

Instrumentalism, Objectivity, and Moral Justification

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I want to examine critically a certain strategy of moral justification which I shall call *instrumentalism*. By this I mean the view that a moral theory is rationally justified if the actions, life-plan, or set of social arrangements it prescribes can be shown to be the best means to the achievement of an agent's final ends, whatever these may be. I shall elaborate this view in greater detail in what follows.

Instrumentalism presupposes a commitment to what I shall call the *Humean conception of the self*.¹ By this I mean a certain way of conceiving the motivational and structural constituents of the self. Briefly, the self on this conception is motivated by its desires for states of affairs that are temporally or spatiotemporally external to the self. And it is structured by the normative requirements of instrumental rationality: The self is conceived as rationally coherent to the extent that theoretical reason calculates and schedules the satisfaction of as many of its desires as possible, with the minimum necessary costs. The motivational and structural elements of the Humean conception of the self combine to form a familiar explanatory model of human agency: We make sense of an agent's behavior by ascribing to her the desire to achieve the ends that she does in fact achieve, and the theoretically rational belief that, given the information and resources available to her, behaving as she did was the most efficient way to do so.²

Instrumentalism is a *strategy* of moral justification because of the relation it bears to the Humean conception of the self. If you conceive yourself and other agents as the Humean conception implies, then if you want to motivate other agents so conceived to accept your favored moral theory - or, for that matter, any suggestion of yours, you must demonstrate to them that what your theory enjoins them to do is in fact the most efficient thing for them to do, in order to achieve their desired ends. And instrumentalism is a strategy of moral *justification* because it attempts to persuade other agents that your suggested theory is objectively the *right* theory. In this way instrumentalism is to be distinguished from a mere piece of practical reasoning that directs someone to perform certain actions in order to achieve her given ends. It is more than that, for it attempts to demonstrate that reason directs *all* of us to

¹ See my "Two Conceptions of the Self," *Philosophical Studies* vol. 48 (1985), pp. 173-97, for a brief discussion of this conception.

² See Richard Brandt and Jaegwon Kim, "Wants as Explanations of Actions," in N. S. Care and C. Landesman, (eds.) *Readings in the Theory of Action* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in N. S. Care and C. Landesman; Alvin Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) Chs. 3 and 4; David Lewis, "Radical Interpretation," *Synthese*, vol. 23 (1974): pp. 331-44.

perform those actions in order to achieve *any* of our given ends. This means not just that each of us has our own reasons to perform the very same actions that are in fact prescribed for others. The persuasive appeal of the moral theory in question is heightened to the extent that the instrumentalist strategy can show its prescriptions to be instrumentally rational, not just to *your* final ends, but to *anyone's*. This fact about these prescriptions, if it is a fact, is supposed to provide you with a reason to conform to them that is independent of their instrumentality in promoting your particular ends.³

I shall want to argue that to the extent that instrumentalism is successful in providing an objective justification of a moral theory - and I shall contend that it cannot be completely successful - it cannot provide a *moral* justification. But when we attempt to modify it so as to produce a specifically moral justification, we see that either it is impossible to do this, or else the Humean notion of instrumental rationality is doing no justificatory work.

I. Instrumentalism and Objectivity

The motivation behind instrumentalism as characterized above is not difficult to understand. Despite the failure of the Cambridge Platonists to justify moral statements as referring to objective facts directly deducible from theoretical reason⁴ and the efforts of the Moral Sense Theorists and Emotivists to demonstrate the implausibility of belief in any such facts,⁵ many of us continue to believe that our deepest moral convictions have the same *sort* of claim to objective validity as our epistemological convictions, whatever sort that may turn out to be, to the extent that they are equally fundamental psychologically. It is natural to view the philosophical enterprise of analyzing and rationally evaluating theories as a natural extension of the prephilosophical impulse to question, criticize, and modify those convictions in the light of evidence and argument. From this perspective, a convincing

³ R. B. Brandt is particularly explicit in his deployment of this strategy in his *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); see especially Chapter VIII. However, I believe (although I do not defend this belief in this discussion) that the other moral theorists I identify below are equally committed to this strategy.

⁴ See, for example, the selections by Cudworth, Samuel Clarke, and Wollaston in D. D. Raphael, (ed.) *The British Moralists 1650-1800*, Volume I (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁵ For the former, see Hutcheson, "An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil," in D. D. Raphael; for the latter, see, e.g. Charles Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944).

case has yet to be made for exempting moral beliefs and theories from these practices. While we may agree that moral truths cannot be deduced from reason or directly confirmed by the "furniture of the earth,"⁶ many of us are less easily persuaded that, as the Emotivists claim, moral beliefs are not genuine beliefs at all. However, our awareness of the history of moral philosophy confronts us with the dilemma of what connection between our moral beliefs and the requirements of objectivity might be left to us to argue for.

The Humean conception of the self furnishes a substantive solution to this dilemma. Just as its motivational constituent supplies a strategy for motivating other agents, so conceived, to accept one's favored theory of what they should do, similarly, its model of instrumental rationality supplies a connection between that theory and the requirements of objectivity. The Humean model of instrumental rationality accepts the traditional conception of fully informed, theoretically rational belief as objectively justified belief, and then assigns such belief an instrumental role in achieving the agent's desired outcomes. Action is then rational, hence objectively justified, to the extent that theoretical reason identifies it as similarly instrumental in producing that outcome.

The implicit reasoning can be reconstructed as analogical. One necessary condition for viewing a *scientific theory* as objectively justified is that, oversimply, it accurately predict certain consequences. Similarly, the Humean might say, we may view an *action* as objectively justified to the extent that it conforms to the theory's prescriptions for producing those predicted consequences that the agent desires. For to the extent that I act in accordance with the theory's prescriptions for producing those desired consequences, my action is more likely to achieve those desired consequences in fact. No further justification of the correct theoretical reasoning that generates the theory is needed, because of course correct theoretical reasoning about the facts itself constitutes the terminating criterion of theoretical rationality as asymptotic to objectivity. Hence an action taken on the basis of correct theoretical reasoning about its predicted consequences receives the imprimatur of objective validity derivatively, in virtue of its instrumental connection with theoretical rationality.

Instrumentalism then extends this line of thought to the justification of moral theories, by attempting to demonstrate the objective validity of a moral theory as the most theoretically rational means to a wide range of unspecified final ends. Here one's favored moral theory plays the same role relative to the

⁶ See L. Susan Stebbing, "Furniture of the Earth," in *Philosophy of Science*, Arthur Danto and Sidney Morgenbesser (eds.) (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1967).

Humean model of instrumental rationality as does an instrumentally rational action. Just as an action is objectively justified by its expected instrumental success in achieving an agent's final ends, similarly, it is claimed, with the correct moral theory. A moral theory lays claim to objective validity if the actions or set of social arrangements it prescribes are the most instrumentally rational means to an agent's final ends, *whatever they may be*.

This last clause just represents a more ambitious extension of the concept of objective validity just described. That concept connected theoretical reasoning with accurate prediction of objective events. But in the case of a *scientific* theory, we require some further, independent check on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the theoretical reasoning by which the theory was constructed, in order to insure that the events it predicts are objective ones. In particular, the theory's predictions must be independently confirmable by other relevantly placed, disinterested observers under similar experimental conditions. Successful independent confirmation then elicits the intersubjective acceptance of the theory by such observers.

Again the application to *moral* theories is analogical.⁷ Under comparable conditions, the instrumentalist might claim, we each may be moved intersubjectively to accept a moral theory as theoretically rational and so objectively valid. That acting on the theory actually promotes the range of ends it is predicted to promote confirms the theory's theoretical rationality to each agent considering whether or not to accept it. This is objective evidence that the theory is in fact theoretically rational and hence objectively valid, and not just that it appears to be to some particular agent whose information and reasoning powers are limited. And that acting on the theory has predicted consequences that are desirable to other, relevantly placed agents who take no interest in the particular predicted consequences I happen to desire is evidence that the theory's theoretical rationality and objective validity do not depend on the particular ends I happen to have. To show that the actions or set of social arrangements a moral theory prescribes instrumentally promote an agent's ends whatever they are implies that they promote not just someone's final ends, but anyone's. Thus as in the case of action, the possibility of supplying objective evidential support for one's favored moral theory is retained, by exploiting its instrumental connection with theoretical rationality.

⁷ The analogy between inductive method in science and the requirements of intersubjective agreement in ethics has been developed extensively in Rawls' pre-instrumentalist paper, "Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 66 (1957), pp. 177-97.

Instrumentalism as I have stated it characterizes in a very general way a large variety of justificatory strategies that differ considerably in their details from case to case. For example, I have claimed that instrumentalism attempts to justify a moral theory as the best means to a wide range of unspecified ends. But different moral philosophers impose different structural constraints on that range, and thus decide differently how wide that range can be: For Hobbes, an agent's relevant range of final ends to which the Laws of Nature are claimed to be instrumental are circumscribed by the existence of other agents who are more or less equally strong, intelligent, and self-interested.⁸ For Sidgwick, the final ends to which commonsense moral precepts are claimed to be in fact instrumental are those definitive of utility, understood as an internal, independent state of pleasurable consciousness which all agents are presumed ultimately to desire.⁹ For Brandt, the final ends that an Ideal Code-Utilitarian society is argued to promote are those that would survive cognitive psychotherapy, understood as a process by which one's desires are maximally corrected by vividly represented facts and logic.¹⁰

Similarly, different moral philosophers impose different motivational constraints on the agent assumed to choose the moral theory: For Gauthier, the choosing agent must be transparent in the sense that others are able to detect any insincerity in her commitment to conform to the precepts of morality;¹¹ for Darwall, the choosing agent must have a reflective commitment to a conception of herself as a rational agent;¹² for Harsanyi, the choosing agent must assign an equal probability to occupying any social position under the set of social arrangements that results from implementing the chosen theory;¹³ for Rawls, the agent is presumed to be overridingly motivated by the desire to realize and exercise her capacity for an effective

⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan* ed. Michael Oakeshott, (ed.) (New York: Collier Books, 1977), Ch. 13.

⁹ Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (New York: Dover, 1966), Book IV, Ch. III.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, note 3.

¹¹ David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Ch. VI.

¹² Stephen L. Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), Ch. 14.

¹³ John C. Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behavior," *Social Research*, vol. 44 (1977), pp. 623-56.

sense of justice, and to form, revise, and rationally pursue her unknown conception of the good;¹⁴ and so on.

These moral philosophers have in common that they conceive neither the circumstances under which moral principles are chosen, nor the ends relative to which they are taken to be instrumentally justified to be *absolutely* unlimited. They each suppose that some constraints must be imposed both on motives and on ends in order for the right kind of choice to be made. In what follows, I want to show that there is good reason for this shared supposition. However, I shall also argue that, at least relative to instrumentalism as I have characterized it generally, no such constraints can succeed in providing an objective moral justification for any viable moral theory. If this general argument is sound, it should have significant implications for any moral view that deploys the instrumentalist strategy. I consider in detail the implications for some of these moral views elsewhere.¹⁵

II. Justification

The appeal of the instrumentalist strategy, even in the very general form stated above, is clear. Prereflectively we may suppose that which action is instrumentally rational depends entirely on the very specific further, final ends a particular agent wants to achieve: This supposition implicitly equates rational justification with correct practical reasoning. From this vantage point, we may find initially mystifying the suggestion that some actions are objectively justified instrumentally *regardless* of the particular character of one's ends. But on further reflection, we can appreciate the plausibility of this suggestion.

Take, for example, behaving courteously. Sometimes behaving courteously has clear disadvantages: It frustrates opportunities to vent your irritation or to demonstrate your lively wit at someone else's expense. Nevertheless, it might be claimed that it pays to behave courteously no matter what. First, you can vent your irritation just as well by kicking a pillow, and demonstrate your lively wit at someone else's expense with whoopee cushions, water-squirting lapel flowers, and the like. Moreover, others will be more positively disposed toward you, and so more positively disposed to help you further your ends if you are courteous than if you are abusive, as

¹⁴ John Rawls, *The Dewey Lectures 1980*, "Rational and Full Autonomy," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77 (1980), Section IV.

¹⁵ The instrumentalist implications of Rawls' and Brandt's views are discussed in a manuscript in progress, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*.

long as your ends do not seem to threaten theirs. Furthermore, you cannot know in advance who will be in a position to help or hinder the achievement of your ends. And since you lose so little by restraining your impulses to verbal abuse, it pays over the long term to behave courteously to everyone, whatever other ends you have. Behaving courteously, then, would seem to be an action that is instrumentally rational for a very wide range of ends, and so objectively justified to that extent.

Note that the intuitive appeal of the above reasoning depends on two connected features. First, the ends to which behaving courteously are instrumental are assumed to be motivated by the desire to achieve them. This is true by definition, relative to the Humean conception of the self. For on this conception, the only thing that can motivate action in the service of some end is a desire for that end. On the Humean conception, if I am motivated to achieve an end, i.e. if it is really my end, then I have a desire to achieve that end.

The second, connected feature of the above justification is the substantive weakness of the resulting constraints. The sole motivational constraint is that you have a desire to promote your ends, i.e. that you in fact have ends. The sole constraint on those ends is that they do not appear to threaten the ends of those to whom you are to behave courteously. These constraints leave open to an impressive extent the substantive nature of the ends that may be promoted by behaving courteously, and so the substantive motivation of any agent who may be persuaded to do so. They give everyone whose reasoning is accurately described by such a justification a reason to behave courteously.

So the above argument counts as a candidate for an objective *justification* of behaving courteously and not just as a bit of correct practical reasoning contingent on the particular ends an agent happens to have, because the argument in question gives each of us, as audience, a reason for adopting this as a rule of conduct *irrespective of the particular antecedent ends each of us happens to have*. A reason for your adopting this action as a rule of conduct - a reason that is assumed to approximate objective validity as the number of agents for whom it is a reason increases - is not just that it promotes your ends; this would make it merely *your* reason. An objective reason for you to adopt it is that it promotes everyone's ends.¹⁶ Hence its status as a reason, to that extent, does not depend on the particular antecedent ends you happen to have. It is an objective reason precisely to the extent that it is everyone's reason.

Of course the fact that behaving courteously promotes everyone's ends cannot constitute an objective *moral* justification of behaving courteously. For

¹⁶ See Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), Ch. X.

among the ends that behaving courteously promotes may be recognizably immoral ones; as when, for example, I behave courteously because this enables me to accumulate political favors which I then cash in in order to ruin my enemies. If immoral ends of this kind, too, are among those that behaving courteously promotes, and if part of the persuasive appeal of behaving courteously is its all-purpose character, then this argument supports the pursuit of immoral ends. This means that the instrumentalist strategy cannot yield a moral justification of a moral theory, if it shows the actions or set of social arrangements that the theory prescribes to be instrumental to the promotion of recognizably immoral ends. In this case it may justify the theory, without *morally* justifying it.

It seems, then, that we cannot generate a specifically moral instrumentalist justification of an action or set of social arrangements without imposing or presupposing at least some prior moral constraints on the range of ends the choosing agent is assumed to desire to promote - as the moral philosophers mentioned above all seem implicitly to recognize. Next I want to suggest that to the extent that such constraints *are* imposed, either the action or set of social arrangements in question cannot be justified, or else the Humean model of instrumental rationality is doing no work in justifying them.

III. *The Incredible Shrinking Means*

Now consider a second example of an action that is instrumental to certain final ends, namely giving one's money away. Let us consider what an instrumentally rational justification of this action might look like, keeping in mind that such a justification must attempt to persuade, not just some few agents, but everyone, you included, that it is rational to give one's money away. Giving your money away seems to have certain obvious disadvantages. It may frustrate your opportunities to indulge expensive tastes, or to satisfy certain desires for which money is a prerequisite, such as buying your parents a house or securing a high-quality education for your children. It also leaves you in a position of relative insecurity, for one cannot know in advance what emergencies the future may bring. Unfortunately there seem to be no obvious compensations for these disadvantages.

However, this depends on the kinds of desires you have. If you take your expensive tastes very seriously, or are particularly committed to a high-quality education for your children, or to being prepared for future emergencies, then of course the disadvantages of giving your money away may seem practically insurmountable. But if you don't happen to care as much about these things as you do about supporting the programs of the

Salvation Army, ending the famine in Ethiopia, and fighting against U.S. imperialism in Central America - let us call these beneficent final ends - then the disadvantages may be more than adequately outweighed by the range of ends you care about that giving your money away enables you to promote. So if you have beneficent final ends, and you agree that giving your money away is the best way of promoting them, then you have a reason for giving your money away. Giving your money away would seem to be instrumentally rational for you.

Of course if you do *not* have beneficent final ends, then you will not be as impressed by the argument that giving your money away enables you to realize them. Not only will you fail to be persuaded by this argument. You may not even recognize it as an *argument*. Rather than an argument or attempt at justification, this claim may strike you as little more than an observation, i.e. a bit of correct practical reasoning contingent on the particular ends some agent may happen to have.

Certainly this reasoning may be supplemented by further argument to the effect that you *ought* to be the kind of person for whom beneficent final ends outweigh other kinds. You may or may not find such arguments persuasive. If you do not, you will need to be persuaded that you *ought to want* to be this kind of person; and if not by this argument, by an argument that you *ought to want to want* to be this kind of person; and so on. You will need to be persuaded, at some point in the regress, that you have some obligation, however tenuous, that links you in your present state to the promotion of beneficent final ends, in order for you to recognize the promotion of beneficent final ends as a justification for giving one's money away. But even if you do so recognize them, it is hard to see how any of these latter arguments will succeed in justifying to you *your giving your* money away, if you do not in fact have beneficent final ends. For they will not show the instrumental rationality of that action to any end you actually have.

So the success of the instrumentalist strategy depends on the inclusiveness of the range of ends to which the prescribed action or set of social arrangements is in fact instrumental. For only if your ends are among them will it justify the action or set of social arrangements to you. And only to the extent that most people's ends are similarly among them will that justification seem to approximate objective validity. The smaller the range of ends promoted by the action, the fewer the individuals likely to hold them, and the less the instrumentalist justification will approximate objectivity. Call such an action or set of social arrangements a *shrinking means*. A shrinking means presents an obstacle to supplying an objective moral justification of an action or set of social arrangements, to the extent that the sympathetic audience it selects is correspondingly esoteric.

Now consider a natural instrumentalist response to the problem of the shrinking means. The response is, essentially, to retort that we cannot concern ourselves with those who do not share our ends, for they lie outside our moral community. If a person does not care about being beneficent (say), then there is nothing more we can say to persuade him of our favored moral theory. We must, it is claimed, suppose ourselves to be talking to those whose basic values are at least roughly similar to our own.¹⁷ The difficulty is that to the extent that this is true, either the action or set of social arrangements in question has not been justified, or else the model of instrumental rationality is doing no work in justifying them.

The action or set of social arrangements in question has not been justified because our acceptance of it is now contingent on the particular antecedent ends we happen to have. If we do not happen to have beneficent ends, or if our ends gradually become less beneficent, say, as we get older and familial responsibilities encroach on us more and more, then the prescribed action will become correspondingly contingent and dispensable. This is an acceptable feature of an agent's practical reasoning about particular ends and how to achieve them. It is less acceptable in reasoning that purports to furnish an objective justification of an action or set of social arrangements. For as we have already seen, what makes a piece of reasoning a candidate for an objective justification is its ability to give us a reason for adopting an action or set of social arrangements that is independent of the particular antecedent ends we happen to have. But restricting the appeal of this reasoning to those who must be presupposed to share our particular antecedent ends violates this criterion. An action or set of social arrangements cannot be both objectively justified and a shrinking means.

IV. Moral Justification

The contingency and dispensability of a shrinking means is a liability for an objective justification of it. But for a purportedly objective *moral* justification of it, its contingency and dispensability is a quite fatal liability. For of course an objective moral justification of an action or set of social arrangements is supposed to persuade us that we ought to observe its implied prescriptions *whatever else we do*. That is, an objectively valid moral theory is

¹⁷ See, for example, Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 81 (1972), pp. 305-16; Gilbert Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 84 (1975), pp. 3-22. Rawls also seems to have moved in this direction in his *Dewey Lectures* (*op. cit.* note 14). See, e.g., p. 537.

supposed to demonstrate its prescriptions to be *absolute* constraints on action, and not mere rules of thumb contingent on the particular antecedent ends some of us happen to have. Indeed, if the theory is to provide *absolute* constraints, even a shrinking means sufficiently comprehensive to promote everyone's antecedent ends will not do the trick. For even here, its promoting everyone's ends supplies me with a reason to act on it that is independent of any of my antecedent ends thus promoted only because of the particular antecedent ends it does promote, namely everyone else's. This means that, at best, the instrumentalist strategy can justify an action or set of social arrangements independently of *any particular* antecedent end it promotes. Instrumentalism cannot justify an action or set of social arrangements as objectively valid independently of *all* antecedent ends, i.e. absolutely, in itself. So instrumentalism can approximate but cannot achieve objective moral justification. Because any action or set of social arrangements it attempts to justify must function as a relatively shrinking means, however inflated it may seem.

But an absolute moral justification is needed, so that we can make the kinds of moral judgments a moral theory should enable us to make. A moral theory is supposed to enable us to make negative moral judgments about actions or sets of social arrangements that *violate* the prescriptions implied by our theory. But in order to be *moral* judgments, these judgments cannot find the action or set of social arrangements defective simply because it does not best promote, say, the beneficent ends we are presumed to share. Such a judgment would not be a moral judgment but rather a judgment of practical irrationality. In order to be a moral judgment, it must evaluate the action or set of social arrangements as right or wrong *independently* of our particular antecedent ends. It must be able to make judgments about the actions of agents who do not share our beneficent ends. If a moral theory is not objectively valid in this sense, it is unclear why anyone would have reason to hold it.

Now put this problem aside for the time being. Assume we can go on thinking of a shrinking means as objectively justified, despite its esoteric appeal, to those who have, say, beneficent ends. I shall signal this assumption henceforth by putting "justify" in scare-quotes when using it to refer to a shrinking means. In this case the Humean model of instrumental rationality is doing no justificatory work. For what "justifies" my giving my money away is not the fact that it is the most efficient means to my beneficent ends, but rather that it itself can be regarded as *constitutive* of beneficent behavior. This will be true in general, of any action claimed to be a means to a set of ends characterized in morally specific terms. A set of ends is *characterized in morally specific terms* if moral terms (like "good," "fair," "beneficent," "evil," "selfish," "unjust,") are among the predicates we ascribe to each member of the set. My

claim is that if we ascribe moral predicates to the ends we aim to achieve by acting, then those predicates can be applied equally to the actions we take to achieve them. Call this the *retrospective application* of these predicates. Thus, for example, if my ends are good, then the actions I take to achieve them may be characterized similarly (of course they may be other things as well, such as stupid, ill-considered, naive, and so forth); if my ends are beneficent, then giving my money away can be described as a beneficent act; if my end of acquiring as much personal power as possible is selfish, then I can be regarded as acting selfishly in forming political alliances in order to achieve it. These three examples illustrate that moral predicates ascribed to an end can be applied equally to the action taken to achieve it, regardless of how specifically either is characterized. It is our ends that confer value on the actions we take to achieve them.

This conclusion may not seem obvious. It may be objected that, for example, if I have the virtuous end of improving social relations among my colleagues at work, and a necessary means to that end is that I dress warmly before going to work in the morning, it does not follow that my action of pulling a second pair of woolly socks over my feet is virtuous. But my claim is not that any such act must be so characterized, nor that it cannot be characterized alternatively. My claim is simply it *can* be so characterized, insofar as it is understood as promoting the good end in question.¹⁸

However, this conclusion does not extend to *any* terms in which an agent's ends are characterized. For example, it does not follow from the fact that my ends are varied that the actions I perform in their service are varied as well. Nor should it be thought that the morally specific terms that characterize an action necessarily have *prospective application* to its end: From the fact that behaving civilly is morally virtuous it does not follow that all the final ends it promotes can be characterized as morally virtuous as well. But this asymmetry is to be expected. For part of what we want to say is that some actions are susceptible of moral evaluation *independently* of the further ends they promote. The problem with an instrumentalist strategy that utilizes a shrinking means is that it does not allow us to do this.

If a shrinking means can always be regarded as constitutive of the moral end it promotes, then its status as an *efficient* means to that end cannot be what "justifies" it. Rather, it is the value conferred on it by that moral end itself that does the justificatory work. Indeed, the whole point of imposing moral constraints on the range of ends an agent is assumed to desire to

¹⁸ I discuss this structural feature in greater detail in "A Distinction Without A Difference," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy VII: Social and Political Philosophy* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

promote via the action or set of social arrangements in question is to *subordinate* efficiency considerations to moral ones. This implies that moral considerations are overriding in evaluating the suitability of means to our moral ends. So we who share that moral end are not persuaded to adopt a shrinking means because it *efficiently* achieves that end. For any action that could be characterized similarly in terms of it would have the same persuasive force. For example, even if distributing fliers promoted our beneficent ends less efficiently than giving our money away, that they did so would "justify" distributing fliers just as well. Now of course we might want to invoke considerations of efficiency in choosing between the alternatives of giving our money away and distributing fliers, if we could not do both. But in this case the primary efficiency considerations would ordinarily concern which alternative was less costly *to us*, given our other ends. They would not, unless we were martyrs or fanatics, concern which was less costly in achieving *those ends*. So it would be the fact that the action achieved our moral ends, rather than that it did so efficiently, that "justified" that action to us. But in this case, the notion of efficiency that is centrally definitive of the Humean model of instrumental rationality is doing no justificatory work. It is rather the values we hold in common that persuade us to adopt the means for realizing them.

Now I have discussed two examples of such means: behaving courteously and giving one's money away. I have argued that these two differ in systematic and important ways. Behaving courteously is instrumental to a wide range of ends. For that very reason, I have suggested, behaving courteously can be objectively justified to a degree, but to that degree cannot be morally justified. By contrast, giving one's money away is instrumental to a more limited range of ends. For that very reason, I have claimed, it cannot be objectively justified to any degree, but to that degree can be morally "justified." In closing I should like to point out one further, important difference between behaving courteously and giving one's money away. Behaving courteously is easy. Giving one's money away is hard. It is not surprising that we can be more easily persuaded to do things that are easy than things that are hard, nor that the instrumentalist strategy is particularly well suited to thus persuade us: This is a consequence of the background Humean conception of the self, according to which we are motivated to do things that efficiently promote ends we are *already* assumed to have. But it would be regrettable if we could find no moral theory persuasive that enjoined us to do things that are hard, things that required us to modify or sacrifice our ends, because in that case we could find no reason to sacrifice where we are able for the sake of the common good. But if it is in any case, as I have suggested, the values we hold in common that persuade us to adopt the means for realizing them, rather than considerations of instrumental

rationality, then our willingness to sacrifice where we are able for the sake of the common good will depend on the values we hold, and on the conditions under which we can be rationally persuaded to modify them. And then it becomes crucial to ascertain whether those values themselves are rationally justified. To answer this question we need to press beyond the limitations of instrumentalism.¹⁹

¹⁹ I have benefitted by presenting an earlier draft of this paper to a graduate seminar on moral philosophy. It is excerpted from *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, work on which was partially supported by an Andrew Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Stanford University, 1982-84. I should particularly like to thank David Anderson, David Cumiskey, Don Demetriades, Don Loeb, and Sigrun Svavarsdottir for helpful comments.