

## RESOLUTION AND RESOLVE

### RATIONALLY RESISTING TEMPTATION

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FOLK WISDOM tells us that if we have any hope of achieving something difficult, we will have to make a resolution to do the thing in question. We do not stumble by accident into running ultramarathons, being good romantic partners, or writing books: we first make resolutions about these things.<sup>1</sup> After all, in the absence of a resolution to do a difficult thing, we can simply change our mind and decide to do something else at any point. Resolutions, in other words, draw a line between intentions that we can revise on a whim and those that we cannot rationally revise without special justification.

But are resolutions appropriate philosophical fodder? Might they be instead a matter for empirical study? After all, one natural question to raise about resolutions is whether they are of any *use*. This is clearly an empirical question, and an important one at that. However, prior and adjacent to this empirical question about resolution are philosophical questions. They are:

1. What is a resolution?
2. Why should we grant resolutions rational authority over our actions, given that the moment of temptation involves the (re)evaluation that it would be best to act on the temptation?
3. Are resolutions a uniquely rational way to resist temptation? Are there any uniquely rational means of resisting temptation?

The first question matters but is to my mind the least interesting of the three questions. It is clear that resolution is some kind of extra-committed intention: I might form the intention to have fried rice for lunch because I like fried rice and I have leftovers readily available in the fridge, or I might form the intention to have fried rice for lunch because I am committing to a gluten-free diet and fried rice is the only gluten-free meal I have available in the home. In the case

1 Of course, many cases of romantic partnership involve something beyond a resolution: a promise to another person. However, it is also common and natural to make resolutions regarding important relationships.

where I form the intention to eat fried rice just because I like it and it is available, I clearly remain open to changing my mind. Perhaps lunchtime rolls around and I decide to have quesadillas instead. But in the second case, where I resolve to have fried rice, it is clear that my intention carries with it the further thought that I should not change my mind or go back on this intention unless there are extenuating circumstances.

When we ask what a resolution is, we are trying to understand this element of “extra commitment.” Does the extra commitment take the form of a second-order intention, a first-order intention plus the intention to not reconsider? Or an intention-desire pair, where we have a first-order intention and a desire to not reconsider? It seems to me that philosophers are most likely to answer question one in light of their answer to question three. I will say more about question three shortly, but if our focus is on giving an account of why resolution would help an ideally rational agent to accomplish her goals (without committing to empirical claims about how actual, nonideal agents manage to accomplish their goals), then it is natural to allow our answer to question three to drive our answer to question one, as I think is the case with the two accounts of resolution I will consider below.

The second question is the one that preoccupies most of the existing philosophical literature on resolutions.<sup>2</sup> For example, the following case posed by Bratman is representative of the cases motivating this literature:

Consider Ann. She enjoys a good read after dinner but also loves fine beer at dinner. However, she knows that if she has more than one beer at dinner she cannot concentrate on her book after dinner. Prior to dinner Ann prefers an evening of one beer plus a good book to an evening with more than one beer but no book. Her problem, though, is that each evening at dinner, having drunk her first Pilsner Urquell, she finds herself tempted by the thought of a second: For a short period of time she prefers a second beer to her after-dinner read. This new preference is not experienced by her as compulsive.<sup>3</sup>

The question is whether it would be rational for Ann to act on a prior preference given that her preferences have now changed. However, for the most part I will set aside this problem in this article: I do not assume that our preferences

2 The current philosophical literature on resolution is concerned primarily with this question. See, for instance, Andreou, “Temptation, Resolutions, and Regret”; Bratman, “Toxin, Temptation, and the Stability of Intention,” “Temptation Revisited,” and “Temptation and the Agent’s Standpoint”; and Paul, “Diachronic Incontinence Is a Problem in Moral Philosophy.”

3 Bratman, “Toxin, Temptation, and the Stability of Intention,” 74.

in each moment determine what is most rational for us to do in that moment. I will not provide a full argument for this claim here, but in brief, it seems to me that this way of thinking uncritically adopts many of the assumptions of, for instance, rational choice theory in economics, and moral philosophers should not feel beholden to adopt such assumptions, or at least not adopt them uncritically.

The final question, then, is the primary object of my attention in this paper: Should we expect resolutions to be of any use in resisting temptation? As I have already mentioned, this question is closely related to empirical questions about the efficacy of resolutions. However, there is space to consider this question philosophically. We might for instance hold fixed the idea that resolutions are at least of *some* use in resisting temptation and then attempt to give an account of why resolutions help rational agents resist temptation. Or, we might think in terms of an ideally rational agent: not so ideally rational that they do not experience temptation at all, but ideally rational enough to respond to temptation in a fully rational way. While a less rational agent might need to use commitment devices or other such strategies that tackle temptation “sideways,” as it were, we might hope that resolution is a way for this ideally rational agent to tackle temptation head on.<sup>4</sup>

In the paper, I will first consider two dueling accounts of resolution, those put forth by Richard Holton and Alida Liberman. Ultimately, I think both accounts go awry in their failure to think about the nature of tempting desire. Tempting desires involve the presentation of reasons, and we cannot use resolution understood as an intention, reason, or desire to simply “hold off” temptation. Instead, in the final section of the paper I argue that the most rational way to resist temptation is to cultivate one’s character and agency such that you are not tempted.

## 1. THE NATURE OF RESOLUTION

In his book *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, Richard Holton introduces the idea of a resolution, writing, “Resolutions serve to overcome the desires or beliefs that

4 The idea of a commitment device is most often used in economics, psychology, and public health. Formally speaking, “a commitment device [is] an arrangement entered into by an agent who restricts his or her future choice set by making certain choices more expensive, perhaps infinitely expensive, while also satisfying two conditions: (a) The agent would, on the margin, pay something in the present to make those choices more expensive, even if he or she received no other benefit for the payment, and (b) the arrangement does not have a strategic purpose with respect to others” (Bryan, Karlan, and Nelson, “Commitment Devices,” 673). A classic example of a commitment device is Odysseus tying himself to the mast of the ship in order to hear the sirens.

the agent fears they will form by the time they come to act, desires or beliefs that will inhibit them from acting as they now plan.”<sup>5</sup> So the purpose of a resolution is to hold off beliefs and desires that might prevent me from acting as I now intend. But what is a resolution? According to Holton, a resolution is a pair of intentions, one first order and one second order. It is “both an intention to engage in a certain action, and a further intention to not let that intention be deflected.”<sup>6</sup> So someone who resolves to quit smoking forms a first-order intention to quit, and a second-order intention to stick with the first-order intention. This second-order intention does not generate new reasons (we would have a bootstrapping problem if it did), but instead entrenches the first-order decision in response to reasons for not reconsidering that decision.<sup>7</sup>

There is something intuitive about this view of resolution, since it captures the phenomenology of resolving: deciding to do something, and furthermore deciding to not let yourself be distracted or deterred from your goal. However, in the following I will consider an objection raised against this account of resolution by Alida Liberman in her article, “Reconsidering Resolutions.”

Liberman argues that resolutions understood as two-tier intentions are not effective in resisting temptation. She summarizes her objection as follows:

It seems that the second-order intention should succumb to the same temptation to which the first-order intention is susceptible. . . . Why do the very same considerations that tempt you toward watching yet another episode of your favorite TV show—say, your burning desire to find out what happens next, and your aversion to working—not *also* tempt you to reconsider your resolution to turn off the TV and get to work on your paper?<sup>8</sup>

Liberman develops this objection through an argument she calls “Temptation Transmission.” The argument comes in two stages. The first stage lays out two background principles, and the second gives the actual argument, which consists of three premises.<sup>9</sup> The details of her argument are compelling, but for our purposes we need only consider her conclusion. She writes:

5 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 77.

6 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 11.

7 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 146.

8 Liberman, “Reconsidering Resolutions,” 4.

9 The first background principle is: “Temptation Claim: Temptation works by altering the appearances in favor of there being a reason to do the tempting thing, from the agent’s perspective” (Liberman, “Reconsidering Resolutions,” 6). The other background principle is simply a version of means-end transmission: “Rational-Means Reasons Transmission (RMRT): Where *E* is an intentional action, if it appears to a rational agent *A* that (1) there

Since the temptation to  $\phi$  leads to the appearance of an *equally strong* reason to abandon the first-order intention to  $\phi$  *and* to abandon the resolute second-order intention, the second-order intention cannot do any meaningful work in blocking temptation and preventing judgment shift.<sup>10</sup>

In short, Liberman argues that resolutions do not work and that the second-order intention is not an effective source of rational resistance against temptation because that intention is itself vulnerable to temptation's effects.

Liberman goes on to offer her own solution to the efficacy objection. The third premise in her argument relies crucially on the rational requirement to avoid *akrasia*, and so Liberman thinks that we must identify a mental state that is not subject to an "anti-*akrasia* norm" to block temptation. She turns to desire to play this role.

*Second-Order Desire Account* (SODA): Resolving to  $\phi$  involves intending to  $\phi$ , and *desiring* not to reconsider the intention to  $\phi$ .<sup>11</sup>

On this view, then, a resolution is a (first-order) intention coupled with a (second-order) desire. For example, if I resolve to clean my office, I intend to clean *and* I desire to not reconsider my intention. Liberman thinks that there are two notable advantages to her view over Holton's. One, it does not fall prey to the Temptation Transmission argument because the argument responds specifically to resolution understood as a two-tier intention, and two, it better captures data about resolutions.<sup>12</sup>

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is a reason of strength  $X$  for an agent  $A$  to attain end  $E$ , and (2)  $M$  is the only rationally permissible way to attain  $E$ , then there will appear to  $A$  to be a reason of strength  $X$  for  $A$  to do  $M$ " ("Reconsidering Resolutions," 6). Then, the actual argument appears as follows: "(1) When  $\phi$  ing is an action about which an agent has formed a resolution, an apparent reason to  $\phi$  (stemming from temptation) necessarily leads to an apparent reason to intend to  $\phi$ . (2) An apparent reason to intend to  $\phi$  necessarily leads to an apparent reason to reconsider the intention to avoid  $\phi$ -ing (call this intention 'Intention 1'). (3) An apparent reason to reconsider Intention 1 necessarily leads to an apparent reason to reconsider the intention not to reconsider Intention 1 (call this intention 'Intention 2')" ("Reconsidering Resolutions," 9).

10 Liberman, "Reconsidering Resolutions," 15.

11 Liberman, "Reconsidering Resolutions," 18.

12 Liberman notes that resolution comes in degrees and that some are stronger than others, and "appealing to desire as a necessary component of a resolution gives us an easy and efficient explanation of how resolutions can vary in strength. . . . We can explain the strength of a resolution as a direct result of the strength of the agent's desire to avoid reconsideration" ("Reconsidering Resolutions," 20). She further claims that the strength of the resolution desire determines the degree to which the agent is successful in resisting temptation. She writes:

In general, the degree to which an agent is resolute in  $\phi$ -ing seems to depend not on how strong the temptation to  $\phi$  is, but on how much the agent cares about

The chief problem with SODA is that we can apply the general gist of the Temptation Transmission argument to Liberman's own positive account. Why should we expect our second-order desires to persist through temptation, when our first-order desires so frequently fail in the face of temptation? Temptation paradigmatically comes in the form of desire, swamping other relevant desires. So how then is desire supposed to play the role of resistor to (tempting) desire?

In order to see how this works, consider an example Liberman uses in defense of SODA: the resolution not to eat donuts. In this case, we have three pertinent desires:

*Desire 1:* The desire *not* to eat donuts, which corresponds to an intention not to eat donuts (*Intention 1*)—first-order desire.<sup>13</sup>

*Desire 2:* The desire to persist in the intention not to eat donuts—second-order desire.

*Desire 3:* The desire to eat donuts—tempting desire.

Imagine that I form an intention not to have a donut on the grounds of *Desire 1*, and furthermore I desire to persist in this resolution. But then I enter the break room and a colleague has brought in fresh donuts, and I am tempted to eat a donut after all. In the face of this tempting desire, imagine that *Desire 1* drops away. I no longer desire not to eat a donut; in fact, I desire the opposite. Why should we expect *Desire 2* to persist after *Desire 1* has disappeared? Liberman's answer to this is as follows:

The second-order desire can persist when the first-order desire does not because the second-order desire is held for additional reasons. I might desire to avoid eating a donut because I do not want to ruin my supper, or because I do not want to get powdered sugar on my shirt, or because I want to heed my doctor's advice to consume less sugar, etc. I desire to remain firm in my intention to avoid eating donuts for another reason:

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whether she  $\phi$ 's... Suppose I resolve not to drink any beer at a party tonight, and I care very much about whether I keep this resolution. In such a case, it seems that even extremely tempting beer ... will not be very likely to sway me to break my resolution. (32)

13 It may seem odd to speak of a first-order desire to not eat donuts, since normally we associate the temptation to eat donuts with desire, but we do not really associate the resolution to give up donuts with desire. However, Liberman herself speaks this way ("Reconsidering Resolutions," 22–23), and I think this language is natural in that we have a (placeholder) desire to  $\phi$  whenever we intend to  $\phi$ . However, I do think that Liberman ought to draw a distinction between placeholder and substantive desires, since there are interesting and relevant differences between the two categories.

because I care about carrying out my donut-avoidance plan and being an effective agent regarding the baked goods I consume . . . my desire to carry out my plan is a desire about what kind of agent I want to be; this sort of desire is resistant to temptations that press on the content of the plan itself.<sup>14</sup>

The agent is likely to lose Desire 1, the first-order desire not to eat donuts, in the face of temptation. Why not think that the tempting desire also puts pressure on the second-order desire, the desire to persist in the intention not to eat donuts? Liberman claims that the agent's second-order desire not to reconsider is supported by her reason to be an effective agent, someone who follows through on her plans and intentions.<sup>15</sup> Our interest in being an "effective agent" thus is an additional reason, separate from our first-order reasons, and it is this additional reason that is supposed to bolster second-order desires in the face of temptation.

However, the heart of Liberman's critique of Holton's views is that temptation applies just as much to our second-order intentions as it does to first-order intentions. Although she defends her own view from this objection by appealing to "being an effective agent" as an independent, additional reason that bolsters the second-order desire, I think this appeal is ultimately unsuccessful.

First, although being an effective agent, the sort of person who follows through on his commitments, is a worthwhile aim, being an effective agent does not require us to follow through on every single resolution. Take the example of resolutions regarding difficult athletic pursuits that require a demanding training regimen. One reason people undertake such pursuits is to prove to themselves their own capability, and in this sense, being an effective agent is among their motives. However, too much rigidity in following one's training plan is a detriment to meeting one's goal. Obsessive adherence to one's training plan is likely to lead to injury or burnout. Rather, what is needed—and is arguably harder to achieve—is flexible consistency. The point holds in general as well: to be a generally effective agent, yes, you must be willing to stick to your resolutions. But perfect adherence to one's resolutions is not effective agency. It is obsessiveness that is likely to backfire.

14 Liberman, "Reconsidering Resolutions," 22–23.

15 Although Liberman does not highlight this aspect of being an effective agent, it seems to me to share similarities with accounts that emphasize the temporally extended nature of practical rationality. For instance, Thomas Nagel writes that one sees "oneself as a temporally extended being for whom the future is no less real than the present" (*The Possibility of Altruism*, 69). As Michael Bratman points out, simply recognizing that one is temporally extended demands some concern for one's future ("Toxin, Temptation, and the Stability of Intention," 85–86).

Furthermore, if our response to temptation is to count the reasons in favor of not reconsidering versus the reasons in favor of reconsidering, it is not clear that the plentiful reasons on the side of not reconsidering will be decisive in favor of staying resolute. Given that temptation paradigmatically involves the presentation of reasons, it may not matter that we have independent, additional reason for the second-order desire (or the second-order intention, on Holton's account). We cannot weigh our reasons in a neutral deliberative space, because temptation makes certain reasons more salient and thus affects our ability to weigh reasons objectively. In the moment of temptation, our interest in being an effective agent may not count for much.

So whether we understand them as two-tier intentions or an intention-desire combo, resolutions are supposed to entrench or freeze our reasons for our original intention by forestalling reconsideration of that intention. The problem with this strategy is that temptation itself involves the presentation of reasons, and those reasons affect our first- and second-order intentions and first- and second-order desires. When tempted, we will feel that we lack good reason to act as we initially intended to act, and this is a key part of why temptation corrupts our rational agency so easily: it involves the appearance of reasons. Part of being rational is responding to a landscape of changing reasons and updating one's intentions accordingly. This means that, from the first-person perspective, resolutions are not going to be consistently effective, since when tempted, we are faced with reasons to do as we are tempted *and* reason to give up the second-order desire or intention not to reconsider.

## 2. THE NATURE OF TEMPTATION

In short, one reason both Holton's and Liberman's accounts go awry is because they fail to attend carefully to temptation in its own right. Thus, in order to give an account of how to rationally resist temptation, we must have in hand a clear and internally consistent account of the "enemy." Although both Holton and Liberman do briefly define temptation—gesturing in their accounts toward Scanlon's view of desire as a state involving the appearance of reasons—they also take on the additional and conflicting idea of desire being an "urge" or "pull."<sup>16</sup> A charitable interpretation of this move is that they recognize the limitations of Scanlon's account when it comes to motivational pressure, i.e., the felt sense of it being difficult to resist acting on a tempting desire, but I think appealing to "urge" language is not the right corrective to this gap in Scanlon's

16 Liberman for her part adds the idea that desire comes in degrees of "strength" in discussion of SODA ("Reconsidering Resolutions," 16, 20). For Scanlon's views on desire, see *What We Owe to Each Other* and "Reasons and Passions."



account. I will start by presenting Holton's view of temptation, and then move to defending my own account of temptation and how tempting desires affect our deliberation.

Holton's view begins with temptation as it relates to judgment shift, since the two are inseparable on his account. He explains his view in several different passages, writing,

I argue that temptation frequently works not simply by overcoming one's better judgment, but by corrupting one's judgment. It involves what I call judgment shift. . . . This in turn gives rise to the problem of understanding how one can resist [temptation]: the impetus to resist cannot come from the judgment that resistance is best.<sup>17</sup>

The change in valuation [judgment shift] is not the *origin* of the process that leads to the subjects yielding to temptation: it is rather itself caused by [their] awareness that they are likely to yield. . . . If the change in valuation is not the source of the process that leads to yielding, what is? What causes the subjects to yield is desire, in one sense of that rather broad term.<sup>18</sup>

Then, discussing a particular case of temptation studied in experiments done by psychologists Karim and Miller, Holton applies his view as follows:

So, to sum up, what I think is happening in [the experiments] is this: the tempted children *find their attention focused* on the immediately available sweet; as a result they *find themselves with a strong urge* to ring the bell to get it; and, as they become aware that *they are likely to succumb to this urge, they change the evaluation of their options* so as to avoid cognitive dissonance.<sup>19</sup>

Scanlon's influence is clearly present in this description: "the children find their attention focused on." But Holton departs substantially from Scanlon as well in his characterization of tempting desire as a pull or urge, and in the claim that we change our judgment in response to the recognition that we are going to succumb to the urge.<sup>20</sup>

17 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 97.

18 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 101–2.

19 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 102 (emphasis added).

20 At one point Holton directly states, "What is missing in Scanlon's characterization is the idea that desire *pulls* me to a course of action: that I have an *urge*, or, in more extreme cases, a *craving*, something that moves me to do it" (*Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 102).

In short, I think there are two problems with this broad view of desire. First, Holton's understanding of desire is at odds with the rest of what he says about temptation and resolution. Consider again his description of how temptation works in the study:

1. The children find their attention focused.
2. As a result of this focused attention, they experience a strong urge.
3. They realize that they are going to succumb to this urge.
4. They shift their judgment in favor of temptation in order to avoid the cognitive dissonance of not doing that which they judge to be best.

How is resolution supposed to be effective, on this account? As I understand Holton, resolutions work by holding off reconsideration, since the second-order intention involved in reconsideration is the intention not to reconsider the first-order intention. The problem with this is that there is no reconsideration in the summary above. It would naturally fall in step two or step three: perhaps we are prompted to reconsider after having our attention focused, or perhaps the urge of temptation just *is* the urge to reconsider, and so after experiencing the urge, we are likely to reconsider. If there is no moment of reconsidering whether or not to act as resolved, there is no moment at which to choose whether to act as resolved or as tempted, and we simply slide into judgment shift and succumb to temptation, or resist temptation simply because the tempting urge is too weak to be a real threat. This leads me to my second criticism.

Setting aside the consistency of Holton's view, the more significant reason for rejecting an "urge" conception of tempting desires is that this conception renders us passive in the face of our desires. This approach conceptualizes desire or inclination as a force that acts upon us, which removes our agency in the face of desires. In other words, a view of inclination as an urge makes our ability to resist that inclination entirely contingent upon the strength of the inclination.<sup>21</sup>

Just like a current is a force outside of me with which I struggle, so is an urge-desire something outside of me, something against which I struggle. But this is not in fact what inclinations are like. Inclinations are not forces outside of us that act upon us. They arise from within our agency, and when we struggle with an inclination, we are struggling with ourselves, not something foreign to us. Grappling with our own inclinations is not the same as wrestling with

21 Going forward I will tend to use "inclination" rather than desire, since I follow Tamar Schapiro in finding "desire" often unhelpfully vague. By inclination, I mean a desire that pressures the agent to act, i.e., a desire upon which it is easier to act rather than not, and a desire that requires effort to resist.

another person or a strong wind. Complicated though the relationship may be, our inclinations are part of us.

Consider for instance being moved to act as a result of an inclination. If having an inclination is like being pushed and pulled by an external force, then whatever results from that inclination is not properly understood as our action but is instead mere effect or behavior. About this, Tamar Schapiro writes, "If my desire pushes me around like an ocean tide, then it is hard to see how its effects can, in principle, count as my actions, unless action is just a way of being pushed around."<sup>22</sup> As Schapiro points out elsewhere, if inclination is a brute force like a tide or wind, it is not clear how we could ever act *on* an inclination.<sup>23</sup> I can act in light of the tide or the wind, but I cannot act on them in the same way I can act on a strong desire to scream or eat cake or start dancing.

Furthermore, construing inclinations as brute forces does not just create problems for acting *on* inclinations, it also creates a problem when it comes to resisting tempting desires. Take a current in water: my ability to swim against a current is ultimately not up to me. It is up to me whether I have learned how to swim, or whether I try to resist. But there are some currents so strong that even very skilled swimmers cannot resist despite their best efforts. Similarly, conceiving of inclinations as forces that act upon us makes inclinations like currents: some of them will be perfectly manageable forces we can resist. But others will simply be too strong, and we will be helpless in the face of them. This means that viewing inclinations as urges renders us unfree in the face of inclination, and whether we are able to resist the inclination is not up to us but is instead contingent upon the force of the inclination.<sup>24</sup>

It is not an accident, in other words, that Holton's view of judgment shift holds that temptation causes judgment shift because we *predict* that we will succumb to temptation. In other words, on his account of judgment shift, I view myself from the outside and realize that the tempting inclination is too strong to overcome, and so I predict that I will succumb and change my judgment about what is best to do to be in keeping with my prediction. But this is an odd and problematic account of how tempting desire affects us. Relating to our inclinations in this way involves abdicating responsibility for ourselves as agents, viewing ourselves from a third-personal perspective instead

22 Schapiro, "What Are Theories of Desire Theories of?" 4.

23 Schapiro, *Feeling Like It*, 49.

24 I intend my remarks in this section to be neutral with respect to views on free will. Although I suppose some determinists might argue that the correct way to conceive of our agency is to view ourselves as predicting what we will do, rather than deciding what to do, I take it that this is a minority position and would generally be regarded as a *reductio* of the view in question.

of occupying our agency from its own perspective, the first-personal.<sup>25</sup> Take the following scenario:

Vinny resolves to spend his Saturday catching up on a complex project for work. He then learns that several of his friends are planning to drive into the country and visit Vinny's favorite vineyard on Saturday, and that he's invited to join them. Vinny loves to get out of town on the weekends, and he furthermore enjoys the food and wine at this particular vineyard. When he reflects on the tempting desire to skip his work and go instead to the vineyard, he realizes that he's probably going to succumb to the temptation. Given his prediction that he will succumb, Vinny just decides in advance to give up on his resolution and tells his friends he will join them on Saturday.

The problem with this scenario is that Vinny replaces the first-personal perspective of the deciding mind with the third personal. But even this is not quite strong enough: it is not just that his instinctive mind has made a *prima facie* decision to go to the vineyard and his deciding mind goes along with it. Rather, Vinny decides what to do *on the basis* of his prediction about what he will do, which is to say that he does not properly decide. He does not settle the practical question of "What should I do?" but rather substitutes it with a theoretical question, "What will I do?" He takes the perspective of an observer, not the perspective of an agent responsible for his own action.

Still, one might object that the problem here is not with the conception of inclination as something that acts on us, necessitating a third-person perspective, predicting stances toward ourselves, but rather that the problem lies in Vinny's failure to distinguish between predicting and deciding. In other words, the problem is that he confuses the two activities. This objection holds that sometimes inclinations really *are* too strong to be resisted. In such cases, we ought to recognize that we are unlikely to be able to resist the inclination, although we should not treat this prediction as good reason for then deciding that the best thing to do is to act on the tempting desire, as Vinny does. On this line of thought, perhaps Vinny should keep trying to maintain his resolution and just wait and see what happens on Saturday: maybe he will be successful in working, maybe he will not. Or perhaps Vinny should take his prediction that he will succumb as a sign that his initial resolution was poorly formed and unrealistic and revise on the grounds that his initial resolution was ill thought.

I find both practical recommendations dissatisfying, since both continue to treat Vinny as a bystander to his actions. However, the objection helpfully

25 My way of framing this issue is drawn in part from Marušić, *Evidence and Agency*, 122–36.

highlights the fact that when we predict that there is a good chance we will succumb to a tempting desire, we typically either alter our plan for executing the intention or resolution in question and/or go on to make a decision that will alter the context in which we decide, in order to avoid succumbing to the tempting desire after all. Take Vinny: imagine instead that Vinny decides to give up his Friday night leisure time and gets his work done then, in order to free up his Saturday for a trip to the vineyard. This would be an instance of altering his plan for executing the resolution. Or perhaps Vinny instead makes plans with his spouse to go out for dinner at a local restaurant on Saturday, knowing that he could not make it back from the vineyard in time for dinner but that he will nonetheless have plenty of time for working. If he takes this option, he alters the context or ecology in which he will deliberate and act on Saturday afternoon. If he makes plans with his spouse, he may still feel tempted to drive to the vineyard on Saturday. But having made plans, he will be able to resist his temptation because this new situation or context will make the vineyard less tempting.

In short, I think we should reject the idea that inclination is a force that acts upon us. For one, construing inclination as a force makes inclination out to be something external to our agency, and inclinations are part of our agency. Second, I do not think that our ability to resist a given inclination is entirely contingent on the strength of the inclination being sufficiently weak.

In contrast, on my view inclinations are moves in deliberation as opposed to brute forces inasmuch as they involve the appearance of reasons, but they nonetheless do pressure our deciding mind because they purport to settle our action. So why is it difficult to resist temptation? Not because temptation is a force that acts on us from without, but because when we are tempted our own agency is in tension, part of it directing us to act as it wills and the other part asking, "But should I really  $\phi$ ?" or even more open-endedly, "What should I do?" But this means that tempting desire is not arational. Part of the difficulty of resisting tempting desire is the difficulty of resisting the reasons latent within it. Furthermore, strong tempting desires can make certain reasons very salient, so that it seems as if we have very strong or decisive reason to do something, even though that may not in fact be true.

When we are specifically tempted to give up on a resolution, we may lose our grasp on the reasons we had for forming that intention, but that does not mean that we lose those reasons altogether. Rather, it is as if we "forget" or "lose sight."<sup>26</sup> For instance, if I resolve to exercise more but then am tempted to stay on the couch when it comes time to go to the gym, it is not that in being

26 Thus, succumbing to temptation often seems subjectively rational in the moment but later occasions regret.

tempted my reasons for exercising are no longer relevant to my situation. No, the reasons that led me to resolve to exercise more in the first place are still relevant considerations; I have just lost sight of them because the temptation made other reasons salient.<sup>27</sup> When tempted, it is not just that my instinctive mind is figuratively yelling imperatives at my deciding mind and the imperatives have no sticking power. Rather, inclinations appear as imperatives for which we have good reason. In the gym case, my inclination to stay on the couch will include my being drawn to the comfy couch, the annoying long drive to the gym, and the physically strenuous and unpleasant workout waiting for me upon arrival at the gym.

But this leads us back to the place at which the discussion began: if temptation makes certain reasons very salient, then the saliency of those reasons affects our ability to maintain our resolutions in the face of temptation. Forming a resolution is not an automatic out from being affected by temptation. Tempting desires are throwing reasons for consideration into the ring, and they may appear to be excellent reasons even in circumstances where we have formed a resolution to the contrary. After all, as I said above, the deciding mind does not tally our reasons from a neutral or dispassionate perspective. We can try to ignore our inclinations when deciding but tempting reasons will affect our overall tally of what we have best reason to do unless we specifically intervene to wholly discount tempting reasons in our deliberation.

Imagine for instance that Bri has resolved to stay home and eat simple homemade meals over the weekend in order to save money. But then on Friday afternoon she gets a text from a friend inviting her to join a group of people at her favorite restaurant for dinner. It would be natural for Bri to feel tempted to join them: she would have the company of friends, her favorite food, and no work preparing for or cleaning up after dinner. Although it might be rational for Bri to refuse to reconsider her dinner plans given her initial reasons for resolving to stay in and any independent, additional reason she has for refusing to reconsider, it is not clear why these reasons will be compelling in the face of temptation. After all, when her deciding mind is weighing what to do, all of

27 Perhaps surprisingly, this account of how temptation affects us is compatible with how Holton understands the effort involved in resisting temptation. He writes, "One maintains one's resolution by dint of effort in the face of the contrary desire" (*Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 118), and then later adds that "the effort involved has to be a kind of mental effort. It is the mental effort of maintaining one's resolutions; that is, of refusing to revise them. And my suggestion here is that one achieves this primarily by refusing to reconsider one's resolutions" (121). In other words, according to Holton's own lights, it is difficult to resist temptation not because resisting temptation is like swimming against a current, but because we must set aside the reasons temptation makes salient and instead affirm our resolutions. In other words, it seems that Holton's account of tempting desire is confused.

the reasons to act as she is tempted will be part of the deliberative milieu. Furthermore, she cannot just pull out the effective agency card and say to herself, “Ah, compelling though these are, I must rule out and ignore all of the tempting reasons because I want to be an effective agent.” You can be an effective agent without following through on every single one of your resolutions. So why not deliberately choose to downgrade effective agency on this occasion and go for the pleasure of going out with friends instead?

Furthermore, it seems to me that this difficulty applies just as much to Liberman’s SODA account as it does to Holton’s two-tier resolutions. Although it is possible to want conflicting things at the same time, it would be unusual to experience a tempting desire *and* a desire not to reconsider what you have previously decided to do because you want to be an effective agent. Why is this unusual? For the same reasons listed immediately above. Temptation makes us think that we no longer have good reason to do as we previously intended, and in the absence of these reasons, it will be hard to maintain a desire not to reconsider that prior intention. Furthermore, although I do think it is possible for the instinctive mind to be conflicted and thus for us to have inclinations for two conflicting things at once, I think this is a case in which it is important to distinguish between desire in the mere sense of finding something good in a way that would make action intelligible, and desire in a more substantive sense, i.e., inclination or desire that makes it easier to act as we so desire. I suppose it is technically possible to be inclined to be an effective agent, but this is rather odd as an object of inclination. Consider how odd it is for instance to speak of “it being easier to be an effective agent rather than not.”<sup>28</sup>

Granted, as Liberman argues, there is independent reason for the desire to not reconsider, and that reason is the aim of being an effective agent. In other words, Liberman claims that Bri’s “first-order” reasons for desiring not to reconsider her first-order intentions may disappear in the face of temptation, but the desire to be an effective agent will persist and protect the first-order intention from reconsideration. This, however, seems tenuous. I do not see why the temptation’s capacity to affect what we see as good reason extends only to first-order reasons and not also to second-order desires, including desires motivated by “additional” reasons like being an effective agent. We cannot appeal to this reason as a special consideration that is somehow immune from pressure by temptation.

Furthermore, as discussed above, being an effective agent does not require *never* changing your mind or giving in to temptation. Sometimes we make

28 Arguably the problem is that “being an effective agent” is not an action you can undertake. It is the accomplishment of one’s actions, and the way to accomplish one’s actions is just to perform a particular action. You cannot generically perform the action of accomplishing one’s actions.

foolish resolutions and sometimes the situation changes so significantly as to make our original resolution inapt. It is also perfectly acceptable for a normally resolute and effective agent to occasionally give up on a resolution just because. Our values and goals regarding the kind of agency we wish to have extend beyond mere efficacy. This is a point Sarah Paul makes, writing:

Most of us do not care about *perfect* self-governance, even as an ideal. We also care about things like existential spontaneity, losing control, rolling the dice and letting the world decide, and other more Romantic ideals. For an agent with these multifaceted values, a life that is perfectly self-governed would not in fact be successful relative to her varied concerns.<sup>29</sup>

Given this, we should not rely too heavily on the idea of effective agency as a solution for resisting temptation. Sure, sometimes we resist tempting desires in order to persist in our goals and be effective as agents, but in other cases we prefer the ideal of being a flexible, spontaneous, or even rebellious agent.

Instead, I think that the power of Liberman's positive account derives from her emphasis on desire. When we want to do what we have resolved to do, it is much harder for temptation to get a foothold in our consciousness.<sup>30</sup> When a desire to do as we have resolved is making our reasons to act on the resolution very salient, tempting reasons will have a harder time crowding them out. For instance, compare someone who enjoys running resolving to push themselves to run their first marathon in contrast to a self-identified "couch potato" who resolves to run a marathon only on a dare from a friend. Although it is certainly possible for the second person to successfully finish a marathon, it seems more likely that the first person will complete the race, and furthermore, it is likely that the first person will have an easier time with their training. This person identifies as someone who enjoys physical exertion, and they view their training as something they want to do. The second person will relate to running the marathon as something they "have" to do. It is not an accident, in other words, that many people come to like and/or teach themselves to like something in order to fulfill a resolution to do that thing.

29 Paul, "Diachronic Incontinence Is a Problem in Moral Philosophy," 345.

30 This idea is well-supported by empirical research on temptation that shows that having "want-to goals," goals that reflect our "genuine interest and values and are personally important and meaningful," helps us focus on our goals and not get distracted by distracting and tempting alternatives (Milyavskaya et al., "Saying 'No' to Temptation," 679). See also Deci and Ryan, "Facilitating Optimal Motivation and Psychological Well-Being across Life's Domains," 14–23; and Werner and Milyavskaya, "Motivation and Self-Regulation," 1–14.



However, although I think desire is a powerful tool for achieving our goals and resolutions, it does not thereby follow that making nonreconsideration the object of our desire is the most effective and rational way to achieve our goals. Rather, note that, in the example above, the object of desire was the goal itself: wanting to run the marathon. This is importantly different from desiring to maintain a resolution or desiring to not reconsider. Thus, if desire will help us resist temptation, we will find the most support from desires to do what we intend to do, i.e., first-order desires, and not in the second-order desire to resist temptation to which Liberman appeals.

In short, it seems that we finally have the answer to the question I posed at the outset of the paper: resolutions understood as a special two-tier intention are not a reliably effective sources of resistance to temptation. Neither Holton or Liberman is committed to the claim that resolutions are effective in every instance, but one way to describe their project is the attempt to give an account of why we should expect resolutions to be effective at resisting temptation in a rational agent. But given the nature of temptation, I think we must abandon this aim. Temptation is not a force outside of rationality such that if we put up appropriate rational bulwarks, we will be free from temptation's pressure. Temptation occurs *within* our rational nature. Temptation is an inner conflict, not a conflict in which one party to the conflict assails us from without.

However, it is important to clarify at this juncture that resolutions nonetheless play an important conceptual role when it comes to temptation. We should not discard the idea of resolutions altogether, because resolutions mark the difference between intentions that are open to easy revision and those for which there ought to be a high bar for revision. Furthermore, this conceptual difference does make a difference in what is most rational for us to do. If on vacation I intend to spend my afternoon watching TV but then change my mind and go for a mystery novel instead, there is no sense in which this is a poor decision or a moment of weakness of will. I just changed my mind about what I wanted to do. If on the other hand I give up on my resolution to spend my afternoon working in favor of reading a mystery novel, I have probably failed to act as I ought.

This might seem inconsistent with my claim that resolutions are not of special use in resisting temptation: How could it be that resolutions mark what is (normally, in the absence of other special reasons or notable changes in circumstance) most rational for us to do but are not of any special use in resisting temptation? Are we really that insensitive to what we have most or best reason to do? In some cases, yes. This just is the problem of weakness of will or *akrasia*. If we always did what is most rational for us to do, there would be no need for this paper.

However, having said that, I want to immediately walk the claim back to some extent. I am not saying that resolutions are of no use, that our understanding

of what our reasons are is useless in the face of the force of tempting desire. I am just denying the strong claim that simply forming a resolution understood as either a two-tier intention or two-tier intention and desire pair is sufficient for resisting temptation. I will take for granted that very often the presence of a resolution means that we *ought* to resist temptation. But simply having a second-order intention or desire present is not sufficient as a *strategy* for rationally resisting temptation.

Insofar as resolutions help make us aware of the excellent reason we have to  $\phi$ , they probably help rational agents resist temptation. But this is not a function that is unique to resolutions. This is just a point about what it is to be a rational agent who is responsive to reasons that bear on practical questions. And certainly this claim does not show that forming a resolution is some special strategy that will take away the power of tempting desire altogether.

Where does this leave us, then? In order to give an account of how to rationally resist temptation, we need to broaden our perspective and move our focus beyond resolution and the discrete desire to be an effective agent to a practical virtue that encompasses our inclinations themselves.

### 3. MANAGING TEMPTING DESIRES

Above I have tried to emphasize that tempting inclinations are not just brute urges that determine our actions from without. On the other hand, our inclinations are not rational if by “rational” we mean immediately responsive to what we judge to be our reasons. Simply judging that one has best reason to act as they have resolved does not mean that a desire or inclination to so act will follow. In light of this, perhaps we should just give up on the idea of resolutions and the project of resisting temptation in a uniquely rational way altogether, and instead focus on distancing ourselves from our inclinations in order to manage them.

In the penultimate chapter of his book, Holton introduces the idea that rationally resisting temptation requires a general policy of nonreconsideration, a policy of not reopening the deliberative question when temptation threatens a resolution.<sup>31</sup> What exactly Holton means by this is sometimes difficult to trace, but one natural thought is that reconsideration is not a strategy of rationally resisting temptation but instead a strategy of mere management: since we cannot get our inclinations to respond to our judgment about what we have best reason to do, and since furthermore our tempting desires can affect our judgment about what we have best reason to do, perhaps we should focus on simply ignoring tempting desires altogether.

31 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 140.

However, Holton denies that nonreconsideration is to straightforwardly ignore one's tempting desires. He writes:

In saying that agents do not reconsider, I do not mean that they do not think about the issue at all; as we have seen, some thought will typically be necessary for effective monitoring. Nonreconsideration only requires that they do not seriously reopen the issue of what to do, and seriously arrive at a new judgment. . . . That judgment [that it would be best, all things considered, to abandon the resolution] involves not just an evaluative judgment, but a comparison: a *ranking* of one option as better than the others. . . . [Such a ranking] is not the kind of thing that simply arrives unbidden.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, for Holton, nonreconsideration is supposed to protect the rationality of resisting temptation: it is not a concept introduced to solve the problem of efficacy but is rather introduced in order to preserve the rationality of acting on one's resolutions in the face of temptation. If we were to reconsider in the face of temptation, Holton reasons, then we would end up making the judgment that it would be best for us to act on our tempting desire and thus we would have a sort of reverse *akrasia* problem in which it would be irrational for us to act as we initially resolved.

More practically speaking, in terms of what it actually looks like to adopt a policy of nonreconsideration, in the above quote Holton suggests that reconsideration does involve thinking about one's resolution, just not "seriously reopening the issue of what to do." There is something compelling about this reply, since there is an important difference between merely thinking about an alternative course of action as opposed to reopening a deliberative question and actively ranking one's options. However, this reply also requires a delicate balancing act, and it is not clear that this balance is possible in practice. About this, Paul writes:

[Holton] denies that what he is recommending is weathering temptation by making oneself irrational, or even arational; we are meant to be able to see ourselves as in rational control of our actions when implementing a prior resolution. At the same time, his proposal requires ignoring one's own evaluative ranking at the time of action and refusing to reconsider a resolution one knows it would be rational to revise if one did [reconsider in view of the tempting reasons]. Holton therefore needs a cognitive state to exist in which the agent takes her present action to be up to her, maintains awareness of her resolution and the considerations

32 Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 150.

supporting it, undergoes a shift in evaluative judgment in the light of which those considerations appear comparatively weak, and yet sees no open practical question. This strikes me as a very difficult state of mind to consciously maintain, bordering on bad faith.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, I think we can add to these concerns. It is natural to interpret the idea of nonreconsideration as just being the policy of refusing to take tempting reasons into consideration, steadfastly ignoring them, refusing to engage with or think about them. This is after all a strategy people take with respect to temptation: say that I have resolved to forgo all fun purchases for the remainder of the month. Essential purchases only. I might reasonably refuse to engage with any tempting thoughts in the course of carrying out this resolution: delete or block all emails about sales, immediately dismiss proposals from friends to go out for the night, etc.

However, in keeping with Paul's remarks, this is unhelpful as a singular long-term strategy, since it results in a kind of alienation from one's inclinations that I think cannot be sustained for long. Furthermore, this strategy is open to the objection that in so acting the agent is irrational, closing herself off to a set of perfectly good reasons to revise her earlier intention. And these points are ultimately the problem with adopting distance-and-manage-by-ignoring as our overall strategy with respect to tempting desires. Refusing to consider tempting reasons may be a way of managing one's tempting inclinations, but to adopt this position is to treat one's inclinations as something that happens to you that you must work around. It may be necessary or appropriate to do this in the short run or in certain extenuating circumstances, but it is not the overall outlook we should adopt toward tempting inclinations because it is not sustainable or appropriate to perpetually live in a state of divided agency. In other words, rather than skirt or bypass our inclining nature altogether in order to forestall inclination from interfering with resolution, the better option is to recognize that inclinations are among the attitudes that constitute our agency, and as such our stance toward them should not be denial but rather cultivation.

#### 4. RESOLVE AS PRACTICAL VIRTUE

An effective response to temptation must address temptation itself. One often hears that it is better to address to source or root of a problem, rather than simply try to manage or mitigate its effects, and the adage holds in the case of temptation as well as in home repairs. Rather than respond to temptation by counting up reasons, a process that will be prone to distortion by highly salient

33 Paul, review of *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 890–91.

tempting reasons, or permanently adopt an alienated stance toward one's tempting desires, we ought instead to strive to resist temptation by attending to what and how we generally desire.

In other words, if we are to rationally resist temptation and uphold our resolutions, we must focus on mitigating or even preventing temptation altogether, not resisting it. This however requires a practical virtue, since a practical virtue shapes the nature of agency, forming habits of deliberating and desiring.<sup>34</sup> I suggest that we call the practical virtue relevant to resisting temptation "resolve."<sup>35</sup> I will first sketch out what I imagine the resolute person would look like before transitioning to address the question of how we cultivate resolve.

The resolute person is good at taking the long view, good at remembering why they resolved to do the thing in the first place, and good at anticipating how they would feel in the future if they abandoned their resolution. Furthermore, such a person will have dispositions to desire that which they have resolved to do and minimize the effects of tempting desire. Of course, there are no absolutes here. Sometimes it is normal or even good to be tempted, and so I am not claiming that a resolute person will never experience conflict over a decision or desire something opposed to their resolution. Rather, the resolute person is the kind of person whose inclinations are generally in keeping with her judgments about what is worth desiring and doing, and furthermore is good at delaying gratification, not getting easily distracted by desires for immediately available pleasant things, the pursuing of which will prevent her from following through on her other resolutions.

Return to the example of Bri and consider what this might look like in practice. Above, I claimed that when Bri is tempted to go out to eat with her friends, her temptation will make her reasons for going out very salient. One

34 By practical virtue, I mean an excellence of agency. I take no position here on how the idea of a practical virtue maps onto Aristotle's distinction between moral and intellectual virtue.

35 One might wonder if resolve is simply another name for continence. I do think there is a strong connection between resolve and continence, but I think resolve involves more than mere continence, since continence involves merely controlling how one acts in the face of one's desires as opposed to shaping them. I also think there may be a connection between resolve and the concept of "trait self-control" in social psychology, which is self-control that involves automatic behaviors as well as conscious and effortful exercise of control. About this, psychologists Gillebaart and de Ridder write, "These findings give credit to the idea that people high in trait self-control make the desired choice in an automatized, effortless manner, suggesting that trait self-control does not so much involve effortful resistance of immediate urges on single occasions, but rather involves the ability of not being tempted or distracted by such urges at all" ("Effortless Self-Control," 90). For more on the idea of self-control as a trait or disposition, see Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone, "High Self-Control Predicts Good Adjustment, Less Pathology, Better Grades, and Interpersonal Success," 271–322; and de Ridder et al., "Taking Stock of Self-Control," 76–99.

response to this temptation would be to tally her reasons for and against going out. The problem with this response, as previously delineated, is that a strong temptation to go out will make all of her tempting reasons very salient, and the initial resolution reasons will pale in comparison, and so her reasons on balance may favor going out to eat, even though this is opposed to her resolution. In contrast, on the view I am advancing, Bri's capacity to resist tempting desires will depend on her broader tendencies regarding desire and deliberation. Is she easily distracted by the inclination to go out with friends and does the tempting desire swamp out all other relevant desires? Or does she remain mindful of her desire to be more financially disciplined, to increase her savings? When deliberating, does she account for the fact that her resolution was formed in order to resist temptations exactly like these, thereby downplaying the apparently good tempting reasons and refusing to actively reconsider her resolution?<sup>36</sup> Or does she take the tempting reasons as new pieces of information that call for full-scale reconsideration of her resolution?

Some of this description might seem relatively obvious, but notice how I am *not* describing resolve: resolve is not forming a resolution that will form a "wall" around one's future deliberation and prevent temptation from taking hold. Neither is resolve strong willpower, the ability to punch down or overcome any temptation that comes one's way. This way of conceiving resolve sees resolve as a virtue exclusive to the rational deciding mind, a strong capacity to resist the inclinations. On the contrary, I think resolve is a practical virtue of the whole agent, which means that it encompasses both our capacity for inclination and our capacity for rational decision making. Resolve shapes our desire as much as our deliberation.

Reading these descriptions, it may begin to seem as though the person of resolve just does not experience temptation. This is true in some sense. It is not true insofar as a resolute person should be able to feel or recognize the force of conflicting considerations. Bri, for instance, might remain fully resolute, fully committed to her budget, and yet acknowledge the presence of conflicting reasons and even "feel" their force, by which I mean seeing them as compelling reasons on which she could act, as opposed to considerations that she merely

36 However, it is clearly irrational to *never* reconsider one's resolutions or intentions. So any such policy will have to take this into account. Holton proposes the following as guidelines: "It is rational to have a tendency not to reconsider a resolution: if one is faced with the very temptations that the resolution was designed to overcome; if one's judgment will be worse than it was when the resolution was formed. It is rational to have a tendency to reconsider a resolution: if the reasons for forming the resolution no longer obtain; if circumstances turn out to be importantly different from those anticipated; if one made an important mistake in the reasoning that led to the resolution" (*Willing, Wanting, Waiting*, 160).

recognizes as potentially reason giving for another person although they have no draw on her, at least not in the current context. Furthermore, I think having the virtue of resolve is compatible with experiencing conflict (understood broadly) over a decision or commitment. However, it is true that the resolute person does not experience temptation in that the resolute will take pleasure in and thus be inclined to do that which she intends to do and has resolved to do.

Notice that the idea of resolve as a practical virtue encompasses key ideas Liberman appealed to in her account. The best understanding of Liberman's SODA highlights the centrality of desire *for* that which we have resolved to do, and the resolute person will either naturally desire the object of his resolution or actively work to cultivate desire for it. What about the desire to be an effective agent, which played a prominent role in avoiding reconsideration for Liberman? Will this desire be present in the resolute person? Yes, although I think this desire will not play an especially prominent role in the psychology of the resolute person. If the resolute person was constantly being resolute to prove his effectiveness as an agent, this would be a desire to be effective for its own sake, and this hardly seems like an excellence of agency. However, I do think a resolute person would desire to be an effective agent, and this desire might be especially important for those in the process of cultivating resolve.

Having seen an outline of what resolve looks like, arguably the more difficult question is how one becomes a person of resolve. The reason tempting desire poses a problem in acting as we have resolved to act is because it is recalcitrant to our judgments about what we have best reason to do in a given moment. How can I then insist that the rational way to relate to temptation is to cultivate one's inclination in the right way?

First of all, perhaps surprisingly, we can use management to cultivate our inclinations. This is surprising because managing or acting on is a stance of alienation: when I take this stance toward my inclinations, I seem to be regarding them from a distance rather than inhabiting them. However, when we manipulate our own attitudes with the result that the attitudes themselves are changed, the result is a change in the attitudes we inhabit and potentially a change in our own character. Take a specific example: say that I am trying to teach myself to love running, and so I decide to make running more fun by listening to my favorite music for dancing while running. I think this is best described as a case of manipulation or management because it is an attempt to shape one's inclinations, not by directly altering our inclinations, but by associating something I wish to be inclined to do with something I already take pleasure in and am inclined to do. But, if the result is that I develop the inclination to run, I think this strategy of management is a form of cultivation insofar as it results in me having cultivated a new inclination.

Still, the natural objection is that unless my new inclination involves some sense of the goodness of running—the inchoate or latent reason of inclination—it will not be an inclination proper but rather a brute urge. This then is where the role of attention comes in. If all we did to cultivate inclinations was bribe or trick ourselves into acting, cultivating inclinations would be no deeper than forming new associations. For instance, in the example above, I would simply form an association between something I was already inclined to do and something new, thus not properly acquiring a new inclination.<sup>37</sup> In cases of especially dull or odious action, this may be the best we can hope for.

If our ideal end result is instead a grasp of the goodness of running, then I think there are two primary ways in which I might come to find running good. One is of course through the practical cognition of judging something good. The problem is that in the running case, I probably do judge that running is good, and I am simply trying to bring my inclinations in alignment with what I judge to be good. What we are inclined to do is not directly up to us, and so there is no way to guarantee or force oneself to have an inclination, although I suspect that the right kind of appreciative attention can at least encourage us to take pleasure in something. Again, take running: if I am attentive to my running and actively thinking about the good embedded in the activity, I might begin bribing myself to run with the promise of my favorite music, but along the way, through attention to running and its goods, I learn to appreciate running for other reasons, for example the mental clarity, the fun of pushing oneself to run farther or faster, and the simple joy of movement. Appreciating these new reasons does not mean that I will have an inclination to run at every waking moment—one can after all appreciate reasons in a motivationally cold way—but it does make it possible for me to have the inclination to run at all.

Although I have for the most part set aside questions about the rationality of resolution in this paper, I want at this point to briefly address the rationality

37 If the activity in question is one for which only certain motivations count as good motivations, then we can raise the further objection that merely associating an existing inclination with this new activity will not generate the right kind of motivation. I have in mind the chess-playing-child case raised by MacIntyre (*After Virtue*, 188). There he imagines bribing a seven-year-old child with candy to play chess, but points out that we can reasonably hope that over time the child will come to appreciate the goods internal to chess, and so desire to play chess for its own sake. This has the further important effect that the child will no longer be willing to cheat, since if the child can cheat successfully in order to get candy, he has every reason to do so as long as candy is his only reason for playing chess. But if and when he begins to play chess out of appreciation of the goods internal to chess, he will no longer be willing to cheat because to do so would be to violate the goods he appreciates in chess. The example is supposed to be a metaphor for the acquisition of virtue.



of resolve. Is it really rational for an agent to have habits that support resisting temptation and maintaining resolutions? One intuitive answer would claim that, objectively speaking, it is normally rational to act as we have resolved, perhaps because resolution is the product of the cool and deliberative deciding mind in contrast to hasty and often misguided inclination. However, although I think there are cases in which there is decisive objective reason for an agent to act as she has initially resolved, I do not think these reasons undergird the rationality of resolve in general. After all, in other cases agents may have good reason to act as they are tempted. Rather, the rationality of resolve stems chiefly from the authority of our decisions. That is not to say that we can never rationally revise our decisions. But as Paul writes:

We may see our decisions as to some degree up to us, but we must also see the act of deciding as a matter of relinquishing our authority to change them whenever we like. For, otherwise, they would not be the kind of thing that can do the job of settling an open practical question.<sup>38</sup>

That is, the rationality of resolve does not stem from balancing of reasons to see whether resolution or temptation has better reason on its side but is rather located in our authority to settle practical questions.<sup>39</sup> As cross-temporal agents, we need to be able to make plans that settle current and sometimes future practical questions, and it is for this reason that we are often justified in refusing to reconsider our resolutions in the face of temptation.

But this answer simply pushes the question back. We can still ask why it is rational to regard our decisions as authoritative. One answer would hold that it is rational to view our intentions as blocking overeager reconsideration because practical rationality demands it: perhaps practical rationality requires that we take a long-range view about our preferences, or perhaps we will fail to be instrumentally rational in achieving our ends if we are constantly reopening the deliberative question. However, another answer maintains that granting past decisions special authority is not a strict requirement of practical rationality but is rather rational in the virtue-theoretic sense: it is a wise or good way to act and live in the world. This is the conclusion at which Paul arrives, writing:

38 Paul, "Diachronic Incontinence Is a Problem in Moral Philosophy," 349–50.

39 By this, I do not mean that intentions have a reason-giving force of their own, but rather that intentions play a particular role when it comes to how we relate to our reasons. Namely, they settle our answer to a question and in so doing they block off reconsideration, or more accurately, once an intention has been formed, reconsideration must be justified and not be undertaken on just any whim.

Diachronic continence [or resolve] is in many respects a virtue but not a rational requirement. That is, from the point of view of living well, treating one's intentions as having default stability and refusing to reconsider one's plans too frequently are highly recommended. The appropriate criticisms to make of someone who fails to be stable in this way will be that she is irresolute, flaky, wanton, always wondering where the better party is. But there are failures from the point of view of human excellence or virtue, not the philosophy of action.<sup>40</sup>

This is a substantive claim, and there may well be individuals or cultures who reject this vision of agency, but for my part I think Paul is right. Thus resolve is rational in two important senses. On one hand, it is uniquely rational as a method of resisting temptation. Efforts to become resolute might require nonrational (or arational) methods of resisting temptation, like refusing to buy a dozen donuts at the grocery store for fear that one will overeat them upon arriving home, but resolve consists in a set of dispositions of rational agency and is thus essentially rational in its function. However, resolve is furthermore rational as an excellence of agency. Being a resolute agent enables excellence in desiring, deliberating, acting, and, ultimately, living. We should aim to be the kind of agent whose decisions are generally resistant to tempting desires because the alternative is to be fickle, to flit from project to project, commitment to commitment, and follow through on few or none of them.

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40 Paul, "Diachronic Continence Is a Problem in Moral Philosophy," 354. For a contrary view on which diachronic continence is a requirement of practical rationality, see Bratman, "Time, Rationality, and Self-Governance," 73–88.

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