**The Eclipse of Instrumental Rationality**

K. L. Sylvan

[T]he ideal of usefulness permeating a society of craftsmen—like the ideal of comfort in a society of laborers or the ideal of acquisition ruling commercial societies—is actually no longer a matter of utility but of meaning. It is ‘for the sake of’ usefulness in general that *homo faber* judges and does everything in terms of ‘in order to.’ […] [But] utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness.

−Arendt (1958: 154)

**Introduction**

Many philosophers of practical reason assume that practical rationality is partly constituted by the suitable coordination of means and ends—i.e., by *instrumental rationality*.[[1]](#footnote-1) This assumption is clear in much of the literature on requirements of rationality, in which means-end coherence remains a standard example of what rationality requires, alongside coherence between one’s normative beliefs and one’s intentions (‘Enkrasia’), and consistency between one’s intentions. The assumption is also clear in much of the literature on practical reasoning: while many reject the instrumentalist view that practical reasoning is always of means and never of ends, many also grant that coordinating our means to our ends is a central case of practical reasoning.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Instrumental rationality was argued to be a myth in Raz (2005). But the objections he raised to the normativity of instrumental rationality turned out to be special cases of broader worries about the normativity of coherence explored by Kolodny (2005, 2007) and Broome (2005, 2007).[[3]](#footnote-3) Hence, it seems fair to say that most in the current literature see no *special* problem about instrumental rationality. Most agree that *if* there are any fundamental requirements of coherence, an instrumental principle is among them; those who follow in the footsteps of Raz—e.g., Kiesewetter (2017) and Lord (2018)—are best understood as denying that there are fundamental requirements of coherence.

In this paper, I want to question this lingering consensus. I think there are *special* problems about the normativity of instrumental rationality which don’t merely reflect broader problems about the normativity of coherence requirements. But I think we needn’t fret, since the patterns of reasoning that the instrumental principle allegedly underwrites shouldn’t have been regarded as instrumental from the outset. Hence, I will argue that we can do without instrumental rationality. This eclipse of instrumental rationality is, I believe, good news for the unity of reason. I have argued elsewhere that epistemic rationality is wholly non-instrumental.[[4]](#footnote-4) The story about practical rationality I give here contributes to a unified picture of the epistemic and practical.

It is worth emphasizing that I will defend this view while accepting that practical rationality has a significant *structural* component not reducible to either (i) the pressures of *apparent reasons* (*pace* Kiesewetter (2017), Kolodny (2005), and Lord (2018)), (ii) requirements of theoretical rationality (*pace* cognitivists like Setiya (2007) and Wallace (2001)) or (iii) to a categorical imperative (*pace* Hampton (1998) and Korsgaard (2009)). I agree with Vogler (2002) that there is a fine-grained order to practical reasoning that is omitted on views which regard all practical reasoning as reasoning of ends. I merely deny that this order is a *calculative* order, as Anscombe (1957) said. In particular, in place of the calculative structure established by ‘in order to’ relations holding between intentions and acts, I substitute an order of meaning better captured by ‘for the sake of’ relations holding between intentions/acts and values.[[5]](#footnote-5) I swap ends for valueswhich are not merely ‘to be promoted’, and replace means-endrelations with relations reflecting the internal structure of the values for the sake of which one acts. Hence instrumental structure is eclipsed by subjective axiological structure, with the latter understood in a non-consequentialist way.[[6]](#footnote-6)

With these ideas in mind, here is the plan. I begin in §1 with some terminological clarifications and a more precise statement of my main claims, together with some disclaimers. I turn in §2 to give special reasons for skepticism about instrumental rationality. §3 shows that the practical phenomena commonly assumed to be underpinned by instrumental rationality can be better explained by non-instrumental structural rationality. §4 sketches a more specific non-instrumental account which better captures the order the instrumental principle was meant to capture. I conclude in §5 by showing how this picture fits nicely with a wider strategy for vindicating the normativity of rationality that I have developed elsewhere.

**1. Instrumental Rationality: Some Preliminaries and Disclaimers**

1.1. *The Face-Value Understanding of Instrumental Rationality and Reasoning*

What is instrumental rationality? I work with a face-value understanding that takes the word ‘instrumental’ in its ordinary sense, not as shorthand for an intuitively broader concept or a technical concept.[[7]](#footnote-7) Hence, I assume that if a form of reasoning does not conclude with the reasoner’s *intending to use something as a means* in any pretheoretically recognizable sense of ‘means’, we lack good reason to call it ‘instrumental’. As we will see, there are many patterns of reasoning which don’t conclude in such instrumental intentions that ought to be distinguished from instrumental reasoning. By correctly distinguishing these forms of reasoning from instrumental reasoning, the face-value understanding helps to carve practical reason at its joints.

To be more precise, the face-value understanding assumes that instrumental rationality is characteristically manifest in reasoning which moves toward the intention to use an apparent means to bring about an end, where the end is treated by the agent as having a value that is ‘to be promoted’ (i.e., to be brought about for its own sake).[[8]](#footnote-8) The understanding hence takes the premise-attitudes of properly instrumental reasoning to be

1. intentions to bring about certain states of affairs (the agent’s ends),

and

1. beliefs that performing certain actions or using certain resources (the agent’s means) would help to bring about these states of affairs,

and it takes the conclusion-attitudes to be

1. *instrumental intentions* to perform certain actions *in order to* bring about the states of affairs targeted by the premise-attitudes.

An example would be reasoning from (i) the intention to bring about peace and (ii) the belief that disarmament would help to bring about peace, to (iii) the intention to pursue disarmament in order to promote peace. Here the conclusion intention apparently has a kind of structural rationality relative to the premise attitudes. If there is such a thing as instrumental rationality, this is a paradigm case.

1.2. *Some Contrasting Phenomena*

Surprisingly enough, the face-value understanding is more fine-grained than many in the literature, and helps to contrast instrumental rationality with several phenomena often conflated with it.[[9]](#footnote-9)

To begin to see why, note that the instrumental intentions with which instrumental reasoning ends are a special case of *derivative pro-attitudes*. If we are interested in carving at the joints of practical reasoning, we should pay attention to forms of reasoning which end in other kinds of derivative pro-attitudes. In parallel to the distinction between non-instrumental value and fundamental value (which aligns with the more familiar distinction between instrumental and derivative value),[[10]](#footnote-10) we should allow for valuing which is non-instrumental but derivative. Reasoning guided by such valuing is not ‘calculative’.

To see non-instrumental but derivative pro-attitudes in action, consider an example inspired by Korsgaard (1988). I assign special value to the scarf you gave me, even though I rarely wear it and I have other scarves that keep me warmer. My valuing is not instrumental. It is derivative, however: I don’t treat the scarf as having *ultimate* value. Instead, I value the scarf *because* it is a token of your friendship. It is just that the ‘because’ here signals no instrumental relation. To use a different example which applies a model from Hurka (2001), I value art-appreciation, and my valuing of it is not instrumental. But this valuing is also not bedrock: I value art-appreciation *because* I value art and I think appreciation is the fitting response to art.

Intentions are pro-attitudes that can manifest non-instrumental ways of valuing. Hence they can be derivatively yet non-instrumentally rational in the same way. This point matters, because it suggests that processes of reasoning that have been *modeled* instrumentally might well be better understood as concluding in different kinds of derivatively rational intentions.

Another contrast that the face-value understanding supports is between instrumental reasoning and what I’ll call *constitutive* reasoning (which Millgram (2001) called *specificationist* reasoning). Suppose I think I should respect your privacy. I think about what would be involved in doing this now. I decide not to enter your room without knocking and hearing you say it is OK to enter. Here it would misrepresent me to regard *promoting respect for privacy* as an end that I have, and to regard knocking and waiting as a means to bringing about this end. I just intend to respect your privacy, and I intend to knock because that is what it is to respect your privacy on this occasion.[[11]](#footnote-11) To be sure, I will bring about the state of affairs in which your privacy is respected. Hence we can *model* my action as a ‘constitutive means’ to bringing about this state of affairs. But we would not correctly describe *my reasoning* if we portrayed it in this way.

If this is right, we should not think that patterns of reasoning such as the following necessarily involve instrumental rationality:

I intend to X

I believe that Y-ing would constitute X-ing in this case

So I intend to Y

If the background belief which leads me to the intention to Y is the belief that I ought to respect your privacy, then it would be a misrepresentation to portray me as thinking that privacy is an end to be promoted, with my action understood as a means to bringing about this state of affairs. For there must be a form of reasoning that enables one to properly respond to values to be respected, by determining what respect consists in on the occasion and then leading me intend to do that thing.

This is not yet to pass judgment on consequentialism or the consequentializing project,[[12]](#footnote-12) or to stack the deck in favor of non-consequentialism.[[13]](#footnote-13) My minimal suggestion at this stage is that it is possible to think like a non-consequentialist, and to reach intentions by reasoning that embodies non-consequentialist ways of valuing. This is a modest claim. It is consistent with this claim that such reasoning doesn’t track the objective norms, and that I shouldn’t reason in this way. It is also consistent with this claim that this way of thinking is right because it promotes the good. All I say so far is this: (1) it is possible to treat something as a value to be respected and not (merely) to be promoted, and (2) there is a form of reasoning from more general to more specific intentions which embodies such valuing.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Even if X is an end to be promoted, the move to a more specific intention won’t be instrumental if it only involves specification. Consider a kind of example from Richardson (1994: 77). I want to order something light and vegetarian. I see that there is only one option (that salad). I think: ‘Actually, that would be very nice.’ I form the intention to have it. Here I won’t be eating the salad as a means to the more general end of eating something light and vegetarian. I want to eat it for its own sake. Still, I concluded that I will eat it on the basis of practical reasoning that moved from a more general to a more specific intention. If I merely needed to eat *something* vegetarian and the salad seemed tolerable, perhaps we could imagine that I order it as a means to eating something vegetarian. But my reasoning is not always correctly portrayed in this way. There are many permissible ways of transitioning from an intention/belief pair to a further intention that are not instrumental.

1.3. *Face-Value Instrumental Reasoning and Rationality in More Detail*

With those contrasts made, let’s consider a fuller statement of the face-value understanding:

*Instrumental**reasoning* is reasoning from an end to-be-promoted and the belief that X-ing is a means to promoting that end to the intention to do X at least partly for the reason that it would help to promote the end. Ends-to-be-promoted are naturally embodied in intentions. Other motivational pro-attitudes within our rational control could embody ends-to-be-promoted (e.g., desires). What is essential is that the reasoning ends with an at least partly *instrumental pro-attitude*. It cannot end with an intention to X just for the sake of X-ing. It also cannot intend with an intention to X for the sake of Y, where Y is not understood as a value to be promoted. It also cannot end with an intention to do an action that includes an instrument (a piano) but constitutes a larger intrinsically valuable activity (playing beautiful piano music). It must end with an intention to use a means to bring about an end.

We can then distinguish between (i) sufficient means, which are X-ings that will alone produce the end, (ii) partial means, which are X-ings that will *help* to produce the end, and (iii) necessary means, which are essential steps in the process of producing the end-state. (iii), it is worth noting, excludes *preconditions*, since they are undertaken *before* the process of producing the end-state starts. Eating breakfast is not part of writing a paper in the afternoon, though it may be a causally necessary precondition. The distinction here seems worthwhile. Preconditional actions are distinct from means in the same way that enabling conditions (e.g., oxygen) are distinct from causes (e.g., fire). To take another example, when I say that I am going to the park to fly a kite, I don’t regard going to the park as a *means* of flying the kite. I regard it as *putting me in a position* to do so.

An *instrumental requirement of rationality* will then be any ‘iffy’ principle that says that you are rationally required to have a certain instrumental intention *if* and *because* you have a certain end-to-be-promoted and a certain instrumental belief. A *pressure of instrumental rationality* will be any *apparent reason* to have an instrumental intention generated by the appearance that certain instrumental facts hold and one’s having an end-to-be-promoted.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Although it is not normally stated in the literature on requirements of rationality, it is crucial to add the ‘and because’ clause to a candidate principle of instrumental rationality. We must allow that there might be *other* reasons why you could be rationally required to have an instrumental intention given certain other mental states on some occasion, and these reasons *might not support belief in any instrumental requirement*. Here we should compare principles of rationality with other explanatory normative principles. Compare an unexplanatory principle which says that it is right to do X if C with an explanatory principle which says that it is right to do X if C *because* C. It is, for example, right to be nice to the people next to you if you’re on a plane. But it is not right to be nice to them *because* you’re on the plane.

Finally, I leave open whether instrumental requirements are to be formulated in a wide-scope way or a narrow-scope way.[[16]](#footnote-16) I just assume that coming to have an instrumental intention on the basis of an end-to-be-promoted and an instrumental belief which coheres with that instrumental intention is what counts as complying with the alleged instrumental requirement.

1.4. *Claims and Disclaimers*

With the foregoing clarifications in the background, I can now state the two main claims I oppose:

**The Status Explanation Claim**: In cases that can be *modeled* instrumentally, the fact that the conclusion-intentions are rational is *explained* by the fact that they comply with requirements or pressures of instrumental rationality.

**The Necessary Glue Claim**: Rational practical reasoning, intending, and acting are necessarily held together, at least in significant part, by instrumental reasoning and responsiveness to apparent instrumental pressures.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In opposition, I will argue that (1) apparent instrumental relations don’t do the explanatory work that they are commonly assumed to do, and that (2) we needn’t fret, since we don’t need them to confer a sufficiently fine-grained order on thought and action. Along the way, I will defend some contrasting positive claims:

**The Valuing Claim**: In the cases that some model instrumentally, the rationality of the conclusion-intention is better explained by the fact that it manifests a derivative but non-instrumental way of valuing (constituents of) the intended event.

**The Non-Instrumental Order Claim**: Rational practical reasoning, intention, and acting exhibit a fine-grained but non-instrumental order. This order is grounded in for-the-sake-ofrelations linking one’s acts/attitudes to one’s non-instrumental values.

These claims distinguish my rejection of instrumental rationality from other approaches that dispense with fundamental instrumental coherence requirements, such as reasons-first approaches (Kolodny (2005), Raz (2005), Kiesewetter (2017), Lord (2018)), cognitivist approaches (Setiya (2007), Wallace (2001)), and the most familiar Kantian approaches (Korsgaard (2009), Hampton (1998)). Indeed, I see this paper as a further installment in a wider rejection of instrumental ideology that would also target instrumental *value* and *reasons*, which are not targeted by some of these other theorists. Kiesewetter, Kolodny, Lord, and Raz, for example, don’t deny that there are instrumental reasons.

Although a wider anti-instrumentalist agenda is in the background, this paper is only explicitly about rationality in what Scanlon (1998) called ‘the narrow sense’. Hence, as a final disclaimer, I stress I am here not directly opposing views about reasons like Schroeder (2007a)’s Humeanism or Portmore (2011)’s consequentialism. Some arguments might extend against these views. But some would be more questionable: an analogue of the argument in §2.2 may, for example, seem too quick against Humeanism and consequentialism, for reasons made clear in Schroeder (2007a: Ch.2) and Railton (1984). But alienation matters more transparently for the theory of rationality.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**2. Against the Status Explanation Claim**

I will now turn to give several arguments against the Status Explanation Claim.

2.1. *Argument from the Explanation of Canonical Examples*

The first argument involves looking at the kinds of examples that might seem best modeled instrumentally, and then maintaining that the rationality of the derivative intentions that hold these cases together is not instrumental on the face-value understanding.

I take it that if instrumental rationality is going to be on display anywhere, it will be in an extended course of action which can be divided into steps or phases, where the course leads to completion. If it is worth its salt, instrumental rationality should be leading us from one step to the next, on to the literal end. The trouble is that the steps in many courses of action do not seem best described as *means* to the completion of the action. Instead, they seem to be *parts* of the action-in-progress. The intentional doing of any of the steps at a given time *just is* the intentional doing of the action, albeit incomplete at the time, and in the process of completion. Consider building a toy house out of blocks for fun. I am not laying the blocks as a means to building the house. Laying the blocks is part of building the house: here I am *already* performing some of the action which is my end.[[19]](#footnote-19)

It seems better to understand this case as one in which I intend a whole non-derivatively, and then intend the parts derivatively, because their unity *is* the whole intended as an end. While the intentions to do each smaller step are derivatively rational, and rational relative to the end, the relation of derivation isn’t a paradigmatic instrumental relation.

If this is all correct, then insofar as we can attribute the status of derivative rationality to my intention to lay this block, this status will not be *best explained* by an instrumental requirement or by instrumental pressures. Instead, it seems better to think that it makes sense for me to intend to lay this block because that is *part of what is involved in* building the house. Of course, not all the things I do which are intelligible in light of my desire to build the house are parts of building the house. But those other things aren’t means either: they are *preconditions*. Buying the blocks, or clearing space for them, for example, are not in themselves *means* to building the house.

If we work with the face-value understanding of instrumental rationality, then, it doesn’t seem that the cases where instrumental rationality would be most likely to be exhibited are cases where it is needed to do any explanatory work. For we can divide our smaller activities into two groups: (1) the activities which lead up to one’s undertaking some project, and (2) the activities which are parts of the progress of the project. The activities that most straightforwardly come to mind under each heading do not seem properly described as means to the completion of the activity. They are either preconditions or parts. Parts can be *modeled* from the outside as constitutive means. But the intentions which hold together a complex action are not best understood as instrumental intentions. The thinking behind them is not instrumental.[[20]](#footnote-20)

2.2. *Instrumental Treatment of One’s Actions Is Not Fully Rational: An Argument from Alienation*

Having an instrumental intention which targets one’s own actions is, I believe, anomalous on closer inspection. I am not clear that it is possible to wittingly sustain such an intention, at least for long. For, as I will argue, having such an intention would involve a sort of *alienation* that structural rationality should frown upon, not require.[[21]](#footnote-21) And it is worth stressing in advance that the familiar consequentialist tool for circumventing alienation from Railton (1984) won’t help here: for here we are not dealing with objective norms but rather subjective principles.

Before I give the argument, a word of caution is in order about the kind of example I will use and my strategy in using it. I will consider cases in which instrumental motivation seems *most transparently* to be on display. Instrumental motivation may be less transparent in other cases if it is present. But I think that is because there will also be non-instrumental motivations working alongside instrumental motivations in other cases. What I assume is that if there is such a thing as instrumental rationality, it is possible for it to be fully manifest in the most transparent cases of instrumental motivation. I will then suggest that these cases are cases of alienation and that what makes them alienating is the fact that they involve instrumental motivation. I will also assume that genuine rational requirements should not be such that complying with them transparently *constitutes* alienation. Of course, one might be inclined to say in my examples that there is more going on in the psychology of the agent which contributes to their alienation. But I will want to say that the crux of the alienation is instrumental motivation.

Let me proceed. The literature on requirements of rationality has gotten people used to the idea that our *actions* can be means. A standard statement of the most often discussed instrumental principle, after all, has the simple form:

**IP-Simple**: It is a rational requirement that if you intend to A and believe that B-ing is a necessary means for A-ing, then you intend to B,

where A-ing and B-ing are actions.[[22]](#footnote-22)

After reading those words many times, they can sound like they pick out something familiar. But I think we must take a step back and reflect on how strange it would be to transparently conceive of one’s own actions as *means*, and to intend these actions *because* they are means to a further end.

I allow that we are familiar with means in ordinary life, but the means with which we are familiar are not actions: they are *mere things*, such as forks and paintbrushes. We use these things, and our usings are actions, and these actions perhaps have ‘instrumental value’.[[23]](#footnote-23) But it doesn’t follow from these claims that we regard our *actions* as means and intend them for that reason. Instead, we normally will these actions as parts of some larger undertaking. One’s use of the paintbrush is part of one’s activity of painting, for example.

A vertigo creeps in when we start to conceive of our smaller activities as means that don’t share in the value of the project to which they were meant to be contributions. Conceiving of them in this way detaches them from the larger meaningful activity in which they were formerly installed. It may detach them from our agency. If I could think of possible movements of my hands as tools I could use to achieve some end, and I exploited these movements with that objective in mind, the movements might rightly seem like puppetry. Partly for this reason, it is hard to get myself to conceive of my acts in this way.

I can think of cases in which this feeling is more familiar. But they fail to involve full rationality, at least if rationality is something of value. And it is plausible that what *makes* them fall short is the fact that they involve treating one’s actions as means. Some examples might be cases in which I have to *get myself* to do something in which I see no value, but which has some chance of producing some unspecified later advantage, or cases in which I’m merely working on the basis of incentives (e.g., factory labor). In such cases, I can get myself to do the required act only by manipulating myself in some way, as in cases in which I try to respond to pragmatic reasons for belief. Yet it also seems these are the kinds of cases in which I am most transparently responding to instrumental pressures, by treating my action as a means. When I can fit the action into some larger meaningful project, it is more appropriate to think of my action as part of something larger which I intend as an end. It gets a share of the same value that this larger thing has as an end.

2.3. *Technical Knowledge Doesn’t Mark Out a Distinct Field of Practical Rationality*

One might think §2.2 only shows that the instrumental principle should never been stated in a way that portrays *actions* as the relevant means. A different option is to push the means back into the world, where they belong. This option better captures the Baconian idea that technical knowledge makes us masters of nature, not parts of the machinery through which nature is controlled. But this view leads to a different problem for the Status Explanation Claim.

The problem centers around the fact that it is unclear why there would be a distinctive sub-compartment of practical rationality devoted to the use of tools and the treatment of other worldly entities as instruments. A type of rationality should not be marked off from others just because it covers actions which involve certain kinds of objects (tools), or certain kinds of dealings with objects (treatment as tools). We can subsume subjectively appropriate forms of object-treatment under a more general principle equally applicable to non-instrumental cases. This broader principle is the subjective analogue of the principle that there is reason of the right kind to respond to X in the way that is fitting to X (e.g., to desire the desirable, to esteem the estimable, to envy the enviable):

**The Fitting Treatment Principle**: If you believe that X is fittingly treated in way W, then there is subjective reason of the right kind to intend to treat X in way W.

This principle captures our understanding of how to treat tools as a special case of our understanding of how to treat any objects of action. If I conceive of something as a toaster, I conceive of its function as being to toast. Hence it is sensible for me to use it according to its function, by putting bread in it. But there is no new or distinctive kind of rationality in play here. The rationality in play is the same which is in play when I envy those I believe to be enviable, or esteem those I believe to be estimable.

Conceiving of something as an instrument does involve conceiving of it as being fittingly treated in a certain way. And so the belief that something is an instrument can be sensibly heeded by acting in certain ways. But the rationality which is on display in such cases is not distinctive. Servicing the apparently serviceable is a special case of X-ing the apparently X-able. Indeed, some cases of using instruments may involve no instrumental intentions: playing piano is most often done for its own sake, though it obviously involves using the piano.

Perhaps one could claim that there is a distinctive kind of knowledge—technical knowledge—invoked by the practical reasoning that others have deemed instrumental. But this fact still doesn’t give rise to a distinctive form of practical rationality. This point was made before by Kolnai (1962), Wiggins (1975) and Williams (1981). Kolnai (1962: 187) put it especially well:

So far as the physician confines himself to the determination of suitable curative means…he does not deliberate but performs the theoretical activities of recalling to his mind relevant knowledge, looking up textbooks for more information, considering the peculiarities of the case in hand, weighing probabilities, comparing the average efficacy of various methods in similar cases, and so forth. He does what a consulting physician, not responsible for any decision, might to just as well for him. The knowledge he brings to his practical task is ampler and more exact but not of a logically distinct nature than my wholly unpractical knowledge….

To be sure, knowledge of the instrumental properties of objects may play an enabling role in helping one to acquire know-how. And know-how is distinctively practical. But properly understood, these points just put us on the other horn of my overarching dilemma. When a person manifests knowledge how to A by B-ing, her B-ing constitutes her A-ing and is known to do so in virtue of her know-how: her B-ing is a *way* of A-ing in a constitutive sense, not a means. In this case, the agent does not treat her B-ing as a means to A-ing: the only thing treated as a means is the object.

Knowledge of the instrumental properties of the object is not on its own sufficient for practical knowledge, Kolnai noted. Even if intellectualism about know-how were true, it is not *this* propositional knowledge which guides one’s action: it is knowledge of a *way* of acting that is presented to one as potentially constituting one’s intentional A-ing.[[24]](#footnote-24) Technical propositional knowledge might play an *enabling* role in allowing me to grasp that way of acting, but once I grasp it, it is my direct apprehension of the way that *grounds* my knowledge of know how to open the door.

Having resolved these issues, we can now combine the points in this section and the last to get a larger argument against the Status Explanation Claim:

1. We can either take the means of means-end coherence to be (a) *actions* (the implicit view in the literature), or (b) *mere things* which are treated in a certain way through one’s acting.
2. If (a), the instrumental principle is false (and hence the Status Explanation Claim is false).
3. If (b), the Status Explanation claim is false: the rationality of one’s use of the thing is better explained by a combination of fittingness and the constitutive rationality of action guided by know-how.
4. Hence the Status Explanation Claim is false.

2.4. *Arguments from Subsumption and Embeddedness*

I turn to a fourth argument. It is similar in spirit to the first, but consistent with a larger concession to instrumental thinking. This argument involves looking at a kind of rational activity that seems to have face-value instrumental structure, but then arguing that the deeper explanation of one’s rationality in these cases is non-instrumental. In particular, the suggestion will be that the apparently instrumental relations in play have significance only as special cases of a more general non-instrumental relation.

Let’s start with the phenomenon. It seems clear that we often do one thing *in order to* do another thing. I go to the park in order to feed the ducks, or to the store to in order to get groceries, for example. It also seems that an intention to X can be linked to an intention to Y via a practical basing relation expressed by ‘in order to’. This basing-relation is at least a *teleological* relation, where Y-ing is the *aim* and X-ing is part of the process of fulfilling the aim. But it also appears to be instrumental. To be sure, I want to explain away this appearance, and suggested a recipe for doing so earlier. Still, once we are confronted with a plausible description of the activity that makes use of the ‘in order to’ construction, we may be less inclined to explain it away. We might be more inclined to say that our initial face-value understanding was simply too narrow.

Suppose we concede that thought, and simply agree that there is an instrumental basing relation expressed by ‘in order to’. Does it follow that we must accept the Status Explanation Claim? No, for two reasons. The first reason is that the Status Explanation Claim concerns the *fundamental* story about why an intention is rational. We have conceded that an instrumental basing relation may be part of the superficial story. But we are not forced to claim that it is part of the fundamental story. For the ‘in order to’ relation is plausibly a special case of a more general relation, and there might be good reason to prefer a fundamental explanation which appeals to this more general relation.

Let me explain what I have in mind by considering the relationship between the two constructions from the Arendt epigraph: ‘in order to’ and ‘for the sake of’. It is clear that ‘X-es for the sake of Y’ does not entail ‘X-es in order to Y’, because ‘for the sake of’ can relate an action to (a) non-actions (e.g., persons for whose sake we act, or values for the sake of which we act) and (b) actions which are not fundamentally cases of bringing about states-of-affairs (e.g., the action of respecting the law). Hence, we should not try to reduce ‘for the sake of’ facts to ‘in order to’ facts. To do so, as Arendt (1954: Part IV) emphasizes, is to over-extend instrumental reasoning. But we *can* reduce ‘in order to’ facts to ‘for the sake of’ facts. Consider ‘He went to fridge to get some milk’. We can translate this sentence into the ‘sake’ ideology as follows: ‘He went to the fridge for the sake of getting some milk’. This second sentence is not as elegant. But it is not false, ungrammatical, or nonsensical. It is true if the first is true, and *vice versa*.

These facts suggest that the ‘sake’ locution is *more general* than the ‘in order to’ locution. But there are good reasons to want more fundamental explanations of rational status to invoke more general ideology. Compare physics. There are different kinds of physical forces—e.g., *contact forces* such as frictional forces, and *non-contact* forces such as gravitational force. Suppose we want to explain why some object of fixed mass has accelerated. We could give an ordinary explanation invoking a specific kind of contact force. It would normally be more elegant to do so—e.g., ‘The ball moved because I kicked it’ is more elegant than ‘The ball accelerated because I applied a force to it’. But the fundamental explanation will go via a force law that doesn’t discriminate between contact and non-contact forces. Hence we shouldn’t invoke the idea of a contact force if we want the most fundamental explanation of why the ball accelerated. If we are interested in the fundamental laws of rationality, we have a similar reason to appeal to the most general features of our actions that can do the work. Doing so illuminates the deeper similarities between otherwise different-seeming cases, in much the way that Newton’s laws illuminate the similarities between the motions of balls and planets.

We should not assume that ‘in order to’ explanations are fundamental. They can be subsumed under ‘for the sake of’ explanations in a way that reveals their similarity with cases which are only properly described with ‘for the sake of’ explanations. If so, we should not accept the Status Explanation Claim even if we agree that ‘in order to’ explanations are face-value instrumental.

But this is not all that we can say to put ‘in order to’ in its place. A second point is that ‘in order to’ explanations are tolerable only given background assumption that the agent to whom they apply has some irreducibly ‘for the sake of’ values. This point is hard to see only because considerations of charity require us to trust that a background story is available unless we have overriding reason to treat the agent as maniacal.

Here the ‘sake’-based translation is illuminating. Suppose I go to the fridge for the sake of getting some juice. Unless I am a lunatic, this cannot be the only thing I can say about what I am doing. For suppose I ask myself why I am going to the fridge for the sake of getting milk, and there is no further story I can conjure. Here either the vertigo of alienation will set temporarily, making me feel lost, or it will emerge that I have values exhibiting the kind of narrow irrationality that Parfit (1984) marked with the beloved example of ‘Future Tuesday Indifference’.

One might, of course, try to respond to this point by saying that we can just appeal to *other* values which are not irreducibly ‘for the sake of’ values. But here Arendt had an insight. In the chapter from which the epigraph is drawn, she suggests that any attempt to terminate the regress which appeals *only* to values-to-be-promoted will merely amount to kicking the can down the instrumental road. Stopping with anything conceived of by the agent as merely ‘to be promoted’ in the way that nourishment is ‘to be promoted’ will either lead to alienation or reveal Future-Tuesday values. To be sure, it might initially appear better to invoke happiness. But that is only because happiness is also a value *for the sake of which* we act, not *just* something that we strive *in order to produce in ourselves* or *get*. Conceiving of it in the latter way puts us on the hedonic treadmill. It would be worse than Future-Tuesday-indifference to have jogging on the hedonic treadmill as one’s ultimate end. So, in saying that we want happiness for its own sake, we are *not* saying that we want to have it in order to have it. Indeed, ‘in order to’ seems irreflexive, unlike ‘for the sake of’.

At the very least, these conclusions should seem compelling if ‘in order to’ is taken at face-value as expressing an instrumental relation. If ‘in order to’ means ‘as a means to’, it is irreflexive. Ends are not things which are means to themselves. Ends stand outside of the chain of in-order-to relations and can only terminate the regress of purposive action by doing so. Perhaps for this reason, the longer phrase Aristotle used to explain the notion of a *telos* (*to hou heneka*) is properly translated as ‘that for the sake of which’, not ‘that end as a means to which’.[[25]](#footnote-25) If ‘in order to’ has a reading closer to ‘to hou heneka’, we have no reason for concessions to instrumental rationality. For that would show that this meaning isn’t instrumental.[[26]](#footnote-26)

2.5. *Argument from the Value of Rationality*

My arguments so far have been internal to theory of practical reason. I have been arguing that careful reflection on the structure of practical rationality doesn’t support the Status Explanation Claim, and hence that we lack sufficient reason to believe that the instrumental principle is a fundamental principle of rationality. But there is also an external argument that we can give if we assume that rationality matters. It parallels some arguments I have given before for rejecting attempts to explain epistemic rationality in instrumental terms in Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020).

The argument rests on the following assumptions about the significance of rationality:

*The Necessary Value Claim*: Necessarily, if a mental state manifests rationality, that fact as such makes that mental state *pro tanto* better than it would otherwise be.

*Derivativeness*: Although necessarily possessed by a mental state, the value which inheres in a mental state in virtue of being rational is *derivative*, relative to a more fundamental value (it is just that this *derivative* value will turn out to be *non-instrumental*).

These are claims about the value *simpliciter* of rationality; in other work, I defended the idea that epistemic rationality necessarily has a special, non-instrumental kind of derivative *epistemic* value relative to the more fundamental *epistemic* value of truth. But it is also possible to give a narrower argument from the assumption that rational *action* necessarily has a certain kind of intrinsic value *for the agent*: namely, it makes the agent’s action *meaningful* for the agent. Indeed, I think these arguments are related, since meaningfulness is not only good for the agent, but good *simpliciter*.

Given these assumptions, if we want to explain the value that any token instance of rationality has for any particular mental state or action, what we need to do is appeal to some relation R that this mental state or action bears to fundamental value such that:

*Constraint on R*: Necessarily, if a mental state bears R to a more fundamental value, this fact as such makes that mental state better than it would be if it didn’t bear R to V.

In previous work on epistemic rationality, I argued that R cannot be an instrumental relation to promoting accuracy (or any other plausible fundamental epistemic values), partly by extending points from Jones (1997) and Zagzebski (2000). Both suggested that the fact that justification necessarily makes a belief better is incompatible with justification having value *merely as a product of an instrumentally valuable process*, where the underlying non-instrumental value is accuracy. Zagzebski made this point through her famous coffeemaker analogy: if a cup of coffee is already good, the fact that it was produced by reliable coffeemaker does not make it any better. Inverting a thought from Carter and Jarvis (2012), I added in Sylvan (2018) that the fact that a bad cup of coffee was produced by a reliable coffeemaker also doesn’t make it any better, and I suggested that this was a general point about products of instrumentally valuable processes, though *not* a general point about *derivative value*, since there are non-instrumental forms of it which aren’t subject to this reasoning. Hence, I suggested that R must be a non-instrumental relation, such as the relation of *being a fitting response* to more fundamental value. I added to this point in Sylvan (2020) by suggesting that we need a non-instrumental model to explain why rational beliefs have epistemic value even in worlds where rational belief-forming processes are not truth-conducive (e.g., skeptical scenarios).

What I didn’t appreciate before is that this point casts more general doubt on the Status Explanation Claim, and on the instrumental principle itself. If complying with the instrumental principle were to give rise to any degree of rationality, this property of rationality would have to have necessary but derivative value. Yet it seems clear that complying with the instrumental principle *as such* could only have instrumental value. If there are cases in which instrumentally rational intentions seem to have some further sort of value, that is not *just* because these intentions comply with the instrumental principle. But if rationality as such confers some necessary value on a mental state, then it would also seem to follow that instrumental relations cannot alone make a mental state rational.

Note that it is no good to respond by insisting that instrumental rationality necessarily has instrumental value. Perhaps one could argue instrumentally rational belief-forming processes as a type necessarily have instrumental value, though it is not plausible in skeptical scenarios that they will have *real* rather than *merely expected* instrumental value. But the token property of being instrumentally rational does not itself necessarily have instrumental value. It won’t have such value if one’s end isn’t achieved. If one’s end is achieved, there is no longer any good in having mental state.

Hence the ‘swamping problem’ for instrumental explanations of epistemic value seems to extend to instrumental explanations of practical rationality. This fact was noted in passing by Arendt (1957: 154-155): ‘an end, once it is attained, ceases to be an end and loses its capacity to guide and justify the choice of means’.[[27]](#footnote-27) And as Arendt was mainly observing, this point reveals that instrumental relations don’t ground a kind of *rationality* at all. For whatever rationality is, it is necessarily something of intrinsic but derivative value.

**3. Against the Necessary Glue Claim**

I turn now to a briefer discussion of the Necessary Glue Claim, since much of the work needed to appreciate its falsity has already been done.

It is worth noting first that this claim is weaker than the Status Explanation Claim. The Status Explanation Claim attempts to limn the *grounds* of the practical rationality of certain patterns of reasoning. The Necessary Glue Claim merely holds that apparent instrumental relations and transitions *necessarily hold together* these patterns of reasoning, which is consistent with their rationality having some deeper non-instrumental explanation. Hence, not all good arguments against the Status Explanation Claim will generate good arguments against the Necessary Glue Claim.

To refute the Necessary Glue Claim, it is enough to show that there are *available* rational patterns of reasoning not held together by apparent instrumental relations which would lead us to all the proper conclusions to which instrumental reasoning would lead us. It is not necessary to show that we in fact don’t rely on instrumental reasoning. Perhaps the Frankfurt School were right to make the sociological claim that practical life under capitalism is *in fact* held together by instrumental reasoning. I am not doing sociology, but just considering whether we could get to certain conclusions by non-instrumental reasoning alone. (I do, however, suspect that we need to replace our currently existing reasoning with more specific forms of non-instrumental reasoning to avoid alienation.)

Although the Necessary Glue Claim is weaker than the Status Explanation Claim, some of the points already made provide a sufficient case against this claim. In the previous section, I drew attention to the following styles of non-instrumental reasoning:

**Constituents and Preconditions Reasoning**: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic[[28]](#footnote-28) desire to do a complex activity and (2) a belief about the constitution of that activity and the preconditions for doing it, to (3) non-fundamental but intrinsic desires for the constituents of this activity and (4) non-fundamental and extrinsic desires to establish the preconditions.

**Specificationist Reasoning**: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire to do a generic activity-type and (2) a belief about what an especially desirable token of that activity would look like, to (3) an intrinsic desire to do that token.

**Tool-Aided Reasoning**: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire or intention to do X, (2) the belief that tool T would be serviceable for one’s X-ing, to (3) a derivative but intrinsic desire to *X with the help of tool T*.

**‘Sake’-Based Reasoning**: One reasons from (1) an intrinsic desire for X or intention to Y and (2) the belief that Z-ing is suitably related to X or Y-ing, to (3) a non-fundamental but intrinsic desire to Z for X’s sake or to Z for Y-ing’s sake.

The first and third styles are structurally closest to alleged instrumental reasoning. It would be easiest to undermine the letter of the Necessary Glue Claim by appealing to them together with the view, already defended, that these forms of reasoning are not worth calling instrumental.

The third style easily replaces alleged instrumental reasoning. It is so close, however, that one might not see it as grounding a sufficient case against the *spirit* of the Necessary Glue Claim. To get that case, one would need to rely heavily on (1) Kolnai’s claim that deliberation about the effectiveness of possible means is merely theoretical deliberation, and (2) the further assumption that only reasoning guided by a view about the serviceability of an object for one’s own doings is genuinely practical. I am least confident about this option, though I think it is defensible.

Properly appreciated, the first style is a more promising replacement. The attitude it takes toward smaller actions that are parts of some larger activity is genuinely different from the attitude that instrumental reasoning takes. It makes good sense to regard a person’s desire for the constituents of an intrinsically worthwhile activity to be intrinsic, and to think of the person as enjoying the parts in the same way they enjoy the whole. Indeed, the whole on this view is enjoyed *through* the enjoying of the parts. Contrast the instrumental attitude. Eating each bite of a sandwich as a means to finishing the sandwich is very different from eating each bite as a part of eating the whole sandwich. The first is not enjoyable, barring bizarre values. The second is enjoyable if the sandwich is good.

We can, I think, easily enough imagine replacing instrumental reasoning with either the first or third styles, though only the first embodies a different attitude toward life. A transition to either of these styles would be less radical than a transition to the second and fourth styles, however. The transition would be like the transition from greyscale to color, with the image otherwise remaining the same, and not like the transition from photography to painting or music. By contrast, shifting to the second or fourth styles would be more like changing the medium of practical thought.

Partly for this reason, it is harder to see how these transitions would work. The transition to the second cannot be done without a loss of important granularity, as far as I can see. While there are some brilliant re-imaginings of practical reasoning in Kolnai (1962), following him in regarding specification as the sole fundamental form of practical reasoning replaces the bones of action with meat. But practical reasoning needs a skeleton to move—this is Vogler (2002)’s insight. Desiring to experience the *denouement* is not a more specific way of desiring to enjoy the story. So, we would need to combine this second style with the first. But the first alone captures what we might want from the second. For parts are not the only things we can regard as constituents of practical activities: specifications could be regarded as constituting tokens of activity types.

Replacing instrumental reasoning with ‘sake’-based reasoning may seem an easier task, involving a single act of find-and-replace. But it will involve a reformatting of practical reasoning, and probably a shift in values. Note that the only simple way to replace an instrumental intention with a ‘sake’-based intention will be to represent one as acting *for the sake of bringing about the activity toward which the instrumental intention is directed*. Acting for the sake of production will often seem perverse. Hence these intentions may need to be dropped once their meaning is laid bare by the transition to ‘sake’-based reasoning. But I think we must trust that an adequate alternative can be found if we want to represent an agent’s activity as meaningful from her point of view (which I think is required for her activity to be fully rational).

In the next and final major section, I will say more about how I think this replacement should go. For now, we can rest assured that there are several ways to replace instrumental reasoning with non-instrumental reasoning which will not involve excessive loss of practical structure. Hence, we can reject the Necessary Glue Claim: there are other ways to hold practical reasoning together.

**4. The Non-Instrumental Structure of Practical Reason**

Suppose one agrees that we should do without instrumental rationality. How then should we understand the non-instrumental structure of practical rationality? Our answer should be guided by some constraints from the previous sections:

**Non-Alienation**: Transparent manifestations of practical rationality should not be alienating as such.

**Necessary Intrinsic (but Derivative) Value**: (1) Necessarily, each manifestation of practical rationality should confer something of intrinsic value on the attitudes or actions that manifest it. (2) But this intrinsic value should not be *fundamental*, since rationality is not of *fundamental* value: it should be derived from a relation to a more fundamental value—just a *non-instrumental* relation.

**Sufficient Generality**: The principles or pressures that underwrite the rationality of transitions should have sufficient generality: they shouldn’t be so specific as to obscure rational similarities between different styles of transitioning.

**Sufficient Granularity**: The principles or pressures that underwrite the rationality of transitions should not be so general as to render all fine structure of these transitions epiphenomenal.

Existing views which dispense with principles of instrumental rationality at the fundamental level violate some of these constraints.

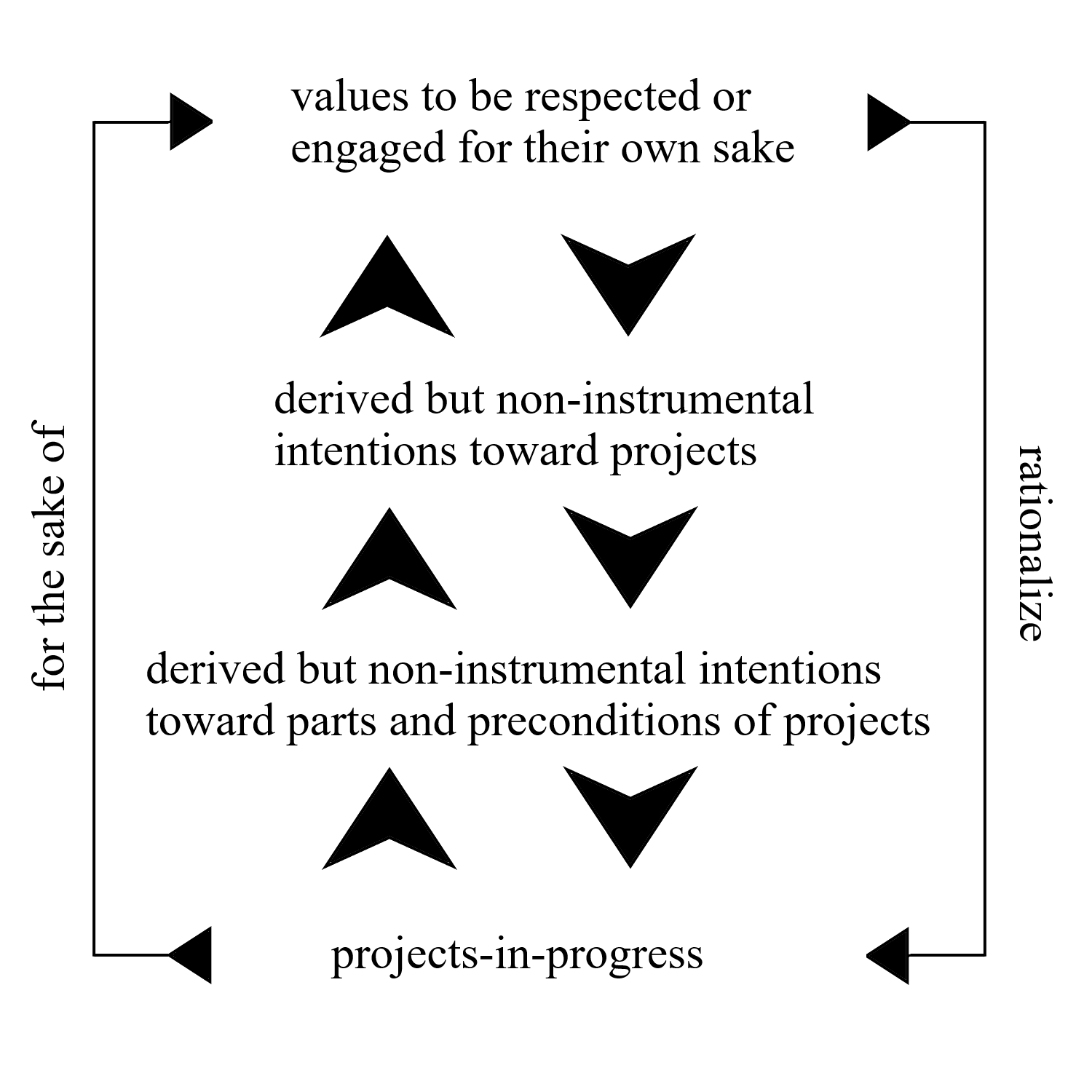
On the one hand, views like Raz (2005)’s, Lord (2018)’s and Kiesewetter (2017)’s that seek to explain all facts about rationality by appealing to the substantivenormativity of reasons threaten to disrespect the fourth constraint. While these figures have error theories to explain away the apparent significance of structural relations, it would be nice to avoid giving an error theory. A parallel point applies to other views which seek to ground rationality in substantive normativity, like Anderson (1993)’s fitting-attitudes account of rationality. The point would also apply to views which seek to privilege some specific forms of structural rationality, such as Kolodny (2005)’s ‘transparency account’, which makes the Enkratic Principle the supreme principle of structural rationality.

On the other hand, the more structural alternatives in the literature violate other constraints. As I have already discussed, the specificationism of Kolnai (1962), Millgram (2001), Richardson (1994), and Wiggins (1975) violates the fourth constraint, depriving practical reasoning of its skeleton. As I have not already discussed, I think the constituents-and-preconditions view (perhaps this is Thompson (2008)’s view) doesn’t make clear sense of the first or second constraints. Here I would want to invert a thought from Wallace (2001) about cases in which one skillfully executes activities one doesn’t value. Wallace thinks a theory of rationality should explain the *cleverness* displayed in these cases. But if rationality has the value I assume it has, I don’t see why we should regard alienated cleverness as a manifestation of practical rationality. If the activity is meaningless from the agent’s perspective and doesn’t reflect her values, I see no practical rationality in intending the constituents of the activity. And I don’t see anything practically clever here, though the agent may exhibit considerable theoretical rationality of the sort Kolnai discussed. There may be great practical *skill* on display, but that is not our topic here. Notice finally that the complaint isn’t a substantive complaint: there might be conclusive substantive objections to an agent’s values, but an act might still be rational in the relevant sense, relative to those values.

Although I don’t think the constituents-and-preconditions approach works on its own, I suspect that this style of reasoning will remain part of the best alternative. As I have hinted, my preferred approach replaces instrumental relations with ‘for the sake of’ relations. What is at the end of the chain of such relations is some ultimate value one holds dear, where examples of proper values might include equality, liberty, truth, happiness, wisdom.

One’s ultimate values directly rationalize one’s final intentions to do certain actions. These intentions are formed in light of one’s conception of those ultimate values. Valuing equality and liberty together might, for example, rationally require having an intention to relate to others as democratic equals, where some background conception of equality and liberty leads one to treat democracy as the social arrangement that best embodies these values. While these intentions are final, they are adopted *for the sake of* the ultimate values. One might finally intend to relate to others democratically, for example, *because* it respects equality and liberty.

Practical reasoning doesn’t end with these intentions: this is the structural insight of instrumentalism. But the relationship between these intentions and derivedintentions to do specific actions won’t be instrumental. Here constituents-and-preconditions reasoning returns in a subordinate role. The fundamental rationalizing relations will remain ‘for-the-sake-of’ relations, but these relations will hold between one’s ultimate and narrower intentions *through* the structure of parts and preconditions. In a diagram, the view suggests that a rational agent’s practical mind will be structured as follows:[[29]](#footnote-29)



With this picture in mind, let’s walk through our checklist of constraints.

Firstly, this picture satisfies the Non-Alienation constraint *unless* one thinks that avoiding alienation requires adopting specific substantive values; I will return to this question momentarily. What seems clear is that having one’s practical thought held together by this kind of structure is sufficient to give it meaning by one’s own lights.

Secondly, I take it that the foregoing fact gives as much value to structural rationality as one could reasonably expect. For-the-sake-of relations can, I suggest, transmit the meaningfulness of highest-level values to the lower levels of practical thought (e.g., intentions directed at parts and preconditions). Such meaningfulness has some measure of ultimate value, and the lower levels share in this value by bearing the for-the-sake-of relation to the top level.

Finally, the picture has a ‘goldilocks’ degree of generality which satisfies the third and fourth constraints. Although there might be special for-the-sake-of relations needed to understand the structure of specific values, a general account of rationality can omit such details. We don’t, however, want to omit the steps that take many rational agents from the top to the bottom level. Perhaps, if Dancy (2018) is right, we can imagine agents who move directly from the top level to the bottom level through one exercise of *phronesis*. But for many agents, rational practical thinking is often harder work, essentially including extra steps. Some or even most of the rationality of such agents’ transitioning would drain out if these steps were skipped.

The one question that remains is a relative of Parfit (1984)’s question about whether some desires are intrinsically irrational in Scanlon (1998)’s narrow sense. One might wonder whether some values would necessarily have deficient meaning in a correspondingly narrow sense (i.e., meaningfulness from the subject’s perspective). Smith (1995) and Markovits (2014) believe that immorality will be excluded by structural rationality. I’m not sure about this claim, which concerns structural practical rationality. But I leave open whether some values are structurally excluded. Indeed, I am tempted to opt for constitutivism and hold that being a being of a certain kind necessarily involves having values of a certain cast. I’ve already made this commitment by giving the ‘for the sake of’ relation a special role here. There are values for the *ultimate* sake of which we cannot meaningfully act. If Arendt was right, *usefulness* is an example.

My suspicion is that moral requirements will not follow from the structural constraints on for-the-sake-of relations. This is my spinoff on Velleman (1992)’s thought that full-blooded agents aren’t necessarily ‘squares’. I would deny that morality is *at odds* with practical reason. But I don’t yet see that morality in the narrow sense falls out of practical reason. A wider Aristotelian story might be more plausible, or there might be better constitutivist pictures, such as Katsafanas (2013)’s Nietzschean picture or the neo-Aristotelian picture that Wood (1999) and Hurka (1993) ascribe to Marx. All of these *and* the Kantian pictures are consistent with my overall view, barring further arguments. The disagreements can be seen as disagreements about what can coherently terminate a ‘for-the-sake-of’ chain. It is beyond the scope of this paper to resolve these disagreements.

**5. The Non-Instrumental Unity of Reason**

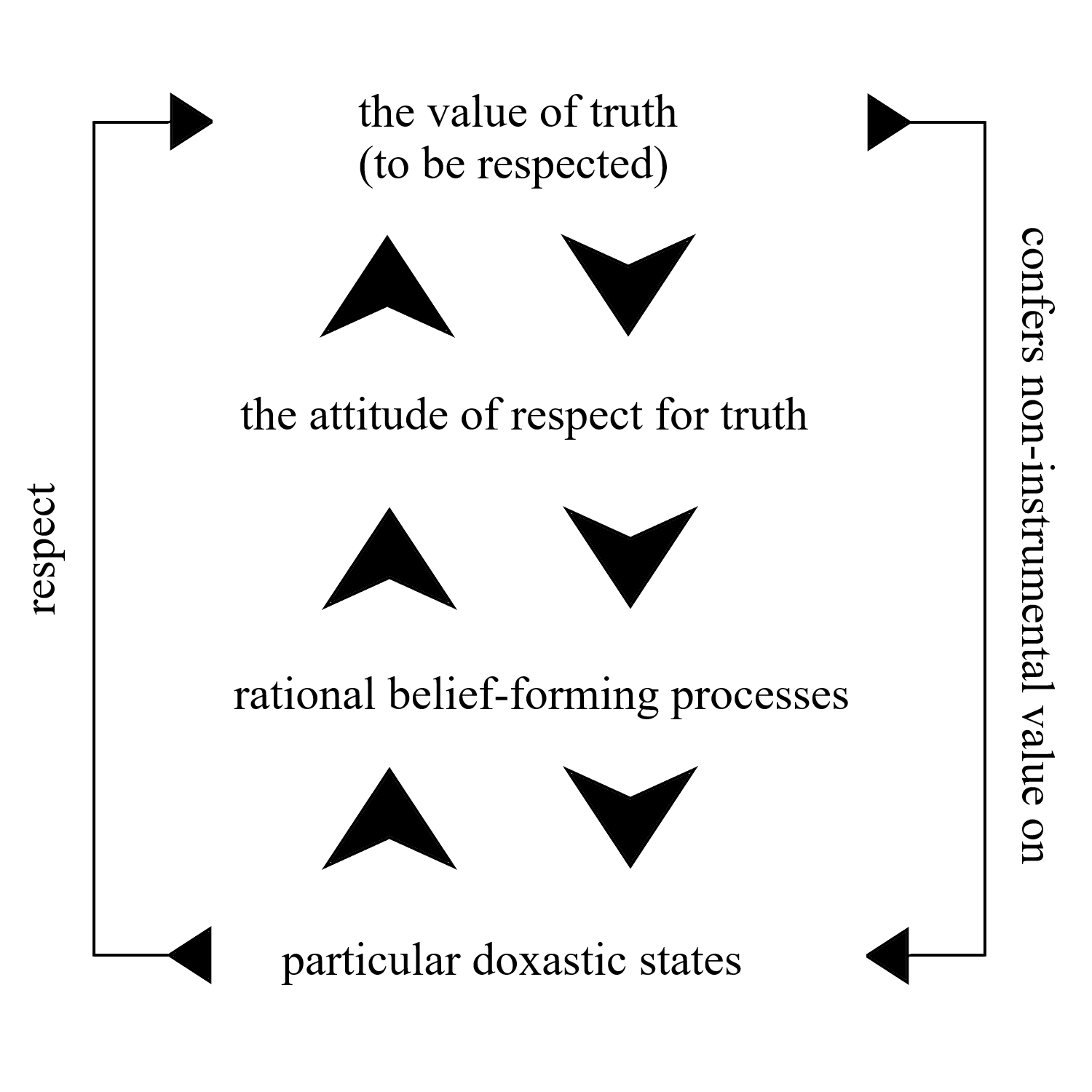
I conclude by drawing attention to a final virtue of the view, which further distinguishes it from views that incorporate a fundamental instrumental requirement: it allows us to see reason as unifiedacross its practical and epistemic manifestations. As I argued in Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020) and others have argued,[[30]](#footnote-30) instrumentalist views do not provide a tolerable unification of epistemic and practical normativity. Hence, if one rejects instrumentalism but still accepts a fundamental requirement of instrumental rationality, the outcome will be disunity: since epistemic rationality is never instrumental rationality, it will be fundamentally unlike much of practical rationality on standard views. Thankfully, there is a non-instrumentalist unification that is as comprehensive as the attempted instrumentalist unifications of pragmatists like James (1896/1979) and Rinard (2015, 2017), instrumentalists like Foley (1987, 1992), and consequentialists like Pettigrew (2016).

But before turning to this alternative unification, I first want to emphasize a different kind of unity that has already emerged but not received explicit comment. As I said earlier, a key insight of Vogler (2002) is that most practical reasoning is not reasoning about ultimate values (*pace* the specificationists) but rather a sequence proceeding from big-picture values to small-scale intentions and actions. What norm gives order to this sequence? For Vogler, it is the instrumental principle. But unless one is either an instrumentalist or a proponent of the view that all ultimate value is ‘to be promoted’, this norm will seem fundamentally unlike the norm that governs embrace of ultimate values. Hence, one will get separate hypothetical and categorical imperatives, making practical reason fundamentally divided.

I upheld Vogler’s basic insight but claimed that the norm that governs the sequence from ultimate values to small-scale intentions and actions is of the same kind as the norm that governs embrace of ultimate values. Ultimate values are embraced with fitting attitudes. What makes it fitting to embrace a value is the same as what makes it fitting to manifest one’s embrace in practice, by acting for the sake of the value. Hence the structure of practical reason is the structure of embracing, thinking, and acting for the sake of value (which is carried out in the messy empirical realm, and is hence a mess of complicated steps). On this view, both structural rationality in the narrow sense (i.e., rationality *relative* to other attitudes) and the rationality attaching to one’s values have the same normative ground.

Although practical reason is in this way unified, it is worth distinguishing two kinds of values that could structure one’s practical mind. On the one hand, there are values to be *respected*, where respect is understood as imposing a *deliberative constraint* not to disrespect the value by acting in certain ways (e.g., in the case of personhood, by violating rights). But not all value is primarily to be respected in this negative sense. Much value is to be engaged with, where engagement is positive.[[31]](#footnote-31) By creating or taking pleasure in art, for example, we engage with aesthetic value. Some value to be respected also merits engagement: persons are not just to be respected but also to be loved, as Kant emphasized in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Engagement and its constitutive norms are the answer to alienation and the instrumental attitude to value embodied in a production-first view. For respect alone seems an inadequate source of meaning (unless one is as stuffy as legend portrays Kant).

With this distinction in mind, we can more easily explore how the view developed above combines with the account of epistemic rationality from Sylvan (2014, 2018, 2020) to yield a unified picture. In those earlier works, I suggested that rational belief derives epistemic value from manifesting *respect for truth*. This view generates a picture like the one above, though it inserts a specific value (truth) in place of the placeholder.[[32]](#footnote-32)



So far, this view is stereotypically Kantian, deriving everything from respect; hence I called it ‘Epistemic Kantianism’. But Kant reserved a place for positive forms of valuing (e.g., love). Where in the theoretical domain might one expect to find positive valuing? Not at the heart of epistemic rationality in the narrowest sense, I think. Narrow epistemic rationality—i.e., the constitutive rationality of beliefand other stativetheoretical attitudes—is fundamentally negative, though iffy positive requirements might be derived if one is seeking to settle some particular question.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Yet besides occupying states like belief, we engage in activities like inquiry and theoretical reasoning. Once we appreciate this point, we may find a place for something more positive, which would yield fuller symmetry between the epistemic and the practical. Plausibly, inquiry is an attempt to *engage with reality*, by opening one’s mind to the facts and seeking to perceive them aright. If there is reason of the right kind to engage with truth for its own sake—a reason which would give force to the criticism of *uninquisitiveness*—then truth will merit engagement as well as respect.

One might wonder whether commands of engagement and respect might conflict, or represent norms of different kinds, as Friedman (forthcoming) suggests in discussing the epistemic and the ‘zetetic’. But I suspect we can restore harmony if we model the zetetic *not* on instrumental practical rationality (as Friedman assumes), but on non-instrumental structural rationality. Friedman assumes that because inquiry is an activity, it generates instrumental pressures. One can block the argument by purging the practical of anything fundamentally instrumental.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to show that the zetetic has the same structure as practical rationality as I’ve understood it. But the challenge to the unity of the theoretical exists only if the zetetic is governed by instrumental rationality. I agree with Friedman that the study of theoretical reason goes beyond the study of the narrowly epistemic (i.e., the constitutive norms of stative theoretical attitudes). Given this point, the picture sketched above together with the picture I’ve already defended in epistemology leads to a unification of rationality.[[34]](#footnote-34)

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1. It was once common to hold that practical rationality is *wholly* constituted by instrumental rationality. See Gauthier (1987) and Dreier (1996) for examples, and Nozick (1993: 133) for an illustration of the perceived dominance of this view. The view is often pinned on Hume, but Sayre-McCord’s contribution to this volume shows that this may be wrong. In the literature on rational requirements which grew out of the pioneering work of Broome (1999), it is more common to hold that there are both instrumental and non-instrumental requirements of rationality. Still, it is unusual for theorists to accept coherence requirements but deny that instrumental coherence is among them. For a thoroughly non-instrumental view, see Hampton (1998), and see Korsgaard (2009) for the view that the instrumental principle is merely an aspect of a categorical requirement of rationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, e.g., Audi (2001), Broome (2013), Dancy (2018), Millgram (1997), and Vogler (2002) for figures who grant that there is non-instrumental reasoning but assume that instrumental reasoning remains a central case of practical reasoning. See Kolnai (1962) and Williams (1981) for the view that all genuinely practical reasoning is of ends. These figures occupy an interesting space in agreeing with cognitivists about practical reason that instrumental reasoning reduces to theoretical reasoning, while adding that it is not practicalfor this reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more discussion in this volume, see the Introduction and the contributions by Lord and Morton and Paul. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, e.g., Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The approach may also have been implicitly accepted by Continental philosophers who were critical of what they called ‘instrumental reason’ (especially Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1979), Arendt (1957), Gorz (1989), Horkheimer (1947, 2012), Marcuse (1964), and Weber (1921/1968)). The paper stalks these figures in its footnotes, and its title is an allusion to Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason* and *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. My understanding of subjective axiological structure also distinguishes my approach from *teleological* approaches as normally understood. Whether it differs from properly Aristotelian approaches is another matter. Note that a close translation of the Greek phrase which unpacks the idea of final cause—`*to hou heneka’*—is *that for the sake of which*. It is possible that Aristotle shouldn’t be regarded as a teleologist if being a teleologist means explaining normativity in terms of *aims* which are fundamentally to be *promoted*; for more discussion, see Johnson (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Vogler (2002: 163) gives a broader characterization that elides distinctions I want to draw: ‘The view I have been laying out isn’t exactly that calculative or technical practical reasoning is entirely a matter of finding ‘causally efficacious means’ by which to attain determinate ends. This is one form such reasoning might take, but it could just as well trace constitutive part-whole relations, or else involve straightforward demonstrative inference….’ As we’ll see, reasoning founded on constitutive relations is often fundamentally different from means-end reasoning. I agree with Audi (2001) that it is unhelpful to obscure this difference with the technical notion of a ‘constitutive means’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hence the ultimate ends of an agent’s reasoning will appear from their perspective to have *final value* of the kind consequentialists use to explain rightness; see Pettit (1989) and Scanlon (1998: Ch.2) for this characterization of consequentialism, and Scanlon for an argument that not all fundamental value is final value in this sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Instrumental reasoning is often merely portrayed (a) as starting with the belief that Y-ing is *necessary* for X-ing rather than the more specific belief that Y-ing is *a necessary means* to X-ing, and (b) as ending with an intention to Y which is not qualified as an *instrumental intention*. See Brunero (2020) for a striking illustration of this tendency. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Korsgaard (1988) for one example, and Sylvan (2012, 2018, 2020) for discussions of the importance of this distinction for understanding the value of epistemic rationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Hurley (2018: 32) for the same point. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Dreier (1993) and Portmore (2007) for defenses, and Schroeder (2007b) for a critique. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. As Hurley (2018) emphasizes, it is only to *avoid* stacking the deck *in favor of* consequentialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I agree Raz (2011, 2016) that *no* values are fundamentally to be promoted. But this view isn’t required for the view defended here. Only briefly in Section 2 will I mention how to piece together this Razian view with the myth view of instrumental rationality. (Note that Raz didn’t explicitly connect these ideas, and still allowed for instrumental value in Raz (2005).) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I endorse Fogal (forthcoming)’s claim that rationality involves responding to pressures, not just requirements. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For discussion, see Errol Lord’s contribution to this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Few explicitly make these claims; the one clear example is Vogler (2002)’s insightful defense of instrumental reason. But I assume that the fundamental requirements of rationality are justified by the fact that they *explain* the rational status of certain attitudes or combinations of attitudes. Hence, anyone who takes the instrumental principle to be a fundamental principle of rationality implicitly accepts the first claim. It is hard to see why one would believe the first claim unless one believed the second. But for a defense of the second, see Anscombeans like Vogler (2002) and Schwenkler (2019), who take it to capture Anscombe’s suggestion that action exhibits a ‘calculative order’. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The importance of alienation for the theory of action was noted in Lavin (2013). But I defend the near opposite of Lavin’s claim. Lavin suggested that if there were *basic* actions, they would necessarily involve alienation. I will be arguing that if there were *instrumental* actions, they would necessarily involve alienation. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For a longer defense of this picture, see Thompson (2008). Curiously, Thompson (p.89) says that he is interested in ‘‘instrumental’ or ‘teleological’’ rationalization, and that his model of naïve rationalization offers a better picture of this. As I will suggest below, it may be fine to describe some rationality as *teleological*, but this should be sharply distinguished from anything *instrumental*, as well as from anything ‘calculative’. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Audi (2001: 84) puts the point well in a discussion of pleasure: ‘[W]hat we intrinsically want *for* pleasure is not properly said to be wanted as a means to pleasure. Wanting something for pleasure is wanting it for the (presumed) intrinsic qualities of it that make it attractive to one *as* pleasurable; it is not wanting it as a causal or other contingent producer of pleasure. To want something for pleasure is to want it in the anticipation of pleasure *in* realizing it.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The alienation at issue is a generalization of what Marx (1988) discusses in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. As Benhabib (1994) usefully summarizes, a central concern of the Frankfurt school was to generalize Marx’s points about alienation to life under capitalism in general to yield (using Horkheimer’s phrase) a ‘critique of instrumental reason’; see especially Horkheimer (1947, 2012), Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), and Marcuse (1964). As I see it, this project was incomplete and never lived up to Horkheimer’s label. It focused only on instrumental reason *under capitalism* instead of giving a critique of instrumental reason in general, which is exhibited in non-capitalist social structures and the solitary life of Robinson Crusoe (a favorite example of neo-classical economists).

    There are independent lines of Continental thought which get closer to targeting instrumental reason as such. As Ridley (2017) sees it, this project may have been in the background of Nietzsche’s central contributions to the philosophy of action. Arendt (1958: Part IV) ought to be the *locus classicus.* Weber (1921/1968), Heidegger (1954/1977), and Gorz (1989) also get closer than the Frankfurt school to a wider critique of instrumental reason. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Bratman (1987), Hill (1973), Kiesewetter (2017), Korsgaard (1997), Scanlon (2007), Schroeder (2005) and Way (2012) for examples of this way of thinking about the means covered by the instrumental principle. Brunero (2012), Harman (1976), Kolodny and Brunero (2018), and Lord (2018) give formulations that instead cast one’s *intentions* as means; the arguments in this section apply even more strongly, I think, to this formulation. Owing to background views about the nature of intention, Broome (1999, 2013: 157) gives a more unusual formulation in which what is intended is an *event*, which represents a different approach discussed in Section 3. At least in translation, Kant (1785/2012) varies between the first and last formulations. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I assume for the moment that there is instrumental value. But see Prichard (1937/2002: 214) for doubts about the category of instrumental value which complement the view here. (Thanks to Jonathan Dancy for drawing this to my attention.) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. It is telling that different stripes of intellectualists like Stanley and Williamson (2001) and Bengson and Moffett (2012) were inclined to appeal to ways rather than means, so that canonical intellectualism reduces knowledge of how to A to knowledge of a way W that W is a way to A, rather reducing it to knowledge of a means M that it is a means to producing some state of affairs. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Johnson (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In discussing whether the themes of this paper are compatible with his (2019) reading of Anscombe, John Schwenkler pointed out to me that the most general phrase needed to understand the structure of action is not the one expressed by ‘in order to A’ but rather simply by ‘to A’, and he observed that the latter is far from being clearly instrumental. He hypothesized that the core relation is one of *directionality* rather than *instrumentality*. This hypothesis would render his picture of the structure of action compatible with the view that non-instrumentalforms of intentional directedness might underwrite action rather than ones properly labeled ‘calculative’. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. At this stage of her argument, she used this point to defend the other side of Prichard’s thought that alleged instrumental value is not a kind of value: alleged value as an end-in-itself is also not a kind of value. Granting Prichard’s point, her conclusion is a corollary: for ends are the subordinate business partners of means. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. By ‘intrinsic desire to X’, I mean *desire to do X for its own sake*. Combined with my case for separating the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction from the non-instrumental/instrumental distinction in Sylvan (2018), the discussion here brings out that we really need a *threefold* distinction in valuing and value: (i) the for-its-own-sake/for-the-sake-of-something-else distinction, (ii) the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction, and (iii) the non-instrumental/instrumental distinction. Threefold distinctions have been defended by others (see Tannenbaum (2010)), but the one here differs from anything in the existing literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The picture doesn’t depict one important ingredient—viz., non-normative beliefs about the relations that must be in place for an attitude or act to be carried out for the sake of a value. These beliefs will replace the beliefs about instrumental relations that figure in the ‘standard story of action’. I should also note that I leave open whether the values and intentions that appear in the picture are cognitive or conative states. I hope that the picture is consistent with both a cognitivist view about practical reasoning (of the kind that goes back to Harman (1976)) as well as a divided view that features both cognitive and irreducibly conative states. But at least if ‘Humean’ implies ‘instrumentalist’, the divided view will be divorced from the Humean theory of motivation. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Fumerton (2001), Kelly (2003), and Berker (2013). See Foley (1987, 1992) for the clearest example of an attempt at instrumental unity, and the primary target of Fumerton and Kelly. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I take the term ‘engagement’ from Raz (2002), who defends a similar view about value. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The value at the top level is one to which I think we are essentially committed in virtue of being cognizers; hence ‘value’ is also used in an internal sense here, to mean a value *of the cognizer*. I am unsure whether we believe *for the sake of* truth (see Sosa (2000, 2015: Ch.2) for worries). But we do constrain our doxastic attitudes for the sake of accuracy. Hence a doxastic attitude could manifest *something* which isfor the sake of truth (respect). Here it might be better to say that our theoretical reason manifests respect for truth through belief (adopted non-voluntarily). These points suggest that some adjustment to the interpretation of the arrows on the left might be needed. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Nelson (2010) for the first point, and Sylvan (2016) for the qualifier. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper, I thank Jonathan Dancy, Alex Gregory, Brian McElwee, Sarah Paul, Christian Piller, John Schwenkler, David Sosa, Jonathan Way, Daniel Whiting, Fiona Woollard, and other members of audiences at the University of Southampton and the University of Texas at Austin. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)