

ON GIVING YOURSELF A SIGN

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SOMETIMES we want a sign. We gaze heavenward hoping to spot some sign from a higher power. We scrutinize text messages for signs of affection. We peek into hot ovens hoping to see signs that our attempt at baking is going well. And so on. Consider something weird: suppose you want a sign of something you know you cannot control, and you believe you can *manufacture* that sign—specifically, you believe you can do something to make that sign happen, and it will *retain its significance* vis-à-vis the thing you cannot control. This is not normally how it works. We seldom try to manufacture signs of things we hope for but have no control over, since normally we know in advance that our best effort will only produce a dud lacking the desired significance—doctoring your email inbox will not give you a sign that your recent job application has made it to the next round of consideration, alas. But in the weird case where you can create such a sign and still have it mean what you want it to mean, do you have a practical reason to do so? I will argue on the basis of a straightforward means-end principle that the answer is yes, provided that we understand “reason” subjectively (section 2). This is intriguing in itself, but what makes it particularly noteworthy is that such reasons are grounded in a species of extrinsic desire that can exist even when you do not believe you have the means to satisfy any of your intrinsic desires—even the intrinsic desire(s) from which the extrinsic desire derives. In other words, desires for mere signs can give rise to practical reasons that do not bottom out in moral duty or in the aim to satisfy intrinsic desire. After responding to objections aimed at undercutting my arguments for the existence of such reasons (section 3), I will argue that the reasons, though they exist, are of an inferior kind and can be trumped by reasons grounded in intrinsic desires. I finish by sketching a two-level means-end account of desire-based practical reasons (section 4).

1. SETUP AND BACKGROUND

1.1. *Objective and Subjective Practical Reasons*

Assertions to the effect that so-and-so has a reason to do such-and-such can be heard “objectively” or “subjectively.” Bernie thinks his glass contains gin

and tonic when in fact it is filled with gasoline.¹ Bernie wants to drink gin and tonic, not gasoline—does he have any reason to take a sip? On one way of hearing the question (the “objective” way), the answer is no, he does not have a reason to take a sip. On another way of hearing the question (the “subjective” way), the answer is yes. A natural account of this is that our ordinary talk about having reasons to do things—practical reason talk—is ambiguous. There are two different sorts of practical reason our talk can be about, depending on how it is disambiguated: objective practical reasons or subjective practical reasons. Bernie has no objective practical reason to take a sip, but he does have a subjective practical reason to take a sip.

Some philosophers deny both the ambiguity and the existence of subjective practical reasons.² Others say that while Bernie has an “apparent” practical reason to take a sip, he in fact has no practical reason to take a sip.³ Still others, myself included, grant the ambiguity and the existence of subjective practical reasons.⁴ This paper is primarily addressed to those in the second and third camps, i.e., those who in some sense countenance subjective practical reasons.⁵

1.1.1. *The Means-End Principle*

I will be assuming the following:

Means-End Principle (MEP): An agent *S* has a subjective practical reason, grounded in a belief *B* and desire *D*, to do option *O* iff *D* is a desire of *S*'s with content *p* and *B* is a belief of *S*'s that doing *O* is (or might be) a means to the truth of *p*.⁶

1 Williams, “Internal and External Reasons.”

2 Dancy, “Response to Mark Schroeder’s *Slaves of the Passions*.” See also Thomson, “Imposing Risks.”

3 Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons”; Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1; Sylvan, “What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be” and “Respect and the Reality of Apparent Reasons.”

4 Mackie, *Ethics*, 77; Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*; Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, “Having Reasons,” and “Getting Perspective on Objective Reasons.”

5 I will often leave “practical” in “subjective practical reason” tacit.

6 I intend “grounded in” as a placeholder for the distinctive relation between subjective reasons and belief-desire complexes. This relation could be like the “in virtue of” relation familiar from the literature on metaphysical grounding, or it could be like constitution or identity.

I intend “is a means” in a broadly causal sense. In particular, the fact that *p* is or will be true if *O* is done is not sufficient for doing *O* to be a means to the truth of *p*. It is sufficient (but not necessary) for doing *O* to be a means to the truth of *p* in the intended sense that doing *O* would cause *p* to be true. It is natural, for instance, to say that my drinking coffee is a means to staying alert. This ordinary, broadly causal sense of “is a means” anchors my usage. I assume causation is transitive and irreflexive. Two notable ways for *S* doing *O* to

MEP captures a means-end view of subjective reasons that is relatively modest inasmuch as it is compatible with such reasons having sources other than desire. What it denies is the possibility of a subjective reason grounded in a belief-desire complex where the belief is not means-end.⁷ On this view, if an agent wants something and believes one of their options is a means to that thing, then those facts give rise to a subjective reason for them to do that option, and that is the only kind of belief that can work together with a desire to ground a subjective reason.

MEP offers a natural explanation of Bernie's having a subjective reason to take a sip. Bernie wants to drink gin and tonic and believes taking a sip is a

be a means to the truth of p in the intended sense are (1) S doing O would increase the objective chance of p , and (2) p is the proposition that S does O .

Readers may find MEP more plausible if, on the right-hand side of the biconditional, instead of "belief," we write "justified belief" (Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*; and Gerken, "Warrant and Action"), "justified true belief" (Littlejohn, "Must We Act Only on What We Know?"), or even "piece of knowledge" (Hawthorne and Stanley, "Knowledge and Action"). If so, they should read as if this substitution has been made throughout and as if the same modification has been made in the right-hand side of the Rational Movement Condition below. Notably, readers who opt for either of the latter two substitutions have to say Bernie does not have a reason to take a sip grounded in his means-end belief and his desire for gin and tonic; they require a different sort of case to illustrate the subjective/objective reasons distinction.

- 7 MEP is what we might call an internalist-adjacent principle (cf. Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"; and Smith, *The Moral Problem*). But care should be taken in drawing this connection. Internalism about practical reason is sometimes understood as the view, roughly, that an agent S has an objective practical reason to do ϕ iff S would be motivated to do ϕ if S were fully informed and deliberating perfectly. Since MEP concerns subjective rather than objective practical reasons, the falsity of internalism as just stated does not imply (or at least, does not trivially imply) the falsity of MEP.

MEP can be fairly considered a Humean-adjacent principle as well (cf. Joyce, *The Myth of Morality*, 52–53). But similar care should be taken here. Humeanism about practical reason is sometimes understood as the view that, roughly, an agent's objective practical reasons are as a rule grounded in their desires (Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*). The falsity of Humeanism in this sense does not imply (at least, not trivially) the falsity of MEP.

Here is the reason for the "at least not trivially" parentheticals. Some theorists characterize subjective reasons in terms of objective reasons. For instance, Lord defends the Factoring Account ("Having Reasons and the Factoring Account"; cf. Schroeder, "Having Reasons"), on which subjective reasons are just objective reasons that one in some sense "has." A less reductive view, favored by Schroeder (*Slaves of the Passions*) and Parfit (*On What Matters*, vol. 1), says roughly that one has a subjective reason to do ϕ just in case one has a belief that if true would give one an objective reason to do ϕ . Other such "objectivist" theories have been proposed (Vogelstein, "Subjective Reasons"; Whiting, "Keep Things in Perspective"; Sylvan, "What Apparent Reasons Appear to Be"; Wodak, "Can Objectivists Account for Subjective Reasons?" and "An Objectivist's Guide to Subjective Reasons"). If such a theory is true—a question on which I take no stand—then internalist and Humean theories of objective reasons may turn out to entail MEP.

means to that. Thus, he has a subjective reason to take a sip grounded in his desire and his means-end belief.

1.1.2. *The Constitutive Roles of Subjective Practical Reasons*

Subjective reasons play constitutive roles vis-à-vis rationality.⁸ Three such roles will be relevant. The core role has to do with rational action. It can be stated simply with the following principle:

Act Rationality: An action is rational iff (and because) the subjective practical reasons to do it are not outweighed by the subjective practical reasons to do otherwise.

A second role played by subjective reasons has to do with rational criticism.⁹ Roughly put, our practices of rationally criticizing agents for their actions or deliberations are constitutively bound up with perceived failures to suitably respond to subjective reasons. The following two principles capture this:

Act Criticizability: An agent is rationally criticizable for doing an act *A* iff (and because) whatever subjective practical reasons they have to do *A* are outweighed by the subjective practical reasons they have to do one of their alternative options.

Deliberation Criticizability: An agent's practical deliberation is rationally criticizable iff (and because) they failed to suitably appreciate (individually or collectively) some of the subjective practical reasons they have for or against one of their options.¹⁰

A third role played by subjective reasons has to do with rational motivation.¹¹ I will rely on the following plausible necessary condition:

Rational Movement Condition: An agent is in a position to be rationally moved by a belief *B* and a desire *D* to do one of their options *O* only if they have a subjective practical reason *R*, grounded in *B* and *D*, to do *O*.¹²

8 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* and "Having Reasons"; and Wodak, "Can Objectivists Account for Subjective Reasons?"

9 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*; and Wodak, "Can Objectivists Account for Subjective Reasons?"

10 There might be some subjective reasons that it is suitable to ignore when deliberating. Cf. Wedgwood, "Gandalf's Solution to the Newcomb Problem."

11 Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* and "Having Reasons."

12 The Rational Movement Condition coheres with a plausible account of motivating reasons provided by Mark Schroeder, which states that for *R* to be an agent's motivating reason

Being rationally moved by a belief B and a desire D to do O is at least materially equivalent to doing O and having a *motivating reason* grounded in B and D . Motivating reasons are reasons that are acted on—reasons for which an agent does an action. They are not mere causes of actions. They *rationalize* actions.¹³ Subjective reasons are what rationalize actions; to act and have a motivating reason is to act on a subjective reason that one has.

1.2. Desire

Subjective reasons are one main theme of this paper; the other is desire. I will assume that desires are propositional attitudes in the sense that a token desire with content p is essentially such that it is *satisfied* iff p is true. So for example, where we might ordinarily speak of Scooby wanting a club sandwich, I will understand Scooby as desiring that Scooby has a club sandwich. Having made this clear, I will sometimes state things in a way superficially inconsistent with it when doing so is convenient for presentation.

1.2.1. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Desires

To intrinsically desire something is to desire it in and of itself, for its own sake. To extrinsically desire something is to desire it for the sake of some further, logically distinct thing. Intrinsic desire is logically independent of extrinsic desire; you can have or not have an intrinsic desire for something that you extrinsically desire.

1.2.2. Extrinsic Desires Are Derivative

Extrinsic desires are derivative. They typically derive from other desires in virtue of “connecting beliefs,” e.g., a belief that if an extrinsic desire is satisfied, some further desire will be satisfied.¹⁴ The claim that extrinsic desires are derivative can be unpacked in two ways. First, extrinsic desires tend to vanish immediately if and when the beliefs in virtue of which they derive are lost—e.g., if Joe the health nut stops believing that exercise causes good health, his desire to exercise immediately vanishes. Second, extrinsic desires are—at least stereotypically—rationally explainable by appeal to further desires (i.e., those from which they derive) together with beliefs (i.e., those in virtue of which they derive). Rational explanation in this context is not merely causal. We ask questions like “Why do you want to go to med school?” and expect answers

for doing some act A is just for R to be both a subjective reason for her to do A and an explanatory reason for why she did A (*Slaves of the Passions*).

13 Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes.”

14 Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 157, and “Instrumental Desires and Instrumental Rationality”; Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*.

like “I want to become a doctor, and (I believe) going to med school is a means to that,” which intuitively differ substantially from purely causal answers like “I was brainwashed.”¹⁵

1.2.3. *Signatory Desire*

The key type of desire in this paper is a species of noninstrumental extrinsic desire that Kris McDaniel and Ben Bradley call *signatory* desire.¹⁶ Consider Tom, who just texted his crush Judy and asked if she is into him. Tom very much wants to receive a text that reads “Yes.” Tom’s desire for a “yes” is not intrinsic, but neither does he believe a “yes” would be a means to anything else he wants.¹⁷ He only wants it because it would be a sign that Judy reciprocates his feelings. His desire for the text is signatory.

The following (somewhat stipulative) definition will suffice for our purposes:

Signatory Desire: A desire D for p is signatory iff there is some q such that D derives from a desire for q in virtue of a belief that p ’s truth is a sign (but not a cause) of q ’s truth.¹⁸

Being a sign but not a cause is a familiar notion. The failure of the bathtub to drain is a sign but not a cause of a clog in the pipe. A persistent cough is a sign but not a cause of an infection. I take being a sign but not a cause of p to be roughly equivalent to being a piece of evidence for but not a cause of p . Roughly speaking, when some p is a sign but not a cause of q , the truth of p implies that it is *ceteris paribus* more likely that q ; but “more likely” in this instance does not correspond to objective physical chance in anything like the deep quantum mechanical sense (e.g., a slow drain does not imply a chance of a clog in that sense, as there being a nontrivial chance of a clog in that sense implies that it is in some deep way indeterminate or inscrutable whether there is a clog, but a slow drain never has any such implication). Rather, the relevant notion of “likely” is the familiar one used, e.g., in medicine and the special sciences,

15 Exceptions to the letter (but not the spirit) of this characterization of extrinsic desires come from cases of desires for knowledge. I will discuss these cases in section 1.2.6.

16 McDaniel and Bradley, “Desires.” Intrinsic desire is often contrasted with instrumental desire, i.e., desire for something as a means to some end. But as the category of signatory desire illustrates, not all extrinsic desires are instrumental. In addition to McDaniel and Bradley’s paper, see also Harman, *Explaining Value*, 128–29; and Arpaly and Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire*.

17 With the possible exception of something like knowledge or justified belief. See section 1.2.6 below.

18 McDaniel and Bradley leave out the parenthetical bit. In view of its inclusion in my definition, one might wish to think of the concept I am using as *purely signatory* desire.

when, e.g., a doctor says that cancer is more likely if certain test results turn out positive. This notion is clear enough for my purposes.

1.2.4. *Desire's Causal Roles*

Desire's roles in folk psychology include but are not limited to motivating and rationalizing action in combination with belief.¹⁹ Five additional causal roles will be relevant. First, the believed satisfaction or frustration of desire is causally tied to pleasure, displeasure, and related feelings and attitudes: coming to believe a desire is or will be satisfied causes pleasure (or excitement, relief, etc.), whereas coming to believe a desire is or will be frustrated causes displeasure (or disappointment, sadness, etc.). Second, desires cause one to fantasize about their objects and dwell on what it is about their objects that is desired.²⁰ Third, desires direct our attention to things in our environment associated with their objects. Fourth, desires can be intensified by dwelling on vivid representations of their objects. Fifth, desires cause a distinctive phenomenological feel (a "pull") vis-à-vis their objects.

1.2.5. *Idle Desire and Working Desire*

Both of the following sentences are true:

1. I want a new car.
2. I want it to be the case that both (i) I have a new car and (ii) there are an even number of hairs on my head.

But only the content attributed by the first of these sentences is such that a mental state with that content plays the causal roles of desire in my psychology. (In other words, I will not be the least bit let down if I come to believe I am getting a new car but have an odd number of head hairs; I fantasize occasionally about having a new car but never about the conjunction of that and my having an even number of hairs; etc.) So we should not assume a one-to-one correspondence between an agent's desires and true attributions of desire to that agent.

Why is 2 true? Is it because I have a desire the content of which is entailed by the conjunctive content that 2 attributes? No. Say that Ralph is an American seven-year-old. It is natural to think the first but not the second of the following is true:

- 19 Cf. Sinhababu, "The Humean Theory of Motivation Reformulated and Defended." For methodological background, see Braddon-Mitchell and Nola, "Introducing the Canberra Plan."
- 20 Cf. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 38; Marks, "The Difference between Motivation and Desire." Note that it makes sense to reflect on "what it is about" the object of a desire that is desired only if the desire is extrinsic. An intrinsic desire's object is desired in itself!

3. Ralph wants a new toy.
4. Ralph wants it to be the case that both (i) he has a new toy and (ii) vaquitas love knafeh.²¹

It is natural to think that 4 can be false despite 3 being true because Ralph might have never heard of vaquitas or knafeh—he might not possess the required concepts.

Why then is 2 true? Here is why: the subject of 2—i.e., me—happens to believe the truth of the content attributed in 2 is a means to or a sign of the truth of the content attributed in 1, which in turn is the content of one of my desires.

What is it that prevents us from saying that I have a desire with the satisfaction condition attributed by 2? Just some causal constraint on positing psychological states. If we do not mind violating such a constraint, we can stipulate a one-to-one correspondence between true desire attributions and desires. As it turns out, doing this will be useful for us. We will simply keep in mind the distinction between the stipulated states and the states that actually play the causal roles of desire.²² Call the stipulated states *idle desires* and the states that play the causal roles of desire *working desires*.²³ Only working desires can be intrinsic; idle desires are by nature extrinsic.

Idle desires cannot ground subjective practical reasons. MEP and other principles quantifying over desires are meant to quantify only over working desires. Henceforth, all my reference to desire will be confined to working desire, unless stated otherwise.

1.2.6. *Are Signatory Desires Just Desires for Knowledge?*

Perhaps signatory desires are nothing more than desires for knowledge or desires for the means to knowledge.²⁴ That is to say:

Signatory Desires Are Desires for Knowledge (SDK): To have a signatory desire for the truth of p is either to desire to know p or to desire p because one believes p is a means to obtaining further desired knowledge.

21 Vaquitas are a rare species of porpoise. Knafeh is a type of cheesy Arabian cake.

22 Or rather, the states that play “enough” of the causal roles. Cf. Braddon-Mitchell and Nola, “Introducing the Canberra Plan,” sec. 1.

23 Cf. Marks, “The Difference between Motivation and Desire” on a separate but similar distinction between “formal” and “genuine” desire.

24 Or desires for justified belief or for the possession of evidence, etc. I focus on knowledge, but the points generalize as far as I can tell. Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

For instance, perhaps strictly speaking Tom does not want to receive a “yes” text, or perhaps the reason Tom wants a “yes” text to appear on his phone is not because it would be a sign. Rather, perhaps what he really wants is to *know* whether (or that) a “yes” has appeared. Or perhaps he wants a “yes” because he believes that would be a means to his knowing whether (or that) Judy likes him. SDK says desires like these are all that is really going on in cases of signatory desire. I think SDK is false for two reasons.

The first reason is just that we can imagine cases where someone wants a sign but clearly does not want knowledge of the sign. Examples that come to mind are weird but intelligible. Patrick the alligator lover believes an Amazing Predictor spared an alligator’s life iff she predicted rain in Bangkok tomorrow and that Patrick will never know about it.²⁵ Patrick hopes for rain in Bangkok tomorrow, but he does not want to know about it.

A second reason to think SDK is false is that it is clearly possible to desire a sign despite not believing it to be a means to one’s obtaining any desired knowledge. Tom learns that his incoming text messages have been encrypted by hackers. There is no hope of ever breaking the encryption; the messages still exist but are unreadable. So Tom is sure that if he has received a “yes” text from Judy, he cannot know of it (unless and until he sees Judy again and musters the courage to ask her). Hence, Tom does not believe that a “yes” text, if one exists in his now hopelessly encrypted account, is a means to his knowing about Judy’s feelings. Still, he hopes that it is there, since if it is, that means it is likely that Judy is into him.

A third reason to think SDK is false is that agents can give up hope of knowing whether a sign or what it signifies obtains without giving up hope that the sign obtains. Damon is a dying man who wants it to be the case that Atlantis existed. He therefore wants it to be the case that Atlantean artifacts exist somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic. Damon has given up hope of ever knowing whether there are Atlantean artifacts or indeed of ever knowing whether Atlantis existed, but he has not given up hope that there are such artifacts.²⁶ If one can give up hope of Desire *A* being satisfied while not giving up hope of Desire *B* being satisfied, then it seems Desire *A* and Desire *B* must be distinct. Further, if one can cease believing a sign is a means to knowing anything one

25 All the “Amazing Predictors” in this paper are, unless stated otherwise, known by the agents in the cases to be almost but not quite infallible predictors of future events.

26 Interlocutor: Why would Damon still want there to be artifacts, having given up hope of ever knowing of their existence? Me: Because he thinks that if there are artifacts, then it is likely *ceteris paribus* that Atlantis existed. Damon wants Atlantis to have existed, and so naturally he wants the former existence of Atlantis to be likely given the evidence at the bottom of the ocean. This is entirely compatible with his believing he does not and will not ever know what evidence is down there.

wants to know and nevertheless still want the sign, then desire for a sign must not necessarily be instrumentally aimed at obtaining knowledge.

I am persuaded by cases like Patrick's and Tom's and Damon's, but as far as the arguments I am going to give go, what is essential is not that SDK be false but rather that in having a signatory desire for something, one need be neither intrinsically desiring that thing nor desiring it as means to some further intrinsic desire. So if SDK turned out to be true, would that throw a wrench into my arguments? There are two ways it could. First, it could be that any time one believes an option is a means to desired knowledge, one also believes it is a means to some intrinsic desire. Second, it could be that signs one desires are desired as means to the satisfaction of intrinsic desire any time they are believed not to be means to the satisfaction of any desires aside from desires for knowledge. I will consider these possibilities in order.

Suppose Terry's only intrinsic desire is to love and to be (and to have been) loved. Terry desires to know whether his deceased relative really loved him. He believes he can gain this knowledge if he reads a special letter they wrote to him. It makes sense to suppose that Terry does not believe reading the letter to be a means to loving or to being loved—maybe Terry believes himself to not be the sort of person to behave any differently given such knowledge, or perhaps Terry is an aging recluse who foresees no future loving relationships, regardless. Cases like this show that believing that x is a means to desired knowledge does not imply believing that x is a means to intrinsic desire.

It is obvious that desire for knowledge is not always intrinsic; knowledge is frequently desired purely as a means to further desired things. But what about when the knowledge one desires is not believed to be a means to any other desire's satisfaction aside from desires for further knowledge—must any of *those* desires be intrinsic? Consider a concrete example. Suppose we ask Yancy why he wants to know whether canaries have been dying in the coal mine. He answers, "Because that would be a sign of dangerous carbon monoxide levels, and I want to know whether the miners are getting poisoned." Note that Yancy can desire the knowledge of canary deaths even if he knows he can do nothing to prevent miners getting carbon monoxide poisoning. Now, assuming Yancy has no other reasons for caring about canaries, the intensity of his desire to know whether canaries are dying will vary directly with (a) his concern for carbon monoxide levels in the mine and (b) his confidence that canary deaths are a sign of such levels. If he stops believing canary deaths are a sign of dangerous conditions for the miners, he will immediately stop caring to know about canary deaths. Further, Yancy's desire for the knowledge of canary deaths will be rationally explainable via his concern over carbon monoxide levels and his belief that canary deaths are a sign that such levels are high. Hence, Yancy's desire for the canary knowledge

is extrinsic. Analogous things can be said for Yancy's desire to know whether the miners are getting poisoned. That desire for knowledge will vary directly with his concern for the miners' lives and well-being, will immediately vanish if he loses that concern, and will be rationally explainable via that concern. Hence, Yancy's desire to know whether the miners are safe is extrinsic as well. So desires to know whether signs obtain can be extrinsic, even when such knowledge is believed not to be a means to satisfying any desires aside from desires for knowledge; and similarly, all the desires for knowledge that may happen to ground such extrinsic desires for knowledge of signs can be extrinsic as well.

Two general observations are in order here. First, it is notable that the way desires to know whether signs obtain derive seems structurally different from the way desires for means derive. In the latter case, one's belief is that the thing desired stands in a means-end relation to some further thing one desires; but in the former case, one's belief is not that the knowledge one desires stands in the is-a-sign-of relation to some further thing one desires but rather that the content of the knowledge desired stands in that relation. Second, it seems desire for knowledge can be extrinsic without deriving in virtue of any belief. If one wants a state of affairs to obtain, one can, in virtue of that alone, desire to know whether (or that) it obtains. Desire for such knowledge counts as extrinsic insofar as it waxes and wanes with and is entirely rationally explained by one's concern for the underlying state of affairs.

2. SIGNATORY DESIRES GROUND SUBJECTIVE PRACTICAL REASONS

The last section familiarized us with signatory desires, subjective practical reasons, and the means-end principle. In this section I connect the dots. Signatory desire together with means-end belief can ground a subjective reason to do something, and this can be so despite one's having no subjective reason grounded in intrinsic desire or moral duty to do the thing—or so I will argue.

2.1. *The Case of Donny*

Donny wants to bowl a strike. Naturally, he thinks bowling is a means to that end. But Donny's case is unusual. His reason for wanting to bowl a strike is not that he thinks it would be pleasant. In fact, he fully expects bowling a strike would overwhelm him with restless doubts. He expects he would doubt whether the strike really happened or was some cruel hoax; he is sure his resulting anxiety would keep him awake all night. Donny is a nervous, fitful man; he trembles at great turns of fate—especially when they involve money. What is Donny's deal? It is this: Donny's reason for wanting to bowl a strike is that he believes an Amazing Predictor mailed him one million dollars iff she predicted he would bowl a

strike tonight. The money, he thinks, will arrive tomorrow, if ever. So on this night, Donny is cold to the usual appeal of bowling and does not think it will be a means to anything he desires besides the sign.²⁷ Donny's desire to bowl a strike is signatory. He believes bowling is a means to a strike, and his desire for a strike derives from his desire for wealth in virtue of his belief that a strike would be a sign (not a cause) that he will soon be a millionaire. In particular, Donny believes bowling is a means to a sign—one that will retain its significance as a sign—of the million dollars. In other words, Donny believes that even if he causally intervenes in the production of the sign, it will still be a sign of the million dollars.

2.2. *Two Main Arguments*

In this section I give two arguments for the claim that Donny has a subjective reason to bowl grounded in his means-end belief and his signatory desire to bowl a strike. Some premises have been given specific titles in parentheses.

Argument 1

- P1. MEP is true.
- P2. Donny has a belief B^* that bowling is a means to bowling a strike.
- P3. Donny has a signatory desire D^* to bowl a strike. (*Desire to Bowl*)
- P4. MEP applies to the pair consisting of B^* and D^* . (*Applies to D^**)
- C1. Donny has a subjective reason to bowl grounded in his means-end belief and his signatory desire to bowl a strike. [P1, P2, and P3]

How can this argument be resisted? An ad hoc rejection of MEP would be implausible. A more serious objection would target *Applies to D^** by seeking to limit application of MEP to non-signatory desires. We will consider such objections in section 3.

Argument 2

- P5. Prior to making his decision, Donny is in a position to be rationally moved to bowl by his means-end belief together with his desire to bowl a strike. (*In Position to Be Rationally Moved*)

27 Interlocutor: Does Donny want the strike as a means to know that the million dollars has been sent? Me: No, he would rather it just show up in his bank account; he is sure such knowledge will only elevate his anticipation and worry over its safe arrival. Interlocutor: Is this a key assumption? Me: Not really. If Donny did want knowledge of the million dollars, his desire for that would be extrinsic as well (cf. section 1.2.6). Interlocutor: If he is not after knowledge, why does he want the sign? Me: He wants it to be likely that the million dollars is on the way (cf. note 26). Interlocutor: If he thinks he can "make it more likely," does he not think he can causally influence the million dollars? Me: He believes the likelihood would be purely evidential (cf. section 1.2.3). He thinks a strike would be a symptom of a common cause or else a mere statistical correlate of the million dollars being sent.

- P6. The Rational Movement Condition is true.
 C1. Donny has a subjective reason to bowl grounded in his means-end belief and his desire to bowl a strike. [P5 and P6]

In support of In Position to Be Rationally Moved, I would say that Donny is intuitively in a position to bowl and rationalize his choice by saying, “I want to bowl a strike tonight, and bowling is a way to make that happen!” Denying the Rational Movement Condition outright just to avoid the conclusion would, like a blanket rejection of MEP, seem implausible and ad hoc. It seems therefore that the best way to resist this argument is to give some reason for denying In Position to Be Rationally Moved. In section 3 we will look at attempts to motivate such a move.

Stepping back, what exactly does C1 amount to? Well, if C1 holds, Donny’s signatory desire D^* to bowl a strike participates in two distinct dependence relations. One is the relation between Donny’s subjective practical reason to bowl and the pair consisting of D^* and his means-end belief. The other is the relation between D^* and Donny’s desire for future wealth, a relation that holds in virtue of his belief that bowling a strike tonight is a sign—but not a cause—of an impending million dollars. C1 is about the first of these two relations. The second relation is one that holds between desires in virtue of connecting beliefs. It does not take a subjective practical reason as a relatum.

2.3. Supporting Arguments: MEP Applies to Signatory Desires

In this section I defend Argument 1’s fourth premise (i.e., Applies to D^*) with a set of three arguments. Once again, some premises have been given specific titles in parentheses.

Argument 3

- P7. Unless Donny has some subjective practical reason to stay home and not bowl, Donny is rationally criticizable if he chooses not to bowl. (*Criticizable Choice*)
 P8. Act Criticizability is true.
 C2. Donny has a subjective reason to bowl. [P7 and P8]

Argument 4

- P9. Donny is rationally criticizable if when deliberating over whether to bowl, he disregards his belief that bowling is a means to bowling a strike. (*Criticizable Deliberation*)
 P10. Deliberation Criticizability is true.
 C2. Donny has a subjective reason to bowl. [P9 and P10]

Argument 5

- P11. The best explanation for Donny's having a subjective reason to bowl is that Applies to D^* is true. (*Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl*)
 C3. Applies to D^* is true. [P11 and C2]

How can these arguments be resisted? There are two main ways. The first way to respond is to motivate a denial of Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation, and then reject Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl as falsely presupposing the existence of a subjective practical reason to bowl. The second way to respond is to accept Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation and motivate a denial of Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl by supplying a competing explanation for Donny's having a subjective reason to bowl. We will look at both of these routes in section 3.

2.4. *Summing Up*

Those are my arguments about Donny. I take them to generalize. That is, I assume that Donny's case points the way to all sorts of other possible cases with the same basic structure. Hence, I take these arguments to show that signatory desires, together with associated means-end beliefs, can ground subjective practical reasons.

3. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

3.1. *Objection 1: Refusing to Satisfy Signatory Desire Is Uncriticizable*

This objection asserts that refusing to try to satisfy signatory desires is rationally uncriticizable. It directly targets Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation in Arguments 3 and 4. Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl in Argument 5 is rejected on the grounds that it falsely presupposes that Donny has a reason to bowl. A proponent of this objection would find MEP implausible unless restricted to non-signatory desires and thus would reject Applies to D^* in Argument 1. This objection does not challenge Argument 2; so even if it is successful, its proponents have more work to do to rebut C1.

3.1.1. *Reply*

If you want p to be true and believe that the only way you can cause p to be true is by doing O , and you have no subjective practical reason to do anything else, then if you choose not to do O , it is just obvious that you can be rationally criticized. "Don't you want this? Don't you believe that the only way you can make it happen is to do O ? Instead, you've done something you have no reason

to do! What gives?”²⁸ It is inadequate to reply: “I do want p to be true, but the only reason I want it to be true is that I want q to be true and I believe that the truth of p is a sign—but not a cause—of the truth of q .” This is inadequate because the reason for wanting p to be true is irrelevant. We can reply, “Yes, that is a perfectly reasonable basis for wanting p to be true. What is your point? Why are not you doing the thing you believe can cause p to be true, given that you have no reason to do anything else?” Perhaps they might protest, “It is the *type* of basis the desire has. It does not derive from another desire in virtue of a means-end belief but derives in virtue of a belief about being a sign. *That* is the excuse.” I reject this invidious distinction. What is disqualifying about the distinctive basis of a signatory desire for p ? Does the agent have a reason for desiring p ? Yes. Is the reason a perfectly acceptable one? Yes. Is it granted, therefore that the desire is not an irrational one? Yes.²⁹ I fail to see any excuse for not doing the thing they think will cause p 's truth, given that they have no reason to do anything else.

3.2. Objection 2: Signatory Desires Are Inherently Irrational

According to this objection, signatory desires are inherently irrational *qua* desires. Hence, it is irrational to act with the aim of satisfying them. In other words, according to this objection, mere signs are always as a rule irrational *to want*, and therefore it is always as a rule irrational to act with the aim of satisfying desires for mere signs. Like the previous objection, this objection challenges Applies to D^* ; a proponent of it would likely want to restrict MEP to nonsignatory desires. But unlike the last objection, this objection also challenges Argument 2 by targeting In Position to Be Rationally Moved: it is always irrational, according to this objection, to be moved by a signatory desire (together with a means-end belief) since signatory desires are themselves always irrational. Hence, *contra* In Position to Be Rationally Moved, Donny was never in a position to be rationally moved by his signatory desire.³⁰

3.2.1. Reply

Recall Tom from section 1.2.3. Is there really something inherently irrational about him wanting to receive a “yes” text? He seems in a position to give a quite ordinary and reasonable account of his desire. Receiving a “yes” text would be a

28 Is the sense of irrationality to be explained by the fact that the person has done something they have no reason to do? No, since this is not inherently irrational; it is rationally permissible to do what one has no reason to do if all of one's alternatives are such that one has no reason to do them either.

29 Well, maybe not so fast. See Objection 2.

30 That is, he may have been in a position to be moved but not *rationally* moved.

sign that something he hopes to be the case is the case: Judy is attracted to him. What is irrational about this? Perhaps the idea is that insofar as Tom really just wants knowledge, his desire is rational, and the charge of irrationality comes in only insofar as his desire for the “yes” text is a desire for neither knowledge nor a means to knowledge but purely a desire for a sign. This possibility was discussed in section 1.2.6. There I gave a version of the case where Tom’s text messages have been hopelessly encrypted by a hacker, and yet he still wants there to be a “yes” text among them, despite his inability to know if it is there and its uselessness to him vis-à-vis knowing whether Judy likes him. Is it really irrational to want this inaccessible evidence to exist? I do not have space to delve too deeply into the topic of the rationality of extrinsic desire, but such delving seems unnecessary here. Desires for mere signs are at least not obviously rationally problematic—they clearly do not essentially involve desiring impossible states of affairs or desiring states of affairs that are incompatible with what one desires intrinsically. Moreover, such desires, while perhaps obscure, are not a purely hypothetical curiosity. Consider wanting certain medical tests to be negative, as that would show your newborn is healthy. To be sure, this desire would normally be associated with desires for knowledge, but even if one for some reason had little or no hope of obtaining knowledge about or via the tests, one’s desire for the tests to be negative would naturally persist. Consider the following. Take any state of affairs *A* you currently desire and imagine that the likely cause of *A* would also cause some separate state of affairs *B*, where *B* would not itself be a cause of *A*. Alternatively, imagine that if *A* were to obtain, it would likely cause *B*, where *B* would be otherwise unlikely to obtain. Ask yourself, would you not naturally hope *B* obtains in either of these sorts of case, even if you knew you had no chance of knowing whether it does? Considerations such as these seem to show that at the very least, it is not the defender of the rationality of signatory desires who bears the burden of proof. Let us consider, then, how my opponent might defend their doctrine.

Prevailing accounts of rational desire come in four flavors. On content-based accounts, a desire is rational iff it has the right sort of content—e.g., it is a desire for the good, for something believed to be good, or for something there is objective reason to want.³¹ On deliberative accounts, desires are rational iff they are produced, controlled, or sanctioned by an actual or idealized process of rational deliberation.³² On information-based accounts, a desire is rational iff it is not based on false beliefs, and/or it would be maintained even

31 Anscombe, *Intention*; Audi, *The Architecture of Reason*; and Parfit, *On What Matters*, vol. 1.

32 Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 407–24; Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*; and Smith, *The Moral Problem*, 157–61.

if the desirer were suitably well-informed.³³ On coherence accounts, a desire is rational iff it suitably coheres with the desirer's beliefs, desires, and/or self-conception.³⁴ Let us look at each of these in turn.

The sort of account that seems most apt to deliver the result that signatory desires are all as a rule irrational is a content-based account that classifies a desire as irrational if its satisfaction is not as a matter of fact objectively good for the agent. One might assert:

The Means to My Intrinsic Desire Is My Good (MIDIG): The objective good for an agent consists in (a) the satisfaction of their intrinsic desires and (β) any proposition whose truth would cause the satisfaction of (one or more of) their intrinsic desires.

Next one might claim that since satisfaction of signatory desires belongs to neither a nor β , it is never objectively good for an agent. Hence, on this account of rational desire, such desires are as a rule irrational. There are two problems with this.

The first problem is that the sort of content-based account just sketched seems promising as an account of when there is objective reason for an agent to desire something but does not seem promising as an account of when there is subjective reason for an agent to desire something. Recall Bernie, who thinks his glass is full of gin and tonic when in fact it is full of gasoline. Is Bernie's desire to take a sip from his glass rational? Here we encounter the familiar ambiguity. Bernie's desire seems unsupported by objective reason but nevertheless subjectively rational. Since it is surely desires' subjective rationality that would be relevant to whether they can ground subjective reasons to act so as to satisfy them, a content-based account seems like the wrong sort of account to oppose the rationality of signatory desires. One could respond by saying my opponent should instead adopt a content-based account that says a desire is irrational iff its content is not believed to be objectively good for the agent. This, together with MIDIG, handles Bernie's case but leads us to our second problem.

The second problem is that MIDIG begs the question. Why should we think it is not objectively good for you to get a sign you want? Dialectically speaking, it is hard to see why mere causes of intrinsic desire satisfaction can be part of an agent's good, but mere signs of intrinsic desire satisfaction cannot be. We could toss out condition β , but then by parallel reasoning, we wind up saying instrumental desire is inherently irrational.

33 Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*; Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*; and Savulescu, "Rational Desires and the Limitation of Life-Sustaining Treatment."

34 Velleman, *Practical Reflection*; Smith, "In Defense of *The Moral Problem*" and "Instrumental Desires and Instrumental Rationality"; and Verdejo, "Norms for Pure Desire."

If content-based accounts do not support the claim that signatory desires are as a rule irrational, can some combination of the other three types of account do so? On the contrary, these accounts seem quite friendly to the rationality of such desires. It would be odd to deny that an informed and ideally reflective agent can desire a sign of something else they want and that that desire might cohere with the agent's beliefs and other desires.³⁵

Finally, it bears mentioning that even if signatory desires are irrational, that alone does not trivially imply that seeking to bring about their satisfaction would be irrational. That inference is mediated by the significant assumption that it is as a rule *practically* irrational to seek to satisfy irrational *desires*. But it is one thing for a desire to be irrational; it is another for behavior aimed at satisfying that desire to be irrational. I am in favor of sharply separating these two domains of rationality. An agent whose actions are sanctioned by the beliefs they have about how to best effect their desires' satisfaction seems to me one whose behavior makes rational sense, even if the desires they aim to satisfy are irrational.³⁶ Such a position seems in keeping with a broadly Humean perspective on rationality.

3.3. *Objection 3: Do You Really Want What You Extrinsicly Want?*

This objection claims that when pressed, we admit that we do not *really* want the things that we only extrinsicly want. Therefore, extrinsic desires do not exist.³⁷ For instance, if we press Donny by asking, "Is bowling a strike *really* what you want?" it would be natural for him to respond, "Well, no. All I *really* want is wealth." So perhaps Donny's desire for a sign is not a real desire. If that is right, I was confused when I stipulated Desire to Bowl (i.e., P₃), and Argument 1 fails for the simple reason that Donny does not want to bowl a strike—indeed he could not desire to bowl a strike unless he intrinsically desired to bowl a

35 Interlocutor: Wouldn't being *sufficiently* informed mean not needing or wanting the sign? Me: If we understand "sufficient information" in that strong a way, it will tend to make instrumental desires irrational. Suppose I think Pete's attendance will cause the party to be fun, and hence I want Pete to attend. Would my desire for Pete's attendance survive my being sufficiently informed if that meant knowing whether Pete will attend? Interlocutor: Yes, it would. If you learn he will not be there, you will wish he were, and if you learn he will be there, you will be glad. Me: The same can be said about signs. Suppose I want my X-ray to be clear because I believe that would be a sign I am cancer free. If I learn that it is clear, I will be glad, and if I learn it is not, I will wish it were.

36 One might protest that for a desire to be irrational just is for it to be inherently irrational to seek to satisfy. This reduces Objection 2 to the nakedly question-begging claim that signatory desires are irrational to seek to satisfy.

37 Finlay, "Responding to Normativity." See also Marks, "The Difference between Motivation and Desire."

strike. Argument 2 fails because In Position to Be Rationally Moved is false—Donny cannot be in a position to be moved by a desire that is not real.

3.3.1. Reply

It is undeniable that sometimes people say they want things only to admit under pressure that they do not *really* want them. But the fact that someone admits (or is disposed to admit) under pressure that they do not *really* want something does not immediately imply that the desire does not exist, for as I will now explain, the meaning of questions like “Is that *really* something you want?” and “What do you *really* want?” is context sensitive.

Asking what someone *really* wants or whether something they profess to want is something they *really* want can be interpreted in at least three ways depending on conversational context.³⁸ First, it can be interpreted as asking whether a salient professed desire is a working desire. Second, it can be interpreted as asking what desire the salient professed desire proximally derives from. Third, it can be interpreted as asking whether the salient professed desire is intrinsic and/or what intrinsic desire the salient professed desire distally derives from. Thus, in some contexts you *can* truthfully say you *really* want something that you merely extrinsically desire, and in contexts where you cannot, the reason is that the context is such that “what you *really* want” just denotes what you intrinsically desire. Allow me to explain more fully.

Sometimes in the face of pressure we steadfastly affirm that we *really* want things that we only extrinsically want. If we ask Donny whether he *really* wants to bowl a strike tonight, he might say, “Absolutely!” We might continue, “But isn’t there some further thing you want that explains *why* you want to bowl a strike tonight?” He might reply, “Of course, but that doesn’t mean I don’t really want a strike—I *really do!*” There is nothing unnatural about this. A competent speaker would not judge his assertions to be baffling or incoherent. It would seem that Donny is taking “*really* want” to denote working desire as opposed to idle desire (section 1.2.5), which is a perfectly ordinary and acceptable interpretation.³⁹ A real-world example might be helpful. Suppose it is the day after the 2020 US presidential election. Votes are still being counted in swing states like Michigan. I want Joe Biden to win the presidency. If he is not going to win the presidency, I do not care if he wins Michigan. His winning Michigan is desirable to me solely as a potential means to his winning the election—it is an extrinsic desire. I am being sincere when I say I really, genuinely want

38 My discussion will be nontechnical, but it fits well with the contextualist Karttunen-style semantics for questions (see Karttunen, “Syntax and Semantics of Questions”) and embedded *wh*-complements drawn on by Stanley and Williamson, “Knowing How.”

39 Cf. Marks, “The Difference between Motivation and Desire.”

Biden to win Michigan. What do I mean? I take myself to mean that my desire is a working desire. I fantasize about Biden winning Michigan. My attention is drawn to news alerts about Biden and Michigan. If I learn that Biden wins Michigan, I will be excited and pleased; if I learn that he lost Michigan, I will be displeased and troubled. And so on.

We have just seen that there is one natural interpretation of “*really* want” on which one can truthfully assert that one *really* wants something that one only extrinsically wants and that Donny can, in that sense, affirm that he *really* wants to bowl a strike. For purposes of blocking the objection, this is all that is needed. But for the sake of completeness, let us consider contexts where a speaker accedes to not *really* wanting something they formerly professed to want. Are all such contexts ones in which you cannot truthfully assert that you *really* want what you only extrinsically want? I will argue that the answer is no. Such contexts come in three varieties. Let us look at them one by one.

The first kind of context is one we have already seen: it is one where the point of asking whether someone *really* wants something is to find out whether the desire is a working desire. Suppose that it is the week after the 2020 election, and someone asks me, “Hey Justin, do you want to hear Wolf Blitzer announce that Biden won Michigan?” and I answer, “Yes, please!” Then they ask, “But is hearing Wolf make the call *really* what you want?” and I reply, “Well, no, I guess not. What I *really* want is for Biden to win Michigan. I don’t care who announces it.” In this example, my professed desire to hear Wolf Blitzer announce a Biden win in Michigan is idle. I believe that its satisfaction would be a sign that Biden won in Michigan, but I have no working desire to hear Wolf Blitzer make the announcement—I do not fantasize about Wolf in particular making the announcement, etc. Note that in this case, I truthfully say what I *really* want is for Biden to win Michigan—but this of course is an extrinsic desire.

In the second kind of context, asking whether someone *really* wants what they profess to want is meant to discover what desire their professed desire proximally derives from. Suppose someone asks, “But is Biden winning Michigan what you *really* want? What are you *ultimately* hoping for?” In this updated context, I cannot truthfully reply by saying that what I *really* want is for Biden to win Michigan. However, I can say, “Well no, what I *really* want is a Biden presidency.” If this satisfies my interlocutor, then it seems what they were after is what desire my desire for a Biden win in Michigan proximally derives from. Note that I truthfully said that what I *really* want is a Biden presidency, which is still an extrinsic desire.

In the third kind of context, the point of asking whether someone *really* desires something is to find out whether their desire is intrinsic or to find out what intrinsic desire stands at the end of the chain of desires from which the

professed desire ultimately derives. Suppose my interlocutor keeps up their pressure. Soon enough I catch on and say, “Well, I suppose what I *really* want is for there to be happiness, health, peace, and justice in human society.” In the context created by the repeat questioning, it seems I cannot truthfully say I *really* want what I only extrinsically want. But note that this is not the most natural interpretation of “*really* want”; it can take a bit of nudging to convey. Perhaps this is because it can be hard to pin down one’s intrinsic desires. Pressing someone to do so is liable to seem weirdly demanding. Further, note that in this sort of context, “what *S* *really* wants” does not denote the set of all *S*’s desires or even the set of all *S*’s working desires—it just denotes a set of *S*’s intrinsic desires.⁴⁰ Saying you do not *really* want something in such a context thus does not entail lacking a working desire for it.

3.4. *Objection 4: Only Intrinsic Desires Are Rationally Relevant*

The rough idea of this objection is that intrinsic desires can do all the work we need from desires in a theory of practical reason, and therefore, extrinsic desires, including signatory desires, do not ground subjective reasons. This idea can take four forms, each targeting a different subset of my premises. What all four forms have in common is a denial of Applies to D^* , of In a Position to Be Rationally Moved, and of Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl. There are two main variants, each with two subvariants. One main variant is neutral on whether extrinsic desires are real psychological states; its distinctive assertion is that when it comes to practical reason and rational motivation, such desires are explanatory third wheels.⁴¹ This variant’s first subvariant attacks Applies to D^* by claiming that MEP needs to be restricted to intrinsic desires; it then denies Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation and rejects Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl as having a false presupposition. Its second subvariant agrees that MEP should be restricted to intrinsic desires but adds that even when this restriction is made, MEP is still true only as a sufficient—not a necessary—condition; this is so because a subjective practical reason, according to this line of thinking, can be grounded in a pair consisting in an intrinsic desire and a belief that an action would itself be a sign that that intrinsic desire is satisfied. One would go this route if one accepts Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation and wishes to account for them without appealing to signatory desire. Those are the two subvariants of this objection’s first main variant. The other main variant’s distinctive feature is that it denies Desire to Bowl and

40 Maybe it denotes the set of all *S*’s intrinsic desires, or maybe it denotes the set containing the intrinsic desire(s) from which the desire *S* originally professed ultimately derives.

41 Cf. Marks, “The Difference between Motivation and Desire”; and Smith, “Instrumental Desires and Instrumental Rationality.”

asserts that extrinsic desires simply do not exist; that is to say, this second main variant “Quines” extrinsic desires.⁴² As with the previous variant, this variant faces a choice with respect to whether Donny is susceptible to rational criticism. On the one hand, the Quiner of extrinsic desires might reject Donny’s susceptibility to rational criticism. If they go this route, there is no need for them to restrict MEP to intrinsic desires—that sort of move would be called for only if there might be an extrinsic desire that Donny takes bowling to be a means to, and the Quiner says such desires do not exist. On the other hand, if the Quiner agrees Donny is susceptible to criticism, then by Act Criticizability, there must be a subjective reason to bowl, and MEP must be denied as a necessary condition; it is again natural to deny Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl and offer in its place the sort of non-means-end-based explanation mentioned above. Regardless of which of the four forms just summarized this objection takes, it will deny In Position to Be Rationally Moved on the grounds that only intrinsic desires can rationally move people.

Table 1. Summary of the Four Variants of Objection 4

	Neutral on extrinsic Desires	Extrinsic desires do not exist
Donny is susceptible to rational criticism	Denies P1, P4, P5, and P11 (Variant 1A)	Denies P1, P3, P4, P5, and P11 (Variant 2A)
Donny is not susceptible to rational criticism	Denies P4, P5, P7, P9, and P11 (Variant 1B)	Denies P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, and P11 (Variant 2B)

3.4.1. Reply

Let us start with those who accept my claims about Donny’s susceptibility to rational criticism but reject MEP as a necessary condition and deny Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl.⁴³ Someone going this route must explain Donny’s susceptibility to rational criticism, and the most natural way to do so is to appeal to Donny’s intrinsic desire for wealth together with the fact that he believes the act of bowling would itself be a sign of impending wealth. Thus, it seems someone going this route will accept:

Evidential Sufficient Condition (ESC): If an agent *S* has a desire *D* for *p* and a belief *B* that one of their options *O* is a sign (but not a cause) of the truth of *p*, then the agent has a subjective practical reason, grounded in *B* and *D*, to do *O*.

42 Chan, “Are There Extrinsic Desires?”; and Finlay, “Responding to Normativity.” Here I am using “Quine” as a verb in the way popularized by Dennett, “Quining Qualia.”
 43 This covers Variants 1A and 2A in table 1.

Here I think we are encountering an intuitive fault line. All I can say is that to my mind, it is primitive that insofar as rational action relates to desire, its aim is to do the most the agent thinks they can to *make* the world *into* what they want it to be. If you believe an action would be a mere sign that some desire of yours is satisfied but would do nothing to affect whether that desire is satisfied, then that desire does not ground any subjective reason to do that action. James Joyce puts the idea nicely when he writes:

Rational decision makers should choose actions on the basis of their *efficacy in bringing about desirable results* rather than their auspiciousness as harbingers of these results. Efficacy and auspiciousness often go together, of course, since most actions get to be good or bad news only by causally promoting good or bad things. In cases where causing and indicating come apart, however, . . . it is the causal properties of the act, rather than its purely evidential features, that should serve as the guide to rational conduct.⁴⁴

Is this a distinction without a difference? Is denying ESC while maintaining that MEP applies to signatory desires in some sense not meaningfully different from denying MEP as a necessary condition, accepting MEP as a sufficient condition, and maintaining ESC?

The claim that my rejection of ESC amounts to a superficial distinction has force only if the following principle is a necessary truth:

Signatory Belief to Desire (SBD): If an agent with option O has beliefs that entail that doing O would be a sign (but not a cause) of the satisfaction of one of their desires, then that agent desires to do O .

If SBD is a necessary truth, then necessarily, if an agent S is minimally rational, ESC implies S has a subjective reason to do ϕ only if MEP also implies S has a subjective reason to do ϕ .⁴⁵ But SBD is not a necessary truth. There could be a hard-nosed sort of person, a “stoic causalist,” who (on at least one occasion) lacks any desire to do a thing they are certain is not a means to anything they want, despite believing that to do it would be a sign of something they want.

44 Joyce, *The Foundations of Causal Decision Theory*, 150.

45 If ESC implies that an agent S has a subjective practical reason to do an option O , then S believes doing O would be a sign (but not a cause) of something they desire. Thus, given that SBD is necessary, if ESC implies that S has a subjective practical reason to do O , then S desires to do O . But if S desires to do O , then provided that S is minimally rational, S believes that doing O is a means to satisfy one of their desires, since it is analytic that doing O is a means to its being that case that one does O .

Should we take SBD to be a norm and hence conclude that the only time ESC and MEP clash is in cases where the agent is “already” irrational? I think not. For one thing, SBD supports the connection between ESC and MEP only if it is restricted to working desire. But given that restriction, SBD is a questionable norm. (Would the stoic causalist be criticizable for, say, feeling no “pull” to doing the thing that would have no causal impact on what they care about?) For another, even if SBD were a norm, violating it would make one guilty of conative, not practical, irrationality. That is, the violation would consist in lacking a rationally required desire.⁴⁶ It seems not implausible that an agent could be conatively irrational while still being practically rational, and vice versa. If these are indeed separate normative domains (cf. section 3.2), then the disagreement between ESC and MEP over what subjective practical reasons are had by the stoic causalist is substantive regardless of whether SBD is a norm.

So much for the rejection of Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl by way of ESC and SBD. If that route is a dead end to anyone who accepts MEP as a necessary condition, where does that leave this objection? It seems the only available alternative is to deny Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation and to claim Donny is not susceptible to rational criticism in the ways I suggest in section 2.3. There are two possible routes. One route is to remain neutral on the existence of extrinsic desires and claim that it is rationally uncriticizable to not do what you think would satisfy such desires, provided you do not think the rejected action might also lead to the satisfaction of any intrinsic desire.⁴⁷ I have already presented my case for the untenability of this route in sections 3.1 and 3.2. Setting that route aside leaves the final route that this objection might take. One might claim that extrinsic desires simply do not exist and that no one can be rationally criticized for failing to aim to satisfy desires that are not there.⁴⁸ This route denies Desire to Bowl, In Position to Be Rationally Moved, Criticizable Choice, and Criticizable Deliberation; it dismisses Applies to D^* and Best Explanation for a Reason to Bowl as each having (separate) false pre-suppositions. I assume it accepts MEP and does not restrict it (since it denies any need for a restriction—extrinsic desires do not exist). I have already considered and rejected an argument that could be used to support this position in section 3.3. Let us consider a different sort of argument.

The sort of argument we turn to now uses inference to the best explanation (IBE). Examples in print focus on motivation. They claim that since rational motivation can be accounted for by intention and intrinsic desire or by belief

46 Cf. Audi, *The Architecture of Reason*, 69.

47 This is Variant 1B in table 1.

48 This is Variant 2B in table 1.

and intrinsic desire, there is no reason to posit extrinsic desires.⁴⁹ Using IBE to deny the existence of extrinsic desires puts my opponent in a somewhat awkward position, as there appear to be in Donny's case two things that intrinsic desire is ill-suited to explain: (1) Donny's meriting blame if he does not bowl (and praise if he bowls); and (2) Donny's being in a position to be motivated to bowl. Additionally, setting aside cases like Donny's, there is good reason for thinking extrinsic desires play the causal roles that are characteristic of desire (section 1.2.4) in many cases better than intrinsic desires—this too presents a serious difficulty for an IBE-based rejection of extrinsic desires.

Let us start with Donny's susceptibility to criticism. The opponent we are now considering thinks there is no such susceptibility. But why not? Well, one kind of inference to the best explanation takes a liberal stance with regard to *explananda*. It is happy to deny certain would-be *explananda* if doing so results in a pattern of data that admits of a more parsimonious and unifying explanation. So the Quiner of extrinsic desire might argue that we should just reject Criticizable Choice and Criticizable Deliberation since in so doing we get rid of a few stray intuitive *explananda* that are not readily captured via intrinsic desire. The result of rejecting the intuition that Donny merits criticism if he refuses to bowl, goes the thought, is a simpler, more elegant, less gerrymandered combination of *explananda* and *explanans*.

The first thing I will say in response to this is that it seems born out of too severe a lust for parsimony. To be sure, a theory that posits only intrinsic desires is just plain simpler, but brute simplicity is a slim basis for rejecting the intuitions regarding Donny's susceptibility to criticism. The tradeoff appears less like good abduction and more like fetishism. But aside from this, there is another, perhaps firmer reason to resist the Quiner: there are additional *explananda*, apart from Donny's susceptibility to criticism, that intrinsic desires alone are ill suited to handle.

Consider motivation. Even if, to avoid begging the question against this objection, we do not assume Donny is in a position to be moved to go bowling by a signatory desire to bowl a strike, surely it must be granted that he is *somehow* in a position to be moved to go bowling. The battle should be over what the best explanation for this potential motivation is. My opponent will claim the best explanation involves Donny's intrinsic desire for wealth rather than any signatory desire to bowl a strike. Given that Donny does not believe bowling is a means to satisfy his intrinsic desire for wealth or indeed any intrinsic desire of his, how can such a desire get involved in his motivation to bowl? The reply

49 Chan, "Are There Extrinsic Desires?"; Finlay, "Responding to Normativity" and "Motivation to the Means."

is that Donny can be motivated by the complex of his intrinsic desire for wealth and his belief that bowling, specifically bowling a strike, would be a sign of the satisfaction of that desire.⁵⁰ On this picture, Donny can be moved to bowl despite not thereby being moved to acquire, make manifest, realize, or, in short, to cause something he wants to take place.⁵¹ This does not square with the sort of explanation we would most naturally expect Donny to give for why he chose to bowl, should he so choose, or why he was tempted to bowl, should he not. Our natural expectation would be that he would explain his motivation in terms of a desire to bowl a strike: he is thinking about that strike and what it would mean, and he wants it to happen. It is less natural to suggest that on the contrary, he does not want the strike to happen—indeed he does not think bowling would yield anything he wants—and instead he believes bowling would be a sign of something he wants and is moved by *that alone*.⁵² In truth, such motivation, wherein there is no prospect of getting anything one wants—and further, no belief that what one is doing is morally required—seems to me incoherent. Stepping back, though, it is unnecessary to press this incoherence claim; to rebut the IBE-based argument, it suffices to point out that the explanatory picture the Quiner offers is less natural than that Donny's motivation would come from a common means-end belief and his desire to bowl a strike.

There is one final set of data that intrinsic desires are ill suited to help explain and for which it seems extrinsic desires ought to be posited. Extrinsic desires, including signatory desires like Donny's, are in some cases the most natural states to play the causal roles of desire (cf. section 1.2.4). That is, extrinsic desires can intuitively be working desires (cf. sections 1.2.5 and 3.3).

Not everyone agrees. Notably, David Chan has presented several cases meant to show that only intrinsic desires can play the causal roles stereotypical of desire.⁵³ Here is one of his cases:

John may be afraid of dogs and dislike the sight of dogs. But John may be in love with a woman whom he regularly sees walking her dog around the block. John may therefore welcome, and even look forward to, seeing her dog coming around the corner on its leash, as he knows that

50 A dialectically equivalent alternative says his motivation would come via an intention suitably formed on the basis of the belief(s) just mentioned.

51 Notably, the opponent we are now imagining would hold such motivation to be irrational, since deeming it rational requires ESC, which we are assuming has been rejected.

52 Interlocutor: The claim is not that he can be moved by belief alone but that he can be moved by belief together with his intrinsic desire. Me: How can an intrinsic desire in any way move him to do something he is sure will not lead to its satisfaction?

53 Chan, "Are There Extrinsic Desires?"

it will be followed by his beloved coming into view. Since John does not have an intrinsic desire to see the dog, it is suggested that his positive feelings in favor of seeing the dog can be attributed to an extrinsic desire.

Speaking of this case, Chan has said the following:

It is not the sight of the dog but the thought of seeing his beloved that gives John pleasure, and he would be not in the least disappointed if his beloved appeared around the corner without her dog. The daydreaming that is motivated by John's desires will be about meeting his beloved without the dog appearing, even if this cannot happen in the real world.

Chan's claims strike me as unappealing. I see no reason why imagining or experiencing the sight of the dog rounding the corner cannot be a source of pleasure for John. ("Oh boy, there is her dog! In just a moment, she will be rounding the corner as well!") To be sure, John's belief that the dog is a sign of the woman's impending presence is (*ceteris paribus*) a necessary background condition for dog sighting (imagined or real) to cause pleasure. But nevertheless, the sight itself still intuitively can cause pleasure. By the same token, it is implausible to insist that John cannot daydream about the dog's appearing (only to be followed closely by his crush) absent an intrinsic desire to see the dog. Here my opponent might argue that all that is needed to explain John's pleasure at the dog sighting (imagined or real) is an intrinsic desire to see his crush together with a belief that the dog is a sign that he will soon see his crush. They might say the same thing about the other causal effects of the supposed extrinsic desire, e.g., John's attention being directed toward the sound of a dog approaching and the "pull" he feels toward the thought of seeing the dog. This seems to me best taken as an argument for the view, defended by Michael Smith, that extrinsic desires can be reduced to "suitably related" complexes of intrinsic desire and belief.⁵⁴ It seems

54 Smith, "Instrumental Desires and Instrumental Rationality." Notably, Smith's "suitably related" qualification, which looks like a problem for a pure reduction, is indispensable. This is because it seems possible (cf. the "stoic causalist" described earlier) to have an intrinsic desire, believe that the truth of some proposition would be a sign or means to the satisfaction of that desire, and yet just not want the truth of the proposition (cf. Smith, 97–98). But further, leaving out "suitably related" seems to commit one to something stronger than (the already implausible) SBD. Whereas SBD is limited to desires to do things, the view in question minus the "suitably related" qualification would entail that in general, whenever one has an intrinsic desire and a belief that the truth of a proposition would be a sign or cause of that desire's satisfaction, one thereby has an extrinsic desire for the truth of the proposition. The resulting proliferation of (mostly gerrymandered) extrinsic desires is unattractive, as they would all, it seems, have to count as working rather than idle desires (cf. section 1.2.5). One avoids this by saying that only the "suitably related" belief-plus-intrinsic-desire complexes count as working extrinsic desires.

to give us no reason to eliminate John's extrinsic desire altogether. Whether Smith's reduction succeeds or not, extrinsic desire is in no danger of elimination.

The reader might be unsure of my take on Chan's case. The sort of intuitions I am aiming to prompt are liable to be muddled due to the "closeness," causally and spatiotemporally, of the objects of John's extrinsic and intrinsic desire (i.e., the dog and John's crush). I suggest we consider a case that lacks this closeness.

Recall my Biden example from section 3.3. Consider me in the days after the 2020 election but before Biden's victory was announced. At that time, finding out that Biden had won Michigan would have been (and indeed later was) a source of great pleasure; I fantasized about a Biden win in Michigan; my attention was drawn to news alerts about Michigan; etc. Some desire ought to have been playing these roles. My claim is that it was an extrinsic desire for a Biden win in Michigan. But notice: all the ready-to-hand alternative desires that might have played those roles were *also* extrinsic. What were those desires? Well, a desire for a Biden presidency, for a reversal of Trump's policies on climate change, for more humane policies on immigration, etc. Assuming those desires existed, none of them were for things I wanted *in themselves*, and in fact, I am not even sure exactly what intrinsic desires of mine would have ultimately supported them. If forced to specify the intrinsic desires, they would have been something like desires for general human happiness, equality, health, flourishing—but those too might ultimately have turned out to be extrinsic desires. My immediate answer would have been nebulous and tentative, and I would have needed to reflect on it to sort it out.⁵⁵ In this case, it is, I expect, clearer than in Chan's case both that an extrinsic desire—my desire for a Biden win in Michigan—is playing the desire roles and that there are no obvious intrinsic desires at hand to usurp those roles.

4. THE TWO-LEVEL ACCOUNT

I have argued that an extrinsic desire—specifically, a signatory desire—together with a means-end belief can ground a subjective practical reason. The cases I have used show further that such reasons can occur even if the agent is certain none of their options are means to any of their intrinsic desires. So there can be a subjective reason to do something grounded solely in extrinsic desire, unaccompanied by any reason grounded in intrinsic desire to do the thing. What is the status of such reasons? In particular, what happens when they compete

55 Facts about what people intrinsically desire seem like they will ordinarily be subject to a good deal more indeterminacy than facts about what they extrinsically desire. Cf. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*: "Whether an aim is final or derivative is not always easy to ascertain. The distinction is made on the basis of a person's rational plan of life and the structure of this plan is not generally obvious, even to him" (494).

with reasons grounded in intrinsic desire? In this section I defend the view that subjective reasons grounded in extrinsic desires can be *trumped* by reasons grounded in intrinsic desire, and this can happen even when the desires and beliefs grounding the respective reasons are of equal respective intensities.

Suppose you have only two options, *A* and *B*. You believe *A* is a means to satisfy an extrinsic desire but not an intrinsic desire, and *B* is a means to satisfy an intrinsic desire. Suppose the desires are of equal intensity, and the beliefs carry equal confidence. My claim is that you rationally must do *B*. Why? Not because of any *quantitative* difference between your desires or reasons but rather because of the *qualitative* difference between intrinsic and extrinsic desires. If you intrinsically desire something, you want it for its own sake—it is one of your basic ends. If you only extrinsically desire something, you do not want it for its own sake—it is not one of your basic ends. It is irrational to pursue something that is not one of your basic ends at the expense of something that is—or at least this is so when the desires for the two things are of close to equal intensity, and your levels of confidence in your ability to obtain each desire are close to equal.

Let us check this with a case. Walter believes a predictor whose predictions he is sure are roughly 90 percent reliable sent him a coupon for a club sandwich, a beer, and a dessert iff she predicted he would not bowl today. He believes the coupon will arrive at his house tonight if ever. What Walter intrinsically desires are pleasurable taste sensations, which for simplicity we will represent in terms of gustatory hedons. He does not believe staying home is a means to such sensations, since the coupon is either already in the mail, or it is not coming regardless. His other notable option is to go bowling with Donny and the Dude. He is confident that if and only if he bowls with them, they will buy him a club sandwich and a beer. A club sandwich and a beer would yield nine gustatory hedons; an added dessert would make it ten. So Walter does not believe staying home will cause him to get any gustatory hedons, but it will give him a *sign* (with roughly 90 percent reliability) that he will soon be able to get ten hedons. By contrast, he is more or less certain that hanging out with his friends will procure him nine gustatory hedons. His desire for the sign of ten hedons and his desire for nine hedons are of close to equal intensity, but they are of different quality: one is extrinsic, the other intrinsic. His confidence in the claim that the predictor is 90 percent reliable is roughly equal to his confidence in his friends' willingness to buy him dinner. There are no other desires that Walter believes might be satisfied as a result of anything he can do tonight. He cannot both stay home and go bowling; he must choose one.

By MEP, Walter has a subjective practical reason to stay home that is grounded in his signatory desire together with the associated means-end belief, as well as a subjective practical reason to go bowling with his friends that is grounded in his

intrinsic desire for nine gustatory hedons together with the associated means-end belief. What I claim is that the reason grounded in the signatory desire is trumped by the reason grounded in the intrinsic desire, even if the two desires have equal intensity. In other words, Walter is not faced with a toss-up; the only rational option is to go bowling with his friends. To reiterate the core intuition, there is an inherent irrationality in choosing to make desirable but causally impotent signs of your ends happen rather than to make your ends happen—or this is so at least in a case like Walter's, where the desire for the sign and the intrinsic desire are close to equal intensity, and the respective means-end beliefs carry close to equal confidence. It bears emphasizing that trumping in cases like Walter's is not due to one reason's arising from a means-end belief and the other's arising from a "signatory belief." Both reasons arise from means-end beliefs.

Are there any cases where trumping does not occur? If the extrinsic desire is far more intense than the intrinsic desire or if the agent is far more confident in their ability to satisfy the extrinsic desire, should we say that the reason grounded in the intrinsic desire still trumps the reason grounded in the extrinsic desire? In short, are there thresholds that prevent trumping? It seems unlikely that everyone who considers this will arrive at the same intuitive answer. In the interest of setting forth the securest aspects of an account of subjective reasons grounded in signatory desire, I will take a neutral approach. I will incorporate thresholds into my account but make no assumptions as to where these thresholds should be set or even whether they should be finite rather than infinite. The outlines of a view involving trumping can be drawn so long as trumping occurs in cases like Walter's, where thresholds clearly do not come into play given (a) the near equality in the intensities of the signatory desire and the intrinsic desire and (b) the near equality in the levels of confidence in the respective means-end beliefs.

Let us say that a subjective practical reason grounded in an extrinsic desire is *subordinate*, and a subjective practical reason grounded in an intrinsic desire is *superior*. Let the *weight* of a subjective practical reason grounded in a means-end belief and a desire be an increasing function of the confidence the belief carries and the desire's intensity.⁵⁶ For any given option *O*, I assume there is some (possibly empty) set containing all and only superior (/subordinate) reasons that favor *O*.⁵⁷ I call this set the set of superior (/subordinate) reasons favoring *O*, and I assume the reasons in that set have a total weight that is an

56 I intend "increasing" in this sense: letting $w(c, i)$ be weight as a function of belief confidence and desire intensity, I assume that if $0 \leq n, m$ then $w(c, i) \leq w(c + n, i + m)$ and if both $0 \leq n, m$ and $0 < n + m$ then $w(c, i) < w(c + n, i + m)$.

57 For convenience, I treat a single-member set as interchangeable with its member, and I speak collectively about the members of a set by speaking of the set.

increasing function of their individual weights.⁵⁸ I say that an agent's superior reasons favor some option O iff there is no O^* such that the total weight of superior reasons favoring O^* is greater than the total weight of superior reasons favoring O . Let every positive number be a *threshold*. Say that the set of subordinate practical reasons to do an option O is *trumped* if its total weight is below the *appropriate* threshold, and the superior subjective practical reasons favor some alternative option(s) distinct from O .⁵⁹ Say the set of subordinate reasons to do an option is *active* iff it is not trumped.

With these definitions in hand, I propose the following.

The Two-Level Account (TLA): If the set of subordinate subjective practical reasons \mathbb{R} favoring an option O is active, its members play the distinctive roles of subjective practical reasons. If \mathbb{R} is trumped,

1. The members of \mathbb{R} do not contribute their weight to O ; the weight, individually and collectively, of the members of \mathbb{R} is irrelevant to what it is rational for the agent to do.
2. The agent cannot be rationally criticized for failing to act in accord with \mathbb{R} .
3. If the agent has suitably involved all their superior subjective practical reasons in their deliberation, failure to also consider, individually or collectively, the members of \mathbb{R} is not rationally criticizable.⁶⁰
4. The agent cannot be rationally motivated by \mathbb{R} .⁶¹

58 It is natural to think of this function as summation, but I do not assume this. I also do not assume favoring is one to one; a reason might favor two or more options equally—that is, it might favor doing any member of a set of options, or it might favor two or more options to different degrees. In either of these cases, it might be better to speak of a “total favoring amount” rather than a total weight.

59 There are two things to note here. First, this is only a sufficient condition. There may be other circumstances in which a subordinate reason is trumped; I am currently uncertain about this. Second, this account is meant to be neutral on what thresholds are appropriate. It can be squared with the view that trumping always occurs by using the extended reals and taking the appropriate threshold to always be positive infinity. If appropriate thresholds should ever be finite, I make no assumptions about what determines them (beyond what I have already said), about whether they should be the same for every agent at every time, or about whether they should be vague. What complications arise if they are treated as vague depends on what theory of vagueness is chosen. (E.g., a trivalent approach requires dealing with reasons that are neither trumped nor not trumped.) As far as I see, such complications are orthogonal to my claims.

60 Note that this is only a sufficient condition. I tend to think there are other kinds of conditions under which it is rationally uncriticizable to ignore trumped reasons.

61 This is not to say that the agent cannot be *irrationally* motivated by \mathbb{R} . Indeed, I would say that they can.

TLA and MEP are logically independent. One could accept MEP only as a sufficient condition while also accepting ESC (cf. section 3.4) and consistently conjoin both of those with TLA. Since I accept MEP as a necessary and sufficient condition and reject ESC, I prefer to take MEP and TLA as a package view, on which you can have a superior subjective reason to do some option *O* only if you believe that *O* is a means to the satisfaction of an intrinsic desire. I call the conjunction of TLA with MEP the *Two-Level Means-End Account*.

Given the Two-Level Means-End Account, Walter subjectively rationally ought to hang out with his friends. By MEP, Walter has a superior reason to hang out and a subordinate reason to stay home. The latter reason is trumped. (In other words, its weight is below the appropriate threshold, and Walter's superior reasons favor a different option.) So by TLA, Walter's subjective reason to stay home does not contribute its weight. Since his only other subjective reason favors hanging out with his friends, that is the rational choice.

There are interesting cases where the subordinate reasons for one option are trumped but those for another option are not. Naturally, one way this can occur is if the weight of the former but not the latter is below the appropriate threshold. It can also occur if superior reasons do not favor a unique option. Suppose there are subordinate reasons R_1 to do *A* and R_2 to do *B*, where R_1 and R_2 have weights below the appropriate threshold (so they are both "trumpable"), and superior reasons favor doing either *B* or *C*. In this case, R_1 is trumped, but R_2 is not. Let us look at this more concretely.

The Dude's only intrinsic desire is for pleasure. He is certain that a Predictor mailed him a free day-pass to a spa iff she predicted he would go bowling at Alley A. He is also certain she mailed him eight dollars iff she predicted he would go bowling at Alley B. The Dude wants to bowl at Alley A (/B), since he believes that would be a sign of an incoming spa pass (/eight bucks). The Dude thinks a spa day would be good for ten hedons; as for the eight bucks, he can use it to buy a White Russian, which would be good for one hedon. Now, unlike Alley A, to which he is indifferent, the Dude likes Alley B; he digs the ambiance. He is certain going to Alley B is a means to nine hedons. If he stays home, the Dude will take a long bath, which would also be nine hedons. Like Walter, the Dude takes the Predictor to be 90 percent reliable. See table 2 below for a summary of the Dude's hedons given each action-prediction combination.

Table 2. The Dude's Hedons Depending on Which Prediction Was Made and What He Does

	Alley A predicted	Alley B predicted	Stay home predicted
Bowl at Alley A	10	1	0
Bowl at Alley B	18	10	9
Stay home	18	10	9

For definiteness, let us assume that the weight of a reason grounded in a desire D and a belief B is equal to the strength of the desire times the confidence (understood as a percentage) carried by the belief. Let us also assume that the Dude's desire for n hedons has an intensity of n . The Dude has no superior reason to bowl at Alley A . He has a subordinate reason to bowl at Alley A with weight 9. He has a subordinate reason to bowl at Alley B with weight 0.9. He has a superior reason to bowl at Alley B with weight 9. Last, he has a superior reason to stay home with weight 9. See table 3 for a summary of the Dude's reasons and their weights.

Table 3. Summary of Weights of Reasons

	Bowling at Alley A	Bowling at Alley B	Staying home
Total weight of superior reasons		9	9
Total weight of subordinate reasons	9	0.9	

Should the Dude go bowling at Alley A and get the sign of the spa pass? Or is he permitted to either bowl at Alley B or stay home, since either one is a means to more intrinsically desired pleasure than bowling at Alley A is a means to? None of the above! Given its equality in weight to the superior reason to bowl at Alley B , the Dude's subordinate reason to bowl at Alley A is trumped. But the subordinate reason to go bowling at Alley B is active and breaks the tie with staying home. The Dude should go bowling at Alley B : it is a means to just as much intrinsic desire as soaking in the tub, but it also satisfies a signatory desire.⁶²

62 If we assume agents' utility functions over possible worlds reflect intrinsic desire only (cf. Weirich, *Decision Space*, "Intrinsic Utility's Compositionality" and *Models of Decision-Making*), we get an interesting result for decision theory. Evidential Decision Theory says the Dude must go bowling at either Alley A or Alley B , since according to EDT, $\text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{AlleyA}) = \sum_n n[\text{Pr}(n \text{ hedons}|\text{AlleyA})] \approx 10 = \text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{AlleyB}) = \sum_n n[\text{Pr}(n \text{ hedons}|\text{AlleyB})] \approx 10 > \text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{Home}) = \sum_n n[\text{Pr}(n \text{ hedons}|\text{Home})] \approx 9$. By contrast, Causal Decision Theory (CDT) says he can either go bowling at Alley B or stay home, since according to CDT, given the aforementioned assumption, $\text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{AlleyA}) + 9 \leq \text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{AlleyB}) = \text{ExpectedUtility}(\text{Home})$. Hence, by the lights of the Two-Level Means-End Account, both Evidential and Causal Decision Theories are wrong, for the Dude rationally must go bowling at Alley B . For background on decision theory and the debate between the Evidential and Causal theories, see Jeffrey, *The Logic of Decision*; Nozick, "Newcomb's Problem and Two Principles of Choice"; Gibbard and Harper, "Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of Expected Utility"; Sobel, "Probability, Chance, and Choice" and "Notes on Decision Theory"; Skyrms, *Causal Necessity and Pragmatics and Empiricism*; Lewis, "Causal Decision Theory"; and Joyce, *The Foundations of Causal Decision Theory*.

5. CONCLUSION

As a general rule, when you want a mere sign, you do not also believe you can make that sign happen without undermining its significance. Cases like Donny's, Walter's, and the Dude's show that deviations from this rule are not inconceivable. I have argued that in such deviant cases, the agent has a subjective reason to bring about the sign they desire, and this reason can be accounted for by the straightforward means-end principle. What is more, such unusual cases make it clear that it is possible to have a subjective practical reason to do something despite believing it to be neither morally required nor a means to satisfying any of one's intrinsic desires. The view that subjective reasons can be grounded in signatory desires implies that they can be grounded in extrinsic desires; I have therefore responded to philosophers who argue that extrinsic desires are not rationally relevant as well as to those who argue that they simply do not exist. Last, I have argued that subjective reasons grounded in extrinsic desires can be trumped by ones grounded in intrinsic desires and have presented a Two-Level Account to express this idea. Conjoining this account with the aforementioned means-end principle yields an outline of a theory of desire-based subjective reasons: the Two-Level Means-End Account.⁶³

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