaluator-relative version of the Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea. With such a specification, the evaluator-relative Outcome (“Compelling”) Idea can then purport to inherit what is deeply intuitive about the Action Idea itself.

Yet any move to evaluator-relative rankings of outcomes seems only to push the point of reckoning back a step. It may well be intuitive that what agents ought to do is always what it best to do, but it does not seem at all intuitive that what it is best to do is always to perform the action that promotes the highest ranked outcome incorporating appropriate evaluator-relative rankings. The apparent appeal of the agent-neutral Compelling Idea turned out to be illusory, but the evaluator-relative Compelling Idea lacks intuitive appeal entirely.[[85]](#footnote-85) This is a form of the Idea, it seems, that we must be driven to by argument despite its lack of initial intuitive appeal. Driving us to this form of the idea is precisely what Michael Smith and Douglas Portmore attempt to do through appeal to relevant non-ethical considerations.[[86]](#footnote-86)

## **Section IV: Two Senses of Bringing About and the Aims and Ends of Action**

The successful performance of any intentional action, regardless of the reasons for which it is undertaken or the values that they reflect, brings about the outcome that the action happens. What I do happens. But it has often been offered as a virtual restatement of this claim that the agent’s *aim* in intentionally acting is always to bring about the occurrence of some outcome the value of which rationalizes its performance. If agents, in intentionally acting, always aim at bringing about outcomes in this second sense, it follows naturally that the evaluation of actions is a function of the evaluation of the outcomes that the agent aims to bring about.[[87]](#footnote-87) Such a claim has seemed to many a virtual platitude; what else could the agent’s aim in acting be but to produce/bring about the outcome that provides the rationale for its performance?[[88]](#footnote-88) In the next chapter I take up non-ethical arguments for the conclusion that the rationale for every action, what I refer to as its end, is provided by some outcome to be promoted, hence that the aim of every agent in every such intentionally undertaken performance is promoting some outcome. Here I want to address what is presented as a commonsense feature of actions and their evaluation—that the *aim* of every agent in intentionally acting is bringing about some outcome, and that because the agent’s aim in action is bringing about an outcome, the *end* of every intentional action is provided by evaluation of the outcome the agent aims to bring about.

Apparent counter-examples to this performing as promoting account of agents’ aims in acting abound. Don’t I often, perhaps even typically, *perform* actions that are not *promotings* of outcomes, e.g. listening to music, keeping promises and telling the truth, going for walks, contemplating works of art, and helping my friends? Isn’t it obvious that in these and countless other cases agents are performing actions that are not promotings of outcomes, and do not have promoting some outcome as their aim? That many actions are promotings of outcomes only seems to highlight many more performings of actions that are not such promotings of outcomes. I aim in acting to keep my promise guided by my reasons for doing so. In keeping my promise, I bring it about, in the constitutive sense, that my promise keeping happens. But my aim is not to bring it about that my promise keeping happens, to promote the outcome that a promise keeping performance by me for the relevant reasons happens, it is to keep my promise for the reasons that justify my performing such an action. It is to do something, not to bring it about that I do it, or that it is done by me. (Baier, 1970)

Even in such seemingly recalcitrant cases, however, the action as production advocate will point out that doing what it is good for me to do, e.g. helping a friend, brings it about that my helping of my friend happens. Isn’t my aim in helping my friend, strictly speaking, bringing it about that I help, and isn’t value of the outcome that my helping my friend happens after all really the end that rationalizes my helping my friend? Thomas Nagel, a lifelong critic of consequentialism, nonetheless advocates just such an outcome-centered unpacking of these intentional performings of actions as after all intentional promotings of outcomes, arguing that in such seemingly resistant cases the “performance of act B” is really “a degenerate case of promoting the occurrence of act B.” (1970, 47) [[89]](#footnote-89)

The suggestion is that non-degenerate cases are those in which agents, in intentionally acting, straightforwardly have *aims* of promoting outcomes the value of which provides the *ends* that rationalize their performance. For example, in convincing you to come to the party, my aim in acting is promoting the outcome that you come, my end is provided by my reasons to bring about your coming to the party reflecting the value of such an outcome occurring. Nagel’s “degenerate cases,” by contrast, are those in which the agent’s aim in acting seems to be the performing of some action that is not the promoting of some outcome. Nagel’s suggestion is that this apparent distinction between two different sorts of performances of actions, performings that are promotings and performings that are not, is really a distinction between kinds of performings that are promotings. The agent’s aim in every intentional action is successfully promoting some outcome and the end is provided by reasons reflecting the value of the outcome being promoted. The difference, he suggests, is that in degenerate cases the performance of the action *is* the promoting of the outcome *that the performance of this very action by me happens*, and the value of the outcome, of my action happening, provides the end that rationalizes my performance of this very action. Seemingly resistant cases of performings of actions that are not promotings of outcomes,[[90]](#footnote-90) actions that seemingly aim at performing actions that are not promotings of outcomes, and that seemingly do not have as their ends outcomes to be promoted, are merely degenerate cases of agents intentionally acting with the aim of promoting outcomes. If my end in keeping my promise is really bringing about the outcome that my promise keeping happens, then my aim in keeping my promise, strictly speaking, is bringing it about that I keep my promise. If seemingly recalcitrant cases are most plausibly accommodated through this degenerate cases strategy, then the agent’s aim in every intentional action is the promoting of some outcome, and the agent’s end in every action is provided by appeal to the value of the outcomes they bring about, outcomes the value of which rationalizes their promotion.

As with the two previous arguments, however, this line of argument appears to trade for its apparent plausibility upon one of our two illicit equivocations, in this case the equivocation between the two senses of “bringing about” that came into view in chapters [1](#_Chapter_1:_Introduction) and [2](#_Chapter_2_The). In successfully performing any intentional action, the agent brings it about, in the constitutive sense, that the action happens. Regardless of her reasons for acting, and in particular regardless of whether or not her reasons are reasons to promote outcomes, in successfully performing any action she brings it about in this sense that her performance of the action happens. Nothing about the fact that actions bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense suggests either that agents always aim in acting at promoting outcomes, or that the agent’s reasons to act, her end in acting, are reasons to promote outcomes.

But our undistorted comparison of ethical theories also revealed the feature of consequentialist theories that distinguishes them from our alternatives, the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value. The constraint takes the relevance of all things of value to reasons for action to be captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted. Commitment to this distinctive feature of consequentialist theories leads advocates to maintain not only that in intentionally acting agents bring it about, in the constitutive sense, that the actions happen, but in addition that an agent’s end in intentionally acting is always some outcome to be brought about in our second, rationalizing sense. Her end in acting, for the advocate of the constraint, is always some outcome to be promoted, thus her aim in acting is the promoting of some outcome. More generally, because all reasons to act are reasons to promote outcomes, all successful intentional actions are promotings of the outcomes that rationalize their performance.

With this distinction between senses of bringing about in view, it becomes clear that the line of thought exemplified by Nagel’s degenerate cases account turns on an equivocation between them. Nagel points out that even in resistant cases successful intentional actions bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense, and takes this to show that the agent’s aim in intentionally acting is, commonsense and alternative theories notwithstanding, bringing about some outcome. But that all actions bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense is a feature readily accommodated by each of our alternative theories, regardless of whether it takes all—or even any—reasons for agents to act to be reasons to promote outcomes. That all agents in intentionally acting bring about outcomes in this constitutive sense, the sense that clearly applies to our resistant cases, provides no grounds for expecting that agents’ reasons in intentionally acting are always reasons to bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense. Moreover, when the two senses are disambiguated, it seems clear that commonsense, as articulated by alternative theories, does not endorse the claim that agents always aim, in performing actions, at promoting outcomes in the rationalizing sense, hence that commonsense does not support the degenerate cases strategy.

But what could the aims of agents be in performing such resistant actions, if not to successfully promote outcomes—to make something happen in the world? And what could an agent’s end in acting be other than the value of the outcome that it aims to promote? If commonsense suggests that the point of any agent’s intentional action is, as Portmore suggests, to “make the world go a certain way,” to bring it about that some event or state of affairs happens, then aren’t reasons for any action going to be reasons to bring it about that the world goes that way? If so, the commonsense understanding of the aims and ends of actions in turn provides intuitive support for consequentialism.

But the commonsense understanding of action, an understanding which seeks merely to characterize the kind of events that intentional actions are,[[91]](#footnote-91) provides no support for such an understanding of the aims and ends of actions. We *perform* actions: intentional actions are performances that we undertake for reasons. Such performances are distinguished by the agent’s answer to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, the question that solicits the agent’s reasons in acting. Intentional actions, then, are performances undertaken for reasons, the reasons that provide the intention with which the agent acts, and that guide the agent in successfully performing the action. It falls out of this understanding of action that the agent’s *aim* in intentionally acting is successful performance of the action guided by her reasons for undertaking it, the reasons in light of which it is intelligible as the action it is. The agent’s *end* in intentionally acting, by contrast, is provided by the agent’s reasons for intentionally undertaking such a performance.

The elements of this commonsense understanding of an agent’s aim in intentionally acting are present in many philosophical accounts of actions. Thus, Frankfurt’s classic essay emphasizes that actions are performances, and that any such performance has a “course” that “is under the guidance of the agent.” (1978, section III) Indeed, once it is acknowledged that typical intentional actions are temporally extended performances,[[92]](#footnote-92) and that they are undertaken for reasons, it seems only to be making explicit what is already implicit that it is the agent’s reasons that guide intentional action, and that the agent’s aim in intentional action is successful performance of the action guided by the reasons for which she undertakes it.[[93]](#footnote-93) The things we value are reflected in reasons to act, reasons to undertake performances of actions guided by our reasons for undertaking them. Such reasons supply the agent’s end in acting. But the aim of any such action undertaken for reasons is its successful performance guided by such reasons. Successfully achieving this aim brings it about, in the constitutive sense, that the action happens. That all actions, in thus achieving their aims, are bringings about in this sense, does not favor any ethical theory, because bringing about in this sense is a constitutive consequence of an agent’s successfully achieving the aim of any action on every theory. In particular, it provides no support for the claim that actions are also all bringings about in the rationalizing sense, hence no support for consequentialism over the alternatives. It is the importing by the consequentialist of the Outcome-Centered Constraint that provides the illusion of support for the claim that the agent’s aim in every intentional action, successfully performing it, is always also successfully promoting an outcome. Only within the context of the Outcome-Centered Constraint, then, does it seem inevitable that every performing of an action is, or is at least grounded in, the promoting of an outcome.

But this is an additional constraint upon agents’ ends in acting, not an intuitive unpacking of agents’ aims in acting. It is a counterintuitive consequence of accepting the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value and the reasons that reflect value, not a commonsense ground for accepting such a constraint. Achieving the aim of an action undertaken for reasons, successful performance guided by the reasons for undertaking it, brings it about, in the constitutive sense, that the action happens. Only when the reasons for undertaking some performance are reasons to promote outcomes is the performance of the action the promoting of an outcome, and only such actions bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense as well as the constitutive sense.

Like the two arguments canvassed earlier, this argument appealing to commonsense claims about the aims and ends of actions also turns on an equivocation, here between two senses in which actions bring about outcomes. The failure of these arguments does not rule out consequentialist ethical theories, it merely reveals that these alleged sources of support for them are illusory. There may nonetheless be an argument for the conclusion that agents in intentionally acting always bring about outcomes in both senses, an argument that all reasons for acting are reasons to promote outcomes in the rationalizing sense (that the agent’s ends are all provided by reasons to promote). Such an argument would establish that in having the aim of completing any action guided by the reasons for undertaking it, the agent also always has the end of bringing about some outcome in the rationalizing sense.

With the distinction between senses of bringing about in view, however, the burden of proof would appear to fall squarely on the consequentialist. Consider, again, the apparent wrongness of murdering even when doing so will bring it about that fewer murders happen, and in this sense that a better overall outcome will ensue. The point of this and myriad other cases is precisely that it is bad, indeed wrong, to perform such an action whether or not the outcome is better overall, or better for me, or better relative to me. Commonsense and our alternative accounts suggest that these are cases in which the right action, performed for the decisively good reasons, reflecting the relevant things of value, is not the promoting of an outcome at all, and is not rationalized by the value of outcomes to be promoted. The rational agent has decisive reasons not to undertake the performance of such an action, but her reasons are not reasons to promote outcomes; indeed, they are reasons that are decisive with respect to whatever reasons to promote she has. We need a reason to explain away such deep structural features of ethics, reasons, and actions. The intuitive and ethical arguments that we have canvassed in this and the preceding chapter are taken by their advocates to provide such reasons, but we have seen that they do not. Distinct non-ethical considerations are also cited as supplying such reasons, and such considerations are the topic of the next three chapters. The point here is that any such non-ethical considerations do not supplement intuitive and ethical considerations, they must instead carry the entire case for consequentialism, for the tyranny of outcomes in ethics, in light of the failure of these intuitive and ethical arguments.

I close this chapter by taking stock. Even granting that intuitively it is always right to do what’s best, the plausible interpretation of such an intuition is in terms of the Action Idea, that it is always right to do what it is best to do, what is decisively supported by good reasons. Such an interpretation provides no support for consequentialism. Only an illicit slide from the Action Idea to the Outcome Idea fosters such an interpretation, but with the alternative interpretation in view any intuitive plausibility to such an idea seems to be lost. Absent additional argument, the Outcome Idea seems plausibly to be rejected as counterintuitive and prima facie implausible.

Even granting that every plausible account of the deontic evaluation of action must have recourse to a rationale appealing to non-deontic value, such appeals are common ground among our consequentialist and non-consequentialist alternatives, hence provide no support for consequentialism. Only an illicit slide from the claim that every plausible account must have a non-deontic value rationale to the claim that every plausible account must have an outcome-centered non-deontic value rationale leads to the impression that the demand for a rationale appealing to non-deontic value favors consequentialism. Absent additional considerations, the demand for a value-based rationale provides no support for consequentialism.

Finally, even granting that the successful performance of every intentional action brings about an outcome, each of our alternatives grants that this is the case when bringing about is understood in the constitutive sense. That every action brings about an outcome in this sense thus provides no support for consequentialism. Only an illicit slide from this constitutive sense to the consequentialist’s rationalizing sense of bringing about, upon which agents aim in every action at successfully promoting some outcome because the ends of action are always supplied by reasons to promote, provides illusory support for consequentialism. The claim that commonsense features of actions warrant this slide itself turns on an equivocation between a commonsense understanding of the agent’s aim in any intentional action, successful performance of the action guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it, and an Outcome-Centered Constraint upon such reasons, and hence upon such aims. The commonsense understanding of agents’ aims in intentionally acting provides no grounds for the slide to the rationalizing sense of bringing about; only the addition of an Outcome-Centered Constraint on the values and reasons guiding the performance of actions provides such grounds. But commonsense opposes any such addition, and our standard alternatives reinforce this opposition.

Such a pattern of argument, revealing a set of systematic equivocations between plausible commitments that provide no support for consequentialism and implausible alternatives that do, manifests itself also in appeals to the impartiality of morality as providing support for consequentialism. It is sometimes argued that because the moral evaluation of actions is impartial, and impartial evaluation is undertaken from a God’s eye, agent-neutral point of view of the universe, the impartiality of morality requires grounding in the impersonal evaluation of outcomes.[[94]](#footnote-94) Here we see yet another version of the same illicit slide involved in the three previous arguments. From the widely accepted claim that the moral evaluation of actions is impartial, presupposing a standpoint upon which “the agent is not singled out for special treatment, and upon which everyone matters equally,” (Parfit 2011, 274) such a line of thought slides to a commitment to the distinctively outcome-centered interpretation of the impartial evaluation of *actions* through appeal to the impartial evaluation of *outcomes*—to an outcome-centered account of the impartial evaluation of actions. But such an attempt to ground the impartial evaluation of actions in the impartial evaluation of outcomes is precisely what our alternative theories reject as failing to reflect what we value. Kantian ethics is a paradigm of the commitment to impartiality in the evaluation of actions, but takes it as obvious that the appropriate standpoint for the impartial evaluation of actions is not, and is not reducible to, any standpoint or structured set of standpoints for the impartial evaluation of outcomes.

Moreover, an outcome-centered interpretation of the impartiality relevant to the evaluation of actions flies in the face of commonsense judgments that we often have decisive impartial reasons for the conclusion that it is much worse to do, and wrong to do, what brings about the impartially best outcome, e.g. impartial reasons not to lie, kill, break promises, or betray friends even in many cases in which we could bring about an outcome that is impartially better along some relevant dimension by doing so. Impartial evaluations of outcomes may well be relevant to the impartial evaluation of actions, but neither commonsense nor alternative theories suggest that the latter should somehow be grounded in the former.

All of these intuitive and ethical arguments for consequentialism fail. This failure becomes clear once the relevant theories are compared and contrasted without distortion. Absent additional support the consequentialist is left with no apparent reasons to hold that it is always right to do what brings about the best outcome, that the agent’s aim in every intentional action is to promote some outcome, that the rationale for deontic evaluation of actions must be provided through appeal to the value of outcomes, or that the impartiality of morality dictates a grounding in the impartial evaluation of outcomes. But consequentialists have from the outset taken themselves to have additional non-ethical support, in default theories of mind and action. It is to these deepest roots of the consequentialist tree that we now turn.

# **Chapter 4: The Non-Ethical Argument for the Tyranny of Outcomes in Ethics**

Chapter 4 Abstract: Chapter 4 presents the non-ethical argument for consequentialism. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that the ethical arguments for consequentialism fail. But Chapter 4 demonstrates that the conclusions of each of these failed arguments for consequentialism find apparent support from widely held non-ethical premises supplied by mutually reinforcing outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes. These are the default accounts in the theory of action and the theory of mind, accounts that are embedded in rational choice theory and the Standard Story of action. The chapter demonstrates the pivotal role played by the default account of the contrasting directions of fit characteristic of practical and theoretical attitudes. This contrast supports an outcome-centered account of desires, and hence outcome-centered accounts of the actions that they rationalize and the practical reasons that they supply in providing such rationalizations. Consequentialism is thus grounded outside of ethics, in default accounts in the theory of action and the theory of mind that are taken to have independent support.

Chapter 4 Keywords: Standard Story of Action, Propositional Attitudes, Direction of Fit, Desire, Anscombe’s Question, Non-Ethical Argument

## **Section I: The Roots of the Consequentialist Tree**

We saw in the previous chapter that several standard intuitive and ethical arguments for the tyranny of outcomes in ethics—for consequentialism—fail. In this chapter I will take up the non-ethical argument for consequentialism, an argument grounded in a set of widely held and mutually reinforcing outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes. If the tyranny of outcomes in ethics is to be vindicated, it will be in virtue of this grounding outside ethics, in theories of action and mind. In chapters [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) and [6](#_Chapter_6:_The) I will show that this non-ethical argument also fails; indeed, that the case for such outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons, and actions trades upon the same two mistakes, and the equivocations that result from making them, that I have exposed in the ethical arguments.

The non-ethical argument supports the view that one particular and particularly fundamental evaluation of actions, whether they ought, in Parfit’s decisive reasons sense, (2011, 33; see also Williams 1981, 120–26) to be performed, is determined entirely through appeal to relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted and the reasons that reflect them. The conclusion of the argument is that what actions agents ought to perform is explained by and determined through appeal to relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted. This rational form of consequentialism does not directly relate the *moral* ought and acting morally to agent-neutral rankings of outcomes, it instead relates this ought in the decisive reasons sense, the deontic ought *simpliciter*, to relevant rankings of outcomes as better and worse. Agents ought in this sense to perform the action decisively supported by good reasons, and such evaluations of actions are determined through appeal, directly or indirectly, to reasons to bring about outcomes.[[95]](#footnote-95) But it falls out as a virtual corollary that the distinctly *moral* deontic evaluation of actions, e.g. as what agents morally ought and ought not to do, is also grounded through appeal to relevant rankings of outcomes.

In the next section I will outline the non-ethical argument for the tyranny of outcomes in ethics; in section III I will present certain apparent objections to the outcome-centered accounts of actions, reasons, and practical attitudes that ground this argument. This will set the stage for a fuller presentation of the non-ethical argument in section IV, a presentation that highlights apparent support for these outcome-centered accounts provided by central aspects of the default theory of action and the default theory of propositional attitudes. This is an argument for adopting outcome-centered non-ethical accounts of reasons, actions, and practical attitudes despite their apparent implausibility, hence for adopting an outcome-centered account of the evaluation of actions—consequentialism.

## **Section II: Outline of the Non-Ethical Argument**

Commitment to the rational form of consequentialism, upon which evaluations of actions as what ought and ought not to be done (in the decisive reasons sense) are determined by and explained through appeal to the relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted, follows plausibly from commitment to an outcome-centered account of reasons to act, upon which all reasons to act are, or at least are ultimately grounded in, reasons to promote/bring about.[[96]](#footnote-96) If any account of reasons has the claim to being the default account, it is such a “teleological” account. It is the account presupposed by rational choice theory, and endorsed even by many influential critics of consequentialism. On such an account all reasons to act are fundamentally grounded in reasons to bring about outcomes, and agents have better reasons to promote higher ranked, and at least in this sense better, outcomes. When there is a best outcome, agents have the most reason to bring about the best outcome and ought, in the standard decisive reasons sense of ought, to perform the action that brings about the best outcome. Michael Smith rightly argues that adoption of such an outcome-centered view of reasons invites a “reduction of one moral concept (the concept of what we ought to do) to another pair of moral concepts (the concepts of goodness and badness),” such that the action that an agent ought to perform will always be one that “produces the most good and the least bad.” (2003, 576)

Adoption of this outcome-centered account of reasons supports an outcome-centered account of value, at least in the sense that has now become familiar to us, the sense that the relevance of all things of value to reasons for action must be captured in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted. If all reasons to act are fundamentally reasons to promote (bring about), and promoting is the rational response to values properly captured in relevant rankings of outcomes, this naturally suggests that the relevance of all value to reasons for action is captured without distortion entirely in rankings of outcomes to be promoted.

If the relevance of value to reasons for action is captured entirely in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, then the best reasons to act reflect the best outcomes, and what agents ought to do will be supported by the best reasons. The deontic evaluation of what agents ought and ought not to do will be determined through appeal to and explained by appeal to the relevant ranking of outcomes as better and worse. Good distinctively moral reasons will reflect value captured in rankings that incorporate a prominent role for impartial rankings of such outcomes.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Here an objector might reply that if the case for consequentialism rests on the case for an outcome-centered account of reasons to act, such an argument seems only to push the point of reckoning back a step. Isn’t such an account of reasons itself counterintuitive, and isn’t it rejected by our standard alternatives? Yet such an account of reasons finds support in what is arguably the default conception of action, the outcome-centered conception adopted by ethicists on both sides of the debate ranging from Nagel to Portmore,[[98]](#footnote-98) upon which every performance of an action not only alters “the way the world goes,” but also aims at making the world go a certain way,” at bringing about some outcome that the agent has reason to promote. I have already highlighted challenges to the claim that such a conception of action is intuitive, but it is nonetheless embedded in, and purportedly vindicated by, what has come to be known as the “Standard Story of Action.”[[99]](#footnote-99) If the Standard Story does vindicate the claim that the performance of every action aims at the promotion of some outcome, then given the Anscombean platitude that actions are differentiated by their answers to the “Why?” question, i.e. by the reasons for which we undertake their performance, (2000, 9) every action will be distinguished by the reasons to promote the outcome at which it aims, and the end of every such action, such a promoting, will be provided by the agent’s reasons to promote the relevant outcome. The default theory of action thus provides support for the view that reasons to act are reason to promote, hence for the rational form of consequentialism, hence for the claim that any plausible ethical theory must after all be captured in consequentialized form.

What if we are tempted to deny such an outcome-centered account of action along with the outcome-centered account of reasons to act? We have already seen, after all, that many performances of actions do not seem to be, or to be grounded in, promotings of outcomes. The outcome-centered account of action, however, appears to be shored up by the standard account of beliefs and desires as propositional attitudes with contrasting directions of fit. This default view of the relationship between actions and such attitudes holds that actions are rationalized by such beliefs and desires, attitudes not just with propositional form, but with objects captured by their contents in propositional form: very roughly, to believe is in part to take such propositional contents to be true—to be sensitive to evidence for their truth; to desire is in part to be motivated to make such propositional contents true (to “realize” them in the world). I believe that I have an apple; I desire that I have an apple. To be in the former state is, ceteris paribus, to alter my attitude in the face of evidence that it does not represent the world accurately; to be in the latter state is in part to be motivated to alter the world to make the propositional content true—to bring about through action the outcome that makes it true.

Such practical attitudes rationalize actions as alterations of the world to bring about the outcomes that make their propositional contents true. I want an apple. Such a want is taken to be more perspicuously represented as a desire that I have an apple. Such a desire rationalizes an action with the aim of altering the world to bring about the outcome that I have an apple, hence that “I have an apple” is true.[[100]](#footnote-100) On such an outcome-centered account of desires their objects are all propositional contents to be made true,[[101]](#footnote-101) the reasons for action they supply are reasons to promote outcomes—to make such contents true, and they rationalize actions aimed at bringing it about that such contents are made true. Such outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes are mutually reinforcing, providing support as a group for the claim that any plausible ethical theory must be a form of consequentialism captured without distortion in consequentialized form.

All three of these outcome-centered accounts are embedded in rational choice theory as it is commonly understood. Normative rational choice theory holds that actions are rationalized by the agent’s preferences, essentially comparative attitudes towards outcomes/options. [[102]](#footnote-102) Reasons to act are reasons to choose preferred outcomes/options, and the agent has the most reason to choose the best outcome/option, understood as the outcome that maximally satisfies the agent’s preferences among outcomes/options as revealed in the appropriate rankings. Every action is ultimately rationalized as bringing about preferred outcome/options.

Structural elements of the Standard Story of Action and rational choice theory thus dictate that desires/preferences are attitudes that rationalize all actions as promoting the outcomes that their contents are true. All actions are promotings, and all reasons to act supplied by desires are reasons to bring about the outcome that their propositional contents are true. The result is a non-ethical argument for the rational form of consequentialism: Agents have most reason to act, hence ought when such reasons are decisive to act, to bring about the best outcome. And if all reasons are reasons to promote, then all moral reasons will be reasons to promote, or at least will be grounded in such reasons to promote. Any plausible moral theory must be a theory of moral reasons grounded in the appeal to the promotion of outcomes. Any commonsense moral reasons that do not appear to be reasons to promote, and any apparently plausible moral theories incorporating such reasons, must, according to this argument, be reinterpreted as fundamentally moral reasons to promote and as theories that take reasons to promote to be fundamental.

Appearances notwithstanding, the most plausible form of any apparently non-consequentialist theory must be a consequentialized form, because the only plausible rationales for the deontic and telic evaluation of actions are provided by appeal to the relevant rankings of outcomes. Within the context of this argument, if a candidate moral theory fails to provide such a plausible rationale in its consequentialized form, this is grounds not for resisting putting it in this form, but for rejecting as implausible the candidate theory. Consequentializing is vindicated after all, albeit as the conclusion of an argument grounded in these non-ethical outcome-centered accounts.

Similarly, every action will be both a bringing about in the constitutive sense and a bringing about in the rationalizing sense, because such non-ethical arguments entail that every performance is a promoting, rationalized as a bringing about of the content of the propositional attitude that rationalizes it. The degenerate cases strategy for accommodating resistant cases may well fly in the face of commonsense, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, but it is nonetheless mandated by the deep theoretical resources of the non-ethical argument. In addition, every plausible rationale for deontic evaluation of actions will have to be a rationale that conforms to the outcome-centered constraint on value, since such an argument demonstrates that whatever the fundamental things of value, all reasons for action that reflect them, and that determine deontic evaluations of actions, are fundamentally reasons to promote the propositional contents of the propositional attitudes that rationalize all actions. Finally, a version of the outcome interpretation of the Compelling Idea is vindicated. Because the reasons relevant to the determination of what agents ought to do will always be reasons to bring about outcomes, the agent always ought to do what will bring about the highest ranked (and in the sense “best”) outcome. Each of these conclusions of ethical arguments, arguments that fail *as* ethical arguments, is validated as a corollary of the non-ethical argument.

## **Section III: The Apparent Counter-Intuitiveness of Outcome-Centered Accounts of Actions, Reasons, and Attitudes**

These mutually reinforcing and interconnected outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes, if accepted, ground a powerful case for consequentialism. If outcomes tyrannize at the non-ethical level, they tyrannize at the ethical level as well. Such non-ethical outcome-centered accounts are currently the default, embedded in standard accounts of actions, attitudes, and rational choice, and are themselves taken to be supported by independent arguments. Despite this default status, it is noteworthy that each of these outcome-centered accounts appears to be at odds with commonsense and ordinary usage. In this section I will briefly highlight this tension with commonsense; in section IV I will present the grounds cited for adopting these outcome-centered non-ethical accounts despite this tension, grounds illuminated by the case for adopting the Standard Story of Action.

***Reasons***

We have already encountered the outcome-centered account of reasons, the teleological conception of reasons (TCR), upon which *all* practical reasons to act are, or are grounded in, reasons to bring about outcomes. TCR, we have seen, holds that what an agent “has most reason to do is to bring about the possible world . . . that she has most reason to want to be actual,” the highest ranked outcome.[[103]](#footnote-103) Thus, TCR holds that all reasons are fundamentally reasons to prefer some outcome over others, and the action that is decisively supported by such reasons to prefer outcomes is the action that promotes the highest ranked outcome.

But why accept TCR? Our traditional alternatives to consequentialism reject TCR. They do not deny that all reasons to act reflect non-deontic value, but they do deny that the relevance of such things of value to reasons for action can be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about. The reasons to act that reflect such values will not all be reasons to bring about outcomes. My current point is that commonsense practices of reason giving further fuel such suspicion of TCR.[[104]](#footnote-104) We perform actions, but only some of these performings would seem to be promotings,[[105]](#footnote-105) and only some of our reasons to act would seem to be reasons to promote. In our everyday practices we seem to take our respect for persons to be reflected in reasons to act that are not reasons to promote, reasons to keep promises that we make to them, not to manipulate them, to tell them the truth, etc. We take our own value for our integrity to be reflected in reasons to avoid hypocrisy, to act with the strength of our convictions, etc., and we take the value we place in friendship to be reflected in reasons to support our friends in times of need, to make time for them, etc. We also often take good actions to rationalize other actions that are either instrumental or constitutive means to performing them.[[106]](#footnote-106) In practice, we often treat the value of objects as reflected in reasons to act and interact with such objects in appropriate ways—to contemplate them, own them, ride them, see them in person, etc. [[107]](#footnote-107)

Even in many cases of actions that are promotings of outcomes rationalized by reasons, the grounds for these reasons and this valuing of outcomes often do not appear to be provided by reasons to promote outcomes.[[108]](#footnote-108) I might act to promote the outcome that you go to the party, but my reason might be to support you, my friend, in time of need, a reason to act reflecting my value for your friendship. My value for your friendship is reflected in reasons to support you, in this case by promoting the outcome that you go. Similarly, although my reason to perform some action, e.g. keeping my promise, might be to bring about some outcome, e.g. that you trust me, my reason to bring about some outcome, e.g. that a tree is planted in your name, might be to keep my promise. In practice, then, we take ourselves to have reasons to perform actions. Some of these performances are promotings rationalized by reasons to promote, but many are not, and the grounds for some of these actions that appear to be promotings themselves appear to be provided through appeal to the value of other performances that are not promotings, rationalized by reasons to act that are not reasons to promote. Our ordinary practices and intuitive judgments do not support TCR. We must instead be driven to such a conception by reflection and argument.

***Actions***

We have already seen in [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The) that the prima facie implausibility of the outcome-centered account of reasons is reflected in the prima facie implausibility of the outcome-centered account of actions. Granting that there are cases of actions that are bringings about in both the constitutive and the rationalizing senses, these stand in apparent contrast with cases of actions that are bringings about in the constitutive but not the rationalizing sense. On the commonsense understanding of the distinct kind of events that actions are, we saw that actions are performances distinguished by the reasons for which we undertake them, reasons that we take, ceteris paribus, to justify performing the action in question. The *aim* of any such action is the completion of the performance guided by the reasons that the agent has for undertaking it. These reasons for acting in turn supply the agent’s *end*, reflecting the things the agent takes to be of value.

If the primary reasons for performing some action reflect the value of outcomes to be promoted, such reasons to act will be reasons to undertake a particular kind of performance, a promoting/bringing about of an outcome in the rationalizing sense. The *aim* of such an action is the completion of this performance—the promoting of an outcome that is its object—guided by the agent’s reasons in undertaking it. Because the decisive reasons in such cases are reasons to bring about the outcome that is its object, the *end* supplied by such reasons is also the outcome that they are reasons to promote.

If, by contrast, the primary reasons for performing some action do not reflect values that can be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes, the resulting reasons to act will be reasons to undertake some particular performance with the aim of completing the performance guided by these reasons for undertaking it. Because such reasons do not reflect some outcome to be promoted, successful completion of the performance of the action -- the agent’s aim in acting -- is not also bringing about some outcome in the rationalizing sense. I achieve the aim of the performance—completing my walk, respecting your rights, keeping my promise, contemplating the fresco—for the reasons that I have to undertake it, reasons that reflect things that I value. But there is no outcome the value of which rationalizes such a performance, and neither the agent’s end nor her aim in undertaking the action is some outcome to be promoted/brought about. Such performances that are not undertaken to promote outcomes in the rationalizing sense only bring about outcomes in the constitutive sense: in successfully completing the action, the agent brings it about in this sense that the action happens. In these cases a characterization of the actions as aiming for some outcome to be brought about seems to be a mischaracterization of these performances as promotings, a misguided designation of all action as a species of production.[[109]](#footnote-109)

***Attitudes***

The outcome-centered account of desires/wants/preferences takes the object of every desire or preference to be the content of a proposition that the desiring agent is motivated, ceteris paribus, to make true. Granting the default account that all actions are rationalized through appeal to an agent’s desires, such a propositional attitude account of desires suggests that desires rationalize actions as bringing about the outcomes that their objects—their propositional contents—are true. To embrace the default account of desires as propositional attitudes, attitudes towards contents to be brought about, is thus to endorse the outcome-centered accounts of reasons and actions as well, and to be committed to the non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics.

But we have already seen that in ordinary discourse desires naturally take a variety of types of objects other than propositional contents to be realized or made true, including particular things (I want a Harley), persons (I want him; I want her as a friend), and, perhaps most frequently, actions (I want to go, to keep my promise, to buy a cow, to improve the taste of the stew).[[110]](#footnote-110) Indeed, as Michael Thompson emphasizes, it is appropriate, in response to any expression of an intention to act by an agent, to ask “Why do you want to do that?” (2008, 104) Moreover, shoehorning desires into propositional form,[[111]](#footnote-111) and treating their objects as the contents of propositions to be made true, seems frequently to mischaracterize rather than to illuminate the content of the desire in question. Agents who desire to phi do not seem to have as their end bringing it about that their phiing happens, thereby making the proposition in question true, nor do they seem to have as their aim successfully promoting the outcome that they phi. Rather, their end is supplied by the reasons that they have *to phi*, and their aim is the successful performance of the action that is the object of their desire—phiing, and of the actions that are instrumental and constitutive means to achieving such an end and aim. My desire to make an omelet rationalizes my buying eggs at the store (instrumental means), for example, but also my breaking eggs into a bowl (constitutive means). In doing what I desire to do, phiing, I bring about the truth of the proposition “I phi,” but not because such an outcome is my end or because promoting the outcome that I perform such an action is my aim. In typical cases it is the truthmaker, phiing, not the truth of the proposition “I phi,” that seems to be the object of any desire to phi.[[112]](#footnote-112) The object of the desire is an action to be performed, a phiing, not an outcome to be promoted, and the aim of an action rationalized by such a desire is successfully performing the action, not promoting some outcome, e.g. the outcome that “I phi” is true. This outcome is a constitutive consequence of achieving the desired aim, but seems to be neither the aim nor the end of the desire.

More generally, because the objects of desires only seem in some cases to be captured without alteration or mischaracterization in propositional form, and only in such cases are we committed to a view upon which desires rationalize actions as bringing about outcomes, the commonsense view of desire provides no support for an outcome-centered account of reasons or an outcome-centered account of actions. If the object of an agent’s desire is an action, the desire rationalizes actions constitutive of and/or instrumental to the performance of the action. Such desires thus typically rationalize other actions, actions that are often not themselves promotings of outcomes. If the object of my desire is to act courageously or justly or with integrity, such an attitude presumably rationalizes actions and interactions that manifest courage and integrity, and that habituate me to such traits of character. If the object of my desire is a thing that I take to be valuable, such an attitude rationalizes interaction with it in ways appropriate to that object, e.g. to own, work on, and ride the Harley. Such alternative objects of desires are precisely what the commonsense account of desire would lead us to expect, and what alternative ethical theories dictate. But such desires, because they do not have as their object some propositional content to make true, do not rationalize actions bringing about the outcomes that such contents are true. So the commonsense account of practical attitudes provides no support for outcome-centered accounts of actions, reasons, and ethics. What is necessary to support the non-ethical argument, in the face of this prima facie implausibility of the outcome-centered accounts, is an argument for the adoption of such a propositional attitude account of desires, its counter-intuitiveness notwithstanding. Such an argument is precisely what advocates of the Standard Story of Action take themselves to provide.

The argument to this point demonstrates that the consequentialist edifice, and the case for legitimating its tyranny, rests upon the case for an outcome-centered account of attitudes—a deep non-ethical foundation in the theory of action and the philosophy of mind. In the next section I will present what I take to be the standard case for these elements of the Standard Story, a case that many who reject other elements of the Standard Story nonetheless take to be convincing. In the two chapters that follow I will make the case that this argument fails for many of the same reasons that we have encountered for rejecting the ethical arguments themselves.

## **Section IV: The Non-Ethical Argument for Outcome-Centered Ethics**

Work in the theory of action over the past half century has been dominated by attempts to provide plausible answers to two questions. Anscombe’s question is prompted by recognition that intentional action is properly characterized by what gives application to a sense of the question “Why?” that enquires into the agent’s reason for acting. (2000, 9) Wittgenstein’s Question asks “what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?”[[113]](#footnote-113) A compelling account of intentional action clearly requires an answer to Anscombe’s question.[[114]](#footnote-114) The standard form of the Standard Story of Action purports to provide answers to both questions. Michael Smith characterizes the answer provided by the Standard Story as follows:

The standard story’s answer is that the difference lies in the causal etiology of what happens when a body moves . . . we establish whether an agent acts by seeing whether this bodily movement is caused and rationalized in the right kind of way by some desire that he has that things be a certain way, and some. . . . means-end belief. (2012, 387)[[115]](#footnote-115)

Intentional actions, on the Standard Story, are distinguished by the desires and beliefs that non-deviantly cause and rationalize them. Why did I flip the switch? I desired that the room be illuminated, and believed that flipping the switch would illuminate the room. Why is he going to the market? He wants to buy a cow, and believes that the market is the best place to make such a purchase. Such attitudes supply the agent’s reasons in acting, thereby providing the answer to Anscombe’s question. In the remainder of this chapter I will focus entirely on the rationalizing role played by such attitudes, upon the answer that the Story provides to Anscombe’s rather than Wittgenstein’s question. This rationalizing condition, [[116]](#footnote-116) that actions are rationalized by the beliefs and desires of the agent properly understood, is an element of virtually every version of the Standard Story, but it is also accepted by many who reject other elements of the standard version of the Standard Story. We can begin by making explicit the general commitment to this rationalizing role of beliefs and desires:

**Commitment 1:** The rationales for intentional actions, suitable answers to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, are supplied by the relevant beliefs and desires/preferences of the agent.

It is crucial to be clear why on the Standard Story desires are taken by Smith and others to provide rationales “that things be a certain way,” rationalizing performances of actions that are all promotings of outcomes. The Standard Story incorporates the prevailing accounts of both desires/preferences and beliefs as propositional attitudes, and of the contrasting directions of fit that distinguish these fundamental practical and theoretical attitudes. The case for understanding beliefs as propositional attitudes is straightforward; the natural expression of belief involves a propositional content captured by a “that clause”—I believe that you are telling the truth, that lead is heavier than ketchup, that my partner is out running errands. The objects of beliefs are states of affairs, captured as the contents of propositions. But are the objects of desires also propositional contents most perspicuously captured by that clauses? For reasons that we have already encountered, the case that desires are propositional attitudes is not at all clear. Many wants/desires/preferences seem naturally to take an infinitival form, with actions rather than propositional contents as their objects; others seem naturally to have things as their objects—I want an apple, or a Harley.

Why, then, take desires, like beliefs, to be propositional attitudes with propositional contents as their objects? A first step in making this case is the claim that desires can all be propositionalized—converted or transformed into propositional form. The formula for propositionalizing desires is captured by Wayne Sumner:

That desires have objects is . . . scarcely news; this much is ensured by the fact that every desire is for something or other. In the surface grammar of desire, these objects are often literally things . . . Sometimes, however, they are activities (I want to go to France) or states of affairs (I want the weather to be good for our wedding). It is a simple trick to homogenize all these ostensibly different kinds of objects into states of affairs: to want the book is to want to own or read it, and and to want to do something is to want the state of affairs that consists of your doing it. It is then a further simple trick to turn these states of affairs into propositions: to want the state of affairs which consists of my owning the book is to want the proposition “I own this book” to be true. By this process of transformation, every desire comes to take some proposition as its intentional object. (1996, 124)

It is important to separate two different commitments put forward by Sumner in the preceding passage. The first is that all desires, regardless of their “surface grammar,” can be propositionalized, put into propositional form.

**Commitment 2:** All desires, regardless of their surface grammar, can be propositionalized, put into propositional form.

The second is that the (real) object of each desire, surface grammar notwithstanding, is the propositional content of such a desire when converted into propositional form, hence that every desire is most perspicuously characterized as a propositional attitude. The claim is that when the target desire is “propositionalized” the “depth” grammar of the desire is revealed—desires are propositional attitudes; their real objects are captured as propositional contents, and their real aims are the promoting of the outcomes that their propositional contents are true.[[117]](#footnote-117)

**Commitment 3:** Propositionalized form captures the relevant features of all desires without alteration or mischaracterization, e.g. the aim and object of the desire, the guise under which the agent takes the desire’s object to be good, and the rationale for action it provides.

The actions rationalized by desires with such real objects and aims are actions bringing about the events/states of affairs that are the propositional contents of these desires. This establishes that the aim of every desire, surface grammar notwithstanding, is altering the world—making some propositional content p true by making p the case.

It is crucial to my arguments in chapters [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) and [6](#_Chapter_6:_The) that endorsement of Commitment 2, that all desires can be propositionalized, put into propositional form, itself provides no support for Commitment 3. That a desire in infinitival form can be propositionalized does not stand in the way of taking the real object of the desire to be an action, and the real aim of the desire to be performance of the action that is its object. To maintain the view that their initial grammar is a better indicator of the real objects of the relevant desires would be to conclude that taking their objects in propositionalized form to be their real objects would be a *mis*taking, altering and mischaracterizing those objects.

Talbot Brewer distinguishes types of propositionalism in a way that invites just such a diagnosis, distinguishing weak propositionalism, which holds that propositional form only captures “the truth of the relevant proposition” that is “a necessary . . . condition of the attainment of the desire’s end,” from strong propositionalism, which holds that only such a form captures “the real intentional object of such a desire.” (2009, 21) The weak propositionalist grants that all desires can be converted into propositional form, but maintains that it is nonetheless the action that is the object of desires that take infinitival form that is their real object.

I desire to go for a walk. For Brewer’s weak propositionalist the real object of such a desire is an action, going for a walk, not the proposition that I go for a walk. Thus for the weak propositionalist it is the truthmaker, the action of going for a walk, not the proposition that I go for a walk, that is the object of the desire. The aim of such a desire is successfully performing the action that is its object, and the end of the action is provided by the reasons for which the agent undertakes it and the values they reflect. The desire rationalizes actions instrumental to or constitutive of this performance, not actions promoting the outcome that the propositional content “I go for a walk” is true. On such an account propositional form only captures a constitutive consequence of successfully performing the action that is the object of the desire, but the propositional content is not the object of the desire, nor is the aim of such a desire bringing it about that such a content is true. Thus, although the weak propositionalist accepts Commitment 2, that all desires can be put in propositional form, she rejects Commitment 3, that such a form captures the relevant features of the target desire without alteration or mischaracterization. That all desires can be propositionalized is thus consistent, for the weak propositionalist, with maintaining that the central features of many desires are mischaracterized by the resulting propositionalized form. It is Commitment 3, not Commitment 2, that provides the crucial premise in the non-ethical argument. If every desire has a propositional content, the aim of every desire is successfully bringing about the outcome that makes this propositional content true, and the end of every desire is provided by the reasons to promote the outcome that it aims to bring about. If (Commitment 1) desires supply the rationales for all actions, then desires thus understood will rationalize all actions as bringing about the outcomes that their propositional contents are true. The three Commitments dictate outcome-centered accounts of desires, reasons, and actions, hence an outcome-centered account of ethics.

Considerations of elegance, simplicity, and explanatory power are invoked to support the adoption of Commitment 3. If all desires can thus be propositionalized, shouldn’t they be? Capturing all desires in a single, homogenized form would facilitate comparison and contrast of desires with each other, and it would facilitate effective comparison and contrast of beliefs (theoretical attitudes generally) and desires (practical attitudes generally),[[118]](#footnote-118) It would also facilitate the application of powerful formal tools. Moreover, recognition of the different kinds of objects of desires suggested by their surface grammar, including actions, things, and propositional contents, might seem to inhibit an understanding of the features in virtue of which these are all instances of the same kind of attitude—desire. Propositional form, understood as revealing a deeper shared grammar of desires as propositional attitudes with propositional contents as their objects, may thus seem to be the obvious form in which to illuminate the shared features in virtue of which all such attitudes with disparate surface grammar are desires. This will in turn simplify and clarify the aims and objects of desires and the rationales that they provide.

In addition, explanations of the fundamental difference between belief and desire in terms of contrasting directions of fit are widely recognized as dictating Commitment 3. Anscombe is recognized as introducing the direction of fit contrast in its modern form. (2000, 54–57) The standard interpretation of Anscombe’s direction of fit contrast (not shared, as we will see in [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The), by Anscombe herself) supports the claims that the propositional content of desires in propositionalized form captures the real object of each desire, and the real aim of each desire as bringing about the state of affairs that makes it propositional content true (Commitment 3).

The apparent explanatory power of this interpretation is captured by John McDowell. He points out that in trying to conceptualize “a thinker’s own place in the world,” (1995, 152) it can seem natural, even unavoidable, that the relevant states of affairs in the world are captured in thought by propositional contents. But any such account of the thinker’s place must account for the thinker’s *representation* of the world and the thinker’s *intervention*, qua agent, in the world. Propositional attitudes with a world to mind direction of fit, attitudes that aim to represent how the world is with their propositional contents, account for the representational role. Such attitudes, beliefs, aim to conform their propositional contents to actual states of affairs in the world. But because thinkers are also agents, any such explanation must also include an account of attitudes with a mind to world direction of fit, propositional attitudes that aim to intervene in the world, making states of affairs in the world conform to their propositional contents. The fundamental “concept-schema” of such attitudes, desires, is taken to be one of “bringing it about that” (1995, 152) their propositional content is realized in the world. The objects of both kinds of attitudes are the same, propositional contents, but in the world to mind direction the aim of such attitudes is to represent the world with their content, and in the mind to world direction the aim of such attitudes is bringing about their propositional contents in the world.

The account can appear to be both simple and elegant. The objects of both types of attitudes are the same, propositional contents. The contrasting directions of fit of the two attitudes towards their propositional contents capture the two main dimensions of a thinker/agent’s orientation to the world, taking the world into thought and bringing about changes in the world through thought. This interpretation of the direction of fit contrast thus purports to provide a straightforward explanation of the fundamental contrast between such theoretical and practical attitudes, upon which the real object of desire and the real object of belief are always propositional contents, and the real aim of desire is always to bring about the outcome that makes its propositional content true, as the real aim of belief is always to represent with its propositional content a true state of affairs. On such an account all reasons to believe will be reasons to take the propositional content to do what it purports to—to represent some state of affairs in the world. All reasons to desire will be reasons to intervene in the world to bring about the propositional content—to bring about some event/states of affairs in the world. Augmentation of the first Commitment with the third, bolstered by this prevailing interpretation of contrasting directions of fit, dictates an outcome-centered account of desire, upon which all desires are propositional attitudes that aim to bring about the outcomes that their propositional contents are true. If desires rationalize actions, the reasons supplied by such desires will be reasons to promote the outcomes that their propositional contents are true.

Such an account, in turn, supports the otherwise seemingly implausible degenerate cases reading of resistant cases. Consider a seemingly resistant desire that naturally takes infinitival form, “I want to go for a walk.” The attitude seemingly has an action as its object, and the apparent aim of the attitude is performing the action that is its apparent object, rationalized by the reasons for performing such an action. The propositionalized form of such a desire, however, is “I desire that I go for a walk.” The propositional attitude account of desire identifies the real object of my desire not as my going for a walk, but as the propositional content “I go for a walk.” It identifies my aim not as going for a walk, but as intervening in the word to bring it about that I go for a walk, bringing it about that “I go for a walk” is true. The actions rationalized as promoting this outcome will include my intentionally going for a walk, but fundamentally as an outcome to be promoted. As Scanlon points out, the relevance of such actions is captured on such an account “as components of states of affairs—as things that *occur*.” (1998, 80) In degenerate cases the desire to go for a walk is really a desire that I go for a walk that rationalizes actions promoting the outcome that “I go for a walk” is true. The direction of fit contrast thus provides a deep structural rationale for treating desires that *seemingly* have actions the agent aims to perform as their objects, and that *seemingly* rationalize other actions that are performings but not promotings, as *actually* having as their objects propositions the content of which the agent aims to make true. It provides a rationale for taking desires to act that are not desires to bring about states of affairs to be, after all, merely degenerate cases of desires to bring about states of affairs.

What dictates the outcome-centered account of desire, then, is not simply that every desire can be put in propositional form, but the claims, central to this interpretation of the contrasting directions of fit constitutive of belief and desire, that the real *object* of the desire is the propositional content of the desire in propositionalized form, that the *aim* of any desire is bringing about the state of affairs that makes the propositional content true, and that the aim of any action directly rationalized by such a desire will be promoting the outcome that realizes the desired state of affairs in the world.

Recapping, our commitments are:

**Commitment 1:** The rationales for intentional actions, suitable answers to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, are supplied by the relevant beliefs and desires of the agent.

**Commitment 2:** All desires, regardless of their surface grammar, can be propositionalized, put into propositional form.

**Commitment 3:** Propositionalized form captures the relevant features of all desires without alteration or mischaracterization, e.g. the aim and object of the desire, the guise under which the agent takes the desire’s object to be good, and the rationale for action it provides.

These commitments central to (but not at all limited to) the Standard Story establish that all actions are rationalized through appeal to desires, and all desires are attitudes towards states of affairs to be brought. The reasons supplied by such desires will be reasons to bring about states of affairs, and the actions they rationalize will be bringings about of states of affairs.[[119]](#footnote-119) Such outcome-centered accounts of reasons and actions, in turn, dictate that the deontic evaluation of actions that ought and ought not to be performed is determined through appeal to reasons to promote outcomes, and that when agents have decisive reasons they will be reasons to promote the highest ranked outcomes.

Crucially, on the Standard Story such rationalization through appeal to the beliefs and desires of the agent provides what the agent takes to be her justification, at least ceteris paribus.[[120]](#footnote-120) An action is justified if these purported reasons for action supplied by the agent’s beliefs and desires are in fact the good reasons that the subject takes them to be. These three commitments implicit in the Standard Story, taken together, entail that the reasons supplied by propositional attitudes explain and purport to justify actions as bringing about the outcome that the propositional contents that are their objects are true. They are all reasons “to realize them, to prevent them from occurring, or to make their occurrence more or less likely.” (Scanlon 1998, 80) But this is just to say that the commitments implicit in the Standard Story establish the outcome-centered conceptions of reasons (TCR) and of actions.

The non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics follows straightforwardly. All reasons to act supplied by such desires are fundamentally reasons to bring about outcomes. Agents have more reason to bring about higher ranked outcomes, and less reason to bring about lower ranked outcomes. When they have decisive reasons to bring about some outcome, this will be the highest ranked outcome. In the decisive reasons sense of ought, then, what an agent ought to do is to bring about the highest ranked, and in at least this minimal sense, the best outcome (when there is such an outcome). Determinations of what agents ought and ought not to do are rationalized entirely through appeal to reasons to promote outcomes, reasons supplied by desires that aim to bring about the outcome that their propositional contents are true. What agents ought to do is determined through appeal to reasons to bring about outcomes, and what the agent ought to do is to promote the best outcome—the outcome that the agent has the most reasons to prefer. Such an account also generates a powerful presumption in favor of consequentialist moral theory: if the agent ought to do what brings about the best outcome, it seems natural to understand what the agent *morally* ought to do as performing the action that brings about the outcome dictated by appropriately prioritizing the impartial ranking of outcomes.

This presumption is strengthened because the non-ethical argument also rules out the accounts of moral requirements provided by our traditional alternatives to consequentialist moral theories. We have seen that the things such alternative theories take to be of fundamental value are often reflected in moral reasons to perform actions that are not promotings of outcomes.[[121]](#footnote-121) Virtuous character traits, friendship, freedom, respect for persons as ends in themselves, etc. are taken by such theories to be reflected in morally decisive reasons to keep promises, refuse to lie, provide aid, etc. These are morally required actions dictated by reasons to act that are not reasons to promote outcomes. But the outcome-centered account of practical attitudes dictates that all reasons to act are, or are grounded in, reasons to promote outcomes, and that all actions aim at the promotion of outcomes. This rules out any fundamental reasons to act that are not reasons to bring about outcomes—any fundamental reasons to act reflecting values the relevance of which cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted. Such apparent reasons must either be explained away as merely apparent, or accounted for through indirection, or interpreted as having a deeper structure grounded in reasons to bring about outcomes. The non-ethical argument thus entails the rejection of any alternative that appeals to fundamental moral reasons that are not reasons to bring about, and entails that any plausible moral reasons must be, or be grounded in, reasons to promote outcomes.

The extent to which such outcome-centered accounts have congealed into dogma can be seen not only in the Standard Story of action, but in standard versions of rational choice theory. The theory of rational choice is itself a mansion with many rooms, but one of the roles often played by preferences on the theory is to provide the underlying motives behind action,[[122]](#footnote-122) rationalizing the action performed. (Commitment 1) As Satz and Ferejohn point out, in this common form “rational choice is a normative enterprise . . . it tells us what we ought to do to achieve our aims.”(1994, 73) The reasons that it recognizes are all reasons to promote outcomes, and the aim of any rational action is to bring about the best outcome: “The reason that an agent chooses act x over act y is that the outcome that is believed to follow from x is preferred to that which is believed to follow from y.” (1994, 73) Anderson points out that rational choice theory, thus understood, is often presented “as if it is the inevitable conceptual framework within which inquiry must proceed.” (2001, 22) Preferences have options/outcomes to be promoted as their objects. (Commitment 3) Reasons to act are, or are derived from, reasons to bring about a preferred option, and the agent ought to perform the action that brings about the best outcome, the outcome that maximizes satisfaction of the agent’s preferences. What it is rational for the agent to do is to perform the action that brings about the most preferred option that is available,[[123]](#footnote-123) the highest ranked option. All reasons to act are reasons to promote preferred options, and agents evaluate actions through appeal to rankings of options as better or worse.[[124]](#footnote-124) Because the outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, actions, and reasons that entail ethical consequentialism are all at least implicit in this standard form of normative rational choice theory, and such outcome-centered accounts dictate adoption of the consequentialist evaluative framework, the alleged inevitability of this framework for rational choice is at the same time the inevitability of outcome-centered ethics.

Michael Smith makes explicit his commitment to these non-ethical outcome-centered accounts as premises in his defense of evaluator-relative consequentialism. His argument appeals to desires understood as propositional attitudes that cause and rationalize actions, desires “he has that things be a certain way.” (2012, 387) All actions are rationalized as bringing about the outcomes that make the objects of such practical propositional attitudes true, and, although Smith takes such rationalizations to provide only what he characterizes as motivating reasons, the structure of such motivating reasons, on his account, is the structure for all justifying reasons: all reasons to act, motivating or justifying/normative, are (or are grounded in) reasons to bring about outcomes—the teleological conception of reason. What the agent has most justifying reasons to do, on Smith’s account, i.e. what she ought to do, is to bring about the state of affairs that she “would desire to be the case . . . if she had a psychology that eludes all forms of rational criticism,” i.e. were her desires “maximally informed and coherent and unified.” (2003, 592 and 596) But this is just to say, he concludes, that the agent ought to do what “produces the most good and the least bad,” thereby providing an analysis of “ought to do” that reduces “one moral concept (the concept of what we ought to do) to another pair of moral concepts (the concepts of goodness and badness).” (2003, 576) This is the consequentialist framework for evaluating actions, CEF, structured by commitment to the outcome-centered constraint on value. Smith rightly argues that because this outcome-centered framework leaves no way “of analyzing the stringency of an obligation except by way of considering the amount of good that acting on that obligation will produce,” (2003, 587) any plausible rationale for deontic obligation must be articulated through appeal to the production of better or worse outcomes.

I have demonstrated in chapters [2](#_Chapter_2_The) and [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) that the intuitive and ethical arguments for consequentialism fail absent additional argument. But the non-ethical argument presented here, if accepted, shores up each of these otherwise implausible arguments. All plausible alternative ethical theories will after all be forms of consequentialism. Whether or not all traditional alternatives can be consequentialized, the non-ethical argument concludes that all reasons to act are reasons to promote, hence that only alternatives that can be captured without distortion in consequentialized form, as forms of consequentialism, will be among the plausible alternatives. Kantsequentialism is not deontically equivalent to Kantianism, but it is the nearest plausible alternative to Kantianism. Kantianism is not a plausible alternative, because it recognizes reasons to act that are not reasons to promote; Kantsequentialism recognizes only reasons to act that are practical reasons to promote, hence is the alternative closest to Kantianism that satisfies the outcome-centered constraint on reasons and value established by the non-ethical argument.

Similarly, although all actions bring about outcomes in the constitutive consequence sense, but many do not seem to bring about outcomes in the rationalizing sense, the non-ethical argument supports the conclusion that all action are after all bringings about in both senses. Even in resistant cases, including degenerate cases, the agent’s real end in acting is to bring about some outcome—I go for a walk to bring about the outcome that “I go for a walk” is true. We have seen that the alleged intuitive appeal of the claim that the aim and end of every action is to bring about an outcome dissipates under closer scrutiny, but the non-ethical argument dictates such an account despite its apparent counterintuitiveness.

Moreover, although the relevance of many of the things of value to our reasons for action does not seem to be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about, the non-ethical argument purports to establish that all reasons are reasons to promote outcomes. To the extent that such reasons reflect value, the relevance of such value to reasons for action must be captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be promoted. The non-ethical argument thus dictates that a plausible value-based rationale for the deontic evaluation of actions must be a rationale based in the value of outcomes, value captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes. Finally, if, as the non-ethical argument concludes, all reasons are reasons to promote, then agents always have the most reason to promote the highest ranked (and in this sense best) outcome. Agents always ought, in the decisive reasons sense, to do what it is best to do, but because what it is best to do is what promotes the best outcome, agents always ought to do what promotes the best outcome. The consequentialist’s Compelling Idea is vindicated after all, despite its apparent implausibility.

The non-ethical argument demonstrates why a social scientist trained in the theory of rational choice will, when taking the ethical turn, see some form of consequentialism as the only viable approach, and why philosophers who adopt these default accounts in action theory and rational choice theory will have the troubling experience of having their considered ethical judgments seemingly unmoored by reflection, since any attempt to develop an ethical theory within such a framework will be inexorably skewed towards outcome-centered accounts that undermine such considered judgments and elide from view their supporting rationales. To rebut this non-ethical argument for consequentialism, then, it is necessary to engage the non-ethical accounts themselves, and in particular the outcome-centered account of desires/preferences that provides its explanatory bedrock. Because consequentialism is grounded in these premises outside of ethics, distinctly ethical objections will always seem to leave this case for consequentialism standing. The non-ethical argument dictates that some form of outcome-centered ethical theory must be right, even if every particular version of it offered to date seems so wrong.

Fortunately, the tools for challenging these outcome-centered accounts, hence for challenging the non-ethical argument for consequentialism, have already been developed in earlier chapters. In the next two chapters I will demonstrate that the same mistaken equivocations that lend illusory plausibility to the ethical arguments for the tyranny of outcomes also lend a merely illusory aura of plausibility to the tyranny of outcomes at the non-ethical level. The arguments of the first three chapters not only demonstrated that the case for consequentialism relies completely upon its non-ethical roots in outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and attitudes, they provide the tools for pulling up these roots, uprooting the case for consequentialism at this most fundamental level. It is to the uprooting of these outcome-centered non-ethical roots that I now turn.

# **Chapter 5: Against the Non-Ethical Tyranny of Outcomes: The Initial Case**

Chapter 5 Abstract: The argument here demonstrates that the same two mistakes undergirding the intuitive and ethical arguments for consequentialism, the conflation of senses of bringing about and the unwarranted imposition of an outcome-centered constraint on value, account for the illusory appeal of the outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, actions, and reasons grounding the non-ethical argument for consequentialism. Just as attempts to consequentialize target ethical theories fail, altering and mischaracterizing the target theories in the attempt, so too strategies of propositionalizing target desires fail, altering and mischaracterizing the aims and objects of, rationales provided by, and evaluative outlooks partially constitutive of these target desires. Propositionalizing typical desires captures neither the objects of such desires, nor the rationales for action they provide, nor the guise under which their objects are taken to be good; it captures only the constitutive consequent of realizing the desire’s object. With the failure of the outcome-centered account of desires, the non-ethical argument for consequentialism is undermined.

Chapter Keywords: Propositionalizing, Evaluative Outlook Account, Desire, Propositional Attitude, Guise of the Good, Practical Attitude, Scanlon, Constitutive Consequence

## **Section I: Uprooting Consequentialism: Against the Outcome-Centered Account of Desire**

In the last chapter I identified 3 commitments that can be teased out of the Standard Story of action along with supporting arguments that appeal to contrasting directions of fit. Together they ground a non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics. The 3 commitments are:

**Commitment 1:** The rationales for intentional actions, suitable answers to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, are supplied by the relevant beliefs and desires of the agent.

**Commitment 2:** All desires, regardless of their surface grammar, can be propositionalized, put into propositional form.

**Commitment 3:** Propositionalized form captures the relevant features of all desires without alteration or mischaracterization, e.g. the aim and object of the desire, the guise under which the agent takes the desire’s object to be good, and the rationale for action it provides.

Together these commitments establish an outcome-centered account of desire (3), and, coupled with Commitment 1, outcome-centered accounts of actions and reasons, upon which all reasons to act are fundamentally reasons to bring about outcomes, and all desires rationalize actions aimed at bringing about the outcomes that make propositional contents true. These outcome-centered accounts, in turn, support adoption of the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value and the consequentialist framework for evaluating actions, upon which the normative status of actions and reasons for action is determined through appeal to relevant rankings of outcomes to be brought about.

I have teased these commitments out of the Standard Story of Action, but it is noteworthy that they are also endorsed by those whose views differ widely in many other respects, and who reject other elements of the standard form of the Standard Story. For example, what Parfit characterizes as “objective” theories, upon which “there are certain facts that give us reasons . . . to have certain desires,” as well as “subjective” theories, upon which “our reasons for acting are all provided by . . . certain facts about what would achieve our present desires or aims,” [[125]](#footnote-125) can both endorse all three commitments as long as the desires in question are taken, as Parfit himself takes them, to be propositional attitudes with propositional form, states “of being motivated or of wanting something to happen and being to some degree disposed to make it happen if we can.” (2011, 43) The subjectivist and objectivist disagree sharply about many of the most fundamental features of reasons and desires, but advocates of both positions typically maintain that desires are propositional attitudes, and that such attitudes, with outcomes to be promoted as their objects, convey an agent’s rationale for action. This is all that is required for the non-ethical case for consequentialism to go through.

Similarly, such an argument can still go through if “desire” is understood broadly, (Davidson 1980, pp. 3–4 and 83–7) as a rationalizing placeholder that “stands in for whatever we would have to refer to in order to explain what motivated an agent’s intentional action.” (Schapiro 2021, 17) As long as what desires hold a place for shares with propositional form what John McDowell characterizes as “the concept-schema *bringing it about that* . . . ,” the things—reasons, for example, or certain goals—that they are placeholders for will also share the *bringing it about that* concept-schema. It is only things sharing this concept-schema, after all, for which desires understood as propositional attitudes can effectively function as placeholders.[[126]](#footnote-126) Thus, even if it is only as placeholders that desires satisfy Commitment 1, but desires convey the agent’s rationalization most perspicuously as propositional attitudes, such a placeholder account of desires will support the three commitments that in turn support outcome-centered ethics. [[127]](#footnote-127)

Consider, for example, Nagel’s influential account of desires as mere placeholders, which suggests that desires always supply an agent’s rationale for acting only because we include “motivated” desires. Such desires rationalize actions because “the presence of a desire is a logically necessary condition . . . of a reason’s motivating,” and the desire functions as a mere placeholder indicating or conveying such reasons. (1970, 30) [[128]](#footnote-128) But every reason, Nagel maintains, is a reason to promote some event or state of affairs, and every desire has as its object such an event or state of affairs that such reasons are reasons to promote. Thus, desires that rationalize only in a placeholder sense are propositional attitudes that supply the state of affairs or event that the agent has reason to promote—the desire’s propositional content. Even though, for Nagel, the desires that play the rationalizing role in Commitment 1 often only function as placeholders, they are nonetheless appropriately captured as propositional attitudes that are placeholders for reasons to promote the states of affairs that are their objects.[[129]](#footnote-129)

In this chapter I will consider challenges to these three Commitments, beginning in section III with Commitment 1. Although Commitment 1 has been widely challenged, and I will briefly explore some of these challenges, I propose to grant it in what follows, if only to highlight the debilitating but typically overlooked problems that beset Commitment 3. In section IV I offer grounds for rejecting Commitment 3 that are orthogonal to many of those on offer, grounds that build upon the arguments developed in previous chapters. In particular, I highlight relevant parallels between the failure of consequentializing to convert target theories and the failure of propositionalizing to convert target desires. We saw in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The_1) that although consequentializing purports to convert theories into consequentialist forms, it does not; indeed, under the guise of benign conversion it alters and supplants them. We will see in the arguments to follow that although propositionalizing purports to convert target desires into propositional attitudes, it does not; indeed, it supplants them with alternatives that alter every central feature of the target attitudes.

If the case for Commitment 3 is undermined, propositional form does not capture the objects of many desires. What, then, is the role of such an outcome-centered form, and what accounts for its continued appeal? Drawing upon Talbot Brewer’s distinction between “Weak” and “Strong” Propositionalism, I will suggest in section V that although propositionalizing target desires fails to capture both the objects of many desires and the rationales that they provide for action, it does capture a necessary condition for their satisfaction. In particular, propositionalizing captures the state of affairs that is the constitutive consequence of successfully acting on the desire to phi with its actual object, phiing. Propositionalizing thus captures what a desire, successfully acted upon, “makes true,” in contrast with what a belief “takes true.” This limited but constructive role for propositionalizing can only come into view with the rejection of the misguided role for propositionalizing dictated by Commitment 3.

By chapter’s end I will have made the case that propositionalized form does not capture the real objects and rationales provided by many desires, in particular everyday desires to phi (to go to the store, watch the Saints game, go for a walk, or bake some bread). Instead, it appears systematically to alter them, and in so doing to mischaracterize them. This mischaracterization is elided from view; moreover, by the very mistakes that drive the ethical arguments for consequentialism, mistaken assumptions that non-deontic rationales must be outcome-centered (the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value), and that actions must not merely produce outcomes in the constitutive sense, but must be rationalized by appeal to the value of the outcomes that they produce.

On an account of desires free of such systematic mischaracterization, their objects are often things (“I desire a phi”) and actions (“I desire to phi”) rather than state of affairs (“I desire that phi”). Objects of these first two sorts reflect values that cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about, values reflected in reasons to act and interact that are not reasons to promote. Such desires, in turn, rationalize actions that are not promotings of outcomes. An account of desire freed from such systematic mischaracterizations not only fails to provide support for outcome-centered ethical theories, it provides a presumptively hostile environment for such theories. Are there nonetheless reasons for endorsing an outcome-centered account of desire in the face of these obstacles?

The arguments developed in this chapter will put us in a position, in [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The), to demonstrate that three kinds of considerations which may seem to shore up the outcome-centered account of desire, hence to shore up the non-ethical argument either trade upon the same conflations that underlie the ethical arguments, or presuppose highly controversial views in metaphysics, the philosophy of action, and the philosophy of mind. Since we have already seen that standard intuitive and ethical arguments for outcome-centered ethics fail on their own, this complementary failure of the non-ethical case will complete the overthrow of the tyrannical rule of outcome-centered accounts.

## **Section II: The Evaluative Outlook Account of Desire**

We saw in the previous chapter that three Commitments embedded in the Standard Story of Action, if accepted, establish an outcome-centered account of desires and complementary outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics. To evaluate these commitments, it will be useful to focus upon one widely held account of desire, although many of the arguments presented presently have purchase against other accounts as well. I will focus in what follows upon what Tamar Schapiro has characterized as the default conception of desire, the “guise of the good” or “evaluative outlook” or “judgment-sensitive attitudes” conception, advocated by many contemporary Kantians, Aristotelians, consequentialists, and Humeans.[[130]](#footnote-130)

Guise of the good/evaluative outlook/judgment-sensitivity accounts of intentional *action* hold that “intentional action, or acting for a reason, is action that is seen as good by the agent.” (Orsi 2015, 714)[[131]](#footnote-131) A guise of the good/evaluative outlook/judgment-sensitivity account (henceforward simply “evaluative outlook account”) of *desires* holds that “all that is desired is seen by the subject as good to some extent.” (Orsi 2015, 714)[[132]](#footnote-132) Desires rationalize actions, on such a conception, supplying the agent’s reasons in answer to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, because they are constituted (at least in part) by such an evaluative outlook reflected in reasons. To have a desire is “to ‘see’ features of our circumstances as directly appealing to us as practical thinkers,” (Schapiro 2014, 133) and to appeal to an agent’s desire as rationalizing action is to invoke this evaluative outlook towards the desire’s object to supply the agent’s reasons for acting. Anscombe and others point to an apparent parallel between this “conceptual connection between ‘wanting’ . . . and ‘good’” and the connection between belief and truth. To want is in part to see what one wants “under the aspect of some good;” (2000, 75 and 76) to believe is in part to see what one believes under the aspect of truth.

Commitment to an evaluative outlook account of intentional *action* does not itself mandate an evaluative outlook account of *desire*, nor does commitment to an evaluative outlook account of desire by itself mandate that desires play the central rationalizing role attributed to them by those who endorse Commitment 1. Moreover, there is no inconsistency in maintaining that desires do play such a central rationalizing role while rejecting evaluative outlook accounts of both desire and intentional action.[[133]](#footnote-133) But if evaluative outlook accounts of desire are the default, and the outcome-centeredness of desires is the cornerstone of the case for outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics, it will be a debilitating blow to such an outcome-centered, propositional attitude understanding of desire that it does not find support within this default family of accounts.

We have already seen in chapters [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) and [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) that an evaluative outlook account of intentional action, by itself, does not provide support for outcome-centered ethics. Intentional actions are performances (we *perform* actions), and the aim of any such action is its successful performance guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it. Many such performances of actions do not appear to be promotions of outcomes. The reasons for undertaking such performances that are not promotings are not reasons to promote outcomes that appear to be good, they are reasons to perform actions that appear to be good. The values that such reasons reflect are not values captured in outcomes to be brought about, they are values of persons, of relationships such as friendship, and of character traits such as courage that seemingly are not captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be brought about, and are often reflected in reasons to perform just such actions that are not promotings of outcomes. Nothing about an evaluative outlook understanding of intentional action provides support for the tyranny of outcome-centered ethics. It is the integration of the evaluative outlook account of desire into the evaluative outlook account of intentional action, coupled with an account of desires as fundamentally propositional attitudes with objects captured by propositional contents, that provides this something more.[[134]](#footnote-134)

If evaluative outlook accounts of desires are the default, and desires understood as propositional attitudes supply the agent’s rationale in intentionally acting (albeit perhaps merely as placeholders), then the objects of the desires that rationalize intentional actions are propositional contents to be brought about, and the evaluative outlook towards the objects of such desires is an outlook towards outcomes, towards such propositional contents as good, valuable, or desirable to be brought about. Intentional actions are rationalized by such desires as promoting such desirable outcomes. The reasons supplied by desires will be reasons to promote, actions will be promotings, and evaluations of actions will be determined through appeal to the outcomes that agents have reasons to promote.

Whether or not we adopt an account of desires as propositional attitudes, desires on the evaluative outlook account are constituted in part by evaluative outlooks, by the guises under which the agent takes their objects to be good/valuable/desirable. Such desires constituted in part by such evaluative outlooks are dependent, ceteris paribus, upon the value in light of which the agent takes their objects to be good, value that counts in favor of the objects of such desires. In commonsense cases of desires to act, the goodness of the action that is the object of the desire in turn seems to rationalize performing the action(s) that are instrumental or constitutive means to performing the desired action. If I have Davidson’s desire to illuminate the room, I take illuminating the room to be in some respect good, hence to be an action I have some reason to perform. The goodness of this action in turn rationalizes other actions, e.g. flipping the light switch, that are instrumental to or constitutive of performing the desired action.

We have encountered such constitutive reason dependence before, in the accounts of deontic evaluation offered by our central alternatives to consequentialism ([chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The_1)). Just as deontic evaluations on these alternative theories are reason dependent evaluations, so too desires, on this default view, are reason dependent attitudes, attitudes that depend upon evaluative outlooks that in part constitute them. These valuations provide the agent with reasons to act befitting the desirability of the object of the desire. With our default account of desire in place, we are now in position to take up the three commitments that we have drawn from the Standard Story of Action, beginning with Commitment 1.

## **Section III: Commitment 1**

One strategy is simply to deny Commitment 1, in particular to deny that desires play such a role in rationalizing intentional actions. Tim Scanlon, apparently among the foremost opponents of Commitment 1, argues that substantive desires, properly understood, are limited to “desires in the directed-attention sense,” (1998, 39) and denies that such desires play the fundamental rationalizing role in the practical sphere that beliefs play in the theoretical sphere. More generally, he argues that we “should not take ‘desires’ to be a special source of motivation, independent of our seeing things as reasons.” (1998, 40) By denying the fundamental rationalizing role for practical propositional attitudes claimed for desires on the Standard Story, Scanlon eliminates any presumption towards the claim that all actions are rationalized as bringing about the outcomes that are the objects of such propositional attitudes.[[135]](#footnote-135) He focuses instead upon intentions, attitudes commonly taken to have actions to be performed rather than propositional contents to be made true or brought about as their objects, arguing that “in order to intend to do something I must take myself to have a reason for *doing* that thing.” (1998, 21) Practical reasons are fundamentally reasons to intend to phi and to phi, but there is no presumption on Scanlon’s account in favor of the teleological conception’s claim that all such reasons to act are reasons to bring about some outcome, hence there is no presumption in favor of the consequentialist evaluative framework. His rejection of outcome-centered ethics is supported by his rejection of this core element of the Standard Story captured by Commitment 1, paving the way for a non-consequentialist theory of value that incorporates reasons to act and refrain from acting that are not reasons to bring about.[[136]](#footnote-136) Such a strategy can leave the outcome-centered account of desire in place, but marginalizes its role in rationalizing action. Even if “desires” are understood broadly as encompassing all “pro-attitudes,” Scanlon suggests that they fail to capture many of our reasons to intend to act and to act. (1998, 50)

Scanlon’s strategy for rejecting Commitment 1, however, is difficult to reconcile with other aspects of his own account, and these difficulties are instructive. First, certain aspects of his account of beliefs undermine his grounds for rejecting the broad rationalizing role of desires defended by advocates of Commitment 1. Second, other grounds for his rejection of Commitment 1 appear to rely, at least implicitly, on his continued endorsement of Commitment 3—the outcome-centered account of desires. It is Scanlon’s failure to free himself from the outcome-centered account of desires, I suggest, that is at the root of these difficulties. I will take up the first problem first.

I have demonstrated elsewhere (2007) that Scanlon’s account of judgment-sensitive attitudes generally, in particular as it is manifested in his account of beliefs, appears to support rather than undermine a broad, substantive role for desire in rationalizing action (of the sort that can support Commitment 1). In particular, he makes a case for beliefs as playing a broad, substantive role in theoretical reasoning and deliberation that is strikingly similar to that presupposed by advocates of Commitment 1 for desires in practical reasoning and deliberation; moreover, his case for a broad, substantive rationalizing role for beliefs in the theoretical sphere appears to carry over directly to a case for a broad, substantive rationalizing role for desires in the practical sphere. Beliefs, he argues, are judgment-sensitive attitudes, such that to believe that P is “to take P to be supported by the best evidence.” (1998, 35) But Scanlon is clear that beliefs are not mere placeholders for the reasons that provide such evidence. “Belief,” he argues, “is not merely a matter of judgment but of the connections, over time, between this judgment and dispositions to feel conviction, to recall as relevant, to employ as a premise in further reasoning, and so on.” (1998, 35) It is in virtue of their judgment-sensitivity to reasons that beliefs supply a person’s justification, but the relevant dispositions are crucial to the central explanatory role that beliefs play. These two dimensions of belief, their judgment-sensitivity to reasons for believing and the relevant dispositions to recall them as relevant, employ them as a premise, act in accordance with them, etc., explain the broad substantive role that beliefs play in theoretical reasoning and deliberation.[[137]](#footnote-137)

All of these grounds for taking beliefs to play a broad, substantive role in theoretical reasoning and justification seem to provide an even more compelling case for taking desires to play a broad, substantive role in practical reasoning and deliberation, the kind of role presupposed by Commitment 1. Desires too are judgment-sensitive attitudes,[[138]](#footnote-138) such that to desire is to take the object of desire to be in some respect desirable for reasons. But if it is clear, as Scanlon argues, that belief is not merely a matter of judgment but of the connections over time between this judgment and dispositions, this seems even more clearly to be true of desire. To desire is not merely to judge the object of desire to be desirable for reasons, but to be disposed to deploy the desire as a premise in further reasoning, recall it as relevant, act as befitting the object of the desire, etc. The parallel with beliefs generally should lead us to expect both that it is in virtue of their judgment-sensitivity to reasons that desires generally supply a person’s justification, and that dispositions constitutive of desire are crucial to the central explanatory role that desires play. These complementary dimensions of judgment-sensitivity to reasons for desiring and dispositions to recall as relevant, employ as a premise, act as befitting its object, etc., would seem to account for a broad, substantive role for desires in practical reasoning and deliberation, and in particular for the role of desires in rationalizing action.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Beliefs, even perceptual beliefs, are in Scanlon’s view rightly understood as constituted by elements that look both to reasons for taking their contents to be true, and to dispositions to infer, recall when relevant, and act in accordance with their truth. In the complete absence of either element we appropriately question whether the agent really holds the relevant belief. Moreover, it is in virtue of belief manifesting both elements that such attitudes can be understood as playing a broad, substantive role in theoretical reasoning and deliberation. But it seems equally clear that, because desires manifest these judgment-sensitive and dispositional elements, they should play the broad, substantive role rationalizing actions that is suggested by Commitment 1. Rationalizations of action that effectively respond to Anscombe’s “Why?” question explain action and provide what the agent takes to be her justification in acting. Desires, at least on such an account of desires paralleling Scanlon’s own account of beliefs, seem ideally suited to supply both explanation and purported justification in virtue of their judgment-sensitive and dispositional dimensions.[[140]](#footnote-140) Beliefs, Scanlon suggests, are not mere placeholders for theoretical reasons; indeed, if we have the reasons but lack the relevant dispositions, we do not believe, and our subsequent theoretical reasoning and practical deliberation will be distorted accordingly. But by analogy Scanlon should hold that desires are not mere placeholders for relevant reasons to act and interact; indeed, if we have the reasons but lack the relevant dispositions, we do not desire to do what we have reasons to, and our subsequent practical reasoning and deliberation will be distorted accordingly. The result is accounts of believing and desiring as occupying broad, substantive positions in the space of reasons, a space that extends both to perception and to action. Such an account suggests that desires do play the role endorsed by Commitment 1.

Why then such resistance to exploring the obvious analogy between the broad, substantive role for beliefs that Scanlon endorses in theoretical reasoning and deliberation and a broad, substantive role for desires in practical reasoning and deliberation? I suggest that this resistance is in part explained by the second difficulty, that when Scanlon entertains a broader “pro attitude” understanding of desire, an account upon which desires could supply the rationales for actions, he continues to endorse Commitment 3, holding that any such desires must have objects that are appropriately captured by propositional contents in propositional form: “the object of a desire is some state of affairs: to have a desire is to desire that something should be the case.” (1998, 50) Such a view assumes that even in the broad, pro attitude sense of desire, any target desires to act and desires for things can readily be converted without distortion into propositional attitudes, with states of affairs to be promoted as their objects. It is such propositional form that captures their real objects, aims, etc. Because Scanlon holds both 1)that many reasons are not reasons to bring about outcomes, and 2)that desires, even in the broad pro attitude sense, must have propositional contents to be promoted as their objects, hence can only rationalize bringing it about that such contents obtain, he must hold 3)that desires, even in the broad pro attitude sense, must have a marginal role in rationalizing action. But this is simply to assume the outcome-centered account of desires as propositional attitudes, adopting Commitment 3 without argument in his argument against Commitment 1. These difficulties internal to Scanlon’s account highlight the importance of Commitment 3. It is thus to Commitments 2 and 3, the case both that all target desires, their surface grammar notwithstanding, can be propositionalized, and that such a propositionalized form captures the central features of the target desires without alteration or mischaracterization, that I will now turn.

## **Section IV: Against Commitment 3: The Perils of Propositionalizing**

Recall Commitments 2 and 3:

**Commitment 2:** All desires, regardless of their surface grammar, can be propositionalized, put into propositional form.

**Commitment 3:** Propositionalized form captures the relevant features of all desires without alteration or mischaracterization, e.g. the aim and object of the desire, the guise under which the agent takes the desire’s object to be good, and the rationale for action it provides.

The default view accepts both commitments, that all desires, regardless of their natural form or surface grammar, can be propositionalized, and that propositionalizing converts them without alteration or mischaracterization of their aims, objects, evaluative outlooks, and rationales for action into propositional form, with propositional contents captured by that clauses as their objects.[[141]](#footnote-141) It follows that the central features of all such desires are perspicuously captured as propositional attitudes. A growing number of philosophers have come to challenge this orthodoxy,[[142]](#footnote-142) and we have already encountered reasons in earlier chapters to question it. Even advocates of the view readily allow that the natural expression (Sumner’s “surface grammar”) of many desires is in infinitival form, as wants and desires to phi, that in such form desires appear to have actions as their objects, and that what appears to be good or desirable is the performance of such actions. Such desires seem naturally to be understood as rationalizing the performance of the actions that are instrumental to or constitutive of the performance of the action that is their object. To appropriate yet another of Davidson’s examples, I desire to improve the taste of the stew, and such a desire rationalize actions, e.g. chopping onions and adding coriander, that are constitutive or instrumental means to performing the desired actions. We have seen that other desires appear most naturally to have things as their objects, e.g. a car or a vacation, reflecting reasons to interact with them reflecting the agent’s evaluative outlook towards them, e.g. to possess, work on, drive, and/or own the Tesla that one desires, or to plan, save for, and take a vacation. Still other desires do seem to be captured most naturally, and without any need for conversion, as propositional attitudes with propositional contents to be promoted as their objects, e.g. the desire that some particular celebrity comes to my fundraiser, or that the number of trial judges be doubled.

But Commitments 2 and 3 reflect the default view, that all such desires can be propositionalized, and that this is to convert them into the form in which their real aims and objects, the rationales for action that they provide, and the evaluative outlooks that in part constitute them are all captured most perspicuously. We have seen that such a conversion is taken to illuminate both the fundamental contrast between desire and belief, and certain relevant symmetries between desires and beliefs. If the aims, objects, evaluative outlooks, and rationales supplied by all desires are captured most perspicuously in their propositionalized forms as propositional attitudes, then all such desires, properly understood, rationalize actions bringing about the outcomes that their objects, the contents of these propositions, are true.

Some who reject Commitment 3 argue that it is infinitival form, desires and wants *to phi*, rather than propositional form, desires and wants *that phi*, that best reveals the central features of all desires.[[143]](#footnote-143) I will join these critics in mounting a case against Commitment 3. But although my argument will draw upon some elements of theirs, mine is framed both to emphasize continuity with the argument against consequentializing developed in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The), and to remain agnostic, as many of these views do not, concerning the aforementioned standard feature of desires in everyday discourse—that desires seem naturally to have objects of various kinds, including actions, states of affairs (captured as propositional contents), things, people, and character traits.

I will demonstrate in what follows that under the guise of benign conversion of target desires into propositional form, propositionalizing systematically purges all desires, reasons to act, values, and actions that cannot themselves be accommodated by outcome-centered ethics. For simplicity, my focus in what follows will be upon target desires that seem naturally to take infinitival form, and to have actions to be performed as their objects—desires to phi. I will thus be referring to the infinitival form of such desires, the natural (“surface grammar”) form of such desires that is the target of conversion, when invoking the target form, and to the propositionalized form of such infinitival target desires as the product of the proposed conversion. The propositionalizing to which I refer in what follows is the process of putting the target infinitival desire into propositional form, the form of a propositional attitude.

I will show that propositionalizing such desires to act in fact supplants the objects of agents’ target desires to act with propositional contents to be brought about, supplants the reasons to act and to interact that such target desires supply with reasons to promote, supplants the values under the guise of which such actions and things are taken to be valuable with values that can be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, and supplants the aim of performing an action that it not a promoting with the aim of promoting some outcome. Outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics are rendered inevitable, and alternatives are doomed, by what is typically presented as an uncontroversial and neutral framework in the philosophy of mind for the debate between consequentialists and their critics. The propositionalizing strategy of Commitments 2 and 3 illegitimately determines the outcome-centered victor of the ethical war in setting the terms for engagement among opposing views.

In the remainder of this section I will proceed first by clarifying the features of the target infinitival desires, desires that seem most naturally to take actions as their objects. I will then present the propositionalizing process for converting such desires into propositional attitudes, purportedly without alteration or mischaracterization of their central features, before demonstrating that such purported conversion instead mischaracterizes the target desires; indeed, that it alters every relevant feature, in the process purging all of the non-outcome-centered elements of the target desires. I will close by demonstrating first that such a propositionalizing strategy, although offered as a homogenizing and simplifying device, in fact introduces byzantine complexity into the account of all target desires, and second that although such target desires are mischaracterized as propositional attitudes, propositionalizing does highlight the constitutive consequents of successfully acting on such desires. This last point suggests that the real insight supplied by propositionalizing such target desires only comes in to view with the recognition that these desires are not propositional attitudes, and that propositionalizing does not after all capture their aims, objects, rationales, and evaluative outlooks.

***Desires in Infinitival Form***

To clarify the features of such desires with actions as their objects, it is useful first to recall from chapters [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) and [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) the commonsense account of actions. Typical actions are temporally extended performances undertaken for reasons, and the aim of every action is its successful performance guided by the reasons that the agent has for undertaking it, the reasons in light of which it can be identified as the action that it is.[[144]](#footnote-144) The agent’s reasons for undertaking any such intentional performance guide her in rendering aspects of the action determinate along the way, provide standards that mark its completion, etc.

Consider now the central features of our target infinitival desires, desires with such actions as their apparent objects. The *object* of a typical desire to phi, to go for a hike, or to practice the guitar, or to plant a garden, or to bake a cake, or to keep a promise, is a complex, temporally extended action of hiking, practicing, planting, baking, or keeping a promise. The evaluative outlook of each such desire is supplied by a nexus of values that reflect or are reflected in reasons to perform the action that is their object. The aim of such a desire is to perform the action that is its object guided by one’s reasons for undertaking it. Such desires rationalize undertaking the performance of actions that are instrumental or constitutive means to performing the actions thar are their objects, e.g. blocking out time, putting on my hiking boots, driving to the trail head, etc., or going to the gardening center, replenishing the soil, digging furrows, etc. It is useful to summarize these apparent features of desires in infinitival form:

**Object**: *an action*.

**Evaluative Outlook**: Values that reflect or are reflected in reasons *to perform an action*.

**Aim**: *to perform the action* that is its object for the reasons it is desirable to do so.

**Rationale**: for undertaking actions that are instrumental or constitutive means to performing the action that is its object guided by the reasons for undertaking it.

***Proposed Conversion into Propositionalized Form***

Consider again Sumner’s proposal for converting such desires to phi into desires that I phi, beginning with a desire in infinitival form, e.g.:

I want to go to the party.

The suggestion is that such a desire is more perspicuously characterized as a propositional attitude:

I want that I go to the party.

To believe that psi is to take psi to be true for reasons, and such beliefs rationalize other beliefs; to desire that psi, where desiring that I phi is merely a special case of desiring that psi, is on this view to take the propositional content to be desirable to bring about for reasons. Such desires rationalize acting to make psi true, and, in such cases in which psi is “I phi,” to make it true that “I phi,” that an act of the phiing type by me happens.

My desire to go to the party has now been propositionalized.[[145]](#footnote-145) Commitment 3 holds that the object of the desire in its natural infinitival form, the desire to go to the party, is not altered or mischaracterized in propositionalized form; rather, the aim, object and rationale strictly and most perspicuously speaking, are brought more clearly into view by conversion of the desire from an infinitival into a propositional form. The form that reveals the deep structure of such desires may be more awkward to the ear, yet just as the real object of every belief can be most perspicuously captured in propositional form, the suggestion is that the real object of every desire can be most perspicuously captured in its propositional form, the form revealed by propositionalizing it.

But consider the central features of the propositionalized form of the target desire. The object of the target desire was an action to be performed; the object of the propositionalized form is a content to be promoted, an event or state of affairs to be brought about (that an act of type phi by me happens). The evaluative outlook of the target desire was provided by values reflected in reasons to perform an action; the evaluative outlook of the propositionalized form is provided by values reflected in reasons to promote an outcome—that an action by me of some specified type happens. The aim of the target desire is to perform the action that is its object; the aim of the propositionalized form is to promote the outcome that its propositional content is true. The target desires rationalize instrumental and constitutive means to performing the actions that are their objects; the propositionalized forms rationalize actions bringing it about that the states of affairs that are their objects, the contents of the propositions, obtain. Every central feature of the target desire is altered by putting it into propositionalized form. In particular, every action-centered feature of the target desire is purged, leaving outcome-centered features in their place. The features of non-outcome-centered target desires conveying reasons to act that are not reasons to promote are purged by propositionalizing, leaving only outcome-centered desires, desires that supply only reasons to promote. But if all of the features of the target desire are altered by propositionalizing it, and in particular if propositionalizing it scrapes off the non-outcome-centered features of the target desire, features that are supported by commonsense and endorsed by our alternative theories, then the purported “conversion” seems instead to supplant the target desire with a different desire with a different object and a different aim constituted in part by a different evaluative outlook, a desire that provides a different rationale for different actions. Commitment 3 should be rejected.

***Propositionalizing as Distorting Target Desires***

This case against propositionalizing has the same structure as the case presented in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The) against consequentializing standard alternative ethical theories. There I demonstrated that 1)alternatives to consequentialism offer accounts of deontic evaluation such that the reasons upon which such evaluations depend are partially constitutive of the actions evaluated, and that 2) consequentializing such theories, far from securing deontic equivalence with the target theories, elides such reason dependent evaluations of the target actions entirely from view, hopelessly distorting the target theories. Here I will show that the problem with propositionalizing target desires in infinitival form is the same: 1)desires are reason dependent attitudes, attitudes constituted in part by evaluative outlooks in light of which the agent has reasons to take their object to be in some respect good or desirable, and 2)propositionalizing desires to phi, far from converting such desires without distortion, elides from view the evaluative outlooks towards phiing that partially constitute such desires and the reasons that reflect such values. Desires *to phi* are desires to undertake a performance, phiing, guided by the reasons for which the agent desires to undertake it, reasons in light of which she judges undertaking such a performance to be desirable. Desires *that I phi*, by contrast, are desires to bring it about through appropriate performances that an act of a certain type by me, a phiing, happens. The original reasons to phi are supplanted by reasons to bring about the outcome that I perform an action of this type—that I make “I phi” true, and the original values are supplanted by outcome-centered values—values that are appropriately reflected in reasons to promote the outcome that I perform an act of type phi. Consequentializing elides from view a target theory’s evaluative outlooks towards the actions that are their objects, distorting the target theory account of deontic evaluation. Propositionalizing, in eliding from view the reason dependent evaluative outlook that in part constitutes such a desire to phi, mischaracterizes the target desire, swapping it out for a different desire with a different object constituted by a different evaluative outlook, a desire that rationalizes promoting outcomes.

Consider an example of such a target desire to act, my desire to bake a cake.[[146]](#footnote-146) The apparent object of such a desire is my action, baking a cake—a temporally extended performance by me that I view under the guise of some evaluative outlook towards the action as desirable to perform. To act successfully on such a desire is, ceteris paribus, to perform the desired action guided by the reasons and values in light of which it appears desirable. The aim of such a desire is thus to perform the action that is its object, to bake a cake, guided by the reasons that it is desirable for me to do so. Such a desire in turn rationalizes my performance of actions that are constitutive or instrumental means to my baking a cake guided by such a rationale. Crucially, because the attitude is constituted in part by an evaluative outlook towards this action, my baking a cake, it is dependent upon the reasons that reflect such an evaluative outlook towards the action as in some respect good. If, for example, my baking a cake is desirable under the guise of my love for my son, reflected in reasons to do something special for his birthday, then successfully achieving my aim will involve such a value and the reasons reflecting it, guiding and rendering more determinate the action in question, e.g. providing reasons for baking my son’s favorite kind of cake, finishing before his birthday party, making a cake of a certain size, etc.

My love for my son is reflected in reasons to do something special for his birthday. Baking a cake is doing something special for his birthday. The contours of the performance -- when to complete it, what kind of cake to bake, etc. -- are provided by my reasons for baking it reflecting my love for him. My desire to bake it for these reasons in turn rationalizes going to the store for eggs, mixing ingredients, and other instrumental and constitutive means to completing this performance of baking a cake. Similarly, if my desire to tell Smith the truth is constituted in part by reasons that reflect my respect for Smith as a person, then such reasons will guide my performance of this action to completion, rationalizing not just my telling her, but what I tell her, how I tell her, when I tell her, etc.[[147]](#footnote-147) Such typical actions are complex performances that unfold over an extended period of time.[[148]](#footnote-148) The agent’s reasons for acting, reflecting the values in light of which she takes her phiing to be valuable, guide the performance of any action rationalized by a desire to act, rendering it determinate in the necessary ways as the performance unfolds, and determining what constitutes its successful completion.[[149]](#footnote-149)

The alterations that result from the propositionalizing of desires to phi to every one of its features, including the object of the desire, the aim of the desire, the rationale for action the desire provides, the evaluative outlook under which the agent takes the object of the desire to be desirable, and the reasons that such an evaluative outlook reflects, can be made vivid through return to our example, but now to the propositionalized form of the desire, a desire that I bake a cake. The object of my desire to bake a cake is an action, baking a cake; the object of my desire that I bake a cake is the event that is the content of the proposition, the occurrence of an action of the cake baking type by me. The evaluative outlook in the target desire is towards the action of baking a cake for the reasons that reflect such an evaluative outlook, e.g. to bake a cake in order to do something special out of love for my son; the evaluative outlook in the propositionalized desire is towards the content of the proposition that I bake a cake as desirable to be brought about, reflected in reasons to promote the outcome that an intentional act of this cake baking type by me happens, bringing it about that “I bake a cake” is true. The reasons reflecting such an evaluative outlook are not my original reasons to phi—e.g. to bake a cake out of love for my son, reasons guiding the performance of action that is not the promoting of an outcome. They are instead reasons to bring about the outcome that I bake a cake reflecting the value of the occurrence of an action of this type by me. My apparent original reasons to bake a cake, reasons that in part constitute this desire to perform an action that is not the promoting of an outcome, are displaced in propositionalized form by reasons reflecting the value of the outcome that a cake baking by me happens, reasons to bring it about that an action of this type by me happens. To summarize these features of propositionalized desires:

**Object**: not an action to be performed; but *a content to be brought about*.

**Evaluative Outlook**: Not values reflected in reasons to perform an action, but *values reflected in reasons to bring about the outcome that makes the proposition true*.

**Aim**: Not to perform the action that is its object for the reasons it is desirable to do so, but *to bring about the content* that is its object for the reasons it is desirable to bring it about.

**Rationale**: Not for undertaking actions that are instrumental or constitutive means to performing the action guided by the reasons for undertaking it, but *for undertaking actions to bring about the content of the proposition guided by the reasons for promoting such an outcome.*

With the relevant features of the two forms distinguished, it seems apparent that propositionalizing the desire alters every significant feature of the target desire, from the object and the aim of the desire to the evaluative outlook toward the desire’s object. The “conversion” thus appears in fact to be a replacement of one desire, including its object, aim, evaluative outlook, and rationale for action, with a propositionalized counterpart that fits within the framework of an outcome-centered account of desires.

This result does “homogenize” desires, but the standard assumption is that propositionalizing target desires homogenizes them in a way that reveals their features more perspicuously. Instead, propositionalizing seems to achieve this homogenization by systematically purging all of the non-outcome-centered features of the target desires, desires that resist homogenization, substituting in their places outcome-centered counterparts. Yet these features reflect commonsense convictions about our values, reasons, and actions, features that find support in our alternative theories. In sum, because:

1) The evaluative outlook of the target desire involves values that are reflected in reasons to phi, reasons that count in favor of the desirability of the action, and

2) Such an evaluative outlook and reasons in part constitute the desire itself, and

3) Such an evaluative outlook and reasons are themselves elided from view on the outcome-centered “conversion” into propositionalized form, replaced by reasons to bring about an outcome that an act of the phiing type by me happens reflecting values all of which are captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes, it follows that

4) The target desire partly constituted by such features, by its object, aim, evaluative outlook, and rationale for action, is elided from view in favor of a different desire.

This suggests that Commitment 3, the cornerstone of the non-ethical argument for consequentialism, is false.

The reasons resulting from the conversion are still reasons to act, but in particular to promote the occurrence of the performance of an act of some type by me because of the value of such a performance happening, leaving indeterminate the reasons for which the action of that type is intentionally performed. But just as I am not acting rightly on standard alternative ethical theories if I don’t act for the right reasons, so too it is not the same desire on the default account of desire unless it is constituted by the same evaluative outlook reflecting the same reasons. More importantly, because the evaluative outlook constituting a desire to phi invokes values that count in favor of phiing, values that reflect and/or are reflected in reasons to phi, but its propositionalized form only invokes values that count in favor of outcomes to be brought about—of propositional contents to be made true—it elides from view any such values that cannot themselves be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted. The Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value that renders outcome-centered ethics inevitable is introduced into this default account of desire under the guise of benign conversion.

In propositionalized form some mode of valuing friendship or respect for persons can be recognized, e.g. minimizing disrespect or maximizing the quality or quantity of my friendships. But because such values can only be reflected in reasons to promote the contents of the propositions that are their objects, their relevance to reasons for action must be captured in rankings of outcomes to be brought about—reasons reflecting adherence to the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value. But the values that in part constitute my desires to go to my friend’s party, bake a cake, and tell Smith the truth are values reflected in reasons to act and interact that are not reasons to promote, values that can only be mischaracterized by insistence that their relevance to reasons for action must be captured entirely in rankings of outcomes to be brought about.[[150]](#footnote-150)

***The Byzantine Complexity of Infinitival Desires in Propositionalized Form***

The awkwardness of propositionalized forms is purportedly justified in large part through appeal to the theoretical simplicity of an account of beliefs and desires as having contrasting directions of fit towards the same objects. But propositionalizing instead introduces byzantine complexity into the structure of such target desires. In infinitival form the desire to phi is striking in its apparent simplicity:

**Object:** There is one object of such a desire, an action.

**Aim:** There is one aim, performance of the desired action guided to completion by the reasons the agent takes it to be desirable.

**Evaluative Outlook:** There is one clear evaluative outlook, towards this action as desirable to perform.

**Rationale:** There is one clear rationale provided by such a desire, for actions that are instrumental and constitutive means to performing the desired action, all guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking the performance.

In its propositionalized form, by contrast, the resulting desire that I phi is striking for its extraordinary complexity:

**Object:** The object of the desire that I phi is the event/state of affairs that an action of the phiing type by me happens. But because no rationale in performing an act of the phiing type is specified, only that I should bring it about that I perform an act of his type, a question remains concerning what desire actually rationalizes the performance of the act of phiing, and what the object of *this* desire is.

**Aim:** In place of one aim of the target desire, there are now two aims. The first is the aim of the desire that I phi, the aim of bringing it about that I perform an action of the phiing type. The second is my aim in performing the particular instance of an action of the phiing type that I do, guided by my reasons for thus phiing. My actions in pursuit of the first aim, bringing it about that I phi, will depend upon my evaluative outlook towards my phiing happening. But there is a wide range of possible aims in performing an action of any particular type, as Parfit’s gangster reminds us, and my aim in bringing it about that I phi might be compatible with many different aims in performing an action of the phiing type. These aims will differ, and each will differ from the agent’s aim in the target desire to phi.

**Evaluative Outlook:** In place of one clear evaluative outlook, the target desire outlook towards phiing as desirable, there is now both an evaluative outlook towards the event/state of affairs that I perform an act of the phiing type as desirable to bring about, and the evaluative outlook guiding whatever intentional phiing instantiates this type.

**Rationale for Action:** In place of one clear rationale provided by the target desire, there is now both a rationale provided by the desire that I phi for performing actions promoting my performance of an action of the phiing type, and another rationale provided by whatever reasons guide my particular instantiation of intentionally phiing.

The byzantine complexity of such desires in propositionalized form reflects the fact that although in each case the propositionalized desire is taken to rationalize actions by me to bring about its outcome, its outcome is itself a type of action by me intentionally performed for reasons. Although propositionalizing is advocated in the name of theoretical simplicity and elegance, it instead introduces additional complexity into the understanding of all such target desires; moreover, we have already seen that the resulting desires 1) can rationalize very different actions (those bringing about an outcome) from the target desires, 2) they have different aims (bringing it about that I perform an action of some type) from the target desires, 3) they introduce new objects (the propositional content that I act) distinct from those of the target desires, and 4) they are constituted in part by an evaluative outlook involving new reasons (reasons to promote the outcome) reflecting new values, values that count in favor of an outcome to be promoted, not an action to be performed. Such a propositionalized form thus not only alters the rationale, object, aim, reasons, and values constituting the desire in infinitival form, it replaces a straightforward, simple account of desires to phi with what, absent additional argument, would seem to be an implausibly complex and unmotivated alternative that elides from view our non-outcome-centered values, reasons, attitudes and actions, dictating, if adopted, a fundamentally outcome-centered evaluative framework.

***First vs Second and Third Personal Cases: The Misleading Analogy***

Nonetheless, such conversion to propositional form might seem to achieve simplicity and avoid complexity along other dimensions. My desire to go to the party and my desire that you go to the party seem to have fundamentally different things as objects; the first naturally takes an action by me as its object, the second has a propositional content—that you perform an action—as its object. But within the context of the view that the object, etc. of my desire to go are better captured in propositionalized form, my resulting desire that I go to the party and my desire that you go to the party have the same kind of things as objects; in each case I have reasons to bring about the outcome that some propositional content is true, and in particular that it is true that someone performs an action of a particular type. The only difference is that in one case that “someone” is me. In place of two structurally different forms with different things as objects, one fundamentally infinitival and the other fundamentally propositional, we now have a simplified account with but one form.

We are now in a position to see that such “simplicity” comes at the cost both of byzantine complexity, and of apparent alteration and mischaracterization of the objects of the first person desires, the rationales they provide, and the guise in which they are taken by the agent to be good, alterations that do not result in the second/third personal case.[[151]](#footnote-151) But such “simplicity” also seems to overlook a fundamental and troubling disanalogy. In the second/third personal case I do not have rational agency with respect to your action of going to the party, you do. My desire rationalizes taking steps to cause you, e.g. by invoking certain reasons, to intentionally go to the party. On the propositionalizing account, bizarrely, my stance towards my actions is my stance towards yours—in each case it is a stance towards a type of action that I have reasons to bring it about that someone performs. But this is for my stance towards my own actions in such cases not to be one of rational agency.[[152]](#footnote-152) It is a stance not in the first instance of doing such actions, but of bringing it about that they are done, albeit by me rather than you. The result is thus not an appealing symmetry, but profound alienation of each agent from her own rational agency.

## **Section V: Towards a Circumscribed Role for Propositionalizing and Propositional Form**

We saw in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The) that there is both an obvious response to the inability to consequentialize alternative ethical theories within the reason independence assumption, and an obvious problem with that response. The tempting response is to abandon the assumption, building such reasons, and the values that they reflect, into the outcomes. The problem, we saw, is that the result is no longer plausibly understood as a substantive version of consequentialism. The occurrence of the action of the virtuous agent will be ranked highly, for example, and that of Parfit’s gangster will not, because the best “outcome” just is acting rightly for what virtue ethics identifies as the right reasons, reasons reflecting what the target theory identifies as the fundamental things of value.

Similarly, it might seem that if the problem is that propositionalizing target desires loses the aim and object of the desire along with its evaluative outlook, in the process alienating rational agents from all desires to act and all actions that are not promotings, the solution is to build them all in to the propositional content to be brought about. The propositionalized form of the desire to tell the truth out of respect for the person with whom I am interacting, for example, would be the desire that I tell the truth out of respect for the person with whom I am interacting; the propositional form of my desire to go to my friend’s party out of friendship would be the desire that I go to the party out of friendship. Since I can only bring about the outcome that such a propositional content is true by performing the action for the reasons that favor it reflecting the values that are constitutive of the desire in infinitival form, it might be thought that such features are now no longer altered or mischaracterized. Might such an approach to propositionalizing, an adjustment to our account of what is involved in putting target desires in propositional form (Commitment 2), allow for conversion of infinitival desires into propositional form without alteration or distortion?

It does not, because a parallel difficulty to the consequentializing analog of such a proposal emerges: the result is no longer a substantive propositionalized alternative to the infinitival form of the desire to phi. The rationale for phiing that guides agents in such cases is provided by reasons to phi reflecting values that often cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes. To bring it about that I phi for my target desire reasons to phi reflecting the value of phiing is to act on an intention to phi that presupposes a desire to phi for such reasons.[[153]](#footnote-153) The agent who successfully acts on this “propositionalized” desire is successfully acting to achieve the aim of the target desire, her evaluative outlook is supplied by the target desire, and her rationale for acting is the rationale for acting of the target desire.

Such a propositionalized form that incorporates all of the features of the target desire does not supplant the desire, it instead captures the constitutive consequence of acting on the desire in infinitival form—of successfully undertaking and completing the performance, thereby satisfying the desire to phi. Successfully acting on the desire to phi for the relevant reasons reflecting the relevant values manifested in infinitival form brings it about, in the constitutive consequence sense, that I phi for the relevant reasons reflecting the relevant values, e.g. that I tell the truth out of respect for the person with whom I am interacting and that I go to the party out of friendship. This constitutive consequence of the target desire is captured by a propositionalized form that builds in all of its non-outcome-centered features. The result is not a new outcome-centered form of the desire, but the same action-centered desire presented in a way that emphasizes its constitutive consequence.

Propositionalizing target desires by building in their target aims, objects, evaluative outlooks, and rationales thus highlights the constitutive consequence that is a necessary condition of successfully acting on the target desire to phi—what acting on the desire makes true in contrast with what holding a belief takes to be true. I desire to tell you the truth out of respect for you as a person. The only way that I can bring it about that I tell you the truth out of respect for you is to tell you the truth out of respect for you as a person—to perform the action that is the object of the desire in infinitival form for the reasons it is desirable to perform such an action, reasons to act reflecting values that cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted. If I do what I desire to do for the reasons that it is desirable, I bring it about, in the constitutive sense, that I do it—I make my doing it happen, making it true that it happens. The target desire captures an agent’s evaluative outlook towards and dispositions to perform actions in the world, and the distinctive forms that such actions take; its propositionalized form captures the alterations to the world that are the constitutive consequences of successful performances of the actions that are the objects of such desires.

Propositionalizing such target desires in this way, Brewer suggests, captures “a necessary . . . condition of the attainment of the desire’s end,” (2009, 21) the “making true” that contrasts with the “taking true” of belief, the constitutive consequent of successfully phiing. His distinction between weak and strong propositionalism, recall, characterizes strong propositionalism as the view that results in the distortion of target desires, the “view that the real intentional object of a desire is a proposition.” By contrast “weak propositionalism” is “the view that the object of any desire is capturable in propositional terms, in the sense that the truth of the relevant proposition is a necessary . . . condition for the attainment of the desire’s end.” (2009, 21) The latter is precisely what appears to be captured by propositionalizing desires that naturally take infinitival form—not the object of such a desire, but the proposition the truth of which is a necessary condition of successfully attaining the desired aim. Lavin and Boyle make a similar point, that such a form does not capture the agent’s want, it captures “what will transpire if his want . . . is fulfilled.” (2010, 11–12) This constitutive consequence captured in propositionalized form reveals what each desire must make true in order successfully to achieve its aim. Such a propositionalized form thus does not offer an outcome-centered alternative to infinitival form and it does not demonstrate that such practical attitudes are really propositional attitudes; instead, it captures the constitutive consequences of successfully acting on such target practical attitudes that are not propositional attitudes.

Consider now target desires that have valuable states of affairs (rather than actions or things) as their objects. Such objects *are* naturally captured as propositional contents, e.g. my desire that you come to my party. The things that are the objects of such desires are captured without mischaracterization as propositional contents. Such practical attitudes will be captured without alteration as propositional attitudes, but precisely because their objects, the things the desiring agent takes to be valuable, are states or affairs/events rather than actions, objects, or character traits. The aim of such desires with states of affairs as their objects will be promoting such states of affairs, such desires will rationalize actions bringing about such states of affairs, and the relevant evaluative outlooks will be towards such states of affairs as to be promoted. Only in these cases in which the desire naturally takes propositional form, in which the surface grammar of the desire takes a propositional content to be promoted as its object, is bringing about this outcome both the end of the desire in the rationalizing sense and a constitutive consequence of achieving the desire’s end, of successfully acting on the desire that you come to the party.

The outcome-centered account of desire holds that all desires operate the way this subset of desires does. But absent additional reasons we have seen that such an account seems to shoehorn most desires into a form that distorts their aims and objects, the evaluative outlooks towards their objects, and the rationale for action that they provide. It imposes an Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value at the foundational level, in the default accounts of attitudes in the philosophy of mind and the theory of action. But only practical attitudes that naturally have states of affairs to be promoted as their objects are propositional attitudes, because only in such cases does propositional form capture their aims, objects, evaluative outlooks, and rationales for action.

Practical attitudes with other objects are only mischaracterized as propositional attitudes. What propositionalizing of such target desires captures, a necessary condition of successfully acting on them, can only be appreciated by first getting clear what it does not capture—the aim, object, evaluative outlook, and rationale for action of the target desire to phi. Because desires that phi, by contrast, have states of affairs to be promoted as their objects, they can be captured without alteration and mischaracterization as propositional attitudes in propositional form. Which practical attitudes are propositional attitudes, this suggests, is a reflection of the kind of thing of value the practical attitude is an attitude towards. Insisting that all such practical attitudes are fundamentally propositional attitudes mischaracterizes the central features of many if not most desires, in the process purging them of all features that resist incorporation into outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics.

## **Conclusion**

The propositionalizing of many desires seems clearly to distort the aims and objects of such desires and the reasons in light of which these objects are experienced by the agent as desirable. It does not illuminate the real objects and rationales constitutive of such attitudes, it supplants them with objects and rationales that dictate the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value. It introduces byzantine complexity in place of apparent simplicity, and apparently elides from view both the reasons upon which the objects of many desires depend and the values that they reflect, values whose relevance to reasons for action cannot be captured without distortion in relevant rankings of outcomes to be brought about. Just as consequentializing ethical theories either distorts such theories, or, if it avoids such distortion, collapses into the original theories themselves, propositionalizing desires and preferences either distorts such attitudes, or, if it avoids such distortion, collapses into the original non-propositionalized attitudes. Propositional form, this suggests, is not the form that captures the objects of many desires, or the values and reasons in light of which the agent experiences such objects as desirable. Such desires are not outcome-centered, do not dictate outcome-centered accounts of reasons to act or of the actions they rationalize, and provide no grounds for adopting an outcome-centered account of ethics, particularly in the face of the collapse of standard ethical arguments for doing so.

We have already seen in the first 3 chapters that the tyranny of outcomes in ethics is overthrown unless it can be grounded in the tyranny of outcomes at the non-ethical level. I demonstrated in [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The) that the non-ethical argument itself depends upon an outcome-centered account of desires. But we cannot plausibly propositionalize seemingly non-propositional, e.g. infinitival, desires for the same reasons that we cannot plausibly consequentialize seemingly non-consequentialist ethical theories. It is infinitival form that seems to capture the real objects and evaluative outlooks of many desires. Because the objects, aims, and outlooks of such desires are not outcome-centered, the non-ethical argument for an outcome-centered account of desires—and reasons, actions, and ethics—fails. Of course, if arguments can be provided that it is nonetheless such an infinitival form, such weighty evidence notwithstanding, that in fact distorts the real objects and evaluative outlooks of such desires, outcome-centered approaches might yet be vindicated. In the next chapter I will take up several lines of thought that might seem to provide such vindication. First among them will be alleged grounds touched upon in [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The), provided by the fundamental contrast in directions of fit between beliefs and desires.

# **Chapter 6: The Inadequacy of Supplemental Grounds for the Non-Ethical Argument**

Chapter 6 Abstract: The chapter highlights and argues against 3 considerations that might seem to shore up outcome-centered accounts of practical attitudes. It considers first whether appeal to the contrasting directions of fit of beliefs and desires provides support for the outcome-centered account of desire, and demonstrates that it does not; indeed, that Anscombe’s actual contrast reinforces an account of desires that is not outcome-centered. It next considers arguments from explanatory symmetry and simplicity, demonstrating that simplicity is no friend of the outcome-centered account of desires, and that a simple, symmetrical understanding of such attitudes as distinguished by their distinctive guidance—by the true and the good—provides no support for an outcome-centered account. Finally, the chapter considers whether a reductionist metaphysical naturalism provides such support, demonstrating that although certain extreme metaphysical positions may support an outcome-centered account of desires, a wealth of other metaphysical positions, including avowedly naturalist ones, do not.

Chapter 6 Keywords: Directions of Fit, Anscombe, Simplicity, Symmetry, Wittgenstein’s Question, Metaphysical Naturalism, Decompositional Account, Reductive Naturalism

## **Section I: Attempts to Shore Up the Outcome-Centered Account of Desire**

In the initial chapters I took up central intuitive and ethical arguments for outcome-centered ethics, demonstrating that they all fail. In particular, they all make two mistaken assumptions, that a non-deontic value rationale must be an outcome-based value rationale—the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value, and that every action brings about an outcome not just in the constitutive sense but in the rationalizing sense. The standard ethical arguments for outcome-centered ethics trade upon such mistaken assumptions, conflating non-deontic value rationales and outcome-centered non-deontic value rationales, and conflating bringing about in the constitutive sense with bringing about in the rationalizing sense. Indeed, with the conflations involved in these assumptions brought clearly into view, it becomes apparent that many of the considerations offered as supports for outcome-centered ethics in fact tell against such an approach.

We saw in [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The) that there is also a non-ethical argument for consequentialism grounded in the default outcome-centered account of desire, an account presupposed by the default (Standard) Story of action. The outcome-centered account of desire dictates outcome-centered accounts of reasons and actions, and, ultimately, of ethics. Many if not most desires appear to have actions and things, rather than propositional contents to be made true, as their objects. The standard claim is that such non-outcome-centered desires can be converted without alteration or mischaracterization into outcome-centered—propositional—form. But we saw in the previous chapter that this standard claim appears to be false. Conversion into propositional form profoundly alters the aims, objects, and evaluative outlooks of desires that do not naturally suggest such a form, and the result of such a “conversion” is to impose an outcome-centered constraint on the evaluative outlooks of such desires, purging them of their non-outcome-centered features and dictating outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics. Such target desires do not have propositional contents to be promoted as their objects, but without the outcome-centeredness of desires the non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics fails alongside its ethical counterparts. Here I take on, albeit perforce only in a provisional way, several strategies for salvaging the non-ethical argument, considerations that might be thought to shore up the case for an outcome-centered account of desires, and with it the cases for outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, values, and ethics.

## **Section II: The Argument from Contrasting Directions of Fit**

The appeal to contrasting directions of fit is often cited as vindicating the claim that propositionalized form must capture the real aim and object of any desire. The evaluative outlook constitutive of the desire, and the reasons that reflect it, would then count in favor of bringing it about that the content of the proposition is true. But with the apparent implausibility of the conversion into propositionalized form clearly in view, a more circumspect return to the appeal to direction of fit suggests that the same pattern of conflation that besets the ethical arguments for outcome-centered ethics is at work in the direction of fit argument for an outcome-centered account of desire.

The conflation becomes clear with a return to the origin in Anscombe of the modern distinction between directions of fit. Although Anscombe is commonly cited as reintroducing the direction of fit contrast into the modern debate,[[154]](#footnote-154) her actual contrast provides no support for an account of desires as attitudes with fundamentally propositional form; indeed, quite the contrary. Only an interpretation of her contrast that presupposes an outcome-centered account of desires yields such an interpretation of her account of the relevant contrast as between different kinds of propositional attitudes with contrasting directions of fit.

Anscombe’s central example is the contrast in “directions of fit” between two shopping lists, one the list of the person shopping, the other the list of the detective keeping a record of the person’s purchases. (2000, 56) The two lists stand in not for desires and beliefs, or for expressions of desires and beliefs, but for intentions to phi and beliefs that phi, or, more precisely, for expressions of intentions to phi and expressions of beliefs that phi. Even more specifically, they stand in, on the one hand, for expressions of intentions to phi and performances in the world of phi, and, on the other, for expressions of beliefs that phi and phi obtaining in the world. The relevant failure in the case of expressions of intention is *not on the reporting side but on the world side*—a failure of execution in performing the intended action in the world (“the mistake is not in the list but in the man’s performance”). In contrast, the failure of execution in the case of expressions of belief is *on the reporting side not on the world side*, a failure to accurately report what obtains in the world. (“the mistake is in the record”) (200, 56) The first is a failure of the performance executed in the world to fit the expressed intention; the second is a failure of expressed belief to fit what is the case in the world.[[155]](#footnote-155) There is a contrast here, but it in no way provides support for an outcome-centered account of desires, and of practical attitudes more generally. Indeed, the contrast is between intentions to phi that naturally take an infinitival form and beliefs that phi that naturally take a propositional form, not between two attitudes that take a propositional form, and not between beliefs and desires. And there is nothing about the account suggesting that among the desires cited to rationalize the relevant intentions to phi there are not desires to phi, desires with actions to be undertaken as their objects.[[156]](#footnote-156) There is no support, that is, provided by Anscombe’s account of direction of fit for the outcome-centered account of desire.

That said, if intentions to act, like actions themselves, are taken to be rationalized through appeal to desires, and every desire is assumed to be a desire that phi with an outcome to be promoted as its object, then every intention to act will be an intention to bring it about that some such propositional content is true. A failure in performance would then be a failure to alter the world to fit the propositional content of the desire that rationalizes it. Intentions to psi, on such an account, would be intentions to act to make the world fit the content of the desires that phi that rationalize them. Such an account would in turn support outcome-centered accounts of reasons, actions, and ethics.

This support, however, would come not from the appeal to contrasting directions of fit, but from the articulation of this contrast within an approach antecedently committed to an outcome-centered account of desires. An outcome-centered interpretation of the contrast is often presented as the contrast itself, but once the actual contrast is separated from this question-begging interpretation, it becomes clear that the contrast by itself provides no support for an outcome-centered account of desire.

Just as the slide from a compelling idea to an outcome-centered interpretation of this idea creates the illusion of a compelling ground for outcome-centered ethics, and the slide from the need for a non-deontic rationale to the need for an outcome-centered non-deontic rationale creates the illusion of a compelling ground for outcome-centered ethics, so too a slide from Anscombe’s direction of fit contrast, which provides no support for an outcome-centered account of desire, to an outcome-centered interpretation of this contrast (not shared by Anscombe) creates the illusion of a compelling ground for outcome-centered accounts of desire, reason, action, and ethics. Once the appeal to contrasting directions of fit is separated out from the prima facie implausible outcome-centered interpretation of it, it becomes clear that the direction of fit contrast, properly understood, not only does not mitigate the case for the implausibility of the outcome-centered account of desire, it reinforces it.

## **Section III: Arguments from Simplicity and Symmetry with Belief**

Additional considerations of simplicity and symmetry are also marshalled in support of the propositional attitudes account of desires. On a judgment-sensitive attitudes account of beliefs such as that invoked by Scanlon, the things that are the objects of beliefs are all captured without distortion as propositional contents, and the believer takes those things (states of affairs) and the propositional contents that capture them to be true for reasons. Considerations of symmetry might lead us to expect that on a judgment-sensitive attitudes account of desires the things that are their objects are all captured without distortion by propositional contents, and that the desirer takes the realizing of these things in the world to be good for reasons.[[157]](#footnote-157) But this is to take all desires to be captured without mischaracterization as propositional attitudes in propositional form, hence to take desires to aim at bringing it about that their propositional contents are true. (Commitment 3) Symmetry might thus be taken to support the view that these are two types of propositional attitudes, distinguished by their telic and alethic evaluative outlooks—by being under the guise of the true in the case of beliefs, and of the good in the case of desires, and by the differing dispositions to infer, recall as relevant, and act that are appropriate to these very different outlooks. Simplicity may seem to suggest that just as the most plausible account of beliefs takes them to have one type of thing as their objects, things that can all be captured without distortion in propositional contents, so too the most plausible account of desires will take them to have one type of thing as their objects, not a plethora of things including states of affairs, actions, things, character traits, etc. This type of thing would plausibly be captured in a form into which they can all be converted—propositional form.

We saw in the previous chapter that the strength of any such appeal to the simplicity of an account of desires as fundamentally propositional attitudes is illusory. The price of such alleged “simplicity” in the cases of desires that naturally take infinitival form is in fact byzantine complexity; moreover, such an account seems to mischaracterize the aims and objects of these and other desires, the agent’s evaluative outlooks towards their objects, and the rationales for action that such desires provide. What, then, of the appeal to symmetry, and to the elegance of an account of beliefs and desires as contrasting attitudes towards propositional contents, one an attitude of *making true*, of making the world conform to their content (as “constructed out of the concept-schema *bringing it about that . . .* ”), the other an attitude of *taking true*, of representing with their content “how the world anyway is.” (1995, 152) The arguments appealing to simplicity and to contrasting directions of fit have been shown no longer to support such an account of desire; indeed, to tell against it. Might this appealing symmetry be an independent source of support for such an outcome-centered account of desire?

The arguments developed in [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) do suggest relevant symmetries between beliefs and desires. But the symmetries suggested are not between types of propositional attitudes; moreover, the relevant symmetries are elided from view within a framework that takes all desires to be propositional attitudes. These arguments suggest that there are two relevant symmetries, the first between:

B1: What in believing the knower takes to be *true* for reasons.

D1: What in desiring the agent takes to be *good* for reasons.

The second between:

B2: What in believing the knower *takes to be true*.

D2: What in acting successfully on a desire the agent *makes true*.

Because the object of a target desire is often an action or an object that appears only to be mischaracterized as a propositional content in propositional form, propositional form does not seem to capture for such desires what the agent takes to be good for reasons (D1), why she takes it to be good, what her aim is in desiring it, etc. It does, however, capture what her successful action on the desire makes true (D2). We saw that successfully acting on my desire to bake a cake brings it about, in the constitutive consequence sense, that I bake a cake. Infinitival form captures the object of the desire, what the desirer takes to be good (D1), but the propositionalized form captures what acting on the desire makes true (D2)—that I bake a cake. Such desires to phi are not propositional attitudes, and what such desires take to be good, mirroring what beliefs take to be true, is lost in propositional form. But propositional form does capture D2, what acting on the desire makes true.

If we shoehorn such desires into propositional form, and treat their propositional contents in such a form as their objects, such an account will obscure the relevant symmetry between B1 and D1, not reveal it. It is the *propositional content* that the believer that phi takes to be true for reasons, but the *action* that the desirer to phi takes to be good for reasons. We also lose the real import of propositionalized form in capturing the second symmetry, between B2 and D2. It is precisely because propositional form in so many cases does *not* capture the object of the desire, what the desirer takes to be good for reasons, that it illuminates the symmetry between what in believing one takes to be true and what in acting on desires one makes true. But this is because such a form captures not the object of the target desire, but the constitutive consequence of successful action on the target desire.

These symmetries, in turn, highlight an illuminating asymmetry. The object of belief, unlike the object of desire, is always captured as a propositional content of a propositional attitude, because what beliefs take to be true is always some event/state of affairs in the world. The object of a desire, what the agent takes to be good for reasons, is often an action, character trait, or thing rather than a state of affairs captured without mischaracterization as a propositional content. If we are misled by illusory appeal to symmetry into characterizing such practical attitudes all as fundamentally propositional attitudes, then what in desiring we *take to be good* (D1) and what we *make true* (D2) must both be outcomes in the world captured by propositional contents. We will as a result fail to appreciate both of the relevant symmetries, between beliefs as takings to be true (B1) and desires as takings to be good (D1), and between what successful believers take to be true (B2) and what successful action on desires makes true (D2). In particular, we will mischaracterize the symmetry between taking to be true for reasons and taking to be good for reasons as always involving evaluative outlooks towards propositional contents, in the process mischaracterizing the objects of desires and the evaluative outlooks that partially constitute them. We will also mischaracterize the symmetry between the propositional forms of beliefs and desires, misinterpreting the constitutive consequence of successfully acting on a desire as the object of the desire. Target forms of desires capture what the agent takes to be good for reasons (D1), propositional forms of these desires capture the alterations to the world that are necessary conditions of successfully acting upon them (D2). Propositional forms of beliefs capture both what the agent takes to be true for reasons (B1), and the state of affairs in the world that is a necessary condition of successfully believing. (B2)

The misguided appeal to symmetry is invited by the tendency to conflate constitutive and rationalizing senses of bringing about. Because propositional form does capture what acting on any desire, regardless of its object, brings about in the constitutive sense, and the constitutive sense is conflated with the rationalizing sense, the temptation is to conclude that propositional form captures, for any desire, that state of affairs the desirability of which rationalizes its promotion. The mistake is all the more tempting because in cases in which the target desire does naturally have a state of affairs captured by a propositional content as its object, it is not a mistake. The mistake is generalizing this feature of some desires to a structural feature of all desires, regardless of their apparent objects.

I noted previously that the relevant symmetries between belief and desire that emerged in [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) do recognize a persisting asymmetry: although in the case of belief we take only one kind of thing, states of affairs, to be true, the account suggests that we take many different kinds of things to be good/desirable, and in this sense to be appropriate objects of desire. But isn’t such an asymmetry precisely what should be expected? Beliefs do have one kind of thing, states of affairs in the world, as their objects. Such objects are appropriately captured as propositional contents, and believers take these contents to be true for reasons. But desires naturally take many different kinds of things as their objects, and the evaluative outlooks appropriately adopted towards these different kinds of things are reflected in reasons to perform them, promote them, interact with them, cultivate them, etc., as befitting the object taken to be desirable and the evaluative outlook adopted towards it.

The preceding is only a bare sketch of an alternative way to understand the relevant symmetries between beliefs and desires, an alternative that can be arrayed alongside other such alternatives.[[158]](#footnote-158) But it is an alternative that avoids the many shortcomings that we have exposed in accounts of desires as propositional attitudes. Moreover, it aligns with commonsense views about reasons, actions, and attitudes, and in particular with the plurality of kinds objects of commonsense desires that agents take to be good/desirable. In addition, it supports a weak propositionalist account upon which propositionalizing makes explicit what acting on desires makes true (D2), in contrast with what beliefs take to be true (B2). It is, finally, an account that provides no support for the non-ethical argument for consequentialism; indeed, that casts further doubt on the foundations of this argument.

## **Section IV: The Argument from Metaphysical Naturalism**

We have focused up to this point in our discussion of actions upon the commonsense account of actions that unfolds naturally in answering Anscombe’s “Why?” question, and upon the role of desires in such an account. Intentional actions are performances guided, ceteris paribus, by the reasons that we have for undertaking them. The aim of any action is its successful performance guided by such reasons, and desires rationalize actions by supplying what the agent takes to be her reasons for acting, as beliefs rationalize in the theoretical sphere by supplying what the thinker takes to be his reasons for believing. The focus so far has been upon desires as supplying the *rationale* for actions, although this commonsense account also purports to be an account of the *cause* of action. (See Ford, 2014)

But the other question often taken to be central to the theory of action, Wittgenstein’s Question, asks “What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?” (1953, 621) This question highlights the causal rather than the rationalizing role of desires in an account of action. Foregrounding the question invites a very different, decompositional approach to understanding action,[[159]](#footnote-159) an approach that, if adopted, can provide support for an outcome-centered account of desire. On this approach the difference between things that agents cause to happen that are not actions, e.g. my arm rising, and things that agents cause to happen that are actions, e.g. raising my arm, is not in the event that happens, but in the distinctive manner in which the latter is caused.

Thus, while the commonsense approach focuses upon unpacking the distinctive form of event that an action apparently is,[[160]](#footnote-160) and the constitutive role that reason plays in events of this distinctive form, this alternative account begins from the premise that there is nothing distinctive about the form of event itself that marks off actions. In the cases of a mere arm rising and of raising one’s arm, for example, the event is the same—an arm rising. It is instead the distinctive causal etiology of the event that distinguishes actions of raising one’s arm from mere risings of one’s arm. In particular, when what the agent makes happen “is caused and rationalized in the right kind of way by the desire he has that things be a certain way and some means-end belief that he has,” then he acts. (Smith 2012, 80)

Certain metaphysical commitments have been taken to dictate such a strategy that takes actions to be composed of mere happenings (mere effects) and the right kind of cause. The strategy in turn dictates an outcome-centered account of desires as bringings about of such mere happenings—propositional attitudes with propositional contents. In particular, if a plausible metaphysics is taken to be a suitably “naturalistic” metaphysics, and such a metaphysics, in turn, is understood as dictating both a reduction of typical temporally extended actions into more “basic” actions, and a decomposition of such basic actions into mere non-normatively structured events caused in the right way by a non-normatively constituted desires, then an outcome-centered account of desire follows.[[161]](#footnote-161)

On such an account if I want you to come over here, and I believe that raising my arm will make you come over here, and this belief and this desire cause what happens—my arm rising—in the right way, then my arm rising is the action of raising my arm. Crucially, the belief and the desire are here understood not as constituted in part by evaluative outlooks, but as (non-normative) behavioral dispositions, the desire as a disposition to make its object, properly understood as “that you come over here,” happen. It is these behavioral dispositions causing in the right way the rising of my arm to happen that result in it being an action of raising my arm. Basic actions are such appropriately caused and rationalized things that I make happen, and the desires that rationalize them (coupled with means-ends reasoning) are behavioral dispositions to make things happen. All other more complex actions are, on this view, built out of such basic actions that an agent “can just do,” actions not explained by an agent’s “knowledge how to do something else.” (Smith 2012, 80) Because the desires that cause and rationalize actions are, on such an account, definable in terms of/reducible to features of the non-normative natural world, such a decompositional version of the standard story is strongly supported by approaches that take a plausible metaphysics to be naturalistic, and take a naturalistic metaphysics to countenance only features that are reducible to non-normative scientific features of the world.

Such a decompositional, reductionist approach to the theory of action provides apparent support for an outcome-centered account of the relevant attitudes, because the fundamental desires that rationalize basic actions, and by extension all other more complex actions that are built out of such basic actions, are attitudes towards something to be made to happen which the desiring agent is disposed to make happen. Such desires will naturally take propositional form, they will have events/states of affairs to be made to happen as their objects, and they will cause/rationalize actions as making their objects happen. All desires and actions, the account suggests, can be analyzed as comprised of such basic actions and the desires that rationalize them. To accept such an account, then, is to be committed to the position that all actions are, appearances notwithstanding, fundamentally bringings about of outcomes, and all desires are fundamentally attitudes towards outcomes to be brought about—made to happen.

The purported attraction of such an account is that desires and actions are built out of metaphysically respectable features of the world. Metaphysically respectable features are in turn understood as those definable in terms of or reducible to scientifically respectable features of the world, in this case non-normative events that happen and non-normative psychological dispositions that cause them. Because more complex actions are built out of basic actions, they inherit the metaphysical respectability of such basic actions, and with it the commitment to an account of desires as attitudes understood fundamentally as dispositions to make things happen. The three commitments teased out of the Standard Story, and with them the non-ethical argument for the ethical tyranny of outcomes, might seem to be dictated by the commitment to metaphysical respectability thus understood.

This argument for outcome-centered accounts is sometimes characterized as an argument from metaphysical naturalism. But “naturalism” is a fickle friend here. Consider, for example, Davidson’s characterization of naturalism:

Naturalism starts by accepting common sense (or science) and then goes on to ask for a description of the nature and origins of such knowledge. (2004, 5)

The preceding reductivist scientific approach starts by accepting science rather than commonsense as the starting point, and is committed to reducing elements of commonsense to science in cases of apparent conflict. We have already seen that starting an account of action by instead accepting commonsense as one’s starting point yields an account of actions and the desires that rationalize them that is not at all outcome-centered. Commonsense supports an understanding of paradigmatic intentional actions as temporally extended performances undertaken by agents for reasons, guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking them. Such a commonsense account is also supported by commonsense accounts of reasons to act that are not all reasons to promote, and accounts of many if not most desires as having actions and things as their objects, not states of affairs that are the contents of propositions. A naturalist approach starting from commonsense thus would appear to stand in sharp contrast to the reductive scientific naturalism sketched earlier, and to provide no support for the non-ethical argument.

Moreover, a reductivist scientific naturalist account of action encounters tremendous obstacles in its attempt to provide plausible accounts of the central elements of the commonsense naturalist approach. It is straightforward what guides actions on the commonsense approach; they are guided by the reasons that we have for undertaking them reflecting the relevant things that we value. But how do we account for the guidedness of actions on the reductive scientific naturalist account? Attempts are legion; failures multiply.[[162]](#footnote-162) Similarly, it is straightforward how the commonsense account provides an answer to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, but difficulties abound for efforts to answer the question on behalf of the reductivist naturalist. How can a non-normative attitude supply the agent’s purported justification in acting, as an acceptable answer to Anscombe’s question seems to require? Many attempts have been made to answer these challenges, but the difficulties they confront seem only to sharpen questions concerning the legitimacy of the project.[[163]](#footnote-163) All the king’s horses cannot seem to put back together the core features of everyday temporally extended actions, performances guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking them, once the scientific reductionist has decomposed them into “respectable” pieces.

The obvious question, in light of these difficulties, is whether a respectable metaphysics in fact requires us to eschew these commonsense features of actions in the first place. The moral of [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) is that the reductionist’s preferred outcome-centered accounts are, particularly in the case of desires, far more problematic than has been recognized. Moreover, although clearly some actions are in obvious ways more basic than others, e.g. are constitutive components of others, and some of these actions, in some contexts, seems to be plausible stopping points in the search for constitutive components, their status in such contexts *as* basic actions seems itself to be a function of the more complex, more temporally extended actions of which they are components.[[164]](#footnote-164) The reductivist naturalist account of basic actions is hard pressed to account for this, or for the fact that it is often the reasons for performing these more complex actions, supplied by the desires that rationalize them, that provide the rationale for performing the more basic actions that constitute them and the contexts in which they are appropriately identified as basic. In light of these difficulties, basic actions as they are understood on the reductivist naturalist approach seem best viewed as theoretical posits dictated by commitments of a reductivist scientific naturalism.

None of these difficulties is surprising given the evidence provided over the past 3 chapters that the outcome-centered accounts of reasons and attitudes presupposed by such a decompositional approach to action are themselves highly implausible, and fly in the face of our commonsense understanding of desires and actions. Does the commitment to a plausible metaphysics require us to abandon the commonsense account of actions as performances undertaken for and guided by reasons, and of the desires that supply the rationales for intentional actions as partially constituted by evaluative outlooks, and as often having actions to be performed as their objects? I will briefly canvas a few representative arguments, among the many available, for the conclusion that it does not.

Some philosophers join Scanlon in agreeing with the reductionists’ characterization of the domain of natural facts as the domain of science, but argue that a plausible metaphysics will recognize the domain of normative facts as a distinctive domain. Scientific statements make claims about the natural world, normative statements make claims about reasons. (Scanlon 2014, 23) Reductivist scientific naturalists can agree with such a claim, but only with the caveat that such claims about reasons are not autonomous from, indeed, are definable in terms of or reducible to, claims in the domain of natural science. Scanlon’s response is to reject such a view of domains, arguing instead that “the truth values of statements within a domain are properly settled by the standards and reasoning internal to that domain,” (2014, 20) and that metaphysical questions, properly understood, “are domain specific—questions about the metaphysics of some particular domain or domains.” (2014, 25) Because such a view identifies the scientific domain with the natural world, and distinguishes the domain of normative facts from the scientific (hence natural) world, it and others relevantly like it are often characterized as non-naturalist. Although they grant the scientific reductionist the claim that the physical world is the natural world, they reject, as relying upon naïve metaphysics, any claim that normative statements concerning normative facts must somehow satisfy the reasoning and standards internal to the domain of the physical, natural world.

Whereas Scanlon and others grant the scientific reductionists’ account of the natural world, denying instead their account of the relationship between the domain of normative facts and this domain of the natural, scientific facts, other philosophers reject the reductionists’ initial identification of the natural with the scientific. The demand for a naturalist metaphysics is plausible, they argue, but the form that such a demand takes in the argument outlined previously is rejected as too restrictive.[[165]](#footnote-165) They argue instead that such reductive scientific naturalism in fact prevents us from seeing ourselves as we truly are, “as animals whose natural being is permeated with rationality.” (McDowell 1994, 84) On this view, the “initiation into conceptual capacities, which includes responsiveness to . . . rational demands,” is a “normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity” (1994, 84) as “the rational animals that they are.” Only commitment to a “primitive metaphysics” creates the illusion that “sensitivity to real demands of reason looks spooky, unless we can reconstruct it from materials that are naturalistic in the relevant sense.” (1994, 82) [[166]](#footnote-166) Appeals to normatively constituted thoughts are appeals to features of the natural world, thus a plausible commitment to naturalism in metaphysics, properly understood, invites the very elements of the commonsense understanding of values, reasons, attitudes, and actions that are hostile to outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, actions, reasons, and ethics.

Others, such as Donald Davidson, eschew explicit talk of distinct domains, and resist proposals to expand our understanding of the natural features of the world beyond science, but identify the mistake of the scientific reductionist as his insistence that real features of the world must be reducible to, or in his terms “definable” in terms of natural, scientific features. From the fact that such normatively constituted thoughts, like colors, “‘sit on top’ of the natural features of the world,” (Davidson 1994, 45) that they supervene on such features and are not definable in terms of such features, it simply does not follow, Davidson argues, that they are not real features of the world. That features of the real world such as colors and normatively constituted thoughts are not “definable in physical terms” is instead precisely why “they can explain what physics can’t.” (1994, 45) Davidson’s suggestion is that beliefs and desires, understood as normatively constituted thoughts, play vital roles in “explanations of a different order” than those available to science. The demand for a reduction of such normative features to scientific features of the world is not required by the commitment to naturalism on a plausible metaphysics, any more than a plausible metaphysics requires such a reduction of colors or countless other real features of the world. Indeed, such a demand systematically impoverishes our explanatory resources. Beliefs and desires provide explanatory rationales for actions because they are normatively constituted attitudes presupposing a rich framework of other normatively constituted attitudes. Our choice, he suggests, is either to countenance such supervenient but non-reducible normatively constituted features of the world, facilitating an adequate answer to Anscombe’s “Why?” question, or reject them and block the possibility of developing a plausible answer.[[167]](#footnote-167)

These are only some of the responses that have been offered against the argument that a plausible metaphysics of action must be a naturalist account, and that a naturalist account must be a scientific reductionist account.[[168]](#footnote-168) Such responses dismiss the metaphysical grounds for adopting a decompositionalist approach to action incorporating an outcome-centered account of desire. Even this brief canvassing is sufficient, I believe, to demonstrate that the metaphysical commitments upon which this argument depends are not the default in philosophy; indeed, that they are highly controversial and widely rejected.

In the first chapter I canvassed two sets of seemingly powerful arguments, the first that outcome-centered ethics cannot be wrong, the second that it cannot be right. In the intervening chapters I have undermined the arguments that outcome-centered ethics cannot be wrong, in the process providing additional support for the arguments that it cannot be right. Rooting out the mistaken grounding for outcome-centered ethics, I have argued, involves rooting out the outcome-centered accounts of value, attitudes, reasons, and actions upon which the case for outcome-centered ethics depends, together with the considerations that have been offered to support them. The ethical and intuitive arguments for outcome-centered ethics are implausible (chapters [2](#_Chapter_2_The) and [3](#_Chapter_3:_The)), the outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons and actions that form the cornerstone of the non-ethical argument for outcome-centered ethics are implausible (chapters [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) and [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against)), and the considerations offered to shore up such outcome-centered accounts either themselves turn on the same equivocations that undermine the ethical arguments, or depend upon highly controversial positions in metaphysics and the theory of action ([chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The)). We should, I conclude reject these outcome-centered accounts, stepping outside of this toxic outcome-centered circle. I will close in the next chapter by pointing to only a few of the many significant implications of this comprehensive rejection of the tyranny of outcomes.

# **Chapter 7: Selected Implications**

Chapter 7 Abstract: The argument here begins the process of exposing the deformities to our ethical theories, our social practices, and our very self-understanding as agents that have been produced by the tyrannical sway of outcome-centered accounts. In particular, it provides detailed diagnoses of the deformations that have resulted to our democratic and legal practices, and to our ethical theorizing. Harnessing standard distinctions between the right and wrong kinds of reasons, and between good and bad reasons, the argument demonstrates that adoption of the outcome-centered framework alienates us, both in our theories of agency and ethics and in our social practices, from good reasons of the right kind for acting and interacting, leading us to focus instead on reasons of the wrong kinds, and on bad—inauthentic—reasons of the right kind.

Chapter Keywords: Wrong Kind of Reasons, Rational Agency, Good and Bad Reasons, Pettit, Alienated Agency, Inauthenticity, Kantsequentializing, Indirect Consequentialism, Voting, Torts

## **Section I: The Defining Tension and Its Elimination**

The outcome-centered approach has from its very inception engendered a profound tension with many of our deepest ethical commitments, a tension often captured by invoking its hostility to deontic constraints, to special obligations to others, e.g. family and friends, and to an agent’s authentic and whole hearted pursuit of her plans and projects. Criticisms of outcome-centered ethics as too demanding, alienating, and confining, and as undermining agential integrity, highlight different elements of this tension. Those resisting the tyranny of outcomes propose resolving these tensions by rejecting outcome-centered accounts in ethics, but often, we have seen, while embracing outcome-centered accounts of actions, reasons, and attitudes that appear to dictate these very ethical accounts.

Advocates, by contrast, attempt to mitigate this tension. If the initial tension between such accounts and so many of our most deeply held ethical convictions is, even for many consequentialists, simply “too much to stomach,”[[169]](#footnote-169) but the case for adopting the outcome-centered constraint is compelling, then sophisticating such accounts to at least mitigate these tensions is the obvious way to go. But if my argument up to this point is sound, one pole of this tension is illusory, and attempts to mitigate tensions between it and our deeply held convictions are properly understood as unwarranted deformations of such convictions.

In the remainder of this chapter I will first clarify (section I) the implications of my arguments in the first 6 chapters for this tension that has defined so much of our recent approach to ethics, law, and policy. In section II I will harness the standard distinctions between good and bad reasons, and the right and wrong kinds of reasons, to reveal the profound deformities to our theories and practices that have been normalized by efforts to mitigate this illusory tension. I will then take up the two main mitigating strategies in sections III and IV, harnessing these two distinctions to clarify the deformities in both theory and practice that result from the pursuit of such strategies. I will focus in particular upon their distorting impact on prevailing explanations and justifications of our democratic practices and the legal practice of torts.

It will first be helpful to characterize the general framework within which much of the contemporary debate in normative ethics has been carried out, a framework dictated by the default status of outcome-centered accounts. The framework presupposes the case for an outcome-centered constraint, i.e. that:

1) There are powerful arguments in favor of the outcome-centered constraint on value and the mutually reinforcing outcome-centered accounts of reasons, attitudes, actions, and the deontic evaluation of actions that adopt this constraint.

Yet it recognizes that:

2) In our everyday practices we deploy values such as friendship, freedom, respect, and fairness reflected in reasons to act and interact that are not reasons to promote, we express desires to act that are not desires to bring about outcomes, we perform actions that are seemingly not promotings of outcomes, and many of our fundamental deontic evaluations of actions depend upon non-outcome-centered reasons.

The result:

3) A profound tension between our commonsense, everyday valuing, reasoning, desiring, and acting, [2] and the default outcome-centered constraint and outcome-centered accounts [1].

Opponents of consequentialism have appealed to 2 as an integral part of their case against 1. But the strategy deployed by those committed to 1 in the face of this confrontation with these deeply “counterintuitive implications” (Portmore 2011, 3) is to modify the relevant outcome-centered accounts without abandoning their fundamental outcome-centeredness, thereby allowing them to accommodate to some degree the non-outcome-centered elements of our commonsense convictions and practices. Doug Portmore seems exactly right that since the advent of classical utilitarianism consequentialists have been refining outcome-centered accounts in order to preserve what are taken to be their attractive “structural features,” their fundamental outcome-centeredness, while avoiding “at least some of its counterintuitive implications.”[[170]](#footnote-170)

But I have demonstrated in the first 6 chapters that the attraction of these “structural features” is illusory. 1 should be rejected, eliminating the tension that has provided point and purpose to the strategies of mitigation that it has spawned. Just as in geological science land bridges, etc., mitigated certain tensions with problematic evidence in pre-plate tectonics geology, as did planetary epicycles within the geocentric theory of the solar system, so too more complex and nuanced recourse to indirection and alternative evaluative focal points, and multiplication or refinement of the standpoints for evaluating outcomes, have been developed to mitigate tensions between our deeply held moral convictions and outcome-centered theory. But once the fundamental theoretical commitments to fixed continents and to the geocentric theory were undermined, the land bridges and epicycles developed to mitigate the tension between these theoretical commitments and evidence against them were revealed to be deformations of the structure of the solar system and the geology of the planet. Similarly, with the grounds for outcome-centered ethics undermined, the shifts in focal points, recourse to indirection, and sophistication of standpoints and outcomes developed to mitigate the tension between outcome-centered theory and the convictions that resist it are revealed to be deformations to our ethical theory and normative practices. There is no reason to mitigate the tension between such a theory and our many non-outcome-centered convictions and commitments, or to accept the deformities to our theories and practices that are the price of such mitigation. In the reminder of this chapter I will harness the distinctions between good and bad reasons, and between the right and wrong kinds of reasons, to clarify and highlight the deformation that has resulted from deploying these strategies of mitigation in our ethical theorizing, our theories of our social practices, and our fundamental self-understanding as agents.

The distinction between the right and wrong kinds of reasons cuts across theoretical and practical reasoning. *[[171]](#footnote-171)* Its distinctive relevance to highlighting the tyrannical nature of outcome-centered accounts can be foregrounded by taking as our point of departure a straightforward picture of an excellent rational believer and agent. Such a believer and agent will answer questions concerning whether any phi is true and whether it is good for her to perform any phiing in standard cases by taking up reasons bearing on the question “Whether phi?” in the theoretical sphere, and “Whether to phi?” in the practical sphere. (Hieronymi 2005) Positively answering the question “Whether phi?” just is, for such a believer, forming the belief that phi *for those reasons*. Answering the question “Whether to phi?” just is, for such an agent, forming the intention to phi *for those reasons*. (Hieronymi 2013, 16) Hieronymi characterizes such reasons for our excellent rational agent, reasons that bear on the questions “Whether phi?” in the theoretical sphere, and “Whether to phi?” in the practical sphere, as reasons of the right kind. Bad reasons of the right kind are then reasons that we take to bear positively on such questions, but that do not. [[172]](#footnote-172) Our excellent rational believer and actor, thus understood, forms her beliefs and intentions to act in such paradigmatic cases for good reasons of the right kind, reasons that in fact bear on, and positively answer, the questions “Whether phi?” and “Whether to phi?”.

Kant and Aristotle provide ethical theories that focus on such excellent rational agency, on determining such good reasons of the right kind for acting, reasons for which excellent agents intend to act and intentionally act. This feature of their accounts is reflected in their reason dependent deontic evaluations of actions. We have seen that for both theories, a determination that the agent’s reasons in intentionally acting are good reasons of the right kind is constitutive in part of the determination that an agent is acting rightly for the Aristotelian, and from duty for the Kantian.

In circumstances in which excellent rational believers and actors appropriately form beliefs and intentions for reasons of the right kind, however, they can also be derailed by the wrong kinds of reasons, reasons that count in favor of believing that phi and intending to phi “in some other way – typically by showing the attitude in some other way good or useful or worth having.” (Hieronymi 2021, 356) In paradigmatic cases, in which the actor focuses appropriately on good reasons of the right kind for believing and acting, a focus instead on the wrong kinds of reasons elides such good reasons of the right kind from view, focusing, for example, not on her evidence for phi, but on the benefit of her believing that phi is true. Our excellent rational agent focuses on reasons that in fact bear on “Whether to phi?”, on positively answering such questions, and intends to phi for such reasons. She resists the siren’s call of displacing such good reasons of the right kind with reasons of the wrong kind, reasons it is good to bring it about that she wants or intends to phi, and intentionally phis.[[173]](#footnote-173) Failure to resist this siren’s call, resulting in a focus instead on reasons to bring it about that I believe that phi and that I intend to phi, systematically elides the agent’s good reasons of the right kind from view, alienating the rational believer and actor from such reasons. Moreover, because the agent must nonetheless believe and act for reasons, and appeal to the wrong kinds of reasons blocks the rational agent from believing and acting for such good reasons of the right kind, to give in to the siren’s call of reasons of the wrong kind is also to supplant good reasons with bad reasons, reasons for acting that do not in fact bear on “Whether to phi?”.

The arguments of the previous 6 chapters demonstrate that to adopt the outcome-centered framework just is to fall prey to the siren’s call of displacing good reasons of the right kind with the wrong kinds of reasons. The excellent rational agent’s quest for good reasons of the right kind, the quest taken up by Kantian and Aristotelian theories, is supplanted with a quest for the wrong kinds of reasons, reasons bearing on whether intentionally acting in some way promotes the best outcome, hence upon whether agents have reasons to bring it about that they intend to perform, and intentionally perform, such actions. In place of the quest for good reasons of the right kind to intend to act and intentionally act, it substitutes the quest for outcome-centered reasons of the wrong kind to bring it about that I intend to phi and intentionally phi. The tyranny of outcomes thus results in the systematic alienation of rational agents from good reasons of the right kind, and in the pervasive inauthenticity of agents’ reasons for intentionally acting – in action for bad reasons. Because consequentialism shifts the ethical question to whether phiing brings about the best outcome, hence to whether we have reasons of the wrong kind that it is good or useful to bring it about that we intend to phi and intentionally phi, it alienates us from good reasons of the right kind to intend to act and intentionally act. Because to bring it about that I intentionally phi is nonetheless to bring it about that I intentionally phi for reasons, but the good reasons to phi are elided from view, it must perforce appeal instead to bad – inauthentic – reasons to intentionally phi. Consequentialism, and the outcome-centered approach more generally, thus swaps out the quest for good reasons of the right kind, reasons to phi, for reasons of the wrong kind, reasons it is good to bring it about that I intend to phi and that I phi, and such an approach not only alienates us from our good reasons of the right kind to act, it must perforce substitute bad—inauthentic—reasons in their place.

We have already seen this problematic shift at work in the failure of the ethical consequentializing project demonstrated in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The). The Kantian and the Aristotelian focus deontic evaluation of actions on reason dependent evaluations, acting rightly and acting from duty. Such reason dependent deontic evaluations take there to be good reasons of the right kind to act, reasons to phi that settle the question of whether to phi, and take such settling of the question by the agent to provide the agent’s reasons for wanting and intending to phi, reasons that guide the agent acting rightly or from duty. Consequentialist ethical theory, by contrast, focuses deontic evaluation primarily upon the reason independent rightness of actions, and upon reasons it is good that my intentionally phiing happens, hence upon reasons of the wrong kind to bring it about that I intentionally phi, thereby promoting the best outcome. Because many fundamental Kantian and Aristotelian deontic evaluations invoke good reasons of the right kind and action for such reasons, but the consequentializer attempts to capture them through reasons of the wrong kind, the consequentializer cannot, as we have seen, capture such deontic verdicts.

This distinction also illuminates the failure of the propositionalizing proposal demonstrated in chapters [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) and [6](#_Chapter_6:_The). Precisely the same shift from good reasons of the right kind to the wrong kinds of reasons is ushered in by propositionalizing. Our commonsense convictions and ordinary practices suggest that a desire to phi is a judgment-sensitive attitude partially constituted by reasons of the right kind bearing on phiing; we experience many of our desires under the guise of such good reasons of the right kind, and in recognizing such good reasons to phi, desire to phi for such reasons. The “conversion” of such desires to phi into desires that I phi swaps out good reasons of the right kind to phi for the wrong kind of reasons, outcome-centered reasons to bring it about that I intentionally phi. To desire that I phi is to have reasons of the wrong kind to bring it about that I phi—that my phiing happens. Such an outcome-centered conversion thus alienates us from our good reasons of the right kind to act and interact, and from the values that reflect such reasons. And it results in systematic inauthenticity. To bring it about that I intentionally phi is to bring it about that I intentionally phi for reasons. Since the agent’s good reasons of the right kind to phi have been elided from view in the “conversion” to propositional form, the reasons for which the agent intentionally phis on such an account will not be the good reasons that in fact bear on phiing, but bad reasons that do not in fact bear on phiing. I will argue in the next two sections that the consequentialist mitigation strategies that dominate much of our ethical theory and our normative practice demonstrate even more starkly the costs of this migration from reasons of the right kind to reasons of the wrong kind (alienation), and from action for good reasons to action for bad reasons (inauthenticity).

## **Section II:** **Mitigating Strategy 1: Shifting Focal Points, Indirection, and Torts**

There are two major strategies for mitigating the core tensions between outcome-centered ethics and our commonsense convictions, although they are often not clearly distinguished. One is more naturally suggested by approaches grounded in the ethical arguments for consequentialism; the other is more naturally suggested by approaches grounded in the non-ethical argument. Approaches of this second sort, that rely directly upon the non-ethical argument for consequentialism ([chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The))[[174]](#footnote-174) grounded in outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons, and actions, tend to invite a *direc*t focus on *actions*. Such mitigating strategies focus in normative ethics upon refinement of the standpoints involved in the direct outcome-centered evaluation of actions, e.g. a shift to evaluator-relative rankings of outcomes, or refinement of agent-neutral rankings. In policy such strategies focus upon more nuanced accounts of the outcomes actions bring about, and more nuanced accounts of the causal link between actions and outcomes.

Accounts of the sort I take up in this section rely instead primarily on the ethical and intuitive arguments. Many such accounts are committed to maintaining only that the rationale for right action must be based, ultimately, in values captured in rankings of outcomes. They often attempt to mitigate the tensions with commonsense convictions by shifting away from direct focus on actions. Some explicitly embrace other evaluative focal points instead of or in addition to actions, such as rules, plans, and motives; others maintain the evaluative focus on actions, while adopting complex indirect strategies for their evaluation appealing to appropriately cultivated complex dispositions. I will focus in my criticism of such strategies primarily upon Philip Pettit’s ingenious outcome-centered ethical theory, which maintains the focal point upon actions, but mitigates tensions through recourse to complex strategies of indirection. But I will first briefly suggest why strategies adopting evaluative focal points that are alternatives to, or additions to, the direct evaluative focus on action are also undermined by my arguments in 1–6.

The apparent appeal of such shifts in focal point for resolving the tension is straightforward. If commonsense suggests that we are often required not to perform the action that brings about the best overall outcome, e.g. that we have good reasons of the right kind not to lie, to keep promises, to help our friends, pursue our plans, respect the autonomy of others, etc., even in cases in which doing so does not bring about the best outcome, the tension with direct act consequentialism is straightforward and profound. But if the primary evaluative focal point is shifted from actions alone to rules, plans, and/or motives, and we are required to act in accordance with the set of rules (or cultivate the motives) the adoption of which leads to the best outcome, action in accordance with such rules or motives, e.g. suitably constructed rules against or motives to avoid lying, promise-breaking, and killing, will often require us not to perform the action that brings about the best outcome. Leaving enormous complexities aside, when such an action violates the rule or is opposed by the motive, we will be required not to perform the action that brings about the best outcome, as our deeply held convictions dictate.

The apparent appeal of this mitigating strategy, however, is undermined once the arguments for adopting the outcome-centered constraint are themselves undermined. We have seen that adoption of the outcome-centered constraint itself is unwarranted. Shifts in the primary focal point for outcome-centered evaluation from actions to rules, motives, reasons, practices, etc. simply fail to address the implausibility of such an outcome-centered constraint on evaluation. It becomes apparent that an outcome-centered constraint on such rationales for rules and motives, like that on actions, distorts or completely elides from view the things of value and the reasons reflecting them that are relevant to the adoption of such rules, the cultivations of appropriate motives, etc. If the rules that should govern our rightful interactions as citizens, for example, are those necessary to secure the conditions of equal individual freedom,[[175]](#footnote-175) and we each have reasons, reflecting the values of equality and freedom, to establish and interact within such conditions, such a non-outcome-centered evaluative grounding is simply elided from view, or at best seriously distorted, through appeal to an outcome-centered constraint on the rationales for rules. Similarly, if honesty for the Aristotelian is a virtue integral to the excellence of character necessary to live well, the Aristotelian will be committed to a defeasible rule against lying, and any justifications for rightful utterances of falsehoods will only come into view within the context of a character that integrates all of the virtues constitutive of living well.[[176]](#footnote-176) Both the virtue ethical grounds for adopting such a rule, and the grounds for departing from it, are elided from view on an outcome-centered approach. Many of our grounds for adopting and adhering to rules and cultivating motives of various kinds do not appear to be outcome-centered, nor, we have seen, is there any reason to expect them to be.

But it is also important to highlight the structural alienation and inauthenticity that results from adopting such mitigating strategies. Commonsense suggests that we should act for good reasons of the right kind. We should strive to determine what we have good reasons to do, and act for those reasons, just as we should strive to determine what we have compelling reasons to believe, and believe for those reasons. We have seen that Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian ethics are theories of the good reasons of the right kind that we have, and of how to habituate ourselves and construct our moral habitat such that we take these to be good reasons to act and are motivated to act for these reasons. A consequentialist approach that mitigates apparent implausibility by shifting focal points from actions to motives, however, elides from view such good reasons of the right kind, focusing instead upon reasons to bring it about, for example, that agents have the motives that it promotes the best outcome to act upon. (See Tucker 2023) Because such motives, e.g. desires and feelings, are constituted in part by evaluative outlooks, hence are sensitive to reasons reflecting relevant values, but both the values and the good reasons of the right kind that reflect them are elided from view, such agents will also be acting inauthentically, for bad reasons.

Thus, although the Aristotelian strives, in desiring to phi, to take to be good reasons to phi what are in fact good reasons to phi, the motive consequentialist strives instead to bring it about that he has motives, in desiring to phi, to take to be good reasons to phi what it brings about the best outcome to take to be good reasons to phi. Even by his own lights, what we take to be good reasons to phi are not reasons that in fact bear positively on phiing, they are the reasons it brings about the best outcome for him to take to bear positively on phiing. Such bad reasons, reasons for phiing that do not in fact bear positively on phiing, are not a problem to be addressed on such an account; rather, the cultivation of such motives to phi for such systematically inauthentic reasons is the solution that is offered for resolving the profound tension with commonsense convictions. To reject the outcome-centered constraint is to escape from this framework within which the cultivation, for the wrong kinds of reasons, of motives reflecting bad reasons for action is embraced as a necessary price for escaping profound tensions between theory and our deepest convictions. Because there are no reasons to adopt an outcome-centered framework, hence to abandon the quest as rational agents for good reasons of the right kind to act, there are no reasons to accept such alienation from good reasons of the right kind, and the inauthenticity of acting for bad reasons, to mitigate the implausibility of adopting such a framework.

Perhaps, however, more nuanced recourse to indirection, e.g. a strategy that retains actions as the central evaluative focal point, does not engender such profound deformity for our rational agency? To see why such views also ultimately engender similar deformities, I will focus on one of the most sophisticated such theories, that developed by Philip Pettit. (2015) Pettit recognizes the apparent tension between outcome-centered approaches to ethics and deeply held commonsense commitments. In practice we take things such as honesty, friendship, freedom, and respect to be “rich goods,” seemingly reflected in non-outcome-centered reasons for performing actions regardless of whether they bring about the best outcome for me, or overall, or indeed in any sense. But Pettit also takes consequentialism to be able, through recourse to strategies of indirection, to provide a justification for developing complex dispositions to provide such goods, dispositions, in effect, to take there to be reasons to interact with others honestly, to treat others with respect, and to nurture our friendships, thereby realizing these rich goods of honesty, friendship, and respect. His suggestion is that it maximizes overall value for agents to cultivate these highly complex dispositions to provide not just the reason independent “thin goods” of telling the truth (vs honesty) and restraining from interfering with others (vs respect), but to provide the rich goods of honesty and respect out of “dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect that shape their behavior in a more or less independent manner.” (2015, 219) To have such rich dispositions is, in effect, to tell the truth not just from reasons of self-interest or overall benefit, but from motives that control for truth telling—from reasons of honesty. Such dispositions, he argues, must be, and are, promoted by social norms, and action for such reasons will provide a striking simulacrum of the good reasons of the right kind that structure our commonsense convictions as rational agents.

The result is a consequentialist rationale for the development in agents of complex dispositions to act and interact from considerations reflecting the importance of honesty and friendship, outcome-centered rationales for bringing it about that agents take there to be reasons to act and interact as though from values such as honesty, friendship, and respect. We do not have good reasons of the right kind, for the consequentialist, to interact with each other honestly, but we do have good reasons to bring it about that we have complex dispositions—feelings and desires—to take ourselves to have good reasons of the right kind, reasons for which we act and interact, thereby providing the rich goods of honesty, respect, etc.

Such a consequentialist strategy of indirection, swapping out good reasons of the right kind to act honestly for reasons to bring it about that we act for bad reasons of the right kind, brings deep structural challenges in its wake. Pettit’s claim that friendship and these other rich goods “are among the most important goods that we can enjoy in human life” (2015, 140) is of course embraced by commonsense and by our alternative theories, and it is surely right that dispositions merely to show me actual favor, or tell me the truth, or not interfere with my liberty in one’s actual interactions with me do not amount to friendship, or honesty, or respect. But it seems equally clear that the mere addition of Ptolemaic epicycles to bare non-judgment-sensitive dispositions, such that they lead you to show me not just actual but counterfactual favor, truthfulness, etc., also clearly does not suffice to bestow what is of value in the relevant rich goods. It is certainly true that two friends, people who enjoy a reciprocal relationship of caring, trust, mutual support, and intimacy towards each other, will manifest dispositions to provide counterfactually robust favor. But if some stranger were permanently conditioned by a Clockwork Orange-like procedure to be disposed to provide me robustly with the thin good of favor, perhaps with even greater reliability than my friends do, although I may value such robust favor I would not take myself to have gained another friend. Nor would I consider the stranger to be “giving me” the good of friendship that I receive from my actual friends.

What is necessary, instead, is the cultivation of more complex dispositions to form judgment-sensitive feelings, desires etc. constituted in part by reasons reflecting the value of friendship, honesty, and respect, thereby providing such rich goods to others. But such a strategy of developing these nearly perfect simulacra of our good reasons of the right kind for interacting honestly, respectfully, etc, would appear to be inherently unstable. Let us grant, with Pettit, that whatever principle of right one takes to be compelling, it must on pain of implausibiity “often require acting out of dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect.” (2015, 219) A consequentialist account cannot plausibly prescribe that the relevant outcome-centered principle of the right “should actively guide agents in their deliberations,” lest it undermine action from these required dispositions. He must maintain instead that the relevant consequentialist principle of right action should function as a “standby guide” that “is invoked to determine what to do only under specific contextual cues.” (2015, 219) Just as a cowboy is engaged in the action of controlling his cattle even though he only intervenes when a member of the herd wanders off track, and otherwise just stands ready to intervene, so too the consequentialist moral agent will “operate in general under independent controls . . . of attachment, virtue, and respect,” and only invokes “the principle of right in deliberation when there is contextual evidence that this is necessary.” (2015, 219)

We can see the apparent difficulty with such an account through recourse to Pettit’s own cowboy analogy. The cowboy’s standby guidance is manifested by his intervention whenever a member of the herd veers off in the wrong direction. The analogous standby guidance in the case of the consequentialist principle of the right would seemingly involve intervening when the dispositions to robustly provide benefits (to act for bad reasons of the right kind reflecting non-outcome-centered values) fail to maximize the overall good. Yet on Pettit’s own account to suspend the dispositions in such cases is not to have the dispositions at all, undermining the value of rich goods and leaving the unacceptable tension with consequentialism in full force.

The point here is not to offer these as decisive objections to such an indirect outcome-centered rationale, but to highlight the forms of deformity to our valuing of freedom, friendship, respect, and other such non-outcome-centered values that result from embracing such an explanation in terms of cultivating dispositions to, in effect, act as though we value friendship, honesty, and respect, and as though we are guided by the non-outcome-centered reasons of the right kind that reflect such values. All of these sources of apparent deformity of our ethical lives by such an account can be avoided by taking agents to value such things because they are valuable, recognizing that the relevance of such values for our reasons to act cannot be captured in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, and that to have such values is to be guided by the non-outcome-centered reasons of the right kind that reflect them. Why, then, isn’t an outcome-centered strategy of indirection ruled out straight off?

Pettit offered two answers. The first is that any acceptable rationale must recognize as plausible the outcome-centered constraint, and his is the most plausible rationale that can be supplied within the framework of such a constraint. (e.g. 2015, 224–26) But this is just to invoke the arguments grounding the tyranny of outcomes, precisely the arguments that have been undermined over the course of the previous 6 chapters. Without support for the outcome-centered constraint, there simply is no reason to prefer problematic rationales for cultivating tenuous and byzantine dispositions to act as though there are such non-outcome-centered values, and to act on the reasons to perform actions that reflect them.

Pettit’s second answer is that alternative theories are partners in guilt; they too cannot plausibly prescribe that their relevant principle of the right “should actively guide agents in their deliberations,” lest it undermine action from these required dispositions. They too must maintain that their preferred principle of right action should function as a “standby guide” that “is invoked to determine what to do only under specific contextual cues.” (2015, 219) All ethical theories must provide rationales for developing complex dispositions in agents to take themselves to have non-outcome-centered reasons to act reflecting such non-outcome-centered values, hence any objections to the distortions reflecting the structure of such rationales are objections to other theories, e.g. our Kantian and Aristotelian alternatives, as well.

But we can now see that this is exactly wrong. For the Kantian and the Aristotelian it is not necessary to cultivate dispositions to act as though there are such non-outcome centered values reflected in reasons to act that are not reasons to promote; rather, these things *are* valuable, and are reflected in reasons to act that are not reasons to promote, good reasons of the right kind for which rational agents should act. This is why, on such theories, agents should *take* them to be valuable, and why rational agents should cultivate dispositions to apprehend such reasons and perform actions guided by them. These are theories of the good reasons of the right kind that we have to act honestly, respectfully, etc. We must refine our dispositions to take such things to be good that *are* good, and to want to act and interact in accordance with the reasons that reflect them, just as we must refine our dispositions to take things to be true—to believe them—that *are* true, and to believe in accordance with the evidence for their truth.

All of the difficulties with Pettit’s appeal to indirection can be eliminated if, instead of disposing ourselves to cultivate desires to act for bad reasons of the right kind reflecting non-outcome-centered values, we dispose ourselves to take such non-outcome-centered values to be valuable because they are, much as we dispose ourselves to take things to be true because they are. Practical and theoretical deliberation is conducted under the guise of the good and the true. Kantian and Aristotelian theories provide accounts of how value does “actively guide agents in their deliberation.” The dangerous deformities that result from rejecting this commitment to the quest for good reasons of the right kind to act are not features that must be confronted by our alternative theories, they are dictated by the tyranny of outcomes.

***Torts***

A striking example of the deformity to our normative practices that can result from the imposition of the outcome-centered constraint is provided by the contemporary theory and practice of tort law. Torts is an area of the law that seems distinctively non-outcome-centered in its guiding rationale. The practice does involve facing consequences for our wrongful actions, but the rationale for who can be called upon to face the consequences of their actions, who is entitled to call them to account, and which actions they can be held to account for, appeals not to better and worse outcomes, but to good non-outcome-centered reasons to hold those accountable who act contrary to the good non-outcome-centered reasons that we each have not to wrongfully injure another. In paradigmatic cases, it is wrongfully injuring another that entitles the person wronged, and only the person wronged, to hold the defendant accountable for wrongfully injuring her. As Goldberg and Zipursky point out, this is “an idea so familiar and compelling,” that “one who wrongfully injures another can be held accountable by the victim,” (2020, 11) and that it is because a person “acted in a manner the law deems wrongful,” that “the victim has a right . . . to redress the wrong.” (2020, 3) Such a legal practice purports to recognize the equal value of persons as reflected both in standards for reasonable interaction with each other, and in a victim’s entitlement to hold a wrongful actor accountable when injured by their failure to adhere to such standards. Participants have good non-outcome-centered reasons to avoid such wrongdoing, and the state has coercive authority to implement and enforce these conditions of reasonable interaction. In general, each participant in the practice has good reasons to interact reasonably with others, and when any participant fails to act in accordance with such reasons, and in doing so wrongfully injures another, the victim has sufficient reasons to hold the wrongdoer accountable.

With the rise of outcome-centered accounts, however, dominant theories of tort law “have been prone to insist that tort law is not what it appears to be.” (Goldberg and Zipursky 2020, 1) Their accounts of tortious conduct appeal to a fundamentally outcome-centered rationale, resting “primarily on the social benefit that stands to be achieved by imposing liability for such conduct.” (2020, 238–9) Although torts appears to enforce good non-outcome-centered reasons governing the rightful interactions of participants in the pursuit of their individual ends, in fact it sets “prices” (Goldberg and Zipursky 2020, 45) on individual conduct, incentives motivating participants to promote societal ends. Wrongness of actions does not reflect good reasons that participants have not to perform them, but the determination that it brings about the best outcome to discourage the performance of such actions. Standards of ‘reasonable’ interaction do not invoke good reasons for interaction, they are the standards to which it brings about the best outcome for citizens to be incentivized to conform. Recognizing victims is no longer recognizing participants with sufficient reasons to pursue recourse, it is recognition of participants who it brings about the best outcome to compensate, to incentivize to participate in the discouragement of others, etc. On such outcome-centered approaches, then, these seemingly non-outcome-centered evaluations of actions and interactions are severed from any appeal to good non-outcome-centered reasons for performing the actions evaluated.

In place of such reasons to act and interact, such accounts focus upon outcome-centered reasons that agents have to act selectively in conformity with the practice, and to exchange non-outcome-centered reasons within the practice. Agents adopting Richard Delgado’s instrumentalist account, for example, have reasons to pursue a strategy of “choosing legality when doing so will benefit us, and pursuing other means when it does not.” (1994, 398) Richard Posner argues that the practice of torts does and should bring it about that participants act in ways that maximize social wealth, but his excellent rational agent has decisive reasons to violate such wealth maximizing standards of reasonable interaction whenever doing so brings about the maximal satisfaction of his preferences. If he can bring it about that he avoids paying the “price,” a sanction of compensation to others when he is detected bringing about the best outcome for himself rather than promoting overall wealth maximization, then he has decisive outcome-centered reasons to do so—to violate the standards of reasonableness. Such an excellent rational agent will strive to bring it about that he operates as an undetectable defector (Frank 2003, 49ff), acting for what seem to be the wrong kinds of reasons in order to violate without detection outcome-centered standards of reasonableness. In doing so he thwarts the point and purpose of a practice designed, on the instrumentalist account, to bring it about that he and other agents act in conformity with such standards.

Moreover, effective functioning of the practice, on such outcome-centered approaches, appears to require that participants continue, for outcome-centered reasons, to exchange what purport to be good non-outcome-centered reasons, reasons emphasizing “the wrongfulness of the act, the fact of harm, and the causal relation between the two,” along with the requirement that one who wrongfully victimizes another “make good the victim’s losses.” (Coleman 2003, 20–1) To instead invoke outcome-centered reasons in the conduct of the practice, reasons determining who it brings about the best outcome to deter, who should be incentivized to deter them, and what relationship, if any, each should have to the other, would seem to threaten the very intelligibility of the practice or to alter it beyond recognition. Although the elements of the practice that presuppose a framework of non-outcome-centered evaluations and reasons become “mysterious” on such instrumentalist accounts, the practice must bring it about that participants keep reasoning with each other as though the harm the defendant ‘caused’ renders him liable because his action was ‘wrong’ (faulty), and as though the plaintiff’s own action is justified because a ‘right’ (claim) of hers is violated, ‘entitling’ her to compensation from her ‘wrongful’ injurer, etc. But locating such non-outcome-centered reasoning reflecting non-outcome-centered values within an outcome-centered rationale for the practice invites the same chronic instability that we saw in Pettit’s strategy of indirection. The judge, lawyers, plaintiffs, and defendants must both reason through appeal to what purport to be good non-outcome-centered reasons to act and interact, and do so while embracing an understanding of the practice that alienates them from recognition of these reasons as good. The resulting inauthenticity is pervasive and profound.[[177]](#footnote-177)

Tort law purports to take actions to be unreasonable because they violate standards of reasonable interaction; it takes agents to be appropriately held responsible because they have wronged others; it takes those they have wronged to be entitled to recourse from such agents because they have been the victims of wrongful interactions at their hands. Jules Coleman makes just this point: “our intuition is that a victim is entitled to sue *because* . . . the injurer has wrongfully harmed him . . . and that if the victim’s claims are vindicated, he recovers against his injurer *because* the law recognizes wrongful harm as grounds for such recovery.” (2003, 21) Instrumentalist accounts suggest that all such takings are in important respects *mis*takings. Coleman makes this point about economic instrumentalist accounts in particular: “the apparently transparent purpose of the tort law in each case is not the real purpose; and . . . the real purpose . . . has nothing to do with the fact that the injurer may have wrongfully harmed the victim.” (2003, 21) Goldberg and Zipursky demonstrate that such opacity generalizes to even the most nuanced instrumentalist approaches, concluding that “the idea that torts establish something akin to moral duties to refrain from injuring and moral rights against certain kinds of interference with interests is not part of the instrumentalist story.” (2020, 239)

The point is not that there are no non-instrumentalist accounts available; indeed, Ripstein, Zipursky and Goldberg, and the Darwalls (Ripstein 2016; Zipursky and Goldberg 2020; Darwall and Darwall 2011) all develop rich accounts of the practice upon which participants have good non-outcome-centered reasons to deem certain interactions wrongful, to be guided by such reasons to avoid such interactions, and to pursue recourse against other participants who wrongfully injure them.[[178]](#footnote-178) The problem is that outcomes so tyrannize over the accounts of values, reasons, and actions deployed in current approaches to law and policy, that judges, lawyers, and legal scholars more and more take it to be a framing assumption that torts as a legal practice both does aim and should aim at some beneficial outcome, disagreeing primarily concerning which beneficial outcome best explains and justifies the practice. (Vermuele 2006, 2116) Within such a framework non-outcome-centered approaches are consigned to the margins or reinterpreted as elements of more sophisticated outcome-centered accounts, and the non-outcome-centered intuitions seemingly grounding tort law are themselves taken to be explained or explained away by appeal to the appropriate outcome-centered benefit of the practice. The result is a pervasive conviction that some such account, despite its counter-intuitiveness, inherent instability, and profound inauthenticity, must be right, because instrumentalism, an outcome-centered approach to explaining and justifying any such social practice, must be right.

Outcomes tyrannize over our efforts to understand such practices, unmooring our deepest intuitions about these practices through accounts that create ad hoc, unstable simulacra of reasonableness, wrongful injury, and entitlement by those wronged to hold such wrongdoers accountable. With the overthrow of the tyranny of outcomes, we are free to embrace authentic theories of tort law, upon which the practice strives to take to be reasonable, wrongful, etc. what is reasonable and wrongful, and to do so for reasons that in fact bear on these questions of reasonableness and wrongfulness. Such an approach will attempt to elucidate and, where necessary, reform or reject normative commitments at the heart of the practice,[[179]](#footnote-179) holding these elements accountable to the distinctively non-outcome-centered values that they purport to reflect.

## **Section III: Mitigating Strategy 2: Non-Ethical Consequentializing and Voting**

The second mitigating strategy is strongly suggested by the non-ethical argument for consequentialism. If all actions are rationalized through appeal to desires/preferences with outcomes to be promoted as their objects, then the obvious evaluative focal point will be actions and the reasons to promote the outcomes at which they aim. Because such an argument invites focus directly upon the evaluation of actions, and because particularly stark tensions arise between commonsense convictions and traditional consequentialist evaluation of actions from the agent-neutral, God’s eye, impersonal point of view adopted by traditional consequentialism, the obvious mitigating strategies suggested by such arguments seek not to shift the focal point of evaluation, but to alter in tension-mitigating ways the accounts of the outcomes themselves, the values they take directly into account, and/or the standpoints for ranking outcomes.

Such alteration of the relevant standpoints and values appealed to in ranking outcomes is the strategy adopted by many advocates of the non-ethical consequentializing strategy.[[180]](#footnote-180) Unlike the ethical consequentializer, who appeals to consequentializing to provide grounds for adopting outcome-centered ethics, the non-ethical consequentializer takes there to be independent grounds for adopting outcome-centered accounts of attitudes, reasons, and ethics, and appeals to consequentializing as a strategy to mitigate the counter-intuitive implications of adopting such an account. Such a non-ethical consequentializer need not mandate deontic equivalence between a target theory that better rationalizes our commonsense convictions and its consequentialized counterpart. Instead, he invokes more nuanced accounts of agent-neutral and evaluator-relative rankings of the outcomes to be promoted, with the goal of more closely capturing our commonsense convictions concerning values, reasons, and deontic verdicts within a consequentialist theory. If the tension between traditional agent-neutral consequentialism and our commonsense convictions concerning reasons, values, and actions is too much to stomach, but consequentializing target convictions and the theories that provide their explanatory rationales minimizes this tension, and does so while adhering to the outcome-centered constraint, the resulting consequentialized counterpart may no longer be too much to stomach; indeed, it may be the best proposal for accommodating the tension.

Of course, if, as I have argued, there is no support for adopting such an outcome-centered framework, then there is no need to stomach anything to accommodate such a framework; no need, that is, to mitigate any tension between such an outcome-centered framework on the one hand, and our commonsense convictions and the theories and values that accommodate them on the other.[[181]](#footnote-181) But it is nonetheless important to trace the contours of deformity to our ethical theory and normative practices produced by the pursuit of such a mitigating strategy.

We have seen that the reason dependence of fundamental deontic evaluations of actions on our alternative theories reflects a central feature of rational agency, that we strive to do what we have good reasons to do for these good reasons, just as we strive to believe what we have good reasons to believe for such reasons. Fundamental deontic evaluations of actions on our alternative theories reflect in part whether the agent acts for good reasons of the right kind. But the non-ethical consequentializer takes all such reasons to act to be, or to be grounded in, reasons to promote outcomes. Deontic evaluations appealing to such reasons are evaluations of actions “whose prospect you ought to most prefer.” (2023, 462) The right action is the action by an agent the performance of which brings about the best outcome—the prospect that the agent ought to prefer. In place of deontic evaluations reflecting phiing for good reasons of the right kind, it focuses on the wrong kinds of reasons, reasons it is good to bring it about that the agent intentionally performs the action that promotes the best outcome. Even if what brings about the best outcome on such a consequentializing account is not just that an agent intentionally performs the action, but that he performs it for certain reasons, the agent will have reasons to bring it about not the he intentionally phis for good reasons of the right kind, but that he intentionally phis for certain reasons for reasons the cultivation of which promotes the best outcome. Whereas Kantians and Aristotelians offer theories of the good reasons that we have to act and the values they reflect, reasons that guide the agent acting rightly or from duty, non-ethical consequentializing precludes such good reasons of the right kind to act, substituting in their place reasons it is good to bring it about that I intentionally perform the action (perhaps for certain reasons) that promotes the best outcome.

Moreover, although such non-ethical consequentializing often purports not only to more closely approximate target theory deontic verdicts, but to capture the values reflected in such verdicts, it cannot but profoundly deform such values. We have seen that the values recognized by Kantians and Aristotelians are reflected in non-outcome-centered reasons to act and in deontic evaluations of actions guided by such reasons. Because substantial consequentialist accounts can recognize neither such reasons nor such evaluations of actions, the values they recognize can at best be distorted versions of these values. Kantsequentialists, for example, purport to capture the value of persons as ends in themselves highlighted by Kant. (Portmore 2023) But because the Kantian takes such a value essentially to be reflected in good non-outcome-centered reasons of the right kind, she will view the Kantsequentializer’s outcome-centered alternative not as a different way of valuing persons as ends in themselves, but as a proposal that fails properly to value people as ends at all.

For the Kantian, the value of humanity as an end in itself is, as Herman emphasizes, “a marker of equal respect: no one should . . . treat the willing of another as subordinate to their own: that is, treat it in their maxims merely as a means,” (2021, 96) Parfit’s gangster fails to treat the barista as an end in herself precisely because he subordinates her will to his own, treating her as a mere means to achieving his ends. If killing her promotes his end, what he takes to be the highest ranked outcome, he will not hesitate to do so. But for the same reason, the Kantian will take a Kantsequentialist to fail to treat those with whom he interacts as ends in themselves. His end, qua consequentialist, must be derived via something like Portmore’s “intermediary duty to perform the act whose prospect you ought to most prefer.” (2023, 462) Because the relevance of the wills of others is always captured in rankings of outcomes that he has reasons to promote, their wills are subordinated to his pursuit of his own ends, the outcomes/prospects he ought most to prefer. Just as the gangster will kill the person if doing so promotes his end, the outcome he ranks highest, and will not if it does not, the Kantsequentialist will kill the person if doing so promotes his end, the outcome he ranks highest, and will not if it does not.

For the Kantian who values persons as ends in themselves, the fundamental difference in kind between her valuing of persons and the gangster’s is the same as the fundamental difference between her valuing of persons and the Kantsequentialist’s—neither the gangster nor the Kantsequentialist ever interacts respectfully with others, as required by duty, because each always subordinates the will of others to their own ends. The difference between them is only the outcome-maximizing ends to which they subordinate the will of others, the objectionable subordination is the same. Even when the gangster pays for his coffee, he does so for reasons that subordinate the will of the other to his ends, hence he fails to act as duty requires. Similarly, even when the Kantsequentialist refrains from murdering, this cannot be treating the person as an end in themselves, because he subordinates the will of the person to his Kantsequentialist outcome-centered end, e.g. to the end of minimizing instances of his treatment of people as mere means. Such actions will always be for the Kantian what Herman characterizes as at best a “simulation of the real thing,” like “driving without using brakes: wrong to do even if no one is injured.” (2021, 68) What a Kantian duty requires of us, Herman suggests, “is deliberative, attention-directing, and being responsive to intersecting saliences,” a “kind of motive that tracks the value in the content of the duty, not just the bare fact that there is a duty in play.” (2021, 69) Because the Kantsequentialist cannot act from such a motive tracking the relevant values even when he acts in accordance with duty, he can never act from duty, guided in his performance of actions by good reasons of the right kind reflecting the relevant values. The values reflected in the reasons for which Kantian and Aristotelian rational agents act, good non-outcome-centered reasons of the right kind that guide the successful performance of such actions, are precisely what the non-ethical consequentializer elides from view. [[182]](#footnote-182)

***Democracy and Voting***

In economics and public policy the default methodology deploys rational choice theory, and we have seen in chapters [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) and [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) that traditional normative rational choice theory is committed to outcome-centered accounts of reasons, attitudes, and actions, the grounds for the non-ethical argument for consequentialism.[[183]](#footnote-183) These non-ethical outcome-centered elements invite an initial focus upon the direct evaluation of actions as maximizing the satisfaction of an agent’s preferences. Non-outcome-centered values, reasons, attitudes, and actions are elided from view on such an approach, a result that deforms any policy recommendation for which such non-outcome-centered considerations are relevant. We saw in [chapter 1](#_Chapter_1:_Introduction) that the most straightforward such outcome-centered evaluations of voting, for example, undermine the kinds of reasons that we take ourselves to have to vote.

Citizens in democracies commonly take themselves to have good reasons of the right kind—indeed, a duty—for each of them to vote. Recognition of such a duty seems to play an important role in the effective functioning of democratic institutions and practices.[[184]](#footnote-184) But if rational choice theory is adopted as the central framework for understanding such practices, rational voters should “vote for the electoral outcome that they believe will leave them best off.” (Brennan 1998, 149–50) On such an approach any “connection between the end (in this case the electoral outcome) and the means (the individual’s vote) is too tenuous,” (Brennan and Hamlin 1998, section I) typically leaving the rational agent with better reasons not to vote. Only irrational agents will take themselves to have, and be motivated by, reasons to vote.

Not only does such an approach not support our conviction that we have a duty, for good reasons of the right kind, to vote, it suggests that we typically have good reasons not to vote. There have been many attempts by advocates of outcome-centered approaches to mitigate this striking tension with our commonsense convictions. They often attempt either to finesse the characterization of the relevant outcomes, or to adjust the understanding of the relation between cause and outcome, in order to tease out of such an outcome-centered framework if not a duty to vote, at least some reasons to prefer, and choose to bring about, the outcome upon which we vote. Alvin Goldman, for example, attempts to introduce a different understanding of the causal efficacy of voting in bringing about electoral outcomes, (1999) upon which it does after all maximize utility to prefer the outcome upon which I vote. Others, while remaining within this outcome-centered approach, have reframed the preference upon which voting agents are understood to act as a preference not for bringing about an electoral outcome, but for bringing it about that one’s support for an electoral option is expressed. Such expression, however, seems to lose a plausible connection to voting once it is divorced from causation of the outcome.[[185]](#footnote-185) Nor, as Anderson has shown, does a shift from preference for what leaves the agent best off to preference for what leaves everyone best off salvage a reason—much less a duty—for each citizen in a democracy to vote. (2001, 25–6) It may well bring about the best consequences for people to vote, but this does not provide any particular individual with reasons to prefer the outcome upon which she votes. The chances that my voting will make a difference to the best overall outcome are, after all, as negligible as that they will make a difference to the best outcome for me, hence if there is the slightest inconvenience to others—and “there is always some inconvenience”—then “I ought not to vote.” (2001, 26)

We can of course legally incentivize citizens to vote, but within such an approach this is not to demonstrate that there is a duty to vote, it is to recognize that there are rarely good reasons (much less a duty) to bring it about that I vote absent the threat of legal sanction. Any such mitigating strategies that adjust understandings of the relevant outcomes and their causation, or adjust the payoffs involved in calculating outcomes, only seem to highlight the failure of such an account to support the convictions that underlie viable democratic practices. Indeed, Brennan and Lomasky speculate that the closest we can come on such an approach to explaining the widespread belief that we have such a duty is an account upon which, although there is no justificatory rationale for a duty to vote, it is best for certain people, a “political elite,” to inculcate in the masses a myth that there is such a rationale—to mistakenly take there to be good reasons of the right kind to vote. The best explanation of this belief within such an outcome-centered approach is that its inculcation is a component of “an ideology crafted by and for political elites” (2000, 84) to function as an “opiate of the masses,” thereby maximizing the satisfaction of the preferences of the members of such an elite. (2000, 86) The proposal, then, is that we understand the duty to vote as a bad reason of the right kind inculcated in the masses by others, adding inauthenticity of our bad reasons to vote to alienation from any good reasons of the right kind to vote.

Standard normative rational choice theory thus undermines the central rationale for political participation, rendering mysterious any non-deceptive duty for citizens to vote, and even any good reasons, self-interested or otherwise, for citizens to vote. Many who adopt rational choice theory recognize that non-outcome-centered rationales for a duty to vote have been provided, but within the outcome-centered framework such rationales themselves come to seem mysterious. They are dismissed as turning on “generalization” arguments that seem clearly to be fallacious when framed within such an outcome-centered framework, or as mistaking the rationalizations people are offered for mistakenly believing that they have a duty to vote as providing actual rationales for voting.[[186]](#footnote-186) The tyranny of outcomes thus strikes at the very heart of our democratic practices, undermining our convictions that we have reasons of the right kind, much less a duty, to foster and participate in democratic governance.

Rejection the tyranny of outcomes, however, brings back into view just the kinds of values, reasons, and attitudes that can provide such a rationale for the conviction that citizens in a democracy have good moral reasons of the right kind to vote. Seana Shiffrin nicely frames the general structure of one such non-outcome-centered rationale:

Each of us as individuals has duties to participate in the fair, inclusive political collective in our relevant context, given our duties to support justice and given that, assuming its decision procedures are fair and followed, the relevant collective’s decisions are politically attributable to its members. (2014, 110)

Such a non-outcome-centered justificatory framework, appealing to duties of justice that we each have to participate in the decision-making of our political collective, can be fleshed out in myriad ways. Kant, for example, argues that we each have reasons to enter into a political state to secure the conditions of equal individual freedom. Private property is necessary for our equal individual freedom, but legitimate private property requires certain conditions that only a state can legitimately provide, e.g. a system of public access (e.g. roads) to private property. The authority of such a state is only legitimate if it is answerable to the omnilateral will of those over whom it is exercised, and we each have a duty of rightful honor to do our part to secure and maintain these conditions through time, including a duty to play our role as a participant in the exercise of this omnilateral will, e.g. to vote.[[187]](#footnote-187) Whether or not it “matters” in the rational choice theorist’s sense that I vote, I have a duty of rightful honor—good reasons of the right kind—to participate in the exercise of the omnilateral will—to vote. Such a duty is dictated by the conditions of equal individual freedom. It should matter to each of us that we vote, regardless of whether, in the rational choice theorist’s sense, any of our votes matters.[[188]](#footnote-188)

Such non-outcome-centered rationales, appealing to non-outcome-centered values and reasons, abound.[[189]](#footnote-189) The point here is not to defend any of these rationales for a duty to vote grounded in appeals to values such as freedom, reciprocity, democratic legitimacy, and justice, but to highlight that all such rationales in support of our conviction that we have a duty to vote are elided from view within an outcome-centered approach. In place of some such rationale supporting our deeply held conviction that we have good moral reasons of the right kind to vote, the outcome-based framework leaves us with such a conviction presumptively undermined. Pro voting campaigns attempting to demonstrate that our votes do matter in the rational choice theorist’s sense only further undermine the convictions of reflective citizens that they have a duty to vote. Perhaps there is not ultimately a compelling rationale for citizens in democracies to vote. But we have seen that outcome-centered approaches provide hostile ground for providing any such rationale, threatening the deep-seated conviction that we do have good moral reasons of the right kind to vote. To reject the tyranny of outcomes is to rebuff this threat, and to bring back into view promising rationales for good reasons of the right kind to vote.

I close with a summary of the themes of this chapter. As rational agents we strive to grasp good reasons of the right kind for acting, and to act for such reasons, just as, as rational thinkers, we strive to grasp good reasons of the right kind for believing, and to believe for such reasons. Accounts of ethics and of our social practices that are developed within the outcome-centered framework systematically alienate us from good reasons of the right kind to act and interact, reasons for performing actions such that to grasp such reasons is, ceteris paribus, to desire and intend to act. They shift focus instead to what we can now recognize as reasons of the wrong kind, reasons answering not the question of whether to act, but the question of whether intentionally performing an action brings about the best outcome, hence is good to happen. Moreover, they shift the focus to which reasons it promotes the best outcome for agents to take to be good, and away from taking reasons to be good that are good, and from acting for such good reasons. If it promotes a socially beneficial goal for us to take ourselves to have good reasons to hold others accountable for wrongful injury, to take ourselves to have good reasons (because we cultivate appropriate motives) to interact honestly with others, and to take ourselves to have good reasons to vote, such approaches often counsel cultivating these (mis)takings—a pervasive inauthenticity in our rational agency.

Far from leading us towards illumination and clarity from the muddle of commonsense conviction, the outcome-centered approach leads us away from our fundamental project as rational agents, acting for good reasons of the right kind, and striving always to do this better, and towards reasons of the wrong kind, reasons to bring it about that we act, and take ourselves to have reasons to act, in ways that promote the best outcome. It leads us not up and out of the cave into the light, but into the cave of reasons of the wrong kind and merely apparent reasons of the right kind—to deep-seated alienation and inauthenticity as rational agents. If such an outcome-centered framework were unavoidable, mitigating the effects of such alienation through such inauthenticity might be our lot. But I have shown that such a framework, and the alienation and inauthenticity that it brings in its wake, is not only avoidable, it is not even plausible.

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1. Here I am indebted to an anonymous referee. Areas in which such outcome-centered accounts loom rather than tyrannize include contemporary theory of action and contemporary accounts of practical reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I include among deontic evaluations of actions both explicitly moral evaluations, e.g. as morally right, morally required or impermissible, and required by duty, and rational evaluations, e.g. of acting rightly in the Aristotelian sense and acting as one ought. See Daniel Munoz for a similar characterization of a consequentialist as “anyone who believes that an act’s deontic properties (rightness, wrongness, and so on) are explained exclusively by the evaluative properties of its outcome,” (2021, 81) and Douglas Portmore’s recent formulation of act-consequentialism as holding that “the deontic statuses of actions depend on an evaluative ranking of their outcomes.” (2023, 449, fn 13) My characterization of consequentialism here is more restrictive than some and more permissive than others. For example, certain accounts appeal only to an “if and only if” relationship between the evaluation of actions and the evaluation of outcomes (e.g. Brown 2011), whereas this framework is more restrictive, requiring in addition an explanatory “because.” Yet other accounts restrict consequentialism only to distinctively “moral” deontic evaluation of actions from an agent- neutral point of view (Pettit 1993), whereas my framework is more inclusive, ranging over what agents ought, simpliciter, to do and what they morally ought to do, over both rational and moral permissibility and requirement, and over accounts that involve evaluator relative as well as evaluator-neutral rankings of outcomes. I will be making the case for approaching consequentialism through this understanding of the evaluative framework throughout the course of this and succeeding chapters. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We will see in the next chapter that what counts as a “deontic” evaluation of actions is itself a matter of dispute. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I am indebted to Douglas Portmore for this point concerning fundamental things of value. (2011, 66–7) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The demandingness objection has been extensively discussed and developed. My own attempts to explore this objection can be found in Hurley (2006, pp 680ff). For discussions of the objection that consequentialism is too confining, see Scheffler (1992, 98) and Murphy (2000, p. 26). The objections that it is too alienating and undermines integrity were introduced by Williams (1973). I have refined this objection (2009). Railton offers a classic development of and response to the alienation objection (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In earlier work I develop arguments of this form (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is a version of what has come to be characterized as consequentialism’s “Compelling Idea,” which will be taken up at length in [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Versions of this “good-is-prior-to-the right” argument are developed by Smith (2003), Scheffler (1982), and Kagan (1989). These arguments will be discussed at length in [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For one among the many examples of such an argument, see Portmore (2011, 56; 2022, 452-54). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Such ethical consequentializing arguments are the focus of [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The_1). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Such an argument is effective even on views that take these desires that supply the agent’s reasons for acting to function merely as placeholders for reasons and/or values that rationalize action. The nature of the rationalizing role played by desires is taken up in chapters [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) and [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This standard story of action will be discussed in detail in [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I take up particular examples of many of these strategies in [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Although my focus in what follows is upon *act* consequentialism, note that the alleged shortcoming identified here is a shortcoming for any form of consequentialism, regardless of focal point(s). I return to this point in [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, Anderson’s account of reasons to vote (2001), and Ripstein (2009) and Varden’s (2016) characterizations of Kant’s defense of the role of the omnilateral will in securing the conditions of equal individual freedom, and the requirement of rightful honor to participate in the exercise of such a will. I take up such reasons to vote in more detail in [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Stephen Darwall makes a similar point, highlighting cases in which “the person values the state of other’s flourishing because he values her intrinsically (in caring for her for her sake).” (2003, section I) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For an illuminating discussion of the myriad objects of desire, see Brewer (2009, 20–22). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Demonstrations that the tyranny of outcomes in ethics has implications that are unacceptably demanding, confining, alienating, and monstrous can profitably be understood as highlighting implications of this more fundamental source of implausibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Philosophers sympathetic to consequentialism who have developed versions of this challenge against non-consequentialists include Smith (2003), Scheffler (1982), and Kagan (1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Barbara Herman emphasizes this point, that although “it is typically thought that a deontological moral theory must not look to moral (or other) value in its rules,” it is instead only true “that a deontological theory is not a good-promoting theory in a consequentialist sense.” (2021, 3) Kantian and other alternatives can and do often appeal to non-deontic value; what they reject is the legitimacy of an outcome-centered (“good-promoting”) constraint on such an appeal to non-deontic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I develop this distinction between the aims and ends of actions in chapters [3](#_Chapter_3:_The) and [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I borrow this terminology from McNaughton and Rawling (1991), and Louise (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See [chapter 4](#_Chapter_4:_The), section IV for an extended discussion rational choice theory and the Standard Story of action. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Many philosophers’ arguments against outcome-centered accounts of ethics, reasons, and actions are in tension with their continued adherence to outcome-centered accounts of desires. See in particular the detailed discussion of T. M. Scanlon’s accounts of reasons and desires in [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I take up Thompson’s arguments in [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Here I follow closely recent work by Pamela Hieronymi (2005, 2011, 2013, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I and other have distinguished what I here characterize as ethical consequentializing arguments from non-ethical arguments for consequentializing (Hurley, 2023; Portmore 2022) Versions of the ethical argument, which I take up in this chapter, can be found in Dreier (1991, 2011), Louise (2004), and Peterson (2010). This is an argument that seemingly non-consequentialist theories can be converted into forms of act-consequentialism without distortion, yielding equivalent deontic verdicts. I will take up the very different non-ethical arguments for consequentializing briefly in section IV of this chapter, and again in [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See for example Tenenbaum (2014), Hurley (2014), and Schroeder (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The first is the strategy deployed by J S Mill (2001), the second is the utilitarianism of rights strategy introduced and ultimately rejected by Nozick (1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Advocates of the move to evaluator-relative ranking of outcomes include Sen (1983, 113–132) Dreier (1993, 22–40, 2011), Smith (2003, 576–598), Louise (2004, 518–536), and Portmore (2007, 2009, 2011, 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. There have also been attempts recently to demonstrate that an agent-neutral ranking can at least in principle accommodate deontic constraints without recourse to indirection, such that deontic constraints can at least in principle be consequentialized within the context of carefully crafted forms of agent-neutral consequentialism. See, for example, Colvyn, Cox, and Steele (2010), Setiya (2018), Johnson (2021), and Howard (2022). See also Shyam Nair’s broader discussion of such approaches (2014). My arguments against evaluator-relative forms of the ethical consequentializing argument for consequentialism extend to ethical agent-neutral alternatives to this argument. I will incorporate discussions of these agent-neutral arguments where appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See on this point Campbell Brown (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Portmore (2009), emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. I take this language of reason dependence and independence from Phillip Pettit (2015), although I do not use it to mark quite the same distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Such a distinction between reason independent deontic evaluations, appealing to the reasons there are for performing actions, and reason dependent evaluations, appealing in addition to whether the agent performs actions for the reasons there are, plays a central role in ethical theory from the Greeks through the moderns (See section II), and continues to play such a role. See, for example, Hanser’s distinction between deontic evaluations that essentially appeal to “an agent’s reasons for acting” and those that are “independent of any agent’s actual grounds for acting in that way” (2005, 443), and Scanlon’s distinction between evaluations that appropriately appeal to “an agent’s reasons for acting,” (2008, 37) and those that appeal to “what reasons there are” for acting (2008, 100). A version of the contemporary distinction between normative and motivating reasons, upon which normative reasons are good reason for someone to act, regardless of whether they act for such reasons, and motivating reasons are the reasons for which someone acts—the agent’s reasons in acting, captures one element of the reason dependent/reason independent distinction, but does not include another key element, that for the relevant reason dependent deontic evaluations the reasons for which the agent acts—the agent’s motivating reasons—must be the reasons there are for acting. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Crucially, outcomes are understood on such a strategy quite broadly, such that they include the act performed. The relevant outcome that my keeping my promise brings about, thus broadly understood, can thus simply be that my keeping of my promise happens. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Arguments stressing the explanatory distortion and impoverishment of consequentialized forms of non-consequentialist theories are provided by Schroeder (2017, 1478–82), Tenenbaum (2014), Bauman (2019), Sauer (2019), and Hurley (2014; 2020). I set such concerns aside here not because they are not legitimate, but in order to focus upon the more fundamental objection that standard target theories cannot be converted into deonticly equivalent forms of consequentialism at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. There are many strains of virtue ethics, including consequentialist strains. My focus here is upon distinctively Aristotelian strains, such as Aristotle’s own (1999), and those articulated more recently by Anscombe (1999) and Annas (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. A similar distinction between wrong action and acting wrongly is highlighted by Scanlon, (2008, 23 and 29) although he takes “wrong action” to assess the action and “acting wrongly” to assess an aspect of the agent (2008, 28). But Hanser points out that “wrongly” clearly functions as “an adverb of manner” modifying the action, i.e. that “the object of evaluation here is an action.” (2005, 274) [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See, for example, Herman on Kant’s account of the fundamental value of a good will (1993), Guyer’s claim that for Kant “freedom is our most fundamental value, and that the law that we can formulate by means of our reason is valuable only as a means to freedom,” (2000, 2) and Darwall’s claim that “Kantian respect for a person as an end in herself is surely a form of intrinsic valuation.” (2003, sec. I) [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I bracket here the complex and nuanced questions concerning what constitutes action from duty. See Herman (e.g. 2007, 2021) for an insightful account of the role of a Kantian agent’s deliberative field in her deliberation and decision-making, and the more nuanced account of action from duty that such an account provides. See also on this point Schapiro (1993) and Hurley (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Herman distinguishes on Kant’s behalf doing nothing wrong “in the narrow legalistic sense,” and the wider sense, in which “it is the agent’s motive that is responsible for the correct elements playing the correct role in the production of an action.” (2022, 63) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Crucially, for Kant, the shopkeeper does act in conformity with the juridical deontic duty against stealing, even though he violates the relevant ethical deontic duty. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mark Timmons has characterized such a reason dependent understanding of fundamental deontic evaluation of actions in Kant as the “motive content thesis.” See Timmons (2002) for an illuminating characterization of the debate between those who interpret Kant as defending such a thesis, e.g. Herman (1993, 2021) and O’Neill (1975), and those, Timmons included, who dispute such an interpretation. For my purposes, it is only necessary to establish that this is a plausible alternative interpretation of Kant. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. I take this analogy between practical and theoretical evaluation from Herman (2022, and correspondence), although I have developed it somewhat differently. See in particular her claim that “an unjustified true belief is of course true, but it is also qua belief . . . incorrect or wrong or defective. I think Kant has a similar view about moral worth and wrongness.” (2022, 64) The parallel yields insights concerning the nature of deontic evaluation regardless of the ultimate plausibility of the justified true belief account of knowledge to which the parallel appeals. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Scanlon highlights that with respect to the second point we should expect a parallel between belief and actions, since they “exhibit a similarly complex structure.” (1998, 52) [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. I borrow this insightful phrase, the “intention with which” one acts, from Anscombe (2000, 25, 31, and 34). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Wiggins persuasive argument for this claim (2006, 139ff). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Herman makes this point in her account of Kant on deontic evaluation, suggesting that although “we are accustomed to saying of the morally motivated person that they perform the right action plus they had a good motive,” we should instead say of the person who merely acts in accordance with duty that their act is “minus something” that is constitutive of fundamental Kantian deontic evaluation of actions, a “kind of simulation of the real thing.” (2021, 67) [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Christine Korsgaard defends many elements of this account. She distinguishes reason independent “acts” from reason dependent “actions.” Such “actions” include both the reason independent act *and* the reason for which it is done (2009, 8–12), e.g. both “committing suicide,” for example (the act), and the reason (in her terminology, the end) for which it is undertaken, “in order to avoid misery.” (2009, 12) Moreover, it is such reason dependent actions, not reason independent acts, that are both “the objects of choice and the bearers of moral value.” (2009, 12) Korsgaard attributes such an account to both Aristotle and Kant, and contrasts their accounts with those of contemporary philosophers who mistakenly “tend to think of the reason for an action as something . . . apart from the action itself.” (2009, 12) See also Herman’s characterization of acting from duty as requiring that “we appreciate and reason to the performance keeping an eye on the relevant . . . aspects of moral value that are present in our circumstances of action.” (2021, 68) She offers an example of paying for a debt in which, for the person acting from duty, if the debt is personal “my debt paying activity is incomplete” if when “I come to pay my debt you turn out to be out of town,” leaving me with “no way to express my gratitude.” (2021, 59) [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See, on this point, Strawson’s own discussion of appropriate experiences of reactive attitudes as properly reflecting agents’ reasons for actions. For example, you benefit me, but it is only appropriate to experience gratitude if you benefit me from “general goodwill towards me” rather than from your own self-interest. (2008, section III) [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See Wiggins’ insightful arguments in defense of this position. (2006, 139ff) Aristotle, Hume and Kant, Wiggins argues, all take reason-dependent deontic evaluation to be fundamental. It is the advent of consequentialism that takes as fundamental the reason independent rightness of actions that produce certain outcomes, and evaluates reasons for acts as dependably (reliably) disposing the agent to perform such right acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. 2005, 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. This will turn out to be a problematic claim. To recognize the *Kantian* value of persons as ends-in-themselves is to recognize the reasons that reflect or express this value. Portmore does not recognize many of the reasons that the Kantian takes to reflect such recognition of this value, calling into question whether the value his Kantsequentialist recognizes is the same. In particular, if the value he recognizes is one such that the reasons to act that reflect it are captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, but the value recognized by Kant is reflected in many reasons to act that cannot be captured in such rankings without profound distortion, the values recognized would appear to be importantly different. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For an insightful discussion of Kantians duties as deliberative schema, sensitive both to the distinction between juridical and ethical duties and to their nuanced interaction, see Herman (2021, chapter 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Acting from duty is also what acting from respect requires, at least as Kant understands respect. Kant understands valuing persons as ends-in-themselves as manifested not in the Kantsequentialist’s feeling of respect, but in a “maxim of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person, and so as respect in the practical sense.” (1996, 199) This maxim of respect is a duty not to treat someone as a mere means, and not, as with Portmore’s Kantsequentialist, a duty to “rank lower” the prospect/outcome “of doing something that risks treating someone as a mere means.” (2023, 461, fn 32) While Portmore characterizes the Kantsequentialist’s feeling of respect as manifesting in dispositions to perform and not to perform certain actions, e.g. not to interfere with autonomous choice, to inquire with and open mind, to reasons with rather than manipulate others, and to hold them accountable for bad choices (2023, 460), Kant’s respect in the practical sense is manifested not in mere dispositions to act these ways, but in attunement to good reasons to perform and refrain from performing many actions that are not, and are not means to, the promoting of outcomes. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. But see [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Portmore characterizes this as the “earnest” consequentializing approach (2022); I have characterized it elsewhere (2020) as the consequentialist argument for consequentializing, in contrast with the ethical consequentializing argument for consequentialism. I characterize it here as the non-ethical consequentializing argument. I take up such arguments explicitly in [chapter 7](#_Chapter_7:_Selected). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See Scheffler (1982), Kagan (1989), and Smith (2003). Smith, for example sees “no way of analyzing the stringency of an obligation except by way of considering the amount of good that acting on that obligation will produce.” (587) [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. For accounts of this relationship between value and reasons for action see Kolodny (2011), e.g. “Of course, it is also obvious . . . that we see our reasons as flowing from what is valuable, or good, or worthwhile;” (69) see also Scheffler’s assertions that to value something is to see it “as a source of reasons for action,” (2011, 27) and that valuing something involves “a disposition to treat certain kinds of X-related considerations as reasons for action in relevant . . . contexts.” [29] See also Parfit’s extensive discussion of goodness in the “reason-implying sense,” (2011, II, 432) e.g.: “when we call something good, in what we can call the reason-implying sense,” we mean that it gives “us or others strong reasons to respond to this thing in some positive way.” (2011, I, 38) These are different accounts of value and valuing, but they all recognize that to value something is to see it as reflected in reasons to act. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Wiggins takes the appeal to non-deontic value rationales on such accounts to be straightforward, suggesting that Kant and Hume, and by implication Aristotle, “wanted to ground their ideas about what it is to act rightly in prior ideas about something else that had to do with the agent—be it virtue, his personal merit, . . . his good will, or whatever.” (2006, 141) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. See Kolodny (2011) and Hurley (2019) for general arguments that many of the reasons to act that reflect our values do not appear to be reasons to promote. See also Munoz’s (2021) distinction between telic reasons and responsive reasons. Herman emphasizes this dimension of Kantian ethics, noting that whereas “some goods, like happiness, are to-be-promoted,” others, such as respect, “have their value realized only in a way of acting.” (2021, 5) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. The subtle operation of this constraint shows up in a recent attempt to consequentialize constraints within an agent-neutral consequentialist framework. In his defense of *de se* agent-neutral consequentialism (2022), Nathan Howard suggests that in contrast to alternatives, which privilege something other than value, the consequentialist “privileges value.” (2022, 812) This invites the view that alternatives to consequentialism must appeal to something other than a value-based rationale for evaluation of actions. But we have seen that the Kantian and the virtue ethicist do emphasize non-deontic value rationales, and that the consequentializer presupposes that they do. What they reject is the consequentialist’s Outcome-Centered Constraint on the relevance of the things that we value to reasons for action. If to privilege value is to be committed to the Outcome-Centered Constraint on Value, hence to consequentialism, the expectation that a plausible rationale appeals to value will suggest that some form of consequentialism, however implausible in other respects, is unavoidable. But there is no obvious reason to adopt such an Outcome-Centered Constraint on the relevance of things of value to reasons for action, hence no support provided from the appeal to value for a consequentialist account of deontic constraints over alternative accounts. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See Timmons (2002, 255ff) for an account of the pervasiveness of such a view. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. I have discussed this slide in Hurley (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The distinction between senses also manifests itself in more subtle ways. In Kieran Setiya’s recent attempt to consequentialize general deontic constraints within an agent-neutral consequentialist framework, he points to the intuitive appeal of the claim that “you should not kill one in order to prevent five others from being killed by someone else,” (2018, 93) and the claim that “you should not want others to do so either.” (2018, 97) The Kantian and the Aristotelian are both amenable to such claims. There are decisive reasons for any person not to kill in such circumstances, reasons that reflect values, e.g. respect for persons as ends in themselves and the virtue of justice. How does this invite agent-neutral consequentialism? The extension to consequentialism is made by way of what Setiya characterizes as the Action-Preference Nexus, which suggests that you should perform the action “whose consequences you should prefer to all the rest.” (2018, 94) If you should not kill, and you should not want others to do so either, the Action-Preference Nexus suggests that you must prefer the consequences that such actions bring about to all the rest. We can then understand “best” in terms of these consequences you should prefer. If I should not kill, and the Nexus establishes the link between such an action and agent-neutral consequences, such a deontic constraint can readily be reconciled to agent-neutral consequentialism. In [chapter 5](#_Chapter_5:_Against) I will present a detailed argument against outcome-centered accounts of desires/preferences of the sort endorsed by commitment to the Action-Preference Nexus. Here I only point out that our two different senses of bringing about yield very different understandings of the Nexus and its implications. For the Kantian and the Aristotelean, I should not kill in such circumstances, and prefer not to kill, but the only sense in which I prefer the consequences of such an action is the constitutive sense—in doing what I should do, what I, in the broad pro attitude sense prefer *to do*, I bring about the consequence that I do it. If the Action-Preference Nexus is understood as appealing to consequences in this constitutive sense, it is common ground for all three views, but provides no support for consequentialism, agent-neutral or otherwise. If the Nexus is understood as appealing to consequences in any more robust sense, e.g. in the rationalizing sense or Setiya’s own “congruence of reasons” sense, then the Kantian and Aristotelean will reject it as false, since the reasons that the agent should not kill, and should not want others to, are reasons to act and to refrain from acting that reflect values the relevance of which cannot be captured without distortion in rankings of outcomes to be promoted, and in the reasons to promote that reflect them. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. I have provided grounds for challenging this commitment elsewhere (e.g. 2017, 2018, 2019). In subsequent chapters I further develop these grounds. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. As I use the terms here the *end* of any intentional action is provided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it, and the *aim* of any intentional action is its successful performance guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it. I will clarify and motivate this distinction between the aims and ends of actions in the final section of this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See, for example, Scheffler (1982); Kagan (1989); Smith (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Such an argument strategy is deployed by Scheffler, for example, (1982, 112 and 120) and Kagan (1989, 27ff). This alleged collapse is why deontic constraints can come to be seen as surrounded by an air of paradox. The reason not to murder is taken to be that murdering is a bad thing to happen. But in the case of deontic constraints three times the murdering can be prevented by my murdering. The rationale for not murdering in typical cases is a rationale for murdering in cases of such deontic constraints, precisely because any plausible non-deontic rationale for deontic evaluation is taken to appeal to the value of the outcomes to be brought about. See Scheffler (1982, 182), Nagel (1986, 179) and Hurley (1997) for discussions of this allegation of paradox. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Paul Guyer also understands Kant as offering a value-based rationale: “Kant’s practical philosophy is based on the fundamental . . . intrinsic value of freedom.” (2000, 127) [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. For examples of such permissibility characterizations of the Compelling Idea, see, in addition to Scheffler (1982, 4), Mark Schroeder (2007, 281), Dreier (2011, 100), Portmore (2005, 98), and Sachs (2010, 264). Scheffler’s work is among the first to highlight this permissibility form of the compelling idea, Portmore labels this form “The Compelling Idea,” and Schroeder highlights its pivotal role in arguments for and against consequentialism by capitalizing it (The Compelling Idea), a convention that I adopt here. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Thus Portmore identifies what it is about “consequentialism that even its critics find compelling” as “the very simple and seductive idea that it can never be wrong to produce the best available state of affairs.” (2005, 98) [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Darwall makes a similar point in his work on Moore: “if an agent has an absolute duty to do something then it follows that that would be the best thing for her *to do*, that it is the best *act* of those available . . . Moore slides to . . . whether the state of its being performed is the best state *to happen* or exist.” (2003, 476-77) [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ironically, it is certain traditional forms of consequentialism that encounter the most difficulty in accommodating the intuitive appeal of this idea. In particular, forms holding that what it is best for the agent to do is determined from a personal point of view, whereas what it is morally right to do is determined from an agent-neutral, impersonal point of view, encounter serious difficulties, because it often seems to be the case that what it is best to do for me, e.g. what promotes my welfare, is not what is agent-neutrally best, e.g. what promotes overall welfare. For a discussion of these challenges, see Hurley (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Parfit (2011, 33). See also Bernard Williams’ account of the “all-in ought of practical deliberation,” (1981, 120) the ought of “decisiveness” (1981, 126) that “expresses the agent’s recognition of the course of action appropriate, all things considered, to the reasons, motives, and constraints that he sees as bearing on the situation.” (1981, 124) [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Davidson famously invokes such telic evaluations in the very formulation of the problem of akrasia. The akratic agent does X despite judging that “it would be better to do Y than to do X.” (1980, 22) The akratic agent knows the better but does the worse. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Many consequentialists have also explicitly endorsed this relationship between deontic and telic evaluation of actions and reasons for action, e.g. Portmore (2011, 12) and Broome (1991, 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See also Portmore (2011, 41–51), and Smith (1994, 63–66). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. This traditional agent-neutral specification incorporates, in addition to a merely formal characterization of agent-neutrality, what Graham Oddie and Peter Milne characterize as pre-theoretical “intuitions about the agent-neutral value of outcomes.” (1991, 74) Indeed, they argue that a merely formal characterization of agent-neutral value, shorn of such additional commitments concerning value, can accommodate such constraints. (p. 71) Shyam Nair demonstrates, however, that augmentation of such a merely formal characterization of agent-neutrality with one powerful pre-theoretical intuition about agent-neutral value, which he characterizes as unanimity (“If every agent ought to prefer some outcome Oi, to another outcome Oj, then Oi is better than Oj.” (2014, p. 184), results in a characterization of agent-neutral value that does not accommodate standard cases of deontic constraints. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Not all cases of constraints that fit Scheffler’s standard schema are problematic for consequentialists. In what follows I will focus upon the standard pre-theoretically plausible examples of constraints that do apparently present such problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Consequentialists sometimes suggests that reasons not to lie, steal, kill, and break promises are not in this sense fundamental, in particular that the strong impartial reasons that each of us has not to break our promises are reasons we have because promise-breakings are bad things to happen. But commonsense morality would appear to suggest, by contrast, that it is because each of us has good impartial reasons not to break a promise that we make to another, and is distinctively accountable for doing so, that such a promise-breaking is a bad thing to happen. This point has been emphasized by Warren Quinn: “it is not that we think it fitting to ascribe rights because we think it a good thing that rights be respected. Rather we think respect for rights a good thing precisely because we think people actually have them.” (1993, 173) Scanlon makes a related point concerning reasons of friendship (1998, 88–89). See also Williams’s classic argument against consequentialism, (1973)) and interpretations of Williams’s argument that highlight this aspect, e,g, in Hurley (2009) and Thomas (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. David Wiggins makes this case on behalf of Humeans (2006, 231–242), and Mark LeBar makes such a case on behalf of Aristotelean virtue ethicists (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. John Broome at points invites a similar reconciliation, holding that “the rightness of acts is determined by their goodness,” (1991, 6) while identifying “the goodness of the act with the goodness of its consequences.” (1991, 4) [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See on this point Schroeder (2007), and see Dreier (2011) for a response. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Their non-ethical arguments will be taken up in chapters [4](#_Chapter_4:_The) and [5](#_Chapter_5:_Against). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. For some among the many consequentialists who endorse some form of this latter claim, see Hare: “It is the effects that determine what I should be doing; it is between two sets of effects that I am deciding;” (1952, 56–7) Regan: “The question “What action to do?” is precisely the same . . . as the question “What course of the world to choose?” (2003, 662), and Portmore (2011, 56). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Munoz follows Schapiro (2001) in characterizing this as the “action as production” model of action. For his own challenge to this model, see (2021, 86–91). For another such challenge, see Nye, Plunkett, and Ku (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. He supports such an outcome-centered reinterpretation of such performances as after all promotings by appeal in turn to an outcome-centered account of reasons, upon which every reason is a “reason to promote” some event A. (1970, 64) [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. For discussions of such resistant cases, see Sumner (1996) and Brewer (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. I take this formulation from Douglas Lavin (2015, 622). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Moran and Stone point out that such “performances *unfold*: they involve a diminishing future and a swelling past of what the agent needs to do in order to do . . . what he is doing.” (2011, 48) This is why the object of an intention typically is a “performance verb (‘to Q’).” (2011, 48) [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Douglas Lavin elaborates upon every element of this commonsense approach, from the distinctive form of event description that actions are, an “essentially self-conscious and rational form of material process,” (2015, 609–10), to their temporal extension (“a duration internal to movement” (2015, 618)), to their aim, which “determines the order, and thus the progress, it comprehends.” (2015, 622) [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See, for example, Hooker (2000, 222). [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Michael Smith explicitly defends what I here characterize as a rational form of consequentialism, according to which agents ought to perform the action that “produces the most good and the least bad.” (2003, 576) We have seen that Portmore similarly holds that “an agent objectively ought to perform some particular action if and only if it is, in fact, the best alternative,” where the best alternative is the alternative that brings about the highest ranked outcome. (2011, 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Such an outcome centered account of reasons to act is commonly referred to as the teleological conception of reasons (TCR). See Scanlon (1998) and Hurley (2017) for discussions of such an account and of its pervasiveness. See in addition Scanlon’s argument against the teleological conception (1998, 78–87), and Portmore’s response (2011, chapter 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. For two different and nuanced accounts of the role of such impartial evaluation of outcomes in distinctively moral deontic evaluation, see Samuel Scheffler (1992) and Douglas Portmore (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Recall Nagel’s suggestion that even the performance of an action that does not appear to be a bringing about, e.g. the “performance of act B,” is really “a degenerate case of promoting the occurrence of act B” (1970, 47), hence that all actions are promotings of outcomes. See also Portmore’s assertion that all actions not only “alter the way the world goes,” they all “aim at making the world go a certain way” (2011, 56). See also characterizations of such an “action as production” account by Schapiro (2001), Korsgaard (2009, 8) and Munoz (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Davidson (1980) and Hempel (1962) are often credited with introducing such an account. For a more recent characterization see Velleman (2000); for a spirited defense see Smith (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. For characterizations of this default outcome-centered account of desire, see Michael Smith (2012, 387), and Derek Parfit (2011, 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. What if the objects are taken to be states of affairs to be made the case or possible worlds to be actualized rather than propositions to be made true? Because such alternative accounts of the objects of desires preserve the outcome-centered structure, and characterize such attitudes through appeal to the same contrasting directions of fit towards the world, the non-ethical argument goes through regardless of whether such objects are understood as possible worlds to be made actual, states of affairs to be made the case, or propositions to be made true. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For discussions of this role for preferences in rational choice theory see Elizabeth Anderson (2001, 22–23), Amartya Sen (1973), and David Gauthier (2022). An alternative, non-normative understanding of rational choice theory denies that preferences play this rationalizing role, deploying them only as a predictive tool. On such a merely predictive model preferences do not purport to explain choice, they reflect choice, and such modeling of choices in rankings of outcomes is defended on pragmatic grounds (See Schroeder 2017), for example as facilitating the application of powerful formal tools that enhance predictive power. Such merely predictive models require no commitment to outcome-centered views of action, reason, and desire/preference. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Portmore (2011, 56). Scanlon characterizes this as the view that all reasons are reasons “to aim at some result.” (1998, 84) [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. These points about commonsense practices of practical reasoning can readily be accommodated by a wide array of particular theories of practical reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Annette Baier highlights this point. Although we do perform actions that are promotings of outcomes, in Baier’s terminology actions of contributing “causally to a variety of states of affairs,” she emphasizes that we also perform actions of myriad sorts other than bringings about, e.g. “to write, to walk, to argue, to announce.” (1970, 653) [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See Thompson (2008, 138ff), Anscombe (2000, 38), Moran and Stone (2011, 53–55), and Frey and Frey (2017) for accounts of actions rationalized through appeal to other actions. See Tenenbaum (2020, 16–17, 71–74) for an illuminating discussion of the distinction between instrumental and constitutive means. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See Scanlon (1998), Kolodny (2011), and Scheffler (2011) for discussions of the range of such considerations in ordinary practice, and the different types of reasons to act and actions that appear to reflect such considerations. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. For example, Barbara Herman points out that for Kant respectful interaction requires certain conditions, certain ends that “we are obligated to have and respect in all our acting.” That we have such ends that are “sometimes to be promoted” (2021, 124) is explained through appeal to the value of free, respectful action and interaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Korsgaard discusses such an account, aligning herself with Aristotle in rejecting it. (2009, 8–10) [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. See, on this point, Brewer (2009, 20–22) and Anscombe (2000, 66–72, 91). Many have noted an apparent contrast here with intentions, all of which appear naturally to be intentions to phi with actions as their objects. (See Moran and Stone (2011, 48–54)). Note that it is a separate question whether any or all such practical attitudes with actions as their objects are nonetheless captured without distortion in propositional form. I argue in the next chapter that they are not. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Or any other similarly outcome-centered form, e.g. as having as objects states of affairs to be made the case or possible worlds to be actualized. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. A point emphasized by Brewer (2009). Michael Thompson brings up a more fundamental challenge to propositionalizing such desires in infinitival form, that “the requisite proposition doesn’t exist.” (2008, 127–28) Converting “I desire to go for a walk” into “I desire that I go for a walk,” for example, seems to deploy a certain amount of “aspectual glue” to convert a non-habitual sense into a very different “habitual sense.” (2008, 128) I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. 1953, Par. 621. Michael Smith formulates the question this way: “What makes it the case that in (say) moving his finger, an agent acts, as opposed to merely being involved in something’s happening?” (2012, 387) [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Wittgenstein’s question will be taken up in [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The). By that point we will be in a position to see that as the question is commonly understood, it begs important questions in the theory of action. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. 2012, 387. See also Frankfurt’s characterization of the Standard Story as maintaining that intentional actions are “movements whose causes are desires and beliefs by which they are rationalized.” (1978, 157) [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. See Asarnow’s characterization of this “rationalization condition” of the Standard Story, in contrast with the “causal condition.” (2021) I postpone until [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The), Section III explicit discussion of “decompositionalist” versions of the Story that are invited by Wittgenstein’s Question. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Crucially, the argument that is built upon these commitments goes through as long as the outcome-centered structure of such attitudes is maintained. For example, if the object is understood not as a propositional content to be made true, but as a state of affairs to be made to obtain, e.g., in the case of my desire to go for a walk, as a desire that the world be such that I walk, the Commitments provide the requisite support for adopting outcome-centered accounts of reasons, attitudes, and ethics. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Michael Smith, for example, takes desires in such propositionalized form to illuminate contrasting functional roles for such theoretical and practical states: “a belief that p tends to go out of existence in the presence of a perception with the content that not p, whereas a desire that p tends to endure, disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that p.” (1994, 115) [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. It need not follow that such attitudes are themselves the agent’s reasons. Such an account need only maintain, following Parfit, that “reasons are given by the facts about the *objects* of these desires.” (2011, 45) Citing the relevant desires is supplying the rationalization because to invoke such attitudes is to invoke the facts that the agent takes to be relevant to bringing about the truth of their propositional contents, much as citing the relevant beliefs is to invoke the facts that the agent takes to be relevant to the truth of their propositional contents. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. David Velleman, for example, emphasizes that on such an account of action “these attitudes also justify the behavior that they cause, that behavior eventuates not only *from causes* but *for reasons.*” (2000, 5) [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Nye, Plunkett, and Ku highlight this distinction between our motives “that are state-directed, or motives to bring about certain states of affairs,” and motives “that are act-directed . . . motives simply to do certain things.” (2015, 5) Much of my argument complements their defense of such reasons to do things that are not reasons to bring about against the charge that they are theoretically “mysterious” (2015, 4) See also Kolodny’s arguments both that states of affairs are not the only thing of value, and that it is simply a “mistake . . . to think that things of value are sources of reasons only in the sense that, when we are able to bring about something of value, we have reasons to do so.” (2011, 68) [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. For discussions of this role for preferences, see Anderson (2001: 22–23), Sen (1973: 241–59), and Gauthier (2022, 217–19). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Thus, Anderson points out that on rational choice theory “the rational act is the act that maximally satisfies the agent’s individual preferences.” (2001, 21) [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. A point made by Anderson (2001, 26). See also Sen’s account, upon which an agent who prefers option x to option y “must regard himself as better off with x than with y.” (1973, 253) Not surprisingly, economists who approach moral theory from within the framework of rational choice theory, given its commitment to outcome centered attitudes, reasons, and actions, tend to find some form of consequentialism obvious. See, for example, Amartya Sen (1983), Robert Frank (2004), and John Harsanyi (1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Parfit, p. 45. See also Tenenbaum’s careful discussion of subjectivist theories (2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Some philosophers reject Commitment 1 in part *because* they endorse Commitment 3. Because desires, thus understood, can only rationalize actions that are bringings about, but many actions that we have good reasons to perform are not bringings about, they conclude that desires, even broadly understood, are too narrow to play the rationalizing role required by Commitment 1. My arguments in the remainder of this chapter undermine the grounds for Commitment 3, hence for arguments against Commitment 1 that are grounded in appeals to such a Commitment. Philosophers who ground arguments against Commitment 1 at least in part in Commitment 3 include Scanlon (1998, 50), Herman (2021, 59–61), particularly her claim that “the role of desire is to orient the agent to bringing about its object,” (60) and Darwall, particularly his arguments built upon the claim that “Desires have possible states of affairs as objects . . . to an agent with the desire that P it will seem that the world should be such that P.” (2003, section III) [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Thus, if desires are understood as placeholders for goals, and such goals are understood as intended outcomes, such that “these outcomes are states of affairs; and these states of affairs obtain if A actually reaches her goal,” (Glock and Schmidt 2021, 6) all such desires will be most perspicuously captured in propositionalized form, with “that-ish constructions” (2021, 7) capturing the outcomes to be promoted that are their objects. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Nagel (1970, 30) He later provides his complementary outcome-centered account of practical reasons: “For all persons p and events A, if R is true of A then p has a prima facie reason to promote A.” (1970, 90) [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. The apparent paradoxicality of deontic constraints on Nagel’s own normative theory is the result of his commitments to the outcome-centered accounts of desires, reasons, and actions. I explore this connection in Hurley (2009, chapter 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Tamar Schapiro makes the case, following Brewer (2009), that convergence upon such an “evaluative outlook” view of desire “is so broad as to make strange bedfellows,” ranging over Kantians, neo-Kantians, Humeans, and Aristotelians (2014, 133; see also 131ff) Similar views are also commonly characterized as “guise of the good” accounts (Tenenbaum 2007, Velleman 1992, Boyle and Lavin 2010) and, following Scanlon, as “judgment-sensitive attitudes” accounts (1998, 20–24; see also Wallace, 2006, 269–75) I will attempt in what follows to appeal to features common to most such accounts. We have already seen that many subjectivist accounts of desires that deny their partial constitution by evaluative outlooks also often endorse the three commitments. Many of the arguments to follow have purchase against them as well. I will briefly take up such alternative accounts of desire in [chapter 6](#_Chapter_6:_The). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. For another such guise of the good account of intentional action, see Raz (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. See also Tenenbaum (2007) for a discussion of the history of the advocacy of the position, and Anscombe (2000), Tenenbaum (2007), and Lavin and Boyle (2010) for some among the many recent defenses. For representative cricisms of core elements, see Smith (1994) and Velleman (1992) I have argued elsewhere that Davidson is also committed to such a guise of the good account of desire (2007, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Defenses of such views often appeal to a particularly sharp contrast between explanatory or motivating reasons and normative or justifiying reasons, maintaining that desires, to rationalize actions, need only provide motivating/explanatory reasons, and that attitudes that play such a rationalizing role need not be constituted in part by an evaluative outlook. (Smith 1994, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Smith demonstrates that if we abandon the guise of the good account of desire, but maintain the account of desires as fundamentally propositional attitudes and the rationalizing role for desire, the case for outcome-centered ethics remains (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Others challenge Commitment 1 on different grounds. Kieran Setiya, for example, argues that what rationalizes an action is not a belief-desire pair, but a “desire-like belief,” (2007, 51) a single state that is both “motivational and cognitive.” (2007, 40) The state is like a desire, in that it has “the power to cause or motivate the action it depicts, and to cause it to be done for the reason in question.” (2007, 40) [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Scanlon makes the case, for example, that the value of friendship can only be distorted by attempts to shoehorn it into rankings of outcomes to be promoted: “the claim that friendship is valuable is not primarily a claim that it is “to be promoted” . . . when we take into account the perspective of the people who are friends, a wider range of reasons comes into view . . . to claim that friendship is valuable is . . . to claim that all of these reasons are good reasons.” (1998, 90) [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. They also explain, in Scanlon’s view, the phenomenon of akratic belief. Because beliefs are attitudes constituted both by judgment-sensitivity and by the relevant dispositions, when the two elements diverge agents can judge the true, but act in accordance with the false. (1998, 35–36) [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Thus, “desiring something involves having a tendency to see something good or desirable about it.” (1998, 38) [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. It also seems ideally suited to explain the phenomenon of akratic action. Because desires are attitudes constituted both by judgment-sensitivity and by the relevant dispositions, and these two elements can come apart, the agent who judges, for example, that it is better for them to help you rather than Smith, but is disposed to help—and intentionally helps—Smith, does not really want to help you rather than Smith or Smith rather than you, because he judges the better but is disposed to act—and acts—in accordance with the worse. I explore these parallel accounts of akratic belief and akratic action in Hurley 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. I have argued elsewhere (Hurley, 2007, 2020) that Davidson anticipates central elements of such a broad, substantive account of desires, and of their role in rationalizing action. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. I will continue to focus here on Sumner’s account, which explicitly lays out the strategy for converting target desires into propositional form. Other philosophers sketch elements of alternative strategies (Goldman, 1970, 49–50; Davidson, 1980, 86); many more simply presuppose that all desires can be converted into, and are most perspicuously captured in, propositional form, for example Smith (2003), Parfit (2011, 45) and Scanlon (1998, 50). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. See, for example, Brewer (2009), Boyle and Lavin (2010, 170–74), Thompson (2008, chapter 6), and Moran and Stone (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. See, for example, Thompson’s powerful argument against propositional attitude accounts of desire (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. See [chapter 3](#_Chapter_3:_The) for the distinction between the aim of an action, its successful performance guided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it, and the end of an action, understood as provided by the agent’s reasons for undertaking it. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Douglas Lavin points out that a similar conversion, from a form that is not outcome-centered to an outcome-centered form, also takes place in the characterization of action, a conversion from non-outcome-centered formulations such as “I moved the matchbox” and “I raised my arm” to “I caused the matchbox’s moving” and “I caused my arm’s rising.”(2015, 612) The first characterizes a performance by the agent that is seemingly not the promoting of an outcome, an X caused Y, the second “converts” such statements into the form “X caused Y’s A-ing,” where A-ing is a “mere happening” brought about by X. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. I borrow here from Tenenbaum (2020, 126). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Contrast this desire to bake a cake with another desire of the same type, the desire to bake a cake to further my excellence as a baker. What ingredients I will buy, what kind of cake I will bake, what time frame I will adopt for baking it, etc., will all be different because the evaluative outlook partly constitutive of the desire is different. Similarly, if my desire to tell Jones the truth is from self-interest rather than from respect for her as a person, such a self-interested desire might rationalize telling her the truth after she has been exploited rather than before, or gratuitously incorporating ugly details in the telling, or withholding information that might cast me in a less than flattering light, or telling her in a way that causes Jones discomfort—all elements that would not be rationalized by the desire to tell her the truth out of respect for her. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. For illuminating discussions of the temporal unfolding of actions, see Thompson (2008), Moran and Stone (2011), Ford (2014), and Lavin (2016). I have also benefitted here from engagement with unpublished work by Micha Glazer. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. See, on these aspects of action, Tenenbaum, in particular his claim that “the (apparent) good I’m trying to achieve” determines, as the performance unfolds, constitutive actions that “better exemplify such a good.” (2020, 59) [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Note that it will not do simply to refine the description of the desire in question, e.g. not simply a desire that I bake a cake, but a desire that I bake a cake for my son. I might bake a cake for my son merely to save money, or to humiliate him with an ugly and foul tasting cake. To meet the objection, it is necessary to include the evaluative outlook towards the acting, e.g. baking the cake out of love for my son, an outlook reflected in reasons guiding any successful performance of the desired action on the desire to completion. See here Herman’s discussion of the “What’s it for?” question (2021, 74ff) [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. I will take up related appeals to simplicity and symmetry with belief in more depth in the next chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Richard Moran highlights this disanalogy, and the tendency of such formulations to elide it from view, in the underappreciated final chapters of his *Authority and Estrangement*. There he points out that I do not have rational agency with respect to your action; I can only cause you to alter your rational agency such that you intentionally perform an act of type phi, thereby bringing it about that the desired outcome happens. His point is to highlight the implausibility of accounts upon which my stance towards my own actions is also not fundamentally one of rational agency, upon which my role is to cause myself to alter my agency such that I intentionally perform an act of type phi in order to bring it about that the desired outcome happens. (2001, 127–8) [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. If we build the features of the target desire into propositional form, successful action on this desire will be doing the action intentionally for the reasons and values constitutive of the target desire. Such intentional action guided by the evaluative outlook of the target desire, however, presupposes the target desire constituted by its non-outcome-centered evaluative outlook. Lavin and Boyle emphasize this point: “the . . . antecedents of my intentionally doing A must include a desire *to do* A.” (2010, 170). Thompson similarly demonstrates that “She wants to do A” is entailed by “She is doing A intentionally.” (2008, 101). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Platts (1979) and Davidson (1980) attribute an outcome-centered interpretation of the contrast to her. See Moran and Stone (2011) and Frost (2014) for arguments that she in fact opposes such an interpretation, and for accounts of the relevant contrasts that she does in fact draw. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. See Moran and Stone (2011) for a compelling case for such an interpretation of Anscombe, and for a comparison and contrast between such an interpretation and the outcome-centered interpretation that is often mistakenly attributed to her. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Indeed, see Anscombe’s appeal in her later work to desires to phi (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. We have already seen McDowell invoke such considerations of symmetry (1995). Davidson also seems to rely on such considerations of symmetry at key points. See, for example, Davidson (1984, 161) and (1985, 473). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See Thompson (2008) and Brewer (2009) for alternative accounts of desires, and of the relationships between desires and beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. I take this characterization of the approach as decompositional from Lavin (2016) and Ford (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. I take this formulation from Lavin (2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. For recent criticisms of the decompositionalist aspect of this approach, See Ford (2014, 15–17), and especially Lavin (2016). See also Frey and Frey (2017, sec. 3.2) for evidence that Anscombe herself clearly rejected such a decompositionalist approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. For early, influential arguments that such a reductionist, decompositionalist account of action cannot provide a plausible account of actions as being under an agent’s guidance, see Frankfurt (1978) and Velleman (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. See, for example, Dancy’s influential argument against non-normative rationalization of action. (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. For challenges to the scientific reductionist account of basic actions see Lavin (2013) and Ford (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. McDowell (1994, 1995), Thompson (2008), Frey (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Thompson (2008) takes such a naturalist argument against the commonsense accounts of desires and actions to make the mistaken assumption that because knowledge of such attitudes and actions is irreducibly first-personal and not observational, it cannot be natural. But first-personal knowledge, he argues, is the form of knowledge appropriate to the nature of actions performed by rational animals, and such knowledge reveals that “the rationalizing order . . . is inscribed *within* every intentional action.” (112) [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. I have made the case elsewhere for the claim that Davidson is properly understood as arguing that desires as well as beliefs are essentially constituted in part by such normative elements, and that he takes such evaluative constitution to be crucial to the role of desires in rationalizing actions. (2007, 2020) Although he eschews reductionists metaphysics, Davidson’s commitment to other elements of the Standard Story, in particular to the claim that all desires are fundamentally propositional attitudes, follows from other commitments on his part to arguments from direction of fit and belief/desire symmetry. I have already shown that such arguments do not support such an outcome-centered account of desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. See Wedgewood (2023) for a nuanced exploration of other such accounts. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Portmore, 2011, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Portmore, (2023, 449, fn 12). Here Portmore is clear that the structural feature in question is commitment to the outcome-centered constraint, i.e. that “the deontic statuses of actions depend on an evaluative ranking of their outcomes (or prospects).” (2023, 449) [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. See Pamela Hieronymi’s illuminating articulation and defense of the distinction between the right and wrong kinds of reasons. (2005, 2013, 2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Thus, Hieronymi demonstrates that “the distinction between the right and wrong kind is orthogonal to the distinction between good and bad reasons,” for example “that I am a Capricorn” is a “bad reason of the right kind” that I might nonetheless mistakenly take to bear on the question of “whether things will go well.” (2013, 117) [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. See Hieronymi’s suggestion (2021, 362, fn 31) that the wrong kind of reason, in contrast with reasons of the right kind, “shows something good about bringing about.” [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Although I take up the ethical consequentializing argument in [chapter 2](#_Chapter_2_The_1), it is recourse to the non-ethical arguments for outcome-centered accounts that ultimately motivates the non-ethical consequentializing strategy, a strategy for mitigating the apparent implausibility of consequentialism by identifying the closest consequentialized forms of alternative ethical theories. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. See, for example, Ripstein (2009) and Herman (2021) on Kant’s Doctrine of Right. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. See, for example, MacIntyre’s virtue ethical account of truthfulness (2007, chapter 14). [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. See Delgado’s discussion of the concern that his instrumentalism courts a debilitating cynicism towards the law (1994, 396ff) [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Substantial strands of such a rationale also run through the account developed by Chamallas and Wriggins (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Mari Matsuda’s tort reform proposals, for example, invite instrumentalist interpretations at certain points, but non-instrumentalist interpretations at others. Her proposals for rethinking what is required to secure equal freedom in torts, offering “a different version of what liberty could mean,” (2000, 2211) and appealing to “longstanding principles of . . . breach (it is not breach unless you act unreasonably),” (2000, 2214) for example, would seem to invite non-instrumentalist rationales for wide-ranging reforms. See also Chamallas’s powerful arguments for sweeping tort reform (2021), arguments that apply to non-instrumentalist approaches. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. I have elsewhere characterized this as the consequentialist argument for consequentializing, in contrast with the (ethical) consequentializing argument for consequentialism (2020, 34–42). See also Portmore (2022, 3.1) for his account of such “earnest” consequentializing, with a particular focus on evaluator-relative modifications to the relevant rankings of outcomes. Setiya proposes a modification of the traditional understanding of agent-neutral ranking (2018), but see Hammerton and Cox (2021) for a criticism of Setiya’s proposal. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Non-ethical consequentializing often proceeds by consequentializing non-consequentialist theories that better accommodate our commonsense convictions. This is the strategy adopted by non-ethical Kantsequentialists. See, for example, Portmore’s acknowledgement that the Kantian can accommodate many commonsense convictions more effectively than the classical utilitarian, and his arguments that consequentialized Kantianism—Kantsequentialism—also accommodates these convictions. (2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. The Kantsequentialist may nonetheless hold that this high price is worth paying, because surely in some cases we must lie, kill, and break our promises, and the Kantsequentialist, who can weigh conflicting ends of minimizing *his* treatment of others as mere means with minimizing such treatment *overall*, for example, is better positioned to account for this. (Portmore 2023) But many Kantian would again reject this as a misunderstanding of the relevant difference that obscures the serious deformation of the target theory. Such a Kantian does recognize a sense in which we should never murder, lie, or break our promises, but she offers nuanced accounts of when we can justifiably kill, utter falsehoods, and fail to fulfill promises. The distinctions between justified killing and murdering, and justified utterance of a falsehood and lying (see Shiffrin 2014, chapter 1), emerge within such an account through careful articulation of the juridical duties that we each have to each other that are necessary conditions for securing equal individual freedom, and of the imperfect and perfect ethical duties that can only be fully articulated within the context of such juridical duties. Regarding the promissory duty, for example, Herman suggests that for the Kantian “practical concerns coming from other duties and moral concerns are already in the catchment area of the promissory duty; the promise isn’t weighed against them.” (2021, 79) [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. But see Wedgewood’s argument (Unpublished) that formal rational choice theory can be formulated without such outcome-centered constraints. Rational choice theory is identified with such an outcome-centered approach, but need not be. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. See Jason Brennan (2020, section 2), e.g. “most citizens in contemporary democracies believe there is some sort of moral obligation to vote,” and supporting evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. For detailed discussion of such an account, see Brennan 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. For such a formulation and criticism of the “generalization argument,” see Lomasky and Brennan (2000, 75–79) [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. For presentations of these elements of Kant’s Doctrine of Right, see Arthur Ripstein (2009, Chs. 6 and 8) and Barbara Herman, (2021). For specific application to questions concerning a duty to vote, see Helga Varden (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. For a very different account of the duty to vote grounded in a different non-outcome-centered account of the duty of justice, see Julia Maskivker’s argument that “we have duties of justice to others that political participation can honor.” (2019, 7) [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. For a more Aristotelian account of the duty to vote, grounded in an appeal to requirements of excellent citizenship within a democracy, see Luke Maring (2015). Anderson suggests that as citizens we identify with a group, that for such a collective agent a constitutive principle is that “whatever can count as a reason for action for one . . . must count as a reason for all,” (2001, 29), and that such a constitutive principle rules out the rational choice theorist’s reasons not to vote. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)