

"The research does not substantiate the assumptions" that constitute the metatheory but simply coheres with the framework used to interpret the results.¹

Deci provides a useful summary of the main approaches to motivation in twentieth-century psychology,² which include:

I. **Mechanistic Theories** which hold that behavior is a direct response to stimuli, while thoughts, feelings, and choices are epiphenomenal, playing no causal role in behavior.

(A) Early psychoanalysis (Freud, Adler), which held behavior to be caused primarily by unconscious drives, conscious desires, and environmental stimuli.

(B) Extreme behaviorism (Watson, Skinner), which ignores conscious processes and intentionality altogether.

(C) Behaviorist drive theory (Hull), which focuses on internal associations between stimuli and behavioral responses.

II. **Organismic Theories** which hold that behavior is primarily caused by conscious internal processes, including cognitive and affective states, and thus generally counts as voluntary action.

(A) Affect arousal theories (McClelland, Young, Atkinson, Clark, and Lowell), which hold that behavior follows quasi-mechanistically from positive or negative affects or feelings caused by past experiences and aroused again by similar environmental cues.

(B) Cognitive theories (Vroom, Hunt, etc.), which hold that actions are caused by choices that are determined in turn by beliefs and desires (or in general, pro-attitudes).

(C) Humanistic psychology (Buhler and Allen, Maslow, Laing), which adds free will to a cognitive picture of motivation, with a special emphasis on personal experience.

To clarify their similarities and differences, it may also be helpful to picture the relation between these theories on a two-dimensional table:

Motivation Theories	Noncognitive Causes/Motives	Cognitive Causes/Motives
Nonconscious Causes of Behavior	Extreme behaviorism (Skinner); James-Lange theory of emotion	
Unconscious Causes	Early Freudian psychoanalysis	
Conscious Causes	Drive theory (Hull); Affect Arousal theory	Cognitive theories; Humanistic theories

Existential Psychology and Intrinsic Motivation:

Deci, Maslow, and Frankl

Overview. This chapter surveys developments in psychological theory that support the existential account of projective motivation and applies the distinction between targetable and by-product goods to these debates. It critiques recent theories of intrinsic motivation and self-actualization on this basis and interprets Viktor Frankl's "logotherapy" as a projective theory. It also applies the goal versus by-product distinction to the problem of self-regarding attitudes such as various types of "self-esteem." The discussions are not technical and connect familiar themes in psychoanalysis with the work of well-known philosophers such as Rawls, Noddings, and Frankfurt.

I. Twentieth-Century Psychological Theories of Motivation

The debate we have traced between egoistic, eudaimonist, and existential theories of human motivation can also be found in twentieth-century psychology and psychoanalysis, where we now find support for the existential model of striving will. I will focus in this chapter on only a few among several areas of important work in contemporary experimental psychology. For the theories behind these experimental approaches often uncritically take over the Transmission principle and focus mainly on the etiology of long-recognized states of prepositive motivation—for example, whether altruistic or sympathetic feelings could be evolved responses. As Edward Deci says, the fundamental disagreements between "metatheories" guiding different empirical methodologies (for example, concerning whether inner experiences are merely epiphenomenal or play a causal role in voluntary action and whether human action is ultimately determined or involves liberty) result from philosophical hypotheses that cannot be directly tested.

In this chapter, I will be interested primarily in ideas from theories in the bottom-right cell of the table, since the others proceed from assumptions now largely rejected in philosophical action theory (chap. 3). When they allow conscious states to play a causal role in generating behavior, these theories also tend to be absolutely egoistic. For example, affect-arousal accounts imply that all motivation flows ultimately from the drive to maximize positive feeling and minimize negative feeling,³ as per the reward-event theory (see chap. 5, sect. 2.2). Similarly, Hull's system conceives the telos of all desire as physiological "equilibrium," with drives as disturbances in this equilibrium that have to be reduced by behavior. In this version of behaviorism, "Drives activate stimulus-response associations, and drive reduction strengthens stimulus-response associations," as the organism learns what kind of behavioral responses will reduce the unpleasant feeling of the drive by returning it to homeostasis.⁴ On this theory, actions motivated by emotions such as pity would have to be regarded as energized by the agent's desire to quell his own distress. Pure or non-egoistic motives are ruled out *a priori*.

The dominant influence of such egoistic models is obvious in Douglas Mook's leading textbook on motivation in contemporary experimental psychology, which lists as main topics all the following:

- under "Biological Motives," hunger, thirst, sex, aggression, homeostatic feedback mechanisms involved in these motives, cultural and cognitive processes related to these, and the neurological and chemical realization of these states in our nervous system;
- under "Energy, Arousal, and Action," theories of habit and drive, and Freud on arousal and drives;
- under "Acquired Drives and Rewards," theories of avoidance conditioning, Pavlovian conditioning, imprinting in early infancy, and opponent-process theory;
- under "Reinforcement Theory," the behaviorist account of operant conditioning; rational decision theory, its relations to criminology, and problems with maximizing, and so on.⁵

It is only in the last quarter of Mook's textbook that we come to issues closer to the central problems of philosophical psychology, including the cognitive processes involved in human motivation (e.g., reducing cognitive dissonance); theories of emotions as motivating states; love and altruism as forms of "social motivation" and "attachment"; and finally a brief look at "long-term goals."⁶ As this indicates, the origin of the most important motives in human psychology—those most central to the *ethos* of a person—

has until recently been addressed only in post-Freudian psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology, while more "scientific" approaches focused on motive processes that human beings share with other animals. As Joel Kupperman points out, there is so little good experimental work on "character" and other key concepts in moral psychology (such as ultimate ends) because it is extremely difficult to conduct experiments in these areas without violating the rights of test subjects or conducting expensive and logistically challenging longitudinal studies of individuals over many years.⁷ Even when experiments can be done, they either use animal models or limit test subjects to college students, and the experiments often proceed by way of collecting stories, diaries, and so on (which must then be parsed according to subjective criteria). Thus the more speculative contributions of psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology have been able to contribute more to literary and philosophical debates about the content and sources of ultimate human motives.

To illustrate this point, consider one recent example in the post-Freudian psychoanalytic tradition. A scholarly workbook for therapists using "ego-strengthening" techniques, including scripts for suggestion under hypnosis, relies on a conception of the "ego" as "the agent or organizer" of the self that is capable of what the authors call "inner strength."⁸ They never mention the word "will"—an example of the lingering effects of Freud's effort to dispense with the will. But they start from a notion of "inner strength" which they take to be "part of the vernacular of the common man," referring to a "psychic structure created through ordinary maturation and development."⁹ They attribute extraordinary powers to this "structure," which their primary script describes to the patient as feeling "like the very center of your being."¹⁰ In particular, the script suggests that

when you are in touch with this part of yourself, you will be able to feel more confident with the knowledge that you have within yourself all the resources you really need to take steps in the direction that you wish to go . . . to be able to set goals and to be able to achieve them.¹¹

This part of the psyche described here as "inner strength" obviously plays the roles that I have attributed to the will as the capacity for projective motivation. To the extent that focusing patients' attention on this source of willpower and resolve helps them gain confidence in themselves and overcome obstacles, it is a testament to the existential theory. Yet these authors start from a theoretical framework that obscures any deeper understanding of what this faculty of "inner strength" really is.¹²

2. From Drive Theories to Intrinsic Motivation

This example illustrates how far some psychoanalytic conceptions of motivation have come from Freud's basically Hobbesian model (with Helmholtzian mechanisms). Psychoanalysis has been influenced by developments in empirical psychology, starting around the middle of the twentieth century, spurred by recognition that many animals have an innate interest in exploration of novel spaces and objects.¹³ Such motives do not seem to be "drives" according to the classic erosiac conception, that is, energies seeking reduction of some physiological "deficit" in a "consummatory" experience.¹⁴ For, among other things, curiosity is often open-ended (aiming at no particular object) and can even motivate activities that seem to *increase* or stimulate it (such as seeking novel stimuli).¹⁵ As we have seen, an agent cannot be motivated by erosiac desire to induce a motivating lack or deficit in herself. Yet evidence shows that human beings may seek new experiences even at the cost of increasing anxiety and dissonance with current cognitions.¹⁶ Hence, as the Wallachs note:

A great deal of what we want and strive for has always seemed to some psychologists just too remote from sex or aggression to be accounted for in terms of Freudian drives. In the early days of psychoanalysis, Jung felt this way about strivings for religious values, for meaning, and for self-realization; Adler felt this way about strivings for power and superiority.¹⁷

They also note Gordon Allport's point that activities originally motivated by basic drives may "become ends in themselves" for us, and Asch's thesis that "certain forms of experience and activity—for example, music, dancing, and painting—are simply interesting or desirable in their own right from the start."¹⁸ Much the same might be said for activities involved in other practices, from chess to ecological science, even when their pursuit becomes difficult.

The inadequacy of Freud's gray-tone palette to produce the colorful array of actual motives we find operating in human experience first became apparent to many psychoanalysts in Hartmann's argument that young children do many things that function to develop their motor, speech, and cognitive capacities without trying to satisfy basic needs for food and comfort. Hartmann saw the "energy" used by the "ego" to motivate such activities as coming from itself, not from the Id.¹⁹ This clearly moves us toward the Aristotelian idea that beings tend to enjoy the development and exercise of their natural capacities in activities with no (other) utility. As Piaget noted of the infant's experimentation with objects, "The activities tend to be engaged in and enjoyed precisely when they are just in the process of

being mastered or of producing new and interesting effects—circumstances in which they afford more challenge and provocation."²⁰

Of course, I am not suggesting that very young children exercise their will to self-motivate; infants have not developed the rational capacities to recognize values as reasons for projecting new ends. Since all psychologically healthy children who are given the opportunity do engage in such play, the motivation for it is both innate and instinctual (not is this instinct limited to human beings). Kierkegaard's aesthetic young man describes it as the drive to avoid "boredom" and says that "As long as children are having a good time, they are always good."²¹ Although seeking relief from boredom by "the interesting" is a movement away from a kind of stasis, this is not enough to make it projective. Still, although our instinctive aversion to tedium is not a willed motive, its goal becomes harder to target directly the older and more reflectively aware one becomes: for to succeed, we have to forget that we are trying to avoid boredom or (better) stop trying to avoid it and start exercising our volitional power to set new goals worthy of our developed capacities.

Hence the baby's play instinct points indirectly to the latent projective power of the will, for both enable the human being to act on motives that do not seek their own reduction. Activity motivated as willed striving differs from the infant's non-erosiac play motive in actively seeking to sustain or enhance the motivation involved. But their kinship helps explain why, as I suggested in discussing the practices (chap. 8, sec. 5), human persons tend to find value simply in novelty and in an activity's being challenging (in the sense of requiring skill and sustained effort), whatever its other effects. Mild novelty and challenges of the most rudimentary sort are instinctively enjoyed by the toddler, but the adult can recognize in complex forms of novelty and challenge a set of values that at least *contribute* to making the relevant ends worth willing for their own sake. Even if these values are rarely sufficient by themselves to ground projective motivation, they are ones to which projective striving can respond. At this stage, they are not sought simply for *amusement*, not just as arbitrary distractions to save us from boredom, but rather because setting ourselves to work on challenging problems and novel tasks (even when we have no prior need for their goals) is our natural volitional function, and we find its exercise inherently meaningful—at least when applied to goals or objects that are important apart from their mere difficulty (e.g., because they produce recognizable goods in some way).²²

This point also applies to the development of personal identity in social relationships. As Alan Gilbert notes in his study of individual selfhood in democratic theory, an Aristotelian-Hegelian influence is found "in the modern psychoanalytic conception of the self offered by Heinz Kohut, Harry

Guntrip, and Alice Miller." For "[i]n contrast to the misguided instinctual determinist strain in Freud's view, Kohut focuses on the social formation of the self in the contexts of its early relationships."²³ He finds that even persons who have suffered deprivation in childhood can form healthy "integrated" selves via the practices: for instance, "through participation in intrinsic goods—painting, music, friendship, nurturing and the like."²⁴ As the Wallachs also recognize, social motives aimed at direct contact with others, participation with them in activities, and belonging to groups can be more powerful than primary biological drives—even in nonhuman mammals.²⁵ After reviewing experimental evidence, they suggest the possibility of motives that point beyond the agent's own good:

Perhaps concern for other individuals also exists without having to be based on the biological needs or competence development of the animal or person showing the concern. Typically, when we are attached to people, we not only want to be near them and to interact with them, but we also seem to care about their welfare. Perhaps such caring is also real and direct, rather than necessarily derivative from one's own needs and welfare.²⁶

On this view, care for others is not simply driven by a need to reduce one's own empathetic distress, since this reduction is only a concomitant effect of caring. This idea is hardly surprising to philosophers, but it was a difficult step for a human science so dominated by Hobbesian assumptions about motivation.

This crucial break from Hobbes, Freud, and behaviorist drive theories led psychologists back to the old idea of "intrinsic motivation," which Mook summarizes as "performance motivated by pleasure in the task itself, rather than by external rewards offered for performing it. Think of the difference between a man who works on a car as a hobby, for the joy of it (intrinsic), rather than as a job (extrinsic)."²⁷ Unsurprisingly, the leading twentieth-century proponent of this idea, Edward Deci, drew explicitly on Aristotle's thesis that human beings are intrinsically motivated to pursue knowledge or understanding:

Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. The activities are ends themselves rather than means to an end. This . . . serves quite adequately as an operational definition of intrinsic motivation.²⁸

However, one problem with this definition is that it does not distinguish agent-transcending from egoistic ends. If I take a walk in the park simply

to enjoy being outdoors and take in some scenery, that activity is pleasurable in itself and so would count as intrinsically motivated, on this definition. So would any activity that directly produces some kind of first-order pleasure or entertainment.

Yet Deci clearly has in mind the kind of higher aspirations that Maslow included within "self-actualization."²⁹ He and colleague Richard Ryan now present "self-determination theory" (SDT) as an account of roughly the same phenomena that I have described as resulting from striving volitional engagement:

The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly. That people show considerable effort, agency, and commitment in their lives appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional.³⁰

Thus Deci and Ryan describe intrinsic motivation as sustained by agentic effort and as including "great volitional persistence."³¹ Although they do not identify "the will" as a *causa* of such motivation, they associate intrinsic motivation with a higher level of voluntariness, "a feeling of volition that can accompany any act" felt to emanate from the self rather than from external pressures.³² Thus they relate intrinsic motivation directly to personal autonomy (although they use the term "authenticity" instead): "Comparisons between people whose motivation is authentic (literally, self-authored or endorsed) and those who are merely externally controlled" show the former to "have more interest, excitement, and confidence, which in turn is manifest both as enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity."³³ The existential account would explain this as a result of the inherent autonomy and resilience of projected motives.

It is also apparent that Deci and Ryan limit the use of "intrinsic" to *certain kinds of final ends*: whose value is recognized independently of any material contribution to the agent's good (whereas if "intrinsic" just meant "final," then any voluntary or goal-directed action would have to involve *some* intrinsic motivation, as Aristotle argued). "Intrinsic aspirations" include "goals such as affiliation, personal growth, and community" or relationships, while "extrinsic aspirations" aim at things such as "wealth, fame, and image."³⁴ that constitute "tangible rewards."³⁵ For example, Ryan and Deci contrast acting "from a sense of personal commitment to excel" with "fear of being surveilled" or being bribed.³⁶ Thus "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" ends in SDT largely map onto MacIntyre's better-defined concepts of "intrinsic" and "external" goods, rather than onto the universal distinction between final and nonfinal goals, as Ryan and Deci sometimes suggest.³⁷ We

see this in more substantive definitions of intrinsic motivation as a "natural inclination towards assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration." An intrinsically motivated agent seeks out challenging and novel goals even in the absence of specific material rewards.³⁸ Given that the intrinsic-extrinsic contrast in this literature really marks an (intuitive) distinction among different kinds of *final ends*, what is meant by "intrinsic motivation" would be better captured in the existential concept of projective motivation.

However, this conceptual problem in "self-determination theory" is rooted in what I see as a deeper explanatory error that leads Deci and Ryan to construe "intrinsic" or internal goods in an agent-relative way. Although I regard their new, humanistic approach within the family of cognitive theories as more insightful than any other model found in empirical psychology today, SDT still does not recognize the projective function of the human will, because its explanation of the "psychological basis of intrinsic motivation" retains too much of the structure of the drive theories that SDT was meant to replace. Deci recognized that his initial operative definition of intrinsic motivation did not contain a causal explanation,³⁹ so he sought to develop one that would subsume earlier drive-theoretic explanations ranging from "secondary reinforcement," "optimal stimulation," "optimal incongruity" or dissonance, "optimal arousal" and "the reduction of uncertainty,"⁴⁰ to drives for "achievement" or excellence, self-actualization, and "meaning" (conceived by Maslow as a need to symbolize, imagine, learn, judge critically, distinguish oneself as an individual and become self-reliant).⁴¹

Deci's own proposal is most indebted to White's concept of "effortance motivation," conceived as the drive to "competence and efficacy,"⁴² which includes Kagan's "motive for mastery" in relation to high standards and the "motive to reduce uncertainty" or be in control of one's fate.⁴³ To this complex idea of competence, Deci adds both a basic social drive for affiliation with significant others and an intrinsic concern for "self-determination" or autonomy, in the broad sense of acting from an internal locus of control.⁴⁴

Thus Deci and Ryan now describe SDT as "an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development," based on empirical research identifying these three "innate psychological needs" as universal and their satisfaction as essential to normal growth and development of human personality.⁴⁵ Much as Aristotle sought to embrace all motivation in the desire for happiness, Ryan and Deci now explain all intrinsic motivation as differentiating out of *formally self-regarding* needs, or what I would call quasi-drives: "We have thus

proposed that the basic needs for competence, autonomy [or self-determination] and relatedness must be satisfied across the span of life for an individual to experience an ongoing sense of integrity and well-being or 'eudaimonia.'"⁴⁶

This explanation results from a dialectical subsumption of earlier drive theories (such as Hull's) that nevertheless leaves intact their most basic (and commonly invisible) premises; namely (1) that there must be *some* reward or perceived benefit to the agent involved in causing all motivation; and (2) that the prospect of this benefit explains the energy involved in intrinsically motivated activities, since no activity can *literally* be its own reward.⁴⁷ It follows from these assumptions that intrinsic motivation exists because of the goods that it tends to produce for its agent, which SDT identifies as psychic development, autonomy, competence and competence-based security, fulfillment, excitement, and so on. In other words, SDT starts from the erosiac concept of our formal telos (see chap. 6, sec. 3), and interprets the substance of that telos as including a triad of innate and irreducibly psychological needs, the drives toward which cause intrinsic motivation to arise (and eventually to be channeled into particular pursuits, projects, and relationships).

The eudaimonist form of SDT is evident in another article, in which Deci and Ryan say that it is part of the natural function or "adaptive design of the human organism to engage in interesting activities, to exercise capacities, to pursue connectedness in social groups, and to integrate intrapsychic and interpersonal experiences into a relative unity."⁴⁸ They equate performing this natural function, or attaining our natural telos, with psychological health or holistic well-being: the Hullan definition of the three psychological needs as "organismic necessities" assumes "a fundamental human trajectory toward vitality, integration, and health."⁴⁹ This seems to imply that a fundamental desire for eudaimonia motivates the activities that fulfill these needs. This is explicit in Deci's first book, which replaces his initial operative definition with the following formula: "Intrinsically motivated behaviors are behaviors which a person engages in to *feel* competent and self-determined."⁵⁰ Yet Deci and Ryan now acknowledge that an intrinsically motivated pursuit

does not have to be aimed at need satisfaction *per se*, it may simply be focused on interesting activity or an important goal if they are in a context that allows need satisfaction. However, if need satisfaction is not forthcoming while they are acting, nonoptimal or dysfunctional consequences typically follow.⁵¹

This phrasing is ambiguous: it suggests that satisfaction of one (or more) of the three basic psychological needs is sometimes only a by-product of

some intrinsically motivated activity A; but it adds the caveat that if this contribution to the agent's well-being does not soon follow, then the intrinsic motivation for A will be counterreinforced and will wane. Thus "A direct corollary of the SDT perspective is that people will tend to pursue goals, domains, and relationships that allow or support their need satisfaction."⁵² This turns SDT into a formally egoistic model like Aristotle's: activities not motivated by acquisitive or consumptive appetites are still driven by the agent's own need for fulfillment. Yet this seems to be refuted by the inherent resilience of intrinsic motives, their tendency to be sustained even through "dry spells" where the usual fulfillment fails to follow.

3. An Existential Reinterpretation of Intrinsic Motivation

I argue here that intrinsic motivation is better understood in terms of projective striving that is not formally egoistic in structure. Carefully specifying the role of by-product fulfillment will lead us to a fuller articulation of our existential telos, as an alternative to the three quasi-drives identified in the Deci-Ryan model. To clarify this alternative, let us return to the example of character-friendship as a type of intrinsic motivation.

One leading account of friendship (which SDT includes in the intrinsic good of relatedness) helps illustrate the Deci-Ryan view that agent-related benefits of intrinsic motivation are crucial to their continuance. Neera Badhwar argues that even when benefits to the agent are an "unintended result" of an activity as Bishop Butler said, "it may well be that the tacit expectation of self-benefit—based on past experience, or even just on the natural teleology of our biological constitution—is necessary for sustaining the activity."⁵³ Applying this idea, she argues against Nygren that for the object I contemplate in love to "further evoke the love" rather than quench it, the happiness I derive from the contemplation "must serve to perpetuate the love of the other who is its source."⁵⁴ Alternatively, we might explain this idea in terms of what Korsgaard, following C. I. Lewis, calls "inherent value," which is "the value that characterizes the object of an intrinsically good experience."⁵⁵ In these terms, Badhwar's claim is that we can perceive the inherent value of a person who is loveable for herself only in enjoying or delighting in that perception.⁵⁶

While it is plausible that delight and similar agent-related benefits act as *reinforcers* for end-friendship and other types of intrinsic motivation, it is not as plausible that my friend's delighting me is an essential *component* of the intrinsic value I see in her—or is an integral part of what I love or am devoted to. In general, the staying power or commitment that is characteristic of intrinsic motivation is difficult to square with final ends that have agent-related benefits built into them, because joy is not always present in

the activities explained by intrinsic motivation. In fact, the greatest sense of fulfillment or meaning often requires persistence through dry spells (both initially and later on), during which we still recognize the value of our goals and continue to strive for them. Sometimes the usual joy in loving our friend is missing; sometimes the intrinsically worthy task involves so many negatives that the real sense of satisfaction in its pursuit comes only after a long time of sustained devotion without reinforcing delight.

That many people are not stoical enough to pursue such "thankless" but valuable activities for long enough to fully appreciate them is no argument for the Aristotelian account. The situation is similar when the agent-transcending goal of intrinsic motivation is an objective standard of excellence rather than the qualities of some figure or the good of some person. As Albert Bandura and Dale Schunk suggest:

By making self-satisfaction conditional on a certain level of performance, individuals create self-inducements to persist in their efforts until their performances match internal standards. Both anticipated satisfactions for matching attainments and the dissatisfactions with insufficient ones provide incentives for self-directed actions.⁵⁷

But notice that these "inducements" are *generated* by appropriating some conception of excellence as one's personal standard; on pain of circularity, the volitional activity of setting and maintaining the standard cannot itself be motivated by the anticipated satisfaction of a job well done. Once again, this hoped-for delight can act as a reinforcer only *after* the goal of meeting one's standard is projected. This reinforcer can be necessary for continued pursuit of the goal beyond some point, because the agent can tolerate only so much frustration in the pursuit of the relevant kind of excellence. This is why "A sense of personal efficacy in mastering challenges is apt to generate greater interest in the activity." Thus motivation training has to (a) get the agent to see the intrinsic value in a goal; and (b) tolerate enough lack of success in pursuing it to get to the point where some effectiveness can be experienced.⁵⁸

Hence the existential account of intrinsic motivation does not require that the agent-related by-product goods remain motivationally irrelevant or play *no* supporting role. On the contrary, such benefits may often help the will sustain its efforts by providing some of the necessary psychic preconditions for volitional striving or outward-looking cares (since a miserable agent may have trouble keeping volitional focus). By-product satisfactions may also provide personal reasons for valuing the caring process that support and complement the agent's independent reasons for valuing her outward goals. For the striving will, though, these agent-related and process-based reasons for pursuing goals with agent-transcending value are not

themselves attractors or erosiac motives; the vital functions of by-product benefits remain *dependent* on the primary operation of the striving will in projecting ends without regard to self.

Hence the existential account can agree with Deci and Ryan that major parts of human happiness depend on the by-product goods of intrinsic motivation, or as they put it: "a critical issue in the *effects* of goal pursuit and attainment concerns the degree to which people are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs as they pursue and attain their valued outcomes."⁵⁹ We should therefore design our schools, trades and professions, civil society, and family life to support and encourage the inherent human tendency to develop intrinsic motivation in various domains of life. But we should remember that these effects emerge from pursuing certain kinds of "valued outcomes" for their own sake and *not merely as occasions* for developing competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Thus it is not these "spiritual" needs that initially "give goals their psychological potency."⁶⁰ Rather, the pursuit of potential goals can meet these needs only if these goals have recognizable agent-transcending values independent of these needs, for the sake of which the agent can posit or set them as her own.

This central tension in the Deci-Ryan theory of intrinsic motivation results from trying to account for non-drive-like motives in an explanatory framework that still assumes the Transmission principle: *all motives* on which people act, whether learned or innate, are originally prepurposive, can compete with one another prior to intention-forming choices, and thus may or may not be acted on. SDT pictures intrinsic motivation as already *there* in the psychic needs, nascently waiting to be expressed and differentiated, rather than as generated by the existential will—the will conceived as an innate *capacity* to generate various types of intrinsic motivation. The SDT model of prepurposive intrinsic motivation thus implies that the basic triad of innate psychological drives interacts with environmental variables to *determine* the development of particular intrinsic motives in the individual. But if that were true, intrinsic motivation could not play the autonomy-making role that the authors attribute to it, for it would arise without the individual's agency.

From the beginning, Deci did distinguish the motive structure of the quasi-drives for competence or effectiveness and autonomy from that of Hullian physiological drives. He notes White's point that "Effectance motivation is persistent in that it is always available"⁶¹ and not slaked or reduced by success in the pursuits that it motivates. Hence in "intrinsically motivated behavior, however, the goal will be attained and the behavior will be rewarded, but the need will not be reduced. Rather, the need is ever-present, so it will remain, and other goals will be set."⁶² Yet surely this would be an infinitely frustrating process, like Sisyphus rolling his stone or

Plato's leaky sieve, rather than a fulfilling one if competence and autonomy were really motivating "needs." To explain why intrinsic motives do not aim at goals that reduce the intrinsic motivation, how they can be self-sustaining, and why activities they motivate can be fulfilling even when *not* successful in attaining their final ends, we have to postulate instead that these motives do not seek their ends as agent-relative *rewards* at all. Even if the agent usually derives by-product benefits from pursuing and/or achieving these goals, the relation between intrinsic motivation and these by-products is contingent and the motivation is internally structured to continue in their absence (within the limits of the agent's tolerances, beyond which agent-fulfillment is a necessary condition for persistence); if it were *not* so structured, then these by-product benefits would have no chance of following from the activity.

This requires a non-erosiac conception of our formal telos and hence a radical break with all drive models. Deci and Ryan recognize that the needs they postulate to explain intrinsic motivation do not seek a *homeostatic completion*, but they do not see all that this implies:

From the [drive theory] perspective, needs are understood as physiological deficits that disturb the organism's quiescence and push the organism to behave in ways that were learned because they satisfied the needs and returned the organism to quiescence. Thus in drive theories, the set point of the human organism is quiescence or passivity; need satisfaction is a process of replenishing deficiencies. . . . By contrast, in SDT, the set point is growth-oriented activity. . . . [people are] naturally inclined to act on their inner and outer environments, engage in activities that interest them, and move towards personal and interpersonal coherence.⁶³

Though this formulation is insightful, the problem with it is that psychological "growth" does not identify any "set point" at all; it specifies an *open-ended* by-product of volitional devotion to other goals. This alleged telos in SDT differs in three striking ways from the equilibria of drive theories. First, there is a direction toward increased effectiveness, autonomy, differentiation of interest, and so on but *no rest point* at which we could say that a "satisfaction" internal to the aim of the activity has been reached. This means that the real aim is not rest, completion, or satisfaction at all. Second, it follows that the motivational telos (or *telos*) of intrinsic motivation would have to be the agent-transcending goals that human agents can take as sustainable final ends (or some relation among such ends), whereas the natural/functional telos of a human person would be her functioning so as to pursue such agent-transcending ends. So an agent's motivational telos can no longer be identified with her natural/functional telos. Third,

since well-being or eudaimonia is a by-product of such pursuits, there is also a gap between performing one's design function well or realizing one's natural telos, and attaining happiness, fulfillment, integration of self, and so on. The agent's holistic good, in this sense, thus stands at two removes from pursuing her true motivational *teloi*. They may be related such that, if the by-product benefits that the agent normally derives from pursuing her motivational *teloi* are blocked and fall below some threshold, then some of the necessary preconditions for intrinsic motivation are missing. But, as I said in reply to Badhwar, such a threshold is not the end-point of the motivational telos, which exceeds it and remains infinitely open to new goal-setting.

These three features together present a working *existential concept of our formal telos*. The existential approach breaks up the erosiac formal telos (see chap. 6, sec. 3) into three distinct concepts with different extensions: (1) our highest ends, (2) our natural function, and (3) our flourishing. This is a more detailed description of the non-erosiac formal telos that we found in both Scotus and Kant, although they do not fully agree about its substantive content or requirements (chap. 11). Within this tradition, different material conceptions of our existential telos are distinguished by the content they specify for our highest ends or, equivalently, the order of agent-transcending goods that is our natural function to will for their own sake. For example, I will present a material conception of our existential telos that is more inclusive than either Scotus's or Kant's conceptions (chap. 14). Any such account of our existential telos remains normative, because it excludes as bad some significant ends that it is possible for human persons to project. But it does not make this discrimination simply by asking which among projectible ends it is most fulfilling, integrating, or self-actualizing to will.

4. Maslow's Eudaimonism

To clarify the importance of these distinctions, it will also be useful to consider Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization. Maslow's theory is less sophisticated than Deci's and Ryan's, which builds in Maslow's idea of an innate motivation to growth and development of creative talents that awakens "higher needs."⁶⁴ But given his place in the tradition of humanistic psychology, Maslow's account is much better known among philosophical audiences and more clearly exhibits the problems with eudaimonist meta-theory.⁶⁵ Maslow proposes that human needs come in a lexical hierarchy, ranging from our most basic biological requirements, through our social dispositions to affiliation, to the most distinctively human goals, in the following order:

1. physiological needs (nutrition, shelter, care in infancy);
2. safety (protection from physical danger and stability in one's lifeworld);
3. love and belongingness (relationships with friends, groups, spouse; attachment in childhood);
4. Esteem (recognition from others for our personality and for our productive/useful work);
5. self-actualization ("realizing their capabilities fully, being all they could be").⁶⁶

This theory certainly recognizes a range of possible ends like those suggested in Aristotelian philosophical theories. Maslow still thought of these motives as drives that are innate in human nature, although the higher ones emerge only when the lower ones are largely satisfied.⁶⁷ And since even the highest goal of "self-actualization" is understood formally in terms of the agent's flourishing or full development of psychic health, all our motives remain formally egoistic in this model.

Maslow's account of the self on a stage-wise quest for its eudaimonia remains too mechanical, conflating how we ought to be moved with how we will in fact be moved. As Mook argues, it predicts that "the more a person is deficient in a given need, the more important it should be. And the more the needs at each level are satisfied, the more important the needs higher in the hierarchy ought to be." Yet in survey studies, "[t]here was little support for either prediction in the data."⁶⁸ This is unsurprising, since Maslow forgot that many people never outgrow what Frankfurt called wantonness, or what Kierkegaard called the "aesthetic" stage of existence:⁶⁹ they are contented with the satisfaction of their existing D1–D2 desires without making any strong evaluations about values that could motivate D3 desires, let alone projecting agent-transcending goals necessary to engage in practices or cultivate noble friendships. After winning the lottery, they would happily just sit in their mansion and watch movies on TV all day long.⁷⁰

That said, even if there is an innate disposition to higher intrinsic motives such as exploration, creative work, and achievement, we could reconstruct Maslow's lexical ordering as a thesis about how *some* level of physiological satisfaction, physical security, and basic acceptance may function as preconditions to willing higher ends. It is certainly compatible with the existential approach to hold that projective willing has necessary preconditions that are not part of the goals it adopts. Physical deprivation, chaos in civil society, terror, or mental abuse may undermine our capacity to set and strive for worthwhile ends. Ryan and Deci cite extensive research showing that "a secure relational base" needs to be in place for children to

develop their capacities for intrinsic motivation.⁷¹ Indeed, we might regard all the evidence they present that nondominating, autonomy-encouraging family and school environments help facilitate the development of intrinsic motivation as supporting this reconstructed hierarchy thesis.

However, given its eudaimonistic character, Maslow's theory is also subject to the crucial objection that it confuses intentional goals and by-products. As Mook notes, the best support for Maslow's ideal of self-actualization in empirical studies is found in the growing literature on intrinsic motivation. I have argued that such motives are best understood as concerns about first-order goals whose value is intelligible to the agent independently of any feedback relation it may have for the agent's own psyche (at least within her limits of tolerance). Maslow should agree, since he emphasizes that "self-actualized" persons are focused outwards on problems to be solved, not on themselves.⁷² They tend to be "caught up in the tasks and challenges per se, and not in the extrinsic rewards of performing them" (as MacIntyre also suggested). Yet, as Mook notes, such "intrinsic motivation is fragile . . . extrinsic rewards for an activity can turn play into work. . . . Anxiety about someone else's evaluation can do the same."⁷³

These observations suggest that what Maslow calls "self-actualization" is essentially a by-product of pursuing other worthwhile first-order goals for their own sake—a side effect that is especially pronounced when the activity aims at highly valuable agent-transcending ends, like those of the practices, noble friendship, just political causes, and so on. If Maslow's representative individuals, such as Einstein, Thomas Jefferson, and Eleanor Roosevelt, had been focused on becoming self-actualized or building self-esteem rather than on working out general relativity, creating a new democratic republic, or solving the problems of poverty generated by the Great Depression, they would never have become self-actualized.

In fairness, this confusion may be more attributable to our idioms for expressing intrinsic motivation rather than to particular theorists. For example, like Maslow, Robert Cavalier describes "self-actuation" as a form of motivation in which "individuals seek ways to fully express their interests, talents, and potentials as free human beings. . . . They find joy in doing, in creating, in performing, in experiencing themselves as people through their work and accomplishments."⁷⁴ Readers easily distinguish this kind of motive from, say, painting as a means to wealth and fame; but the phrasing is still misleading, for it implies that the agent's intended goal is a kind of joy in experiencing the power of their talents. This would reduce the goals of their craft to mere occasions for self-discovery or opportunities to test their abilities, when they are rather the opposite: self-discovery and joy in developed talent happen in activity aimed at something else. The agent may recognize these goods that emerge in the process as *reasons* for continuing

their devotion, but that is distinct from being moved by a desire or drive for these goods.

The same distinction also needs to be made—but usually is not—in studies on "personal achievement" as a long-term goal. For example, Mook describes David McClelland's theory of achievement motivation as follows:

People high in need for achievement (*nAch*) are likely to choose occupations that entail independent decision-making and rapid, concrete knowledge of results. McClelland's group has gathered evidence that across societies over time, industrialization and economic growth are associated with the prevalence of achievement motivations.⁷⁵

However, we must distinguish someone who considers "achievement" (in the sense of success in school, success in a high-status job, or success in starting a business, along with the recognition these normally entail) to be an intrinsic part of his well-being and thus acquires a D3 desire for it, from someone who cares primarily about the agent-transcending purposes of her studies, profession, or even a for-profit business and *profits* excellent realization of these purposes as her final end. In the latter case, it is misleading to say that the individual has a "need for achievement" and so is formally seeking her own well-being in striving to excel. Rather, she actively pursues something for which she has no preparative need at all. In doing so, she may display "drive," but this is the resoluteness of her will, not her "ambition" in the sense of seeking something to add to her resume. (Resumes tend to be more impressive when their contents are mostly a side effect of goals *other* than building an impressive resume).

Of course, in everyday life, we can find it hard to distinguish this D3 desire for merits and the projective striving for ends that may (as a side effect) count as meritorious or as "achievements." Often a person may act on both kinds of motives, to a greater or lesser degree in each case, and I do not believe that the ambitious D3 desire must always defeat the pure projective motive; in a single psyche, the two can often be mutually supporting, despite their different purposes. But they will tend to come apart in cases where a determined effort to bring about some agent-transcending result may bring no immediate worldly success or may even hamper one's chances of gaining social recognition as a high achiever. This is where we see the difference between a person of strong will and McClelland's highly achievement-motivated agent, who needs continual feedback confirming success and recognition of the merits or status he is accruing.⁷⁶

By contrast, imagine a mathematician who is so certain of the importance of the problem on which he is working that he pursues it even when colleagues whose support he needs dissuade him and see no value in it. Indeed, the value of such work may sometimes become apparent to others

only after the agent's death. For example, in 1919, the "little-known Polish mathematician named Theodor Kaluza from the University of Königsberg" sent Einstein a paper suggesting that in addition to the three recognized spatial dimensions, our universe could have another, smaller, curled-up, fourth spatial dimension.⁷⁷ After some initial enthusiasm, Einstein became skeptical; although Kaluza's paper was eventually published, it was largely ignored for decades.⁷⁸ But now it has become the foundation of string theory, the leading contender today for the ultimate unification of physics! Sadly, Kaluza never got a Nobel Prize or appointment to the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, but he could still have been self-actualized.⁷⁹ In sum, the "drive for achievement" can be interpreted either so that Kaluza satisfied it or so that he did not, and this implies two quite different kinds of motive.

5. Frankl's Existential Will to Meaning

5.1. *Meaning as a By-Product of Self-Transcending Devotion*

These criticisms of Maslow's theory, which parallel my critique of Arisotle, were famously made by the existential psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl. In his book *From Death Camp to Existentialism*,⁸⁰ reprinted under the bestselling title, *Man's Search for Meaning*,⁸¹ and in later works, Frankl argues that the "will to meaning" is a "primary concern" of persons.⁸² While imprisoned in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, Frankl found that when people were stripped of dignity and treated as mere objects to be used and finally exterminated, their practical egos (or sense of being a continuing self defined by its values) tended to collapse.⁸³ Under these terrible circumstances, "only a few kept their full inner liberty and obtained those values which their suffering afforded" by achieving spiritual growth.⁸⁴

This was in large part, Frankl judged, because their dehumanization cut prisoners off from the goals that had formerly given meaning to their lives and the hopes that gave significance to their future: "A man who could not see the end of his 'provisional existence' was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life."⁸⁵ In other words, these conditions made it almost impossible to exercise the striving will in projective motivation. "A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts," tended to turn inward, and eventually to find everything "pointless."⁸⁶ Then the crisis would come in which the prisoner simply gave up and refused to get up or do anything, until he became sick and died.⁸⁷ In human beings, the phenomenon that Martin Seligman has called "learned helplessness"⁸⁸ often involves existential despair or loss of will.

The only way to "restore a man's inner strength" when he reaches such despair is "to succeed in showing him some future goal,"⁸⁹ to change his attitude by focusing him on life's challenge "to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual."⁹⁰

Frankl generalized these findings into a theory of motivation that led to "logotherapy," a method for helping those with "noögenic neuroses" that do not come from trauma or repression of appetites but rather from lack of sufficiently meaningful purposes to which to devote themselves. This theory recognizes the distinction between the projective motives of the existential will and what I call DI-D2 desires:

Logotherapy deviates from [Freudian] psychoanalysis insofar as it considers man as a being whose main concern consists in fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing values, rather than in mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts, the mere reconciliation of conflicting claims of id, ego, and superego, or mere adaptation and adjustment to the society and environment.⁹¹

Frankl also distinguishes the proper functioning of what I call the striving will from all erotic motivation, including D3 desires. For he recognizes that in finding intrinsic values in different possible goals and devoting ourselves to them on these grounds, we "may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium."⁹² To explain this remark, it helps to recall that from Plato's point of view in the *Symposium*, it would seem that by projecting goals for which we had no prior appetite or attraction, we would be *creating* need or lack in ourselves, or making ourselves *less satisfied*. Frankl describes this as moving from a state of motivational equilibrium or psychic stasis to a new state of tension caused by *caring passionately* about something. "However," Frankl continues, "precisely this tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health."⁹³ We can even recognize this and realize that we *enjoy* the tension caused by our enthusiasm for the tasks at hand. To paraphrase Senator John McCain, another war camp survivor, we find meaning by devoting ourselves to "causes greater than our self-interest."⁹⁴

Hence Frankl explicitly rejects "those motivational theories which are based on the homeostasis principle"—the psychoanalytic version of Plato's lack model of desire, according to which "man is basically concerned with maintaining or restoring an inner equilibrium."⁹⁵ This was Freud's principle, but Frankl thinks that it is refuted by Allport, Maslow, and Bühler, who found that "propriate striving" resists equilibrium and maintains motivational tension.⁹⁶ So Hobbes and Callicles turn out to be right in a sense if we restate their objection to Plato in existential form. There may be no value or sense in stimulating additional DI-D2 desires (which, according to Socrates' famous analogy, would be like making holes in our psychic

sieve), but there is certainly a point to creating a wholly different kind of "dissatisfaction" in our mental economy by setting demanding goals for ourselves. As Frankl puts it, our mental health always requires

the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. . . . What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.⁹⁷

If so, then it seems that the strong erotic thesis is wrong; not all our motivation arises from attraction toward completeness, however broadly interpreted. It is our nature to be ready to suffer as long as that suffering has a worthwhile point or meaning.⁹⁸ By contrast, a person who believes that happiness is our ultimate goal must see unhappiness as "a symptom of maladjustment" and therefore experience second-order unhappiness or shame about his or her suffering or unhappiness.⁹⁹

Frankl also considers serious existential commitment to real values beyond ourselves to be the mark of psychological maturity in human persons: "the Freudian pleasure principle is the guiding principle of a small child; the Adlerian power principle is that of the adolescent; and the will to meaning is the guiding principle of the mature adult."¹⁰⁰ In other words, mature agency is typified by projective response to an array of important moral and nonmoral values. Frankl also rejects Nietzsche's and Freud's hermeneutics of suspicion, which contend that behind all apparently noble, virtuous, or other-regarding commitments of the self there must lurk repressed, ulterior, self-serving motives. After noting Allport's remark that Freud specialized in interpreting motives that "cannot be taken at their face value," Frankl adds, "The fact that such motives exist certainly does not alter the fact that by and large motives can be taken at their face value."¹⁰¹ Psychological egoism can be defended against such counterexamples only if it is taken as an *a priori* dogma—as when C. S. Lewis's wonderful Nietzschean devil, Screwtape, rejects the "cock-and-bull story about disinterested love" and insists that all this "talk about Love must be a disguise for something else."¹⁰²

Because he recognizes that projective motivation is necessary for mental health and that the neuroses of the "existential vacuum" result without it, Frankl still speaks of "man's desire for a life that is as meaningful as possible,"¹⁰³ and he calls such meaning a "higher need."¹⁰⁴ But "desire" and "need" stand here for motivation in general, not any kind of erotic attraction. Objectively, we can be said to "need" the meaning provided by existential willing, since this is our natural function (which is one part of our

existential telos), but that does not mean that projects are undertaken by persons on the *motive* of satisfying a desire for meaning or of gaining happiness. As a result, the phrase "will to meaning" is misleading if it is taken as implying that meaning itself is our intentional target; rather, Frankl employs it to contrast with the will to power and the will to happiness.

For, as Frankl himself insists, finding meaning requires an outward focus on values "found in the world rather than within man or his own psyche." Hence he rejects the formal egoism of Maslow's theory: "Self-actualization is not a possible aim at all, for the simple reason that the more a man would strive for it, the more he would miss it."¹⁰⁵ This point is obviously similar to my critique of A-eudaemonism: "like happiness, self-actualization is an effect, the effect of meaning-fulfillment . . . if he sets out to actualize himself rather than fulfill a meaning, self-actualization immediately loses its justification."¹⁰⁶ This paradox of Maslow's eudaemonism results from the psychological fact that the agent's sense of his own self-worth depends on what Jaspers calls "that cause which he has made his own"; as Maslow himself admits, we realize our "selves" primarily "via a commitment to an important job."¹⁰⁷ More generally, a person can become his "true self" only through concerns that are directed to persons, standards, and issues *outside* himself or unrelated to his own material interests:

He becomes so, not by focusing on his self-actualization, but by forgetting himself and giving himself, by overlooking himself and focusing outward. . . . What is called self-actualization is, and must remain, the *unintended effect of self-transcendence*; it is ruinous to make it the target of intention. . . . It is the very pursuit of happiness that obviates happiness.¹⁰⁸

This parallels my Elsterian critique of eudaemonism as self-defeating, because eudaemonia is essentially a by-product of virtues, practices, and pure relationships.

The concept of self-transcendence, which is at the heart of Frankl's theory, also corresponds to my description of agent-transcending first-order motives (introduced in chap. 5, sec. 2.2). Frankl emphasizes self-transcendence precisely because he recognizes the point (which we also found in Feinberg and Williams) that a fulfilling and meaningful life depends on forming commitments and undertaking endeavors as valuable for their own sake. Hence in logotherapy "the typical self-centeredness of the neurotic is broken up instead of being continually fostered and reinforced," as in the introspective methods of Freudian psychoanalysis.¹⁰⁹ This agrees with Frankl's paradox that there is something liberating in the experience of being "seized" or "captivated" by an object of our love, through commitment to which we move out of ourselves (and toward focus on others or the world).¹¹⁰

The relation between projective motivation and existential meaningfulness is therefore not usefully explained or analyzed in terms of a *desire* for meaning. If we could be motivated to take up a demanding task just by the simple longing to have something to do or to avoid boredom or to find "some meaning or other" for our life, then we would be able to satisfy such a desire just by picking any end *arbitrarily*. But such randomly chosen ends could not be projected or pursued with serious devotion and volitional resolve. For they would not be *responding* to any perceived importance; either there would be no substantial grounds for valuing these ends or, if there were, we would not be choosing them for these reasons. As a result, we could only *play at* pursuing them. If our ends lack the requisite gravitas or intrinsic importance for us, we find it possible on a whim to reverse our interest in them—which is just to say that we are not able to form a real commitment to them or to fully invest ourselves in them.

5.2. *The Alterity of Values to Which the Will Responds*

Frankl's existentialism, like my own, thus presupposes the possibility of real values outside us in the world to which we can respond. As Frankl argues, if "the meaning that is waiting to be fulfilled by man" were just an invention of his mind, like Narcissus's image in the pool, "it would immediately lose its demanding and challenging character; it could no longer call man forth or summon him."¹¹¹ On this basis, Frankl rightly rejects Sartre's notion that we invent values by choosing our projects; Sartre gets the relationship backwards.¹¹² This is what he means by saying that one cannot just "will to will" without the perception of meaning or significance that could provide an objective reason for forming a serious project.¹¹³

Without nonarbitrary grounds, then, existential projection would be self-undermining and fail to generate personal meaning. This is why "subjectivism and relativism" about values undermine our capacity for existential resolve, or "erode idealism and enthusiasm" of the spirit.¹¹⁴ Moreover, to furnish grounds for projective motivation rather than only D3 desires, these values must have a certain *alterity*, otherness, or separation from the agent's good. This independence of the agent is implied in the concept of self-transcendence, which Frankl explicitly takes from Buber: "The essentially self-transcendent quality of human existence renders man a *being reaching out beyond himself*."¹¹⁵

In this respect, Frankl's theory agrees with Nel Noddings's conception of caring, which is crucially influenced by Kierkegaard, Buber, and Marcel. She conceives caring for "living things" as including an effort to attend to "their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires."¹¹⁶ Without this focus on the other's reality, we could not understand their good well enough to help

them. Thus the caring agent focuses on the other rather than on herself "as caretaker" or on how burdened and caring a person she is.¹¹⁷ In particular, Noddings emphasizes that caring involves "engrossment" in the other, or "a displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other." Moreover, she adds that a "genuine caring for self . . . for the *ethical* self, can emerge only from a caring for others."¹¹⁸ Thus, although there is a secondary place for concern about the coherence and value of one's cares, at the ground level, "caring is always characterized by a move away from self,"¹¹⁹ or a *nonreflexive* focus. There is a convergence here with Frankfurt's claim that caring is liberating because of its "selflessness."¹²⁰ Caring as a motive state requires this intrinsic interest in something or someone transcending the self: "At bottom, all caring involves engrossment. The engrossment need not be intense nor need it be pervasive in the life of the one-caring, but it must occur." Without it, Noddings says, there is no love in Buber's sense of direct contact with the other-as-*thou*.¹²¹

Existential willing therefore requires an *Anstoss*, or experience of a reality that is not merely an ideal construct in the manifold of one's own consciousness. Echoing Buber, Frankl writes: "The world must not be regarded as a mere expression of one's self. Nor must the world be considered as a mere instrument, or as a means to the end of one's self-actualization."¹²² In projective motivation, I will my movement toward persons, objects, and states whose value I do not seek to possess, experience, or appropriate into myself (even in a reasonably extended sense). It is this *alterity* or *alienness* of its ends that makes existential willing essentially *non-narcissistic* in its general form, in strict opposition to formal egoism.¹²³ As Frankl puts it, the human person "reaches out for something other than itself."¹²⁴

We cannot create *ex nihilo* any basic or underivative values with this kind of alterity or difference from our own being, as Sartre's approach would require, because we are not God. Our inventions and artifacts are doomed to remain extensions of our minds; we rightly see them as expressions of ourselves, and our love of them (even when justified) remains formally narcissistic, for they cannot become free beings whom we can meet or to whom we could devote ourselves in fully self-transcending will (this is the dream of which Pinocchio becoming "a real boy" is a classic expression).¹²⁵ As the existential theory of divine creativity in chapter 9 suggests, the ability to create *alterity* itself—to bring forth separate beings that are not mere property or equipment of the maker but free of his or her control—would be a distinguishing mark of the divine.¹²⁶ Indeed, Levinas (a Jewish author) reminds Christian theologians that

The great force of the idea of creation such as it was contributed by monotheism is that this creation is *ex nihilo*—not because this represents a work more miraculous than the demiurgic informing of matter, but because the separated and created being is thereby not simply

issued forth from the father, but is *absolutely other* than him. Filiality itself cannot appear as essential to the destiny of the I unless man retains this memory of the creation *ex nihilo*, without which the son is not a *true other*.¹²⁷

Thus God, on Levinas's "open" conception of the divine, is the only one who can give distinct being itself to the value aimed at in projective willing, and this is the right way to understand creation *ex nihilo*.

Of course this general point about the need for non-arbitrary values to ground projective motivation does not depend on theism, nor does it tell us which values can play this role. But it does clarify why worthwhile purposes, according to Frankl, are not all formally egoistic or agent-relative in their content. Frankl tends to interpret this altruistically, like Noddings, who writes that "Our motivation in caring is directed toward the welfare, protection, or enhancement of the cared-for."¹²⁸ Yet Frankl's structure of self-transcending motivation could also be instantiated by evil volition; as Jeffrey Blustein says, "we can devote ourselves directly to the destruction or diminishment of something," and such caring is "negative in tenor."¹²⁹

Perhaps the significance to be found in such negative projects is in some interesting ways less enduring or shareable or fulfilling when pursued. But that it is possible at all puts in clear relief the crucial distinction between existential meaning (i.e., subjective/personal significance and practical coherence) and *eudaimonia*, which the radically evil agent may lack. As an agent-related good deriving from volitional projection or as an *effect* of a life with self-transcending motivation, existential meaning is more fundamental than *eudaimonia*. For a *eudaimon* life is necessarily a life with existential meaning, but the converse does not hold: a life full of existential meaning is not necessarily *eudaimon*, both because it may be subject to serious ill-fortune and injustice and because it could be devoted to negative ends that are either contingently harmful to the agent or even intrinsically self-destructive (on this point, see sec. 9 below).¹³⁰

Thus even if the reflective patient does take an interest in finding existential meaning through projective willing, she would not be acting on a *eudaimonistic* D3 desire. If meaning itself is an indirectly targetable end for us, as Frankl sometimes seems to suggest, then our motivation to pursue it would still not embrace all other motives in the way that the drive to *eudaimonia* is supposed to, according to the *Eudaimonia* thesis. Rather, it would constitute what Blustein calls one type of "care about caring," namely a basic commitment to being engaged meaningfully in the world:

The person who cares about caring in . . . [this sense] is emotionally invested in being a caring person, that is, a person who takes an interest in and devotes him or herself to things, activities and people

in his or her world. A person who cares about caring . . . may deliberately take measures (perhaps with the assistance of others) to find something to care about or to keep alive a sense of purpose and attachment to life.¹³¹

As Blustein says, such a search for meaningful roles or worthwhile values to care about normally sees caring as an end-in-itself. If it is conceived only as a means to a self-interested end like showing off superior abilities or perhaps maintaining an image of oneself as caring, then it can become hollow and self-defeating.

Noddings also affirms that "As human beings, we want to care and to be cared for. Caring is important in itself."¹³² But she tends to construe our response to the intrinsic value of caring in more erosiac terms, for example, as the "longing for relatedness,"¹³³ and to suggest that genuine "presence" to the other requires an *affektive* response from the one caring, so that the cared-for "feels her warmth in both verbal and body language."¹³⁴ It is debatable whether volitional devotion to individuals must always involve this kind of affective component. In many cases, the projective efforts of the will may entrain emotional dispositions, but the same dedication to a shared purpose may find quite distinct emotional expressions in different personalities. Yet the deeper problem lies in Noddings's suggestion that our "longing for goodness"¹³⁵ or "our longing for caring—to be in that special relation" is the wellspring of ethical motivation.¹³⁶ She may well be right that "the joy that accompanies fulfillment of our caring" can bolster our allegiance to the ethical ideal of caring response. But caring cannot begin from such a motive: Buber is clear that I-Thou relations are not directly targetable. Noddings's error here is like Badhwar's: she conflates a reinforcing condition that can become a necessary condition of continuation with an initial incentive for caring.

6. How Caring Benefits the Agent: Frankfurt on Means and Ends

We have seen that existential meaning is not usefully conceived as the target of D3 desire, since it is founded on devotion to ends in view of intrinsic values that are at *least* partly independent of the by-product goods that the agent derives from pursuing these ends, such as the feeling that her life is important in virtue of its engaging in significant pursuits or maintaining caring relations. This position can be contrasted with a closely related analysis offered by Harry Frankfurt in his essay "On the Usefulness of Final Ends"¹³⁷ and further developed in his recent book, *The Reasons of Love*.¹³⁸ Frankfurt's concern, like Frankl's, is with what makes an agent's life meaningful, not in the third-personal sense of indicating or representing something to others, nor in the consequentialist sense of having a major impact

on the world, but rather in the essentially first-personal sense of being experienced as significant by the agent living it.¹³⁹

More clearly than Frankl, Frankfurt recognizes that while it is good for life to have this kind of existential significance, this is not the only important good, since a life that is meaningful to its agent could still be unhappy or evil.¹⁴⁰ Still, the meaningfulness a person finds in her life is a very important good that depends, in Frankfurt's view, on (1) how important the goals of her activities seem to her; and (2) whether she finds the means to her ends or the activities involved in pursuing them intrinsically interesting and well suited to her personality. This shows that the meaning-value of *working toward* a final end is more than the terminal value of the state of affairs sought as the final end, and this surplus may be realized even when the end is not achieved:

when is activity important to a person? It is important to him only when he is devoted to something that he cares about. Thus a person's life is meaningful only if he spends it, to some considerable extent, in activity that is devoted to things that he cares about. It is not essential that the activity he devotes to the things he cares about be successful. The extent to which life is meaningful depends less upon how much it accomplishes than upon how it is lived.¹⁴¹

Thus Frankfurt rejects the traditional view that "the only value that a final end necessarily possesses for us, simply in virtue of the fact that it is a final end, must be identical with the value for us of the state of affairs which we bring about when we attain that end." For having and pursuing final ends gives personal meaning to our activities, which is an existential value distinct from that attained in the end.¹⁴² In some cases, the quest itself is so rewarding that we are almost sad when the end has been attained and the journey toward it is over.

The distinction to which Frankfurt is drawing attention here is the one that I have characterized as the difference between the *product*-value of end E and the derivative values realized in pursuing and possibly achieving E (existential meaning, challenge, solidarity with others involved, self-esteem, etc.). Simply for heuristic purposes, I summarize these relations in the following schema:

$$\begin{array}{l} (\text{Agent } A \rightarrow E) \Rightarrow M \\ \perp \\ V \end{array}$$

where \rightarrow indicates intention, \Rightarrow indicates efficient causation, and \perp indicates a grounding relation of rational support.

In this schema, agent A intends E as a final end, and this is grounded by E's terminal value V, and pursuing E for this reason causes personal meaning (M) and other goods in A's life. I have argued that A's motive for intending E must be projective where V is an agent-transcending value; for M is an effect on A that derives from pursuing E on the basis of V (or having E among his active final ends) rather than part of E. I have also suggested that such existential meaningfulness is not itself a directly targetable goal; it can be pursued effectively only by looking for objective grounds for caring or seeking out realizable values worth caring about that supply reasons for projecting final ends.

Frankfurt instead takes this distinction as a reason to question the traditional relation between "instrumental value" and "terminal value," and the "fundamental asymmetry" between means and ends in Aristotle's moral psychology. He summarizes Aristotle's position as follows:

[First,] A means derives its instrumental value from the relationship in which it stands to its end, but an end derives no value from the relationship between itself and the means to it. . . . [Second,] A means derives no terminal value from being useful. . . . Of course, what has instrumental value may have terminal value as well. But it cannot have the latter by virtue of the fact that it has the former.¹⁴³

Frankfurt believes that this Aristotelian approach is too "impersonal," since it "diverts attention from the fact that every end is the end of an agent" and plays a complex role in her life.¹⁴⁴ Human agents posit ends, Frankfurt says, not just for their terminal value but also so that their activities (and thus their life) can be meaningful for them.¹⁴⁵ This suggests, in terms of my schema above, that end E can be chosen in part for the sake of M:

Final ends are possible states of affairs, which someone values for their own sakes. It must not be supposed that the measure of how a life is lived is given by the value of his final ends. Rather, how a life is lived is a function of what it is like for the person to *pursue* them. The problem of selecting final ends is not the same, then, as the problem of measuring the inherent or terminal value of possible states of affairs. . . . The goals that it would be most desirable to achieve are not necessarily those that it would be best to seek.

This is not only because there are differences in the probabilities and in the cost of attaining various goals. It is also because there are differences in the kinds of activities, and in the patterns of activity, by which various final ends may be pursued.¹⁴⁶

In other words, the required means to a final end have a lot to do with the existential value of pursuing that end. For example, Frankfurt suggests

it is possible that pursuit of some highly noble end might (for a particular individual in his circumstances) require very little challenging activity, whereas pursuit of a different end with more modest product-value "might require invigoratingly complicated and wholehearted attention" that "would fill the person's life with meaning and purpose."¹⁴⁷ I agree that the fulfillment an agent gains from pursuing worthwhile ends is partly a function of her means to that end (including relationships involved and necessary preparations), and that considerations about the means can function as reasons for taking up a final end E that do not focus on the product-value of E. This is one species of what I will call *process-focused* grounds for projecting ends. E's existential value, or the meaningfulness of pursuing it, is in part a function of these important considerations about the processes by which E can be sought.¹⁴⁸

Yet, as the title of his article indicates, Frankfurt instead concludes that final ends have a kind of "instrumental value" for making life meaningful: "our final ends derive a certain instrumental value from the very fact that they are terminally valuable."¹⁴⁹ This is a category mistake like the one that leads to the paradox of eudaimonism: meaning is construed as an embracing end that we desire (or existential boredom becomes the object of an embracing aversion), and we choose final ends because of their "instrumental value" as a *means* to this end of leading a meaningful life. Frankfurt repeats this view in his lectures on love: "Despite the air of paradox, we may fairly say that final ends are instrumentally valuable just because they are terminally valuable"; for example, the lover cares about his beloved "for its own sake," but in addition "what he loves necessarily possesses an instrumental value for him, in virtue of the fact that it is a necessary condition of his enjoying the inherently important activity of loving it."¹⁵⁰

Frankfurt clearly senses the tension in this proposed solution, for he asks us to consider

a man who tells a woman that his love for her is what gives meaning and value to his life. Loving her, he says, is for him the only thing that makes living worthwhile. . . . From his declaration that loving her fulfills a deep need of his life, she will surely not conclude that he is making use of her.¹⁵¹

Assuming that this man is sincere, Frankfurt is surely correct—but only because the woman will understand that the existential value that loving her contributes to the man's life is primarily a concomitant effect of devotion to her rather than *the motive* for his attention to her and his concern for her well-being. For if she thought the latter, she *would* feel used, like a mere ornament in the man's narcissistic (and self-deceiving) project of constructing and maintaining an image of himself as a loving being. Frankfurt seems both to recognize this point yet to obscure it:

The appearance of conflict between pursuing one's own interests and being selflessly devoted to the interests of another is dispelled once we appreciate that what serves the self-interest of the lover is nothing other than his selflessness. It is only if his love is genuine, needless to say, that it can have the importance for him that loving entails. . . . Accordingly, the benefit of loving accrues to a person only to the extent that he cares about his beloved disinterestedly, and not for the sake of any benefit that he may derive either from the beloved or from loving it.¹⁵²

While correct, this last sentence surely implies that the loving agent is *not* pursuing his own interest (even if his volitional state does in fact promote it); therefore the conflict is *not* resolved. Frankfurt's phrasing suggests that his analysis gives comfort to eudaimonism, when really it does not.¹⁵³ There is also something misleading in Frankfurt's interesting and closely related argument that because "living a meaningful life is important to us for its own sake, useful activity possesses for us not merely instrumental value but terminal value as well."¹⁵⁴ As Frankfurt explains, his point is not just Aristotle's idea that "activities may be desired as final ends and not merely as means to ends other than themselves." Of course activities themselves can be desired as ends because of their "intrinsic character." But "Aristotle does not recognize that [activities] may possess terminal value precisely because they are instrumentally valuable,"¹⁵⁵ that is, because they are experienced as meaningful work that helps produce an end whose realization is valuable for its own sake.

Frankfurt's point could be expressed by saying that there is a unique form of terminal value that attaches to the very *pursuit* of many ends; thus "it is inherently important for us to engage in activity that is devoted to advancing our goals," even aside from the product-value of the goals themselves.¹⁵⁶ This is the intrinsic existential value that useful activities have independently of the value of the ends that define these activities. Existential value in this sense is unlike the terminal value that activities can have for Aristotle when they constitute an intrinsic good. For even those activities that are only means to such goods rather than constituting part of the human good still have Frankfurt's existential value above and beyond the product-value of the ends when achieved. This is an insightful response to Aristotle but it neglects to mention that when an activity acquires such terminal existential value because it is at least partially constituted by disinterested commitment to the final end, the agent cannot choose this activity as a *means* to such existential value, or initially be moved by erosiac desire for such existential value.

In general, Frankfurt misses the fact that not all terminal value is targetable and what generates nontargetable terminal value should not be described as *useful* for causing such nontintended by-product value. His analysis conflates the existential value of final ends (their power to provide an object for meaningful endeavor) with a kind of instrumental value and thus reinscribes caring within precisely the eudaimonist framework that he has criticized as leading to an inadequate picture of selfhood. The traditional distinction between ends and means may be inadequate, but the problem is not solved by blending them. Considering process-focused grounds for taking up a final end E—such as how interesting the means involved in the task may be or how pursuit of E is likely to affect one's character—cannot amount to regarding the whole process of *pursuing E as final* as what we ordinarily call a *means* to a separate end. As I argue in chapter 7, even when our final end is itself an activity involving the pursuit of other things, the terminal value of this activity for the sake of which it could be intrinsically desirable is quite distinct from the *derivative* benefits of taking the activity as final. Potentials for meaning, interesting work, full employment of one's talents, or fulfilling engagement with a diverse range of goods operate here *neither* as ends nor as means but, rather, as *grounds* for willing both the final end and its requisite means. The introduction of this third term allows us to solve the problems that Frankfurt identifies in the traditional Aristotelian doctrine.

So while I agree with Frankfurt that the process of pursuing final ends can add to the agent's life a kind of value distinct from anything the agent believes to be inherent in the end-state pursued, I deny that *desire* for this agent-related value can be what moves the agent to set and strive for such ends. Her own will must motivate the agent if her effort is to generate the highest kinds of existential value for her own life. Another way of saying this is that if they are not to be self-defeating, agent-relative process-focused considerations can enter into the selection of final ends only as *grounds for projecting them*, not as attractors that cause an appetite for the pursuit of these ends. When they function as grounds, such process-focused considerations are not already operative as *motives*; hence they cannot compete with any other motive for pursuing the relevant end for its own sake. Moreover, they can serve as agent-relative grounds for projection only *in conjunction* with more agent-neutral grounds focused on the product-value of the final end. For recognizing that a final end has some terminal value that could justify anyone projecting it is quite consistent with judging that the pursuit of this end is also supported by considerations concerning what this project would be like in a particular individual's life, given his circumstances, history, other projects, and so on.

Hence I argue that the sort of consideration to which Frankfurt draws attention in this part of his work in fact helps explain why, contra Frankfurt's own position, caring is grounded on objective reasons. Our projected life goals can give meaning to our lives only because they are grounded by our awareness of values that are *important to care about* independently of their power to satisfy preferences, contribute to our eudaimonia, or make life interesting. I defend this "objectivist thesis" in chapter 14.

7. Self-Esteem as By-Product

At this point, we might imagine some contemporary psychologists counter-arguing that a meaningful life in Frankl's sense is motivated by the ultimate or embracing desire for strong "self-esteem." For it seems that a sense that our life is worth living must involve some positive evaluation of our own character and social roles. But we must be wary of conflating existential meaning with other reflexive psychic states, especially when their concepts have several senses. If self-esteem is simply a matter of achieving one's goals whatever they are, then anyone with very low self-expectations could achieve it through meeting his very modest targets. Conversely, someone who demands much of herself for worthy ends may enjoy a rich sense of meaning in her endeavors even while remaining frustrated by lack of adequate accomplishment. After all, some endeavors may be worthwhile even though there is very little real chance of attaining the goal; for example, counseling death-row inmates to come to terms with their lives and themselves; doing everything possible to save or comfort a terminally ill child; trying to broker peace in the Middle East; or running for president in the United States on a platform of social justice, financial sacrifice for the common good, separation of church and state, and a new federation of democracies with our allies. There is a superlative kind of self-esteem that would come from succeeding at any of these tasks, but it is not based on reasonable expectations of oneself. Not all kinds of "self-esteem" should be important to us, nor are all forms of it that are inherently valuable also directly targetable.

"Self-esteem" is often recommended as a crucial goal by therapists to their patients, by teachers to students, and by parents to children. In moral theory, a number of thinkers follow Rawls in treating "a sense of our own self-worth" as both a human good (something it is rational for all persons with a rational life plan to want) and as a "primary good" (or precondition for carrying out rational life plans) for the purposes of determining basic justice.¹⁵⁷ For example, as Joel Anderson explains, Alex Honneth develops from Hegel a conception of ethical life in which individual autonomy "depends crucially on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem," all of which require "recognition by others whom one also recognizes."¹⁵⁸ I am sympathetic with Honneth's analysis, but it also points to

important distinctions. For example, while he treats "self-respect" as a matter of possessing universal dignity shared with all persons, he understands "self-esteem" as involving "a sense of what makes one special, unique, and (in Hegel's terms) 'particular'" in a valuable way.¹⁵⁹ As this suggests, we need to distinguish between at least four different kinds of positive self-regarding attitudes:

1. The first derives from social recognition of our *constitutive status* as a competent moral agent capable of responsible action, or as a person capable of forming and pursuing a conception of her good, or as a citizen capable of exercising rights, and so on.¹⁶⁰
2. The second derives from other people (our caregivers first and foremost) believing in our innate and acquired *abilities* to do things that should earn us respect and recognition over and above what we deserve merely as competent agents and rights-bearers.¹⁶¹
3. The third, when reality-based, derives from actually *doing* these things; it thus depends on the desert or merits we *may* or *may not* acquire by our choices, efforts, and projects. Since these merits arise from accomplishments measured on some *absolute* scale of excellence (whether discounted relative to individual abilities and circumstance or not), in principle everyone could acquire high merits and the reflexive attitude that properly depends on them.
4. The fourth kind of positive self-evaluation properly depends instead on merits defined *comparatively* according to the differences between individual accomplishments as measured absolutely in 3. Merits of this last kind cannot even in principle be achieved equally by all.¹⁶²

Since usage is fluid in this area, it does not matter much what labels we give to the different kinds of positive self-regard that arise in these four ways. I will call the first "basic self-respect," or a sense of our "intrinsic dignity," and the second "faith in ourselves," or confidence in our own potential. The third, which I call "self-honor," or pride in our accomplishments measured absolutely, comes closest to Aristotelian "magnanimity" (see chap. 7, sec. 5). The fourth, which I have already called the "desire for superiority status" and "pride in distinction" (chap. 10, sect. 2.4), has an important place in human life but is also dangerous; the desire for this kind of pride is what Hobbes calls "glory" and what Nietzsche celebrates as the will to ascendance over others.

Now, it is clear that if a child's "self-esteem" or "positive self-image" refers to either justified self-honor or pride in distinction as defined here, it is irrational to try to produce it directly. For unless they are to rest entirely

on illusions about oneself, these kinds of self-esteem must be mainly by-products of activities undertaken for reasons *other than* building self-esteem. Hence it is not surprising that one study of 642 college freshmen by Jennifer Crocker of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research found that students trying to improve their looks or get good grades for the sake of self-esteem were more likely to become frustrated and experience anxiety—thus lowering their confidence in themselves. "An obsession with external markers of self-worth, Dr. Crocker believes, leads to self-absorption," and this "focus on the self" is also off-putting to others.¹⁶³ Frankl's existential approach seems like a plausible solution to this common neurosis: what is needed is *more will directed outward at worthwhile causes, relationships, works, and ideals*. It is hoped that pride in genuine accomplishment will follow.

Rawls's conception of "self-respect (or self-esteem)," which combines what I have labeled "self-honor" and "confidence in oneself," has the same implication. For he describes its two aspects as follows:

it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. . . . It is clear why self-respect is a primary good. Without it, nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, *we lack the will to strive for them*.¹⁶⁴

Rawls is not concerned to explain how this striving will functions, but he thinks it is undermined both by a lack of worthwhile goals and by pervasive social impediments that make it impossible to pursue worthwhile projects. In this first respect, self-esteem is clearly dependent on the goods that are available for the agent to care about. Like Honneth, Rawls also thinks that this requires some level of interpersonal recognition of the value of our life goals and activities; in addition to internal coherence, it requires "finding our person and deeds appreciated and confirmed by others who are likewise esteemed and their association enjoyed."¹⁶⁵ Like Frankl's analysis, this suggests that the goods we care about must have a kind of objectivity, although Rawls rejects the strong objectivity of perfectionist doctrines of excellence.¹⁶⁶

Rawls's student Thomas Hill, Jr., develops this idea beyond moral self-respect. He argues that in addition to basic respect of oneself as a moral agent, some people develop respectable nonmoral standards, values, or goals for their lives, whereas others lack "a sense of minimum non-moral standards."¹⁶⁷ It is possible for a person in the latter category to satisfy basic deontic moral requirements yet think and act wantonly within these limits.

By contrast, a person in the former category cares deeply about values beyond respecting basic moral rights and feels self-contempt in violating these values. Hill summarizes: "This form of self-respect would require that one develop and live by a set of personal standards by which one is prepared to judge oneself even if they are not extended to others."¹⁶⁸ Let us label this fifth kind of positive self-regarding attitude *ethical seriousness*. A person who is ethically serious has a more demanding scale on which to judge herself than a person who is not.

On Frankl's account, once again, this kind of self-respect is also derivative from identifying worthwhile objects of attention and concern and devoting oneself passionately to them. For example, someone fully engaged in a practice in MacIntyre's sense would obviously derive some appreciation of her own ethical seriousness as an agent from this. Moreover, like Rawls, Hill recognizes that needed for values and standards broadly ethical self-respect cannot be selected arbitrarily but must have significance for others too. For one can *lack* respect for oneself as an ethically serious agent in at least three different ways: (1) by remaining wanton; (2) by setting respectable standards and goals but failing to live by them; and (3) by setting standards that one recognizes as arbitrary or caring about values that one sees as insufficiently important. In this last case, "It is as if one's interests, projects, and plans seem worthless even to oneself."¹⁶⁹ If this negative self-judgment is justified, then this constitutes one kind of noögenic neurosis in Frankl's sense. The best therapy is to care more devotedly about more valuable goals and ideals—a topic that I explore further in chapters 13 and 14.

8. Willed Carelessness: Emily Fox Gordon's Case

Frankl's central point that certain kinds of self-absorption can block passionate devotion to self-transcending ends or block volitional investment of the self in intrinsically rewarding activities goes a long way toward explaining one especially revealing kind of noögenic neurosis, in which the agent quite intentionally avoids the volitional effort required for any ambitious undertaking. For illustration of this neurosis, we might turn to Dostoyevsky's Underground Man or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. But since they receive variant interpretations—and so many different diagnoses of Hamlet's "problem" are possible—a less ambiguous autobiographical case will serve better.

In a shockingly self-critical piece on her personality as a writer, Emily Fox Gordon begins, "I am a gormless woman. My life has been characterized by an extreme and pervasive failure of agency."¹⁷⁰ Coming from the best-selling author of *The Mockingbird Years*, this is a little hard to believe at

first. But she proves her point by describing how, into her thirties, she cultivated disengagement from her own life and a snobbish disdain for others happily engaged in theirs—such as Marcy, the chupper wife of a fellow graduate student. On Marcy's hokey calendar, plans were listed in detail (and with obvious zest for life) for each day of the current month, accompanied by absurdly enthusiastic cartoons drawn by Marcy and her husband.¹⁷¹ Perhaps this calendar so filled with tasks and interests got to Gordon because it represented the kind of planning described by Michael Bratman as extending "beyond simple purposive agency" to deeper commitments.¹⁷²

Gordon admits that she defaced this calendar during a party at Marcy's house while making fun of the calendar with friends. She diagnoses the "vehemence" of her reaction as due to the existential challenge she sensed in Marcy's down-to-earth Midwestern spontaneity: "Marcy's proactive grip on her life called into question my own attitude of fatalistic detachment. . . . I was forced to ask myself a painful question: If she cared so much about her life, how was it that I could care so little about mine?"¹⁷³ Her approach to life had been the opposite of Marcy's: she had tried to "avoid acknowledging any ambition or aspiration" in order to "stay potential" and avoid any commitments that would fix significant aspects of her future. This attitude, which Kierkegaard called aestheticism, Gordon figures as follows: "Nor would I allow myself to inhabit my life fully. Instead, I'd stand waiting in the doorway, half in, half out."¹⁷⁴ Gordon finally discovered the personal essay as the genre best suited to her temperament, because it allowed lengthy introspection, irony, and taking the stance of passive observer toward one's own experiences. "Unproblematically self-assured types" like Marcy would not make good essayists, but self-tortured aesthetes like Kafka would. This essay form "granted me the paradoxical authority of self-deprecation."¹⁷⁵

As Frankl's theory predicts, Gordon found that when circumstances finally gave her the chance to write her memoir, and she had to focus on this task rather than on her own psyche, it was fulfilling: "Having a job to do, and a limited time to do it in reminded me of my pregnancy twelve years earlier—I felt the same sense of being pulled towards the future."¹⁷⁶ She ought to have tried this earlier since, as her memoir tells, she already recognized that undergoing too much traditional psychotherapy in her adolescence had been destructive because it encouraged morose self-involvement, and she was saved, interestingly, by the "anti-psychiatric psychoanalyst Leslie Farber"¹⁷⁷ (whose ideas on unwilling states of character and self-defeating ways of pursuing them were among Jon Elster's chief inspirations—see chap. 5, sec. 2.4). But by Gordon's own account, the work of writing her

autobiography was not enough to overcome her essential barrier to meaningful engagement in life. Since this book itself focuses on her adolescent years in self-studying therapy, it marginalized her more modest adult activities: "my studies; my motherhood; my marriage; the pleasures, pains, and struggles of my daily life" were all consigned to obscurity in the memoir.¹⁷⁸

In her *American Scholar* essay, Gordon diagnoses this as part of her continuing failure to value her role as participant in ordinary daily activities; instead, she tended to value speculative reflection on herself—even on her own disillusionment with therapy and its inward focus.¹⁷⁹ Thus acknowledging the regret she felt in Marcy's kitchen more clearly recognizes the need for existential engagement than the memoir did: there "it occurred to me that there was something to be said for planning to make a life instead of planning to make a story of my life."¹⁸⁰ Her conclusion is both poignant and philosophically significant:

What was I regretting as I stood in her kitchen? Almost everything: I regretted the way I had exiled myself as an observer rather than a participant, regretted the exceptionalism I had used to console myself since childhood. . . . How many times have I comforted myself with the old saw about how the unexamined life is not worth living? In Marcy's kitchen it occurred to me that the reverse might well be truer—that the un-lived life is not worth examining.¹⁸¹

This response to Socrates could serve as the motto for my new version of existentialism, as long as we remember (as I noted in discussing Elster) that authenticity still requires something more than totally unreflective spontaneity, which only leads to wantonness. Instead it requires a kind of practical self-critique and volitional self-control that seeks existential coherence while avoiding the self-defeating aspects of speculative and introspective evasions. And this will always require commitments regarding our own character that cannot be followed through merely by *writing an essay*, however sincere. Notice that having written a memoir that was itself largely a reflection on the dangers of too much therapeutic reflection-on-self, Gordon went on to critique her memoir as inauthentic, but she did this by writing *another* self-reflective essay about the process of writing a memoir and its seductions.¹⁸² In other words, she achieved *fourth-order* reflection on the possibilities of self-deception in reflecting on the dangers of therapeutic reflection! Even Proust never managed this feat.

Gordon does not tell us *to what* concrete purposes she will now commit herself, although her studies, her relationship with her spouse, and her relationship with her children are possible candidates. An abstract resolve to form some commitment or other will not work, as Frankl's analysis implies—we need to let ourselves encounter values that transcend us in their

alterity, because *particular* commitments are a response to values that strike us independently of our will. We cannot have such an I-Thou encounter with meaningful values simply in writing an essay about our existential regrets; that is still too reflexive an activity.¹⁸³ As an emotion, regret at most opens us up to encountering values that we might positively embrace in willed resolve. (That important values may sometimes only be discoverable this way at least implies that a life without any regrets may be condemned to a certain ignorance and should not be regarded as an ideal). Regret over ignoring or rejecting worthwhile goods is thus a possible *ground* for projecting more concrete goals involving these values, as long as one does not *wallow* in regret. As the saying goes, if you feel sorry, *do something* to make amends.

9. Willed Inferiority: Sartre

Whereas Gordon willed her state of noncommitment or aesthetic wantonness, there are (probably) even more dramatic cases in which *dissatisfaction* *itself* is the agent's primary goal. In such cases, lack, deficiency, and incompleteness would become final ends (not so that the agent could consume more, as Plato's Callicles imagined, but just so that she would be punished for her self-perceived inadequacies). In such an intended purpose, where the opposite of fulfillment is the goal, virtually by definition the motive must be non-erotic: such a goal could only be projected. For example, consider Sartre's argument, against Nietzsche's reduction of all motivation to "will to power," that "We can choose ourselves as fleeing, inapprehensible, as indecisive."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Sartre argues that an "inferiority complex" consists at bottom in the will to take one's being-for-others as a basis for self-abhorrence:

the inferiority that is felt and lived is the chosen instrument to make us comparable to a *thing*. . . . But it is evident that it must be lived in accordance with the *nature* which we confer on it by this choice—*i.e.*, in shame, anger, and bitterness. Thus to *choose* inferiority does not mean to be sweetly contented with an *aura médiocritas*; it is to produce and assume the rebellion and despair which constitute the revelation of this inferiority. For example, I can persist in manifesting myself in a certain kind of employment *because* I am inferior in it. . . . It is this fruitless effort which I have chosen, simply because it is fruitless—either because I prefer to be the last rather than to be lost in the mass or because I have chosen discouragement and shame as the best means of attaining *being*.¹⁸⁵

Such a project is paradoxical because it requires the agent to project a recognizable task or role such as being a great artist (and strive to achieve

it) yet to select such a goal *because* it guarantees failure. The project becomes a mere means for the agent to prove her worthlessness or lack of merit. Such a state is no mere expression of "infantile dependency." Rather, it is one manifestation of what Izenberg calls "a will to unfreedom or self-abnegation."¹⁸⁶

If it really is possible for an agent to be so motivated, then she clearly cannot *desire* her inferiority in any orektic sense. Nor could her problem be a separate second-order desire to experience *unsatisfied* desires for approval and success, because as we have seen, second-order desire must be independent of the satisfaction or *frustration* of the first-order desires to which it refers. Sartre's agent does not even want any second-order satisfaction in being regarded as inferior; ironically, her aim would be stymied if she were happy as a by-product of attaining it.

Sartre imagines an existential ground for such a project that is perhaps intelligible: the agent is desperate enough to see inferiority as a viable way to be assured of *some* definite meaning in her life, some individual *distinctness*, no matter what the cost in happiness. In addition, we might suggest as grounds for such a project that after years of neglect and abuse by others or the failure to develop ambitions she can earnestly pursue in good faith, the agent decides in self-hatred that the only thing to which she can devote her whole self with all her volitional capacity is the denial of her value as a person and the denigration of her agency—and *better this than nothing!* In this way, she will spite those who destroyed her hopes or discouraged her, or she will punish herself for past failures.

If Kant is right, then the volitional capacity that this agent engages to will her own worthlessness also inevitably expresses its own inherent value in the very process of motivating her to strive for her perverse goal. This implies a kind of pragmatic contradiction in the existential project of inferiority. For the ground or basis for her projection is the importance of some meaning rather than none, or the value of individual expression via existential projection rather than pure passivity, and this seems to commit the agent to the inherent value of her own will. But the specific content of her goal is to deny this value.¹⁸⁷ The will to inferiority is therefore self-contradictory in the sense that violates the categorical imperative and it can also be regarded as a form of radical evil, or willed cruelty to persons. It is directed inwardly at the self rather than outwardly at others, as in the forms of radical evil I discussed in chapter 10.

Perhaps this kind of self-hatred is often connected with a malign will toward others; perhaps some agents who define themselves in terms of despising others cannot believe themselves capable of more positive contributions or relationships. Since they do not believe themselves capable of

willing genuine goods, in despair they throw themselves into evil purposes instead.

Conclusion

At this point, we have identified the objective status and alterity of values or practical reasons that can serve as grounds for projecting related ends. We have also identified some particular examples of such values or reasons serving as a basis for projective willing: for example, in the good will to justice or duty and (oppositely) in the various forms of radical evil, willed carelessness, and the will to inferiority. These are all states of the existential striving will with strong moral properties, ranging from moral virtue to extreme moral corruption. In between, however, there is a large range of projective endeavors that are morally neutral (in the narrow deontic sense), being morally permissible within limits required by justice, but which have broader ethical significance arising from nonmoral values to which they respond.

In chapter 8, I suggested that we find grounds for engaging in practices in aesthetic values, theoretical values of knowledge, and other social goods, while we find grounds for engaging in friendship in the values of individual personalities and character on the basis of which we commit ourselves to friendships. In the next two chapters, I return to this question of broadly ethical or non-deontic grounds for projective willing. We will see that the existential theory of striving will requires not only a conception of the right but also a conception of the good.