

# Replies

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Paul Katsafanas makes the most fundamental objection to the project of the book, which is that it is an attempt to solve a non-existent problem. Katsafanas' view is that aspiration only appears paradoxical against a background characterization of agency as—in senses to be further specified below—*simple*, *unified*, and *transparent*:

- (1) Simplicity: the agent must have a *single* reason for acting as she does.
- (2) Unity: this (single) reason cannot be *composed* of non-additive reasons.
- (3) Transparency: agents understand why they are doing what they are doing.

Katsafanas' view is that there are garden variety, un-paradoxical examples of agency that lack one of these characteristics. Let me take each of the claims in order.

With respect to simplicity, Katsafanas points us not to cases of overdetermination but rather to cases of fragmentation: he wants to assert that, because diachronic agency involves a complex array of sub-actions, it may be unable to be explained with reference to a single overarching desire or goal. So, for example, he notes that over the years of aspiring to become a doctor, a medical student performs many subordinate actions, each of which has its own rational structure. This is correct, but I would distinguish two levels of agency here: the agency involved in (e.g.) giving a particular shot, and the agency involved in becoming a (better) doctor. Even if it is true that I cannot become a better doctor without (inter alia) giving people shots, my reason for becoming a better doctor is not exhausted by my reasons for shot-giving. That project requires an overarching reason.

To see this, imagine two nurses in training, and let us imagine that shot-giving is the only medical activity either of them engages in. Each of the nurses has a reason for giving each specific shot she gives, but if, on top of giving shots one of them is *trying to get better at giving shots*, then that nurse needs an additional reason for engaging in *that* activity. The aspirational nurse's agency is structured at a higher level than the nurse who is not trying to improve, and this extra bit of structure calls for an extra reason.

So, what I maintain, with respect to (1), is that for anything someone is doing, she must have some reason for doing that thing. My claim is not that she cannot have *more* than one reason, but that she must have *at least* one reason that hits at the right level of specificity. Someone who is trying to get

better at what she is doing needs a reason for engaging in that project. And if she has no ulterior motive—if this is not a case of self-regulation, but of aspiration—then she will need a proleptic reason.

Still, one might wonder whether that reason couldn't be *composed* of other reasons. This is what (2) gets at. I think it is possible for someone to want to do something for two reasons, where neither of those reasons suffices, but the two, together, do. For example, I might be in a situation where neither my desire for a walk nor my desire to return an overdue book to the library would suffice to make me break from pressing work, but the two, taken together, do. I think it is possible to act for two reasons, taken together, in this way—but only if those reasons are additive. As Katsafanas acknowledges, the proleptic reason is not like this: the two faces cannot be added together. (The reason for this is that they belong to evaluative perspectives that stand in intrinsic conflict with one another: the perspective of the distal face insists that the one belonging to the proximate face has things (somewhat) wrong. If reason A in some sense “disputes” the validity of reason B, they cannot be added together as reasons for  $\phi$ -ing.)

Katsafanas supports his denial of the unity requirement with two examples: masochism and love of challenge. But are these cases in which someone acts from multiple, non-additive reasons? Of masochism, Katsafanas says, “the reasons of pain and the reasons of pleasure somehow combine into one reason, a masochistic reason. But there’s nothing mysterious about this reason.” I disagree with both sentences: the latter because I find masochism to be quite paradoxical—and it is regularly treated, in the philosophical literature, and in everyday life, as “a difficult case”—and the former because it is not clear that there are *reasons* of pain and pleasure for the masochist. Masochism, unlike aspiration, is typically understood as a pathology. It appears in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and this means it is not clear how much of a burden there is on the theorist of masochism to offer a unified, rational picture of masochistic action. Perhaps masochism involves being motivated to pursue pain and pleasure in a way that simply doesn't “add up,” because it is irrational.

But if we assume this is not the case, then Katsafanas is right to infer that I would hold the theorist of masochism to a high explanatory standard: he would owe us a special account of how the reasons of pain and pleasure combine in such a way as for the pain to ground the pleasure. Such an account would be required to differentiate the distinctive rationality of masochism from that of a case where a painful thing is undertaken because the pleasures associated with it outweigh the pains. I am not committed to thinking that the reasons in question would be proleptic, and I doubt they would be—proleptic rationality is the solution to one form of paradoxical agency, not all.

As for those who love challenges, I think this is likely to be because the challenge gives them an opportunity to test their ability. This provides them with a single, unified reason: I want to know how much I have in me. (Of course some people may love challenges because they are somewhat masochistic, and others might love challenges because they are aspirational and are trying to improve. But those kinds of love of challenge would not constitute an independent basis for objecting to my account of proleptic reasons.)

In sum, then, I do think that if someone does something for two reasons, and if those reasons cannot be “summed”, and if neither is sufficient on its own to motivate the action, then one needs a special account of what allows such an action to nonetheless have the unity that would qualify it as rational.

Finally, let us turn to transparency. Must agents be aware why they are doing what they are doing? Katsafanas is correct that hidden motives are a fact of life: a person can be ignorant of the fact that she is teasing her friend out of jealousy, or that his real motive for arguing for restrictions on immigration is racism. In those cases, however, the agent would not take the “reason” in question to speak in favor of the action. To the extent that a reason is taken to justify the action—to rationalize it—I think it is in fact true that the agent must have access to that reason, and be able to cite it as a consideration in favor of so acting. Such a person can, as Anscombe says, offer the reason as an answer to the “why”

question. Absent some such answer—where we might include “no special reason” or “just for fun” as limit cases of answers—the action does not qualify as intentional. The transparency of our reasons is a feature of intentional action.

Aspiration presents a challenge for the action theorist precisely because, while it does not fit the usual paradigm of intentional action—unified, single, and transparent—it nonetheless cannot be dismissed by the action theorist as irrational, pathological or unintentional behavior.

Katsafanas is right that the aspirant can say *something* about why she’s doing what she’s doing—the aspiring music student is able to offer us some articulation, however vague or incomplete, of the value of classical music. Katsafanas wonders why that isn’t sufficient. The answer is: because, in order for the student to count as an aspirant she must herself find it insufficient. (The aspiring appreciator of music must be distinguished from someone who only has a minimal, vague appreciation of music, and is satisfied to listen for that reason.) What fuels aspiration is precisely the agent’s sense that her own understanding of why she is doing what she is doing does not suffice to meet her own standards for doing it. She is driven forward—to aspire—by the thought that she does not yet grasp the value enough; and that what she is doing now will only make sense in the light of the understanding that lies in her future.

The paradox of aspiration is that it is possible to act, now, for a reason one will only fully understand later. The aspirant’s grasp of why she is doing what she is doing is not as good as the grasp she will have once she is capable of the simple, unified, and transparent agency she aspires towards; nor does she straightforwardly lack reasons for her behavior, as in the case of pathological or unintentional action. Rather, the aspirant’s agency grows more rational over time, as the proximate face catches up with the distal one.

## 1 | Response #2: Kraut

Richard Kraut raises what I take to be three distinct objections to my book:

- (1) It presupposes an objective list conception of well-being.
- (2) It fails to justify the invocation of intrinsic value and proleptic reasons.
- (3) It places excessive weight on the final moment of a person’s aspirational journey.

### (1) Objective List Conception

On Kraut’s interpretation of my book, it is committed to “an “objective list” conception of well-being – one that “takes many different sorts of things (not just pleasure) to be valuable” components of well-being. Though I personally find such a conception to be somewhat plausible, the theory of aspiration put forward in my book is not in fact committed to it—or to any relationship between aspiration and overall well-being, flourishing or happiness. For instance, Kraut ascribes to me the view that aspiration has to improve the life of the aspirant, so that someone who (mistakenly) pursues a tennis career where that was the wrong choice for her (too little ability, motivation and money) fails to count as an aspirant.

Kraut is responding to the fact that I restrict “aspiration” to cases in which the value in question is genuinely valuable. I use “aspire” as a success term, along the lines of terms like “see” or “know” or “remember.” So, for example, if someone harbors (what she takes to be) religious aspirations, though God does not exist, then I claim that there was in fact no aspiration going on. Such a person might believe she is aspiring, but aspiration is value-learning, and you cannot learn what is not the case. We could speak of “seeming to oneself to aspire” as a common denominator between aspiration and what

happens in the no-God-religiosity case, just as we could speak of “seeming to oneself to” see or remember or know or learn. But, I take it, in this case as in those, there is some reason to want a theory that doesn’t take the “seeming” case as foundational.

It is important not to conflate the thesis that “aspiration” is a success term with the thesis that every aspirant improves the overall quality of her life. In order to be an aspirant, you must be learning the value of something. So it must have value, and you must be (increasingly) responsive to that value. However, this entails nothing about how your life goes overall: it could be that you make inappropriate valuational sacrifices. So someone could make real, aspirational progress in improving as a tennis player—over time, she better and better appreciates just what is great about tennis—but that could make her worse off, in general and specifically with respect to how much value she apprehends. (e.g. perhaps she gave up on too many other valuable pursuits in the service of her tennis career).

Consider an analogy: in order to count as learning mathematics, there must really be mathematical knowledge, and your possession of it must increase over time. But it could be that you make such cognitive sacrifices in order to achieve this end (perhaps you forget all the physics and biology you once knew!) that you end up with less overall knowledge. Still, you count as having learned math. Whereas you cannot learn some alchemy: there is simply nothing there to learn.

If you call someone an “aspirant,” you are committed to thinking that the value she aspires to learn is not a sham. But this doesn’t mean you think there are a multiplicity of values: you could think, for instance, that there is only one value—pleasure—and the person in question aspires to value it more perfectly. Thus the theory of aspiration does not rule out rational hedonism of this kind. It would rule out a form of descriptive hedonism on which pleasure is the only thing we *do* pursue, and it is not of value, and nothing else is of value either. But such a view might not have the resources to call the maximization of pleasure *rational*, either.

In any case, it is true that someone who thinks that nothing is of value (call this person, “the value nihilist”) must deny that there is any such thing as aspiration. If nothing is valuable, no value learning is possible. This is analogous to how the person who does not believe that the external world exists cannot think there is such a thing as “seeing,” only “seeming to ourselves to see”; and the person who believes that there are no truths thinks that there is no such thing as learning.

I want to make a concession to Kraut: to deny value-nihilism is to presuppose metaethical scaffolding of some kind or other, and my book doesn’t provide it. I left this question open because I think the theory of aspiration is compatible with a variety of forms of realism about the existence of (at least some!) value—even ones that are quite deflationary and subjectivist, as long as they do not amount to nihilism. (For example, a subjectivist who thought of valuing in terms of being in a certain subjective state would have to analyze aspiration as moving from a less to a more complete version of that subjective state.) In this way, I am in a similar position to someone who offers an account of learning without offering a theory of what it is for a proposition to be true.

One final point. Kraut writes:

A skeptical reader might challenge Callard in the following way: “Just as an atheist denies that someone who aspires to understand and love God is acquiring better values, so I deny that there is good reason for people to marry, or have children, or listen to opera, or study philosophy – unless that is what they want to do. There is no such thing as ‘the value’ of these activities, dimly or fully grasped, that we should conform our desires to; rather, it is our desires (or the ones we would have when fully informed) that determine what we should pursue.” That is a conception of well-being Callard must reject.

I am not as far from this “skeptical reader” as Kraut imagines. I agree with her that people have no reason to marry, or have children, or listen to opera, if they lack any kind of desire to do these things. You shouldn’t try to learn something you have no interest in: you won’t get anywhere. (The same holds for non-value learning.) It doesn’t follow from the fact that marriage, child raising or opera are possible objects of aspiration that *everyone* should so aspire. As for the skeptical reader’s second sentence, everything depends on what is meant by “the ones we would have when fully informed.” If this means “informed by, among other factors, value-learning,” then I am entirely on board. If, on the other hand, the idea here is to imagine a world in which the only way peoples’ desires could change is nonaspirationally, then, yes, I am in disagreement with such a skeptic, but only because she outright denies the possibility of aspiration. In a world in which there was no aspiration, aspiration would indeed not exist!

## (2) Intrinsic Value

Kraut objects to my invocation of “intrinsic value” as the object of the aspirant’s striving. He suggests, instead, that such people want “to understand and appreciate such-and-such works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, or such-and-such books of Descartes, Hegel, Wittgenstein.” One way to use the term “intrinsic value” is simply to insist that such people want to understand those works/books *for their own sakes*—if Kraut read me this way, he would agree with me.

However, Kraut correctly reads my use of the phrase “intrinsic value” as loading more into it than “for its own sake.” Kraut’s comments have helped me to see that when I say something has “intrinsic value” I often mean something like: it has a mysterious sort of value that cannot be fully specified. I grant this is an odd use of the phrase “intrinsic value,” and I am grateful to Kraut for picking up on the fact that I use it this way. I want to defend the claim that intrinsic value—in this odd sense—is relevant to understanding aspiration.

The paragon—someone who has completed her aspiration—can be described in just the way Kraut suggests: she understands and appreciates XYZ. But the aspirant doesn’t yet do so. So what does she want? She wants to come to be in the condition the paragon is in. But how does she describe that condition to herself, given that she is not in it? My suggestion is that she must see her target in something like the following terms: “it has some noninstrumental value or other, a value peculiar to it, whose precise nature I cannot yet articulate to myself.” This is the work my word “intrinsic value” is doing. And so when Kraut insists that the language of intrinsic value is out of place for thinking about the mindset of the person who has “finally become a sophisticated musician,” I think this is exactly correct. But it might, nonetheless be fitting for thinking about the aspiring musician.

In some way, “intrinsic value” is the valuational counterpart to a “proleptic reason.” A proleptic reason to  $\phi$  is a reason that can be acted on by someone who understands the point of what she is doing in aetiolated, “intrinsic value” terms. So his objections to my invocation of proleptic reasons might be connected to his objection to the terminology of intrinsic value. In defense of his position, Kraut cites (a) mentors and (b) openness to new experience as factors that can rationalize aspirational actions in the place of proleptic reasons.

In chapter 2, I discuss the case of the mentor, arguing that aspirants rely on mentors in a distinctive way—namely, with a sense that there is something wrong or imperfect or incomplete about the fact that they have to take someone else’s word for it: “the testimonial element in aspiration is of a distinctively degenerative kind: the present legitimacy and authority of the mentor’s voice are conditioned on, indeed anticipate, its gradual evanescence.” (p. 81) Mentorship is not an alternative to proleptic rationality, it is one form proleptic rationality takes.

I would say something similar about openness. It is one thing to show up in a new place and be “open to new experiences” of any kind that might befall one. It is another thing to have the targeted openness of the aspirant, who has the sense that her current understanding of music or philosophy (or, indeed, of some location) is in some way lacking. The aspirant is “open to” something quite specific,

namely what she currently takes herself to be missing. And her “openness” is more active than that word indicates: she is not merely willing to come to understand better, but actively taking steps to improve her understanding. The latter form of “openness” is a proleptic one. Thus, as I argue in ch. 2, purported alternatives to proleptic rationality don’t actually rationalize aspirational activity unless we give them a proleptic form.

### (3) The Last Moment

Kraut worries that my account of aspiration defers gratification and insight until a final moment in which the agent grasps that “this is what I was after all along.” He infers, from the fact that the agent only has a full grasp of the value in question when her aspiration is complete, that I place little importance on the intervening period. This would indeed be problematic, since my entire project is one of articulating the rational structure of that intervening period. Let me explain why I do not understand aspiration as a “very lengthy period of suffering...redeemed by what endures for just a moment of joy and insight.”

The first point to make is that when the agent arrives at her aspirational endpoint, she has become the sort of person who appreciates something. The result of aspiration is not “just a moment” but a stable state of character, an enduring source of joy and insight. But that doesn’t address Kraut’s main worry, which concerns the “discounting” of the intermediate period. Kraut is correct that a proleptic reason makes reference to a point of view on value the agent will only have when her aspiration is complete. His mistake, I believe, comes in conceiving of the latter reference as static in nature. As the agent’s aspiration progresses, she has better and better access to the point of view that she will have when she becomes the paragon she aspires to be. She needs fewer external rewards, and finds it easier to motivate herself to continue to her endpoint. Her engagement with the value becomes progressively richer, deeper and more satisfying.

But what if she never gets there? Does it follow that she is bereft of “joy and insight?” No, that simply means she did not acquire all the joy and insight she had been aspiring for. If the aspirant is engaged in making progress towards her value destination, and if that activity is cut off, then her total progress will be whatever she achieved to that point. The interrupted aspirant can say, “this is some of what I was after all along.” Analogously: if someone’s visit to an art museum is cut short, at least she saw a few paintings. Every aspirant already has in her possession, (some) actual grasp of the value in question. This amounts to: some joy and insight, hers for the taking.

## 2 | Response #3: Meyer

Sauvé Meyer’s piece is focused on my challenge to internalism. In its simplest form, the challenge I raise runs as follows: an agent has “an internal reason” to  $\phi$  when  $\phi$ -ing satisfies her current set of desires—but, in the case of an aspirant,  $\phi$ -ing satisfies not her current but her *future* set of desires. So she doesn’t have an “internal” reason to  $\phi$ . By itself this would be no problem for internalism, since the internalist could simply use that fact to deem aspiration irrational. But most internalists would not choose that route. One way I articulate the cost, to Sauvé Meyer’s approval, is in relation to infertility: if the desire to be a parent is usually aspirational, then those who grieve infertility would have to be described, by such internalists, as grieving the absence of the possibility of doing something they had no reason to do.

Sauvé Meyer agrees with me that we want a theory of rationality that can avoid diagnosing aspirants with irrationality. She departs from me in doubting whether the aspirant lacks an “internal reason” to engage in the relevant aspirational action. Now my presentation of internalism, above, is heavily simplified. I said the action must satisfy her desires, and this compresses complications the

internalist analyzes in terms of the existence of a (as Bernard Williams dubbed it) “sound deliberative route” between the action and her desires. The idea of a sound deliberative route can then be further unpacked in a variety of ways; in the book I discuss some of these sectarian disputes among internalists, and argue that aspiration presents a challenge to internalism on all of them.

Sauvé Meyer’s challenges do not trade on any specific conception of how we spell out the notion of a sound deliberative route. For this reason, I leave those complications aside. Her objections are grounded in the fact that the aspirant does have *some* desire to engage in the relevant action, and she wants to argue that this desire *suffices to* underwrite the rationality of the action in question.

She raises a series of objections grounded in the observation that the aspirant has *some* reason to  $\phi$ . Sauvé Meyer is correct to note that, unlike Paul, I conceive of aspirational situations as ones in which the aspirant has already made progress along her path. Such a person has *something* to go on, which is to say, *some* desire to act from. If the aspirational action of  $\phi$ -ing—attending a concert, taking a music class, getting on the bus—satisfies that desire, why not think she has an internal reason to  $\phi$ ?

My answer is that if the action is truly aspirational, she does not have *enough* of a reason to  $\phi$ . But this insufficiency cannot, as Sauvé Meyer believes, be cashed out in terms of the strength of the relevant desire, because what we need to explain is how someone can be motivated to *increase the strength of that very desire*, and that goal must be bundled into our characterization of “ $\phi$ .” Let me explain.

Sauvé Meyer interprets the insufficiency of her desire in terms of the presence of countervailing desires to do other things. She points us to the fact that even in cases where my desire for X is less than my desire for Y, there are many circumstances in which it is nonetheless rational for me to choose Y: though I prefer chocolate, I might on occasion choose vanilla for variety; likewise, someone who prefers parenting to gardening might choose to garden sometimes. I think it is certainly true that there are factors that go into our decision about whether we should  $\phi$  beyond the strength of our desires for the particular items. The internalist may want to analyze this case by saying that the chocolate-lover who rationally chooses vanilla is nonetheless making the choice that satisfies her overall set of desires, which include desires for variety. Likewise, not only do we sometimes lack opportunities for parenting, but it is also true that if we do too much of it we can get burnt out and become worse parents. Reserving time for non-parenting activities might be an expression of someone’s commitment to parenting. Certainly it is true that we cannot infer from the fact that someone chooses to garden on a given occasion that she values gardening more than parenting. But I don’t think these cases share the paradoxical structure of a case of aspiration, because in all of these cases the importance the person places on the relevant activity can be entered straightforwardly into the (albeit complicated) function outputting what she should do.

The aspirant’s difficulty is not that there are other things she also likes to do, or even that she likes to do those things more than the aspirational activity. Sauvé Meyer is right that that would still license, within the confines of internalism, her engagement in the relevant activity, both in ways that are proportional and perhaps also in ways that are disproportional to her interest in it<sup>1</sup>. The problem is that the aspirant is, as it were, suspicious of her own desires and this makes her equally suspicious of the relevant deliberative comparisons. She thinks she likes lounging around too much; and that she likes listening to classical music too little. So she is not inclined to try to figure out, “what should I do to balance the value of music against that of lounging?” That would be the internalist reasoner’s question. The aspirant’s goal—her  $\phi$ —is not simply to listen to music, but to listen to music in such a way as to come to desire to listen to music more.

<sup>1</sup>For an argument that internalist reasons needn’t be proportional to desires, see Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of The Passions* (2007), p. 97-102

The aspirant's question is "what can I do to change how much I value music and lounging, respectively?" In aiming for such a change, she is not trying to satisfy her current desire for music, but rather to change that desire. And, as I argue in chapter 2, a question about how to acquire (more of) a desire cannot always be recast as a question about how to satisfy the desires one already has. The problem for internalism is not that the aspirant's desires are too weak to rationalize her action, but that they are a work in progress. And this fact about them cannot be analyzed in terms of the (determinate presence of) another desire, either.

At one point in her discussion, Sauvé Meyer gestures at this fact:

"[The aspirant] may recognize that once she appreciates music better, she will likely accord less importance to things that she currently values, and that she will have to face questions she has not yet had to address, regarding how music stacks up against other things she values. But this is something she needs to work out, not something she already has decided, endorsed, and encoded in her motivational apparatus. Thus we should reject the claim that the aspirant to A currently values A less than B. It is not that she values B more than A or that she values both equally. Rather, her current weak appreciation for A falls below the threshold for valuing it."

Though there is something importantly right about this passage, I want to dispute a few points. First, I hold that the aspirant does value A somewhat—valuing comes in degrees, for the same reason desire does. The way I would analyze such a case is: there is in fact 'some precise amount' at which she currently values B or A, but if that is all you know about the case you are missing one of the important facts about the situation, which is that those values are not stable over time.

The "vagueness" that Sauvé Meyer wants to invoke here—that there is some sense in which there is no fact of the matter about which she values more—is a correct and important way of capturing a *diachronic* fact about the agent. And I precisely do want to insist that a diachronic perspective is crucial for capturing the distinctive rationality at stake in such a case. But to say that her rationality doesn't come into view at a moment is simply to say that it cannot be understood within a strict internalist framework.

As an analogy, consider the fact that, if you take a high resolution photo you can capture many facts about the position of an object—except the fact that, in the event that it is moving, its position is changing over time. Internal reasons are reasons that apply to a person in virtue of where she currently stands, *desideratively* speaking. Reasons that apply to a person in virtue of the development of her desires towards a favored condition are, instead, *proleptic reasons*.

### 3 | Response #4: L.A. Paul

Before discussing the details of Paul's criticism, it is worth noting the relationship in which it stands to that of Katsafanas, Kraut and Sauvé Meyer. Katsafanas believes that the phenomenon of aspiration is not especially puzzling or problematic—trying to have new values is a straightforwardly rational activity. Kraut thinks that, while I have identified a distinctive phenomenon worthy of philosophical attention, one doesn't need to invoke proleptic reasons in order to understand how aspirational agency is rational. Sauvé Meyer takes one step closer to me: she agrees that aspiration is distinctive, puzzling, and that it calls for proleptic reasons. What she doubts is my claim that proleptic reasons themselves cannot be incorporated into an internalist framework.

These three philosophers all find the rationality of aspiration to be (to varying degrees) more straightforward and familiar than I claim it to be. Paul differs sharply: she agrees with me that it is

difficult to understand how someone could rationally acquire new values, and, specifically, that the reasons such a person acts on do not seem to be internal reasons. But she wants to go even further than I do, to the conclusion that such activity *cannot* be rational.

Here is one way to put the dialectic: we can distinguish between (1) acting *from* value and (2) acting *towards* value. (1) is the case of ordinary, intentional action: we act in order to realize the values we have, for example by trying to satisfy the desires that are constitutive parts of those values. (2) is the case of aspiration: we act so as to arrive at a condition of valuing. In this case, we are acting, first and foremost, on ourselves: we seek to arrive at the very condition from which we would be acting from in (1). Katsafanas, Kraut and Sauvé Meyer all want to render the rationality of (2) unproblematic by assimilating it to (1): acting towards value can be understood as a form of acting from value. Paul, by contrast, recognizes these distinctive forms of agency, and holds that the difference is so great that (2) cannot be rational.

The claim of my book is that (2) constitutes a distinctive form of rationality I call “proleptic.” Paul is willing to go so far as to grant that, as a psychological matter, something like distinctively proleptic thinking may characterize the aspirant’s mental life. She nonetheless presses: why call this “reasoning?” She puts her point baldly: “Rationality requires that when one acts, one acts in accordance with one’s current values.” This is a very important objection, and I am grateful to get another chance to defend the thesis that acting towards value can be rational.

In a few places, Paul frames her objection in these terms: “it seems incoherent to choose values you do not value.” I want to make two small points about this formulation, before turning to what I take to be the deeper issue.

The first point to make is that those who act towards a value don’t fully lack that value. In several places, Paul seems to assume that when I aspire to value something, I do not value it at all. My view is that aspiration gets (kick-) started by way of outside influence: one finds oneself in a culinary mecca, one’s parents play one some music, one’s friends drag one along on a shopping expedition. Paul is correct that someone with no interest in cooking, music or fashion would not have reason to orchestrate these encounters. Nonetheless, I want to stress, on Paul’s behalf, that this initial contact cannot do the work of rationalizing aspiration. (Indeed I have been making something like that argument against Katsafanas, Kraut and Sauvé Meyer.) The (minimal) grasp of the value I already have cannot explain why I seek to grasp it more—and one way to see this is that we can imagine a nonaspirational counterpart who is satisfied with the minimal grasp such an encounter produces.

The second point is the language of “choice.” My view is that one doesn’t *choose* to aspire. The rationality of choice is the rationality of what I call “self-standing agency”—this form of agency applies to an action when it is rationally intelligible on its own terms, by contrast with those that are only rational insofar as they are seen as embedded in a larger, temporally extended process that is not itself an action. (See p. 57-62, 220-222) Aspiration can be rational, and aspirants can be acting on reasons, even if it is not appropriate to speak of them as choosing to aspire, or to value, or to change themselves. This linguistic point marks an important difference: if we incorporate into our theory of rationality too many assumptions based on the peculiar form of rationality that characterizes (1), we will stack the decks against recognizing the rationality of (2).

My substantive response to Paul is, first, on the negative front, to argue that aspiration is less deceptive than she takes it to be, and second, positively, to offer up some (non-aspirational) examples of processes that qualify as rational despite the fact that the person engaged in them is guided by a similarly obscure goal.

FIRST In several places Paul describes proleptic rationality as though it involved self-deception: she speaks of “hiding our ultimate ends from ourselves” or “taking an indirect route” or a “stealth approach.” I agree that if aspiration required a person to be less than honest with herself, it would be irrational; and I also want to acknowledge that aspiration is in some ways opaque: the agent does not have complete

access to where she is going. But in fact I contend that aspiration entails a distinctively straightforward form of self-engagement when contrasted with the mode of self-engagement Paul proposes as a solution to what she calls the “easy problem” of self change: when someone has higher order values that dictate the acquisition of other values, he can “put himself in the way of external forces, various experiences, that can create this value in him.” I agree with her that this solution does not make sense in the absence of higher order values to guide one, but it’s worth noting that the solution I’ve proposed to the “difficult problem” does not require a person to go behind her own back in this way.

Someone who aspires does not submit herself to be changed by outside forces; rather, she changes herself. The engine of this change is her own sense that her grasp of the value in question is insufficient: her awareness of her own (valuational) ignorance drives her to learn. The proleptic structure of her rationality—the fact that she is motivated by a consideration (the proximate face) that she sees as an inadequate response to the value in question (the distal face)—should be understood not as a form of self-trickery, but rather a painful confrontation with her own inadequacy. Someone determined to see her valuational knowledge as complete and sufficient is incapable of aspiring. The very fact that the “distal face” has—by way of its acknowledged absence—a psychological reality for the agent should be read as an honest and humble openness to learning. Showing that aspirants are honest with themselves (about their own lack of self-understanding) does not suffice to show that they are rational, but it at least clears out of the way one reason for thinking that they might not be able to be.

SECOND Let me now speak to what may be the most fundamental source of Paul’s intuition that aspiration cannot be a rational process. The aspirant comes to acquire a grasp of a value by means of the (disturbing) awareness that she has not yet grasped it. How is such a thing possible? How can one be guided by something—the final value—that one does not, at a psychological level, have a grip on? The problem is not solved by the fact that every aspirant already has some grip on the value in question: what needs to guide the aspirant’s progress towards value is not the value, to the degree that she already grasps it—that would simply produce actions *from* value—but the value, to the degree that she doesn’t. How can her thinking be guided by some object precisely to the degree that she can’t represent it? I am not sure of the answer to this question, and I grant that it is a deep puzzle not fully addressed by anything in my book.

However, it does seem to be something that can happen. Consider three examples: recollecting what one has forgotten, solving a mathematical problem, and a journalistic expose.

The one trying to recollect has a vague inarticulate sense that there is something she is trying to remember. She knows some things about it—that it is the name of one of her teachers, perhaps—and as she recollects, she might acquire “bits and pieces” of her target—that it ends in “-ton,” for instance. What guides her forward progress is always whatever is still missing. If she succeeds, then at the end she knows this name—“Bevington”—was what she was seeking, all along, without being able to represent it that way earlier.

Likewise, someone tasked with producing a geometrical proof, engages in all sorts of exercises—drawings, looking through books for theorems—that are geared to progressively “filling in” the parts of the proof he hasn’t yet found. Once he finds it, he can write the proof systematically—but the route to discovery did not have this same systematic character.

Finally, suppose that an investigative journalist hears a few details of a news story that sound “off”—something smells fishy. Over weeks and months of inquiry, she pieces together the giant scandal whose presence she initially only intuited.

In all of these cases, the agent is guided by her target, precisely to the extent that she doesn’t yet grasp it—but that target can only serve as target because of her special way of conceiving of something she *does* grasp. The presence of something that could stand in an analogous relationship to the “proximate face” is crucial to each of these investigations: the inquirer knows she is looking for the name of that Professor, or the proof of this theorem, whatever is making this news story smell fishy. Of

course it would be possible to grasp each of these concepts non-proleptically, simply on its face—to illustrate with just the third case, a non-journalist who heard the same news story might not see the relevant details *as* the tip of a scandalous iceberg.

These are examples of purely cognitive cases of reaching beyond what one can grasp; in aspirational cases, the reach will be conative and affective as well as cognitive, but the principle is the same. It is possible to have an inkling that there is more out there than what one has yet encountered, and reach after what's missing. These forms of looking are less subject to algorithmic systematization than those in which one acts from a precise knowledge of what one wants; or draws deductive conclusions from first principles; or updates one's knowledge, in a Bayesian vein, on the basis of new information. Hunting for an elusive memory, a mathematical proof, or an investigative lead will involve missteps and guesswork, but when someone succeeds, we do not think she necessarily arrived at her target by accident or through outside intervention. Given that trying to remember, to prove, or to uncover are activities a person can engage in, and that the person engaged in them can attain her goal by way of the activity, it seems appropriate to speak of some kind of rational guidance.

My response to Paul, then, is to insist that rational guidance can take a non-standard form, in which a person acts not in accordance with her current values, but rather in accordance with (the project of acquiring) her future ones.

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Kraut quotes the ending of my book, in which I make the following admission:

“Like everyone else, I have trouble getting aspiration into view. ... I find it natural to conceive of rational agents as reasoning from value rather than toward it. In writing this book, I embarked on a project that entailed fighting against these tendencies in myself; the completion of the project is something that will, I believe, call for fellow soldiers”

Kraut comments, “I must apologize for not volunteering to fight on her side.” Of all the claims made by my four interlocutors, this is the one with which I most strenuously disagree. I believe he has fought on my side, as have the other three. Objections that fault me for failing to establish the existence of a paradox and objections that fault me for failing to solve it have in one thing in common, which is that they are made by people who are fighting on my side.

Of course it is always true that philosophers are benefitted by criticism—one of the virtues of philosophy is that people don't need to agree with you in order to be on your side. Those fighting “against you” are still on your side, because, as Socrates says to Callicles in the *Gorgias*, refutation is the greatest favor that one human being does another. But I have a more specific point to make which is that, in addition to running the usual risk of being wrong, I have not only run the risk but in fact definitively succumbed to the pitfall of being unclear. Neither my presentation of the paradox nor my solution to it was fully articulate, even when I was being as clear as I could. Careful, insightful criticisms, such as those made by Katsafanas, Sauvé Meyer, Kraut and Paul, have a kind of magic power to draw out of you somewhat more than you thought you had in you. This is an instance of yet another phenomenon my book fails to sufficiently theorize: the social structure of aspiration. The way we lean against others for guidance in grasping new values extends well beyond mentorship to include cases of being questioned, contradicted, and challenged to, in the words of my most beloved teacher, “say another sentence.” My omission of any discussion of this form of aspirational assistance is but one of the many ways in which the ideas in my book have not yet fully succeeded in coming into being.

I can only hope that future iterations of this battle will feature more soldiers like these.

## REFERENCES

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