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# REPLY TO RALPH WEDGWOOD

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ralph Wedgwood has posed a number of important questions concerning the discussion of normative authority that runs through Part III of *Facts, Values, and Norms*. His questions all deserve answers, though in reply I must confine my reply principally to two issues: the means/end principle as a presupposition of practical inquiry, and the character of normative force.

## 2. THE MEANS/END PRINCIPLE

Wedgwood correctly identifies the 'non-hypothetical' practical principle I see as lying behind even so-called 'hypothetical imperatives', namely, a requirement of means/end coherence. As I see it, the means/end principle is very catholic. It is not committed to the standard of maximization. Nor is it restricted to causal ways in which means promote ends — it encompasses as well ways in which an act can *realize* or *express* an end. Accordingly, the means/end principle has no special affinity with consequentialism or a purely 'production-oriented' (*poedic*) conception of morality, and is an integral part of both Aristotelian and Kantian theories of practical reason.

The means/end principle is a *coherence* condition of the form $\mathbf{O}\text{~}[E \ \& \ \text{~}M]$, which applies regardless of the content of one's ends (i.e., is *non-hypothetical*) yet does not authorize detachment of a practical conclusion (i.e., is *non-categorical*).[1] It imposes a discipline on practical agents similar to that

imposed on theoretical reasoners by the requirement of logi-
cal consistency − if $p$ implies $q$, then $\mathbf{O}$~[Bel($p$) & Bel(~$q$)].
And just as a reasoner can avoid logical inconsistency either
by accepting both $p$ and $q$ or by rejecting $p$ if he rejects $q$, an
agent can avoid practical incoherence either by adopting $M$ if
she holds $E$, or by revising $E$ if she will not to perform $M$.

Wedgwood and I agree that means/end coherence and logi-
cal consistency are not 'constitutive' of the mental states of
having goals or beliefs. No norms would be needed to enforce
conceptual or metaphysical necessities. Lapses in means/end
coherence and logical consistency, in contrast, are a familiar
part of everyday life and play a crucial role in our capacity to
learn. An agent can become disaffected with an end when she
finds herself increasingly unable to stomach the means it re-
quires, and a believer's confident preconception can be under-
mined from within when experience yields incompatible
perceptions that he cannot successfully explain away.

We can learn through lapses in coherence because we feel a
normative pressure to restore coherence. The capacity to feel
such pressure is part of the general psychological backdrop
that enables individuals to have beliefs with determinate con-
tent and to act with definite purposes − indeed, to be capable
of reasoning and be worth reasoning with. It is thus a key
part of our capacity to exercise meaningful self-regulation
and rational self-guidance. Thus far, I think, Wedgwood and
I agree.

### 3.  GARY'S PRESUPPOSITIONS

Turn now to the independent-minded student, Gary, who
asks, "Why should I conform to the standards of reason laid
down by the philosophers we've studied?" Assume that Gary
is the kind of person one can reason with, and raises his
question in earnest. Does he thereby betray deference to any
practical norms? In my original paper, I suggested that Gary
implicitly defers to a Low Brow principle of means/end
coherence. Wedgwood correctly points out that Gary need
not be assuming anything quite so definite, and offers his

own suggestion of a practical commitment Gary's challenge presupposes rather than calls into question.

If Gary is sincere in presenting himself as an agent in search of reasons, Wedgwood argues, then he must "presuppose the normative authority" of the practical *should* that figures in his query. That is, he must allow that a correct answer to his question, if one could be given, would settle for him the question "What to do?" ('other things equal,' of course − again, we treat this as understood). Let us grant that the practical *should* is committal in this way, and attribute to Gary sincere and competent use of it.

Now, imagine that Gary has been convinced to accept a standard, *S*, as correct. Following Wedgwood, we can say that he thereby agrees that it is settled that complying with *S* is the thing for him to do. Gary has, effectively, committed himself to the *policy* of conforming to *S* (compare Bratman, 2000). According to this policy, Gary is to act in accord with *S* in an open-ended range of circumstances. If, in some circumstance *C*, conformity with *S* would calls for taking means *M*, then Gary's policy tells him to perform *M* in *C* − for him, at least, the question of what to do in *C* is settled. But what if Gary balks at this, protesting that the means/end principle is a *further* policy, one of which he would still need convincing even after accepting *S*? A Tortoise-like regress threatens. If it were a further policy, *P*, then Gary could cheerfully accept *P* as well, while leaving open the question whether he is committed to taking those acts required to bring about compliance with *it*. Better to say that practical commitment to a policy is incomplete to the extent that it does not bring with it commitment to the indispensable means of compliance. As Thomas Nagel writes: "Reasons are transmitted across the relation between ends and means" (1970, p. 33). If Gary has a problem with the idea of enacting the indispensable means *M* of complying with *S*, then this is a problem about making the initial commitment to *S*, not a problem brought on by an independent principle.

The contribution of means/end reasoning to making the practical *should* genuinely practical explains why a means/end

principle is at least part of the story of practical reason on nearly everyone's account, and why Instrumentalism has (misleadingly) struck so many as uncontroversial.

## 4. NORMATIVE FORCE

Freely formed beliefs, goals, policies, and intentions involve commitment, which is to say, a kind of unfreedom. Suppose that I am initially agnostic about $q$. If I happen freely to examine the question whether $p$ and $(p \rightarrow q)$, and make up my mind that both are true, then unless I go back on those commitments, I have cast my lot with the world being such as $q$ − like it or not, either $\sim q$ is wrong or I am. This kind of unfreedom with respect to $q$ is neither physical nor metaphysical − I do not lose my freedom to err. Rather, it is *normative*. Situations of this kind display a blending of force and freedom which I take to be typical of the domain of normative self-regulation.[2] Suppose, then, that I recognize the logical implication, feel its bearing on whether I can avoid commitment to $q$, and decide in light of all my evidence to overcome any reservations I have about $q$ and accept it rather than reject $p$ or $(p \rightarrow q)$. This looks like a paradigm case of normative guidance via 'the force of argument'. Yet, as Wedgwood notes, I claim in the book that argument alone cannot afford a complete model for understanding normative force, even in the domain of theoretical reason and even if (as Wedgwood suggests) the notion of an argument is enlarged to include a variety of non-deductive forms of reasoning. Why, according to me, isn't argument enough?

   Arguments themselves are logical entities, not inferences or claims about what *ought* to be inferred from what. We use arguments as models for our inferences and *ought* claims because we believe that arguments encode information about relations of normative epistemic significance, such as implication, evidential support, and consistency.[3] However, whenever we deploy an argument on behalf of an *ought*, we draw upon sources of authority beyond the argument itself. Absent commitment to the argument's premises and deference to its

rules, the argument by itself can exert no authority over our minds to 'force' us to accept the conclusion.[4] To be a Bayesian is not to accept Bayes' Rule merely as a theorem of the probability calculus, but as a guide to *appropriate* revision of one's credence in response to evidence. The slogan for all this could be: *Commitment out? − Commitment in.*

Returning to Wedgwood's question: perhaps these input commitments can be seen as themselves the upshot of prior argument? In the case of epistemic commitments arising from perceptual experience, Wedgwood urges that the argument form:

(A)    From 'It appears to me as if $q$' infer '$q$'

is epistemically legitimate. Grant this, but now we need the premise 'It appears to me as if $q$'. Call that $p$. How to arrive at $p$ by means of an argument? We might try another application of (A): it appears to me (introspecting my occurrent experience) as if $p$, so $p$. Yet now an argument is needed for the introspective report 'It appears to me as if $p$'. Is regress blocked at this point because introspective reports are 'self-evidencing'? But 'self-evidence' is not a matter of feeling the force of argument − it is a claim of authority without argument. Similar problems arise if we attempt to justify the rules of logic via 'the force of argument'. We face potential regress or rule-circularity, or end up helping ourselves to authority by speaking of 'self-evidence' or 'stipulation'. More generally, in order to feel the normative force of an argument we must already credit ourselves with some authority on matters of self-continuity, memory, and the contents of our own thought and experience. Were I to lose this basic trust in my own faculties, from what could I derive it? − Certainly the fact that something appeared self-evident *to me* could yield no conviction. *Given* some measure of underived self-trust, I can question my faculties piecemeal by means of failures of corroboration, or strengthen my initial confidence in them by means of induction. No particular element of self-trust must remain wholly fixed or indubitable throughout such questioning and learning. In this sense, then, I am happy to accept

Wedgwood's claim that "perhaps all of our beliefs can be de-
fended − at least retrospectively − by means of ... good argu-
ments." Not because we can defend them by arguments *ex
nihilo*, but because, for familiar holistic reasons, we can seek
corroboration or evidence for, or subject to critique, any ele-
ment of our beliefs in light of the rest. Feeling the force of an
argument is a very real thing − we all know how inconve-
nient and uncomfortable it can sometimes be. I have been
urging that it involves something quite unlike a rule or an
argument, namely, a sentiment − default trust. This is no rea-
son to reject inferential rules like Wedgwood's (A) or deny
their potential authority. The sense of competition is mis-
placed: one and the same thought-process can be following
rule (A), feeling the force of argument, and being guided by
underived sentiment.[5]

## NOTES

[1] Where $E$ is an end and $M$ an indispensable means, $\mathbf{O}[\ \_\_\_\ ]$ is the
objective *ought*, and 'other things equal' is understood. Note that this
principle is distinct from Instrumentalism, $E \rightarrow \mathbf{O}[M]$, and from (what we
might call) *Ought* Entrainment, $\mathbf{O}[E] \rightarrow \mathbf{O}[M]$.

[2] Here is Kant on the subject: "The consciousness of a *free* submission
of the will to the law, yet as combined with the unavoidable constraint
put on all inclinations though only by one's own reason, is respect for the
law." (Kant, 1788, 5:80). Wedgwood challenges my account of Kant on
respect for the law and the normativity of morality, which gives a basic
role to 'moral feeling'. He argues that "our susceptibility to moral feeling
*follows from* our being subject to the moral law" owing exclusively to the
fact of our *freedom*. Therefore, he argues, this susceptibility cannot ex-
plain or ground our being subject to the moral law. Is this at odds with
my claim that, according to Kant, "we must look for a 'feeling of a spe-
cial kind', not obligation, at the bottom of moral duty"? Here are two of
the passages in Kant I had in mind, one from the *Metaphysics of Morals*,
the other from the second *Critique*:

Respect (*reverentia*) [for the moral law] is, again, something merely sub-
jective, a feeling of a special kind, not a judgment about an object that it
would be a duty to bring about or promote. A duty to have respect
would thus amount to being put under an obligation to duties. ... [I]t
must rather be said that the law within [the agent] unavoidably forces

from him *respect* for his own being, and this feeling (which is of a special kind) is the basis of certain duties, that is, of certain actions that are consistent with respect toward himself (Kant, 1785, 6:402).

Therefore respect for the moral law must be regarded ... as a subjective ground of activity − that is, as the incentive to compliance with the law − and as the ground for maxims of a course of life in conformity with it (Kant, 1788, 5:79)

Kant, I claim, requires duty to have a *dual* grounding: objective ("a law, which represents an action that is to be done as *objectively* necessary") and subjective ("an incentive, which connects a ground for determining choice to this action *subjectively*"). The first is "a merely theoretical cognition of a possible determination of choice," and not a will or a maxim for action; the second alone is *practical*, since "the obligation so to act is connected in the subject with a ground for determining choice generally" (Kant, 1785, p. 6:218).

[3.] Compare Wittgenstein's remark that logic is a 'normative science' in the sense that "we often *compare* the use of words with games and calculi which have fixed rules." (1953, § 81). For further discussion, see Railton (2001).

[4.] If we think of the norms of inference as 'encoded' in the logical constants figuring in the premises, then the point would be that in order to be committed to the premises, one must accord authority in the regulation of thought to these encoded logical operations relations.

[5.] With thanks to Aaron Bronfman and Jacob Ross for very helpful conversation.

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