Shaping the World in One’s Image:
An Essay on the Nature and Value of Achievements

by

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Abstract for:

*Shaping the World in One's Image: An Essay on the Nature and Value of Achievements*

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This project is a philosophical exploration of the common sense notion that achievements are among the things that make a life go well. Parts I and II develop an account of achievements as *competently reached goals* and discuss in virtue of what some such goals are more of an achievement than others. Part III argues that, given the account of achievements developed in parts I and II, we have good reason to think that the common sense idea is true: achievements are intrinsically valuable. We can see that this is so by reflecting on the fact that achieving our goals realizes certain valuable relations of harmony between mind and world.
Acknowledgements

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I truly hope that I am right that the effortful and competent achievement of difficult goals is something that makes our lives intrinsically better. For then it would be justifiable to have sometimes pursued this project at the cost of other values such as happiness and, in particular, friendship. I am extremely grateful to those who have remained close friends despite my decision to study philosophy far away from home and my tendency to spend more time at the office than on the phone or in the bar. Among those Toni Hesselink occupies a special place; a very special place!

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The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson
PART I

Achievements as Competently Reached Goals
Introduction

Many people believe that achievements make life intrinsically better. This becomes particularly clear when we reflect on large scale and unusual achievements such as those of polar explorer Roald Amundsen. Whatever else we may think of Amundsen's life, it seems that it was better in virtue of his successful exploits (including being the first person to sail through the North-West-Passage, the first to reach the South Pole, and the first to reach the North Pole by aircraft) than it otherwise would have been. Indeed, many people (including himself) would probably think that these achievements were so valuable that they more than outweighed potential losses in terms of pleasure and happiness.¹

But we need not think of such lofty achievements as those of early polar exploration to encounter the belief that achievements are a source of value and meaning in our lives. While most of us will never ascend to the heights of an Amundsen, we take pride in our own small-scale achievements (and in those of our children). We admire the achievements of others. And we are willing to sacrifice (some) happiness in the pursuit of achievement. I may seem to be belabouring an obvious point here: achievements are great – that is just common sense.

However, while it may be common sense that achievements are among the things that make a life a good one, this is a part of common sense that seems to have eluded philosophers thinking about the good life for literally hundreds of years. Providing a pithy summary of Western philosophical thinking on the question of what makes for a good life, Roderick Chisholm writes in 1968:

¹Amundsen appears not to have been a particularly happy man and incapable of generating lasting happiness or satisfaction from his achievements. Cf. Huntford (1999), chapter 35.
If we follow the great traditions in western philosophy, we could readily make two lists – a good list and a bad list. The good list, the list of things that are intrinsically good, would include such items as these: pleasure, happiness, love, knowledge, justice, beauty, proportion, good intention, and the exercise of virtue.²

These are surely all things that many people value. Yet, this is true of achievement also, but it is a notable absentee from this list.

Over the last couple of decades philosophy has come around a little bit. Robert Nozick made some remarks about the value of achievements in the context of his famous experience machine thought experiment.³ James Griffin made 'accomplishment' his central example of human goods ten years later.⁴ Another decade passed and Thomas Hurka included achievements as one of the central values in his updated version of Aristotelian perfectionism.⁵ And, another ten years on, epistemologists started talking about how the value of knowledge could be explained by pointing to the (alleged) fact that knowledge is a kind of achievement.⁶ This last development is a bit surprising, given that knowledge has been on the “good list” since, at least, Socrates, while achievement has been largely ignored by those thinking about intrinsic value. The situation is rather like when the cool kids in high-school discover that nerdy Frank is the cousin of hot Georgina who they have been trying to get to come to their parties: suddenly everyone has always been great friends with Frank.

²Chisholm (1968-9), 22.
⁴Cf. Griffin (1986).
⁶Cf. Greco (2010); Pritchard (2010).
But, despite these recent developments, achievements remain on the fringes of philosophical theorizing about the good life. We should perhaps not be surprised about this in the case of theorists who have monistic theories of the good – such as hedonists. But there is no shortage of authors who embrace more or less eclectic lists of ultimate human goods and fail to include achievements on them. These include Aristotle and the Stoics, more recently G.E. Moore, W.D. Ross, A.C. Ewing, and Hastings Rashdall, and even more recently William Frankena, John Finnis, and Martha Nussbaum. Moreover, even those who have recently acknowledged the idea that achievements might belong on the list have, for the most part, not explored this idea in much detail.\footnote{For notable exceptions cf. Hurka (1993) and (2006); Keller (2004) and (2009); Bradford (2010), (2012) and (2013).}

This state of affairs leads to two questions. First, how come there is such a disconnect between the people in the street and the people in the ivory towers? Why have philosophers thinking about the good life not spent equal time and effort on discussing the (putative) value of achievements as they have spent on talking about beauty, friendship, pleasure, and knowledge? Second, is the common sense idea true? Does achievement actually have value or is this a belief that does not withstand scrutiny?

The first of these questions is interesting but thinking too much about it can quickly turn into a kind of philosophical navel-gazing. Unless it helps us to answer questions about achievements, why should we care why philosophers have not widely discussed such questions? Accordingly, I will devote my energies almost exclusively to the second question. As to the first question let me wager the following brief remarks. I think that at least part of the reason that achievements have not received much axiological attention is that there are three influential schools of thought that, while maybe not incompatible with the idea that achievements are
intrinsically valuable, at the very least marginalize that thought. I will briefly discuss them in temporal order of philosophical popularity.

Consider first, Aristotle's view on the value of goal directed activities (what he calls kineseis). Aristotle seems to hold that if an activity is aimed at a goal outside itself, the activity cannot have intrinsic value, or at least it cannot have much intrinsic value.\(^8\) The idea seems to be that an activity cannot have more value than the goal it aims at. Achievements, however, often have the structure of activities that are aimed at (and reach) goals that are external to them and need not be valuable. This is not true for all achievements, for it is perfectly possible to have goals that are internal to a given activity (the goal of working hard, say). However, more often than not our goals are external to our activities. Thus, it is easy to see how someone thinking about value in Aristotelian terms would overlook achievements as potential bearers of intrinsic value.

Second, there is hedonism. According to hedonism, or really any kind of mental state account of the good, all intrinsic value is born by subjective experiences. Achievements, however, are not subjective experiences. Rather, as we will see in chapter 1, they are complex events, consisting of a goal, a state of the world, and some relationship(s) between them. To be sure, there are often subjective experiences accompanying achievements, and the hedonist will say that, insofar as these experiences are valuable, achievements may contribute to a good life in virtue of that fact. However, because achievements are not mental states they cannot, on this view, have intrinsic value themselves.

Lastly, consider the axiologists that contributed to, and took over after, hedonism's decline in popularity at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, most prominently G.E. Moore and W.D.\(^8\) Cf. Aristotle (1984), 1094a.
Ross. In a way it is surprising that these thinkers did not pay much attention to achievements. After all they were self-proclaimed intuitionists. One might have expected that alongside such things as aesthetic appreciation (Moore) and knowledge (Ross), achievements would have received some consideration at least. But we do not find any discussion of achievements in either Moore, Ross, or any other prominent philosopher from this period. That people who tried to elucidate commonly held intuitions about intrinsic value would have overlooked achievements is rather surprising. The following might be an explanation but it is not very satisfying.

Even though authors like Ross and Hastings Rashdall accepted intuition (appropriately reflected upon) as a somewhat final arbiter about the question what things are intrinsically valuable, they might have been to some degree in the grips of a particular version of perfectionism. This version combines the perfectionist idea that intrinsic value lies in the excellent exercise of central human faculties with the claim that there are three such faculties: cognition, conation, and affect. Accordingly, there are three valuable human states; one for each faculty. Excellence of cognition gives us knowledge, and excellence of affect gives us pleasure. This leaves the position of excellence of conation. Achievement might look like a natural candidate here, but so does virtue. And those authors were not about to deny virtue a spot on the list. There is more than one reason why this explanation is not quite satisfactory. Most prominently, even though authors like Ross, Rashdall, and A.C. Ewing hinted at the kind of perfectionism just described,⁹ they explicitly declined to embrace such a view.¹⁰

Whatever may be the reason that philosophers have disregarded the question whether achievements are intrinsically valuable, it is an interesting question. And it is this question that I will attempt to answer. The road to an answer, however, will be long and winding. For before we

⁹Cf. Rashdall (1924), I 75-6; Ross (1930), 140; Ewing (1953), 72.

can seriously begin thinking about it, we need to know what achievements even are. I will begin to provide an account of achievements in chapter 1. In part II, I elaborate on my conception by discussing what makes one event “more of an achievement” than another. Only then are we equipped to return to the question about value that started the whole enterprise (part III). Let's get to it.
Chapter 1: An Account of Achievements

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I develop and defend an account of achievements as competently reached goals (CRGs). I begin with a section introducing the idea of achievements as competently reached goals. I then defend the CRG account against the charge of descriptive inadequacy, i.e. the claim that it is not sufficiently close to our everyday experience of and talk about achievements. In the process I explain what we should expect from a philosophical account of achievements.

The charge of descriptive inadequacy can take many forms. I will discuss and reject four of them. First, in its most general form, the descriptive inadequacy objection claims that the CRG account is mistaken because it does not cohere with the ordinary use of the term 'achievement'. Second, it may be charged that the concept 'achievement' is a thick evaluative concept, and since the CRG account makes no reference to the desirability of achievements, it misses an important aspect of the target. Related to this line of thinking is the third objection: while some CRGs might be achievements, not all are. The account is too general in allowing the competent attainment of trivial or even vicious goals to count as achievements. Finally, it may be charged that while some achievements are CRGs, not all are – the account is too restrictive. In particular it may be doubted whether all achievements require competence or whether all achievements need to have been aimed at (as the goal clause of the CRG account implies).

The upshot of this chapter is that the CRG account is the best conception of what, following Haybron, we may call the philosophically primary concept of achievements. The philosophically primary concept of achievements (a) must pick out a coherent class of phenomena (b) must be associated closely enough with the everyday use of the term
'achievement' and (c) must be the one that answers best to our philosophical interests in achievements.\footnote{This is an adaptation of Haybron's account of the philosophically primary notion of happiness. Cf. Haybron (2008), 47. Haybron claims to borrow the notion from Sumner (1996), but it is unclear whether Sumner intends anything like Haybron's use when he talks about the 'philosophically primary sense of subject'; cf. Sumner (1996), chapter 2. More generally, the methodology of reforming ordinary concepts to conform to criteria such as these is a staple in contemporary moral philosophy. For an excellent early discussion cf. Brandt (1979), ch. I.}

2. Competently Reached Goals

In all cases of achievement there is something that is being (or has been) achieved, whether it is a gold medal, a scientific breakthrough, the eradication of a disease or the maintenance of the political status quo. However, what is being achieved is not itself the achievement. Take the eradication of disease. If malaria was eradicated as a strange if fortunate side effect of a meteor colliding with earth, that would not be an achievement.\footnote{Cf. Bradford (2010), 3.} However, when we imagine the eradication of malaria, we usually assume that it would be the result of someone's (or many people's) actions. And in that case we might rightly think of it as a major achievement. This suggests two things. First, it is not the absence of malaria itself that is an achievement, but rather the achievement is a temporally extended event that culminated in the eradication of malaria. Second, not just any kind of event can be an achievement. Achievements are events that involve conscious efforts by agents.

Before I continue let me briefly comment on my use of the term 'event'. Following Jaegwon Kim I use 'event' not in the narrow sense in which the term implies change. Rather I intend it to cover all kinds of property exemplifications such as states, processes, and
conditions. I will be interested in concrete rather than abstract events. That is to say that I take events to be the exemplifications of properties by particular individuals at particular times. I will often follow Kim in denoting specific events as \([x, P, t]\) where \(x, P,\) and \(t\) stand in for the event's constitutive individual (or individuals in the case of non-monadic properties), property and time interval respectively. For example, \([\text{Hasko, working on a chapter of his dissertation, June 11th 2013}]\) denotes an event that is currently happening.

Achievements, then, are temporally extended events. That which is achieved is another event, usually of lesser temporal extension. Let us call this the result of the achievement. In the example given above the state \(M: [\text{the world, being free of malaria, 20xx}]\) would be the result of the achievement. The achievement itself would be a more complex event that included the process by which \(M\) came about. Take, as a first approximation, \(A_1: [\text{Researcher x, achieving M, 20yy – 20xx}]\). While it is probably unrealistic that just one researcher could achieve the end of malaria, the constitutive individuals of achievements are always agents. Sometimes we speak of nature's great achievements or the achievements of science, but I think it is clear that this way of speaking is either metaphorical (as in the case of nature) or shorthand for the achievements of (groups of) agents (as in the case of science). In other words, an achievement is always somebody's achievement. Generalizing from \(A_1\) we can say that achievements are events of the form \([x, achieving R, t]\) where \(x\) is an agent and \(R\) (the result of the achievement) is an event of

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14 Cf. Ibid.

15 There is no such restriction imposed by the general notion of events. As the example of \(M\) shows, all kinds of entities can be the constitutive individuals of events.

16 I would like to remain neutral here on questions about what exactly is needed for agency, whether there can be collective agents, and so on. Whatever the right theory of agency may be, only agents can have achievements. I am quite open to the idea that there can be group achievements. But if that is to be more than metaphor, it requires that there is group agency also. For a metaphysically fairly undemanding account of group agency cf. List/Pettit (2011).
the form \([y, P, t']\) where \(t'\) is typically contained in \(t\). The next task is to unpack the constitutive property (achieving \(R\)) of such events.

A first condition for someone to count as achieving a certain state is that this person aimed at that state in one way or another. Consider Forrest Gump's fictitious invention of the bumper sticker phrase 'shit happens'. According to the story told in the movie, the widespread use of that phrase is something that Forrest Gump was instrumental in bringing about but, I submit, it is not something that he achieved. What is missing in this case is that Forrest Gump was not trying to bring about the state of affairs that 'shit happens' is widely used.\(^{17}\) Compare someone who is trying to come up with a slogan for a successful bumper sticker and, maybe after a couple of failed attempts, comes up with 'baby on board' (the rest being mildly annoying history). This person may have achieved the success of their bumper sticker (we would need to know more about the story to determine whether this is actually the case), whereas Forrest Gump has not achieved the success of his. In order for an event to be achieved by an agent the agent must have pursued it. Once we accept that pursuing an event is part of achieving it (I consider objections to this below), we can replace all talk of the 'result of an achievement' with the phrase 'goal of the agent'. That is what I will do. A first try at unpacking 'achieving \(R\)', then would be 'pursuing and reaching \(G\)', where \(G\) is the event that is the agent's goal.

But, of course, this is not enough. To see this consider Simon Keller's case of Joan:

_Parking Law 1:_ Suppose that Joan's goal is to change the law prohibiting overnight parking in Brookline. ... Suppose that Joan tries to achieve her goal by organizing a letter-writing campaign. And suppose that the law is eventually changed, but that it's

\(^{17}\) As you may recall what happens in the movie is that Forrest steps on dog excrement while being approached by a guy who is asking him whether he could help him with an idea for a bumper sticker slogan. When told that he just 'ran through a pile of dogshit' Forrest replies 'it happens', thus giving the man the idea for the slogan.
changed not because of Joan's letter-writing campaign but because a pertinent politician buys a new car and needs somewhere to park.\textsuperscript{18}

Clearly, and despite the fact that her goal was reached, Joan is not to be credited with an achievement. Joan's plan to start a letter-writing campaign might have been a very reasonable idea with a good chance of success. The plan might well have worked. However, as a matter of fact the plan did not work. It was not her pursuit of the goal that brought it about. Another condition, then, is that the agent plays some role in bringing about the attainment of her goal. However much you may endorse an event or might like to take credit for it, you cannot have achieved it, unless you were in some way instrumental in its obtaining. But that is not enough. Consider a second version of Joan.

Parking Law 2: “Suppose that Joan has the crazy belief that repeatedly saying the word 'widget' will cause the law to be changed [...].”\textsuperscript{19} She sets out to change the law by saying 'widget' over and over again. One day she crosses the path of a young girl who is so amused by Joan's constantly repeating the word 'widget' that she fails to pay attention to the traffic, is hit by a car and ends up a paraplegic. Her father, the aforementioned pertinent politician, used to not own a car. However, with his daughter being paraplegic he changes his ways, buys a car, needs somewhere to park and pushes through a change to the law.

Here, again, Joan does not achieve her goal. Part of the problem with Joan is that her plan is crazy and bound to fail. In other words she does not pursue her goal competently.\textsuperscript{20} We might think that we need to amend 'pursuing and reaching G' to 'competently pursuing and reaching G'.
But competent pursuit is not enough still. A third variation of Joan's case will help to see that (this version is the practical analogue to a Gettier case).\textsuperscript{21}

Parking Law 3: As before, Joan believes that a letter writing campaign could lead to the law being changed. So she sets out and gets many people to write letters. So many letters indeed, that a young woman delivering the mail to city hall finds herself physically exhausted from carrying unusually heavy loads of mail for weeks. One night, after finishing work, she trots home without paying much attention to traffic, is hit by a car and ends up a paraplegic. Her father, the aforementioned pertinent politician, used to not own a car. However, with his daughter being paraplegic he changes his ways, buys a car, needs somewhere to park and pushes through a change to the law.

Here, Joan competently pursues her goal and reaches it. But we are still reluctant to credit her with an achievement, because the competence of her pursuit is not what leads to her reaching the goal. What Joan has, despite her competent pursuit, is not an achievement but a lucky success. What we need, then, is a connection between competent pursuit and success. I do not yet want to get into the messy business of what exactly that connection is like (I will get into it in chapter 2). But we need to note that such a connection is needed. Thus I propose to unpack 'achieving G' as 'competently pursuing and \emph{thereby} reaching G'.\textsuperscript{22}

This completes my sketch of achievements as competently reached goals or events of the form \([x, \text{competently pursuing and thereby reaching } G, t]\). In the following sections I will refine the account in response to different versions of the charge that it is descriptively inadequate.

\textsuperscript{21}Cf. Gettier (1963).

\textsuperscript{22}The word 'thereby' here is not meant to signify a constitutive relationship.
3. What Should We Expect from an Account?

3.1 Ordinary Language

Let me be frank: the account of achievements as competently reached goals does not impress with a particularly good fit with the everyday use of the term 'achievement'. This would be a fatal problem for my account, if ordinary speakers applied the term 'achievement' to (almost) all and (almost) only achievements. I do not think this is the case. Rather, I think that people use the term 'achievement' in different ways in different situations. If that is true, a conception of achievements largely congruent with ordinary language would not be of much philosophical interest.\(^{23}\) It would be a conception of what Ned Block has called a mongrel concept. A mongrel concept, in Block's sense, is a concept that is the result of attempts to fuse two or more distinct concepts into a single one. Block famously argues that philosophers trying to analyze consciousness have created a mongrel out of two distinct notions that he calls P-consciousness and A-consciousness and that are both (sometimes) suggested by the ordinary use of 'consciousness'.\(^{24}\) Similar claims have been made about 'intrinsic value'\(^{25}\) and 'happiness'\(^{26}\).

Ordinary language, while often a useful heuristic, can lead conceptual analysis astray.

If, in search for a descriptively adequate account of achievements, we accepted ordinary language as the final arbiter, the test of descriptive adequacy would go something like this. We would ask competent speakers of English to draw up a list of true (false/ambiguous) claims about achievements and see whether these claims are true (false/ambiguous) of CRG's. However, it is

\(^{23}\)This is a bit strong, of course. Philosophers might have all kinds of reasons to be interested in a conception of a mongrel like 'achievement'.


pretty easy to see that such a list would be internally inconsistent. For example, most people would agree that the sentences 'winning a major soccer tournament such as the world cup is an impressive achievement' and 'a success that is to a significant degree due to good luck is not an achievement' are both true. But, of course, there will be hardly a case in which the world cup is won without a significant amount of good luck. Similarly, the sentences 'achievement involves the overcoming of obstacles' and 'it is easier to achieve something when there are fewer obstacles' seem both plausible and yet in obvious conflict. A further hint that the use of 'achievement' does not latch on to a unique coherent concept is the fact that it is difficult to translate the term into other languages. Neither German nor Portuguese, for example, have a word that corresponds to 'achievement' nor is it possible to describe the term's meaning in a concise phrase.

3.2 Criteria of Adequacy

Descriptive adequacy is important but, at least in the case of achievements, ordinary language by itself cannot provide a test of descriptive adequacy. I would like to propose an alternative test consisting of the following two criteria. (1) A descriptively adequate conception of achievements must be close enough to our ordinary language and thinking about achievements. (2) A

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27 I should point out that these claims are not inconsistent in a strict logical sense (the first pair has this appearance only because of the vague qualifier 'significant'; the second pair could be reconciled by saying that one obstacle is necessary but further obstacles make things gratuitously harder). However, they still point to the fact that ordinary speakers operate with a mongrel concept. It would be quite natural for one of two speakers who find themselves in initial disagreement about the world cup, for example, to say: 'oh, I see, yes in that sense it is not an achievement', without changing his mind that, in another sense, it is an achievement.

28 The difficulty in translation does not just stem from the fact that these languages lack a word that directly corresponds to 'achievement'. There is no English word that corresponds to the German 'Schadenfreude', yet it is not particularly hard to translate (it means: joy taken in someone else's misfortune). No similar translation of 'achievement' into German seems available (I tried!). The difficulty, I submit, is that 'achievement' can mean different things in different contexts.
A descriptively adequate conception of achievements must be internally coherent and pick out a homogeneous class of phenomena. We can think of criterion (2) as the anti-mongrel clause. It ensures that we are talking about one concept rather than shifting between two or more. Criterion (2) also guards against a certain kind of arbitrariness. An account cannot pass criterion (2) if it excludes some events on the basis of criteria that do not seem to be well motivated within the account. Criterion (1), on the other hand, ensures that we are not missing the target. It does so by assigning to ordinary language and thought as much weight as they can handle – but not more. Instead of trying to maximize fit with ordinary language and thought about achievements, we should try for a satisfactory fit.

A third criterion of adequacy for a philosophical conception of achievements is that (3) it satisfies our theoretical, and in particular our axiological, interests in achievements. People value achievements and a conception of achievements should be able to explain why. That is not to say that achievement is an evaluative concept (more about that in section 4.1). Nor is it to deny the possibility that people are mistaken to attach value to achievements. But a conception of achievements should not render our valuing of achievements mysterious. It should either be consistent with achievements being valuable (maybe even explain why they are) or offer a convincing error theory. 29 Criterion (3) also serves to further specify the notion of homogeneity embedded in criterion (2). There might be accounts that are internally coherent but we are not sure whether the phenomena picked out form a class that is homogeneous in the right way. In such cases an account's passing or failing criterion (3) can provide evidence one way or the other.

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29This criterion corresponds to Haybron's 'practical utility'. Cf. Habyron (2008), 53-4.
That the CRG account passes criterion (2) is, I hope, fairly uncontroversial as it offers a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for an event to count as an achievement. Whether the account passes criterion (3) will depend on the success of the axiological part of my project. However, let me briefly describe the account from a different angle, thereby pointing to a feature of my account that I take to be a consideration in favour of its passing criterion (3), and that will be a recurring theme throughout the dissertation. The CRG account portrays achievement as the mirror image of knowledge. Just as knowledge (according to the standard view) consists of a mental state (belief) that stands in a correspondence relationship with the world (the belief is true) and this relationship is non-accidental in the right way (the belief is justified and not Gettiered), so too achievement consists of a mental state (goal) that stands in a correspondence relationship with the world (the goal is reached) and this relationship is non-accidental in the right way (the success is the result of competent pursuit). And if knowledge is an axiologically interesting concept, it seems prima facie plausible that an account of achievements that relates achievements to knowledge is axiologically interesting also.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that the CRG account passes criterion (1).

3.3 Close Enough

According to criterion (1), a conception of achievements has to be close enough to our ordinary language and thought about achievements. But how close is close enough? I think we can operationalize this notion by testing against two conditions. A conception fails to be close enough if it (a) is clearly outstripped in terms of fit by a competing notion that also passes

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30Given the way that criteria (2) and (3) are intertwined this is not quite conclusive. Ultimately, whether we can be sure that the account passes criterion (2) may also depend on the success of the axiological part of this project.
criteria (2) and (3) or (b) is recognizably a conception of some concept other than achievement.\textsuperscript{31} I take it to be obvious that the account does not fail in terms of (b). If CRGs are an interesting class corresponding to an ordinary concept at all, they are the class of achievements.\textsuperscript{32} In the following sections, I will consider whether the CRG account fails in terms of (a). Obviously, I cannot anticipate every possible account someone may come up with. Instead, my strategy will be to consider objections to the CRG account and see whether the accounts that would result from accepting these objections and making corresponding amendments would be an improvement. In the process, I will refine the CRG account, in particular by elaborating on my notion of goals.

4. Is the CRG Account Too Permissive?

4.1 A Thick Evaluative Concept?

According to the CRG account 'achievement' is a non-evaluative concept. There is nothing in the account that prejudges the question whether an achievement is intrinsically valuable or, more generally, has any normative properties. But one might question whether this is the right way to think about achievements. Compare the concept of 'abuse'. This is clearly a case of a thick evaluative concept (i.e. a concept that has not only descriptive content but is also normatively loaded) rather than a non-evaluative one. Any conception of abuse that left it an open question whether there was anything wrong with instances of abuse would clearly be missing the mark. Maybe 'achievement' is a thick evaluative concept too.

\textsuperscript{31}Cf. Suits (2005), 164.

\textsuperscript{32}Some might be tempted to think that the CRG account is a conception of actions, but I do not think that is very promising. For starters, it seems very dubious to me to think that there could be actions that last over several years. There are action theorists who would disagree but it seems to me that criterion (2b) would cut against them, not me.
James Griffin argues that what he calls 'accomplishment' is a thick evaluative concept. In discussing accomplishment as one of the things that make human life valuable he says that “what is accomplished has, by definition, to be worthwhile: it has to be the sort of thing that gives life point or substance.” In a later discussion he is quite explicit that finding the right account of accomplishments involves respecting the normative content of the concept:

I should be driven to use value-rich vocabulary to bring this possible value into focus. ... Then, having isolated [the concept of accomplishment], I should have to decide whether what is left really is valuable—or rather, as the search for the definition already brings in value-rich language, these two processes, definition of the possible value and decision about its value, go hand in hand.

But Griffin does not deny that there is also a non-evaluative concept in the neighbourhood of what he calls accomplishment and he even uses the term 'achievement' for it:

‘[A]complishment' (if I may simply commandeer this word for what I am after) is roughly the sort of achievement that gives life weight or point.

I do not object to Griffin's distinction between a non-evaluative concept of achievement and a thick evaluative concept of accomplishment. If we use the terms this way and if the arguments in part III of this dissertation are correct, all achievements are accomplishments (which Griffin would deny). However, the important thing to note is that the non-evaluative concept (achievement) appears to be independent of and maybe even prior to the thick evaluative one.

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33 Griffin (1986), 66.
34 Griffin (2008), 114.
Griffin seems to suggest that we can first know what achievements are and then identify a subclass of them as accomplishments.\(^{36}\)

Griffin's 'accomplishment' is an interesting concept in its own right but I do not think that it does anything to damage the CRG account's claim to pass criterion (1). I am not convinced that people who talk and think about achievements operate with a thick evaluative concept most of the time. Consider, for example, that we can recognize someone's achievements without thinking them valuable at all. The exploits of someone like (Enron's CFO) Andrew Fastow come to mind.\(^{37}\) It also seems anything but strange to wonder (and worry) whether one's own achievements are in any way valuable without having to question their status as achievements. To be fair, sometimes we do question the status of an event as an achievement when we think that it is not particularly valuable (that is how many people feel about video game high-scores); but I do not think that this way of thinking is central enough to our ordinary notion of achievements to threaten the (non-evaluative) CRG's account claim to be close enough to that notion and thus pass criterion (1).

The suggestion that 'achievement' must be a thick ethical concept is ultimately not plausible. Whether achievements are intrinsically valuable (or have any other normative properties) is an interesting question and does not rest on a conceptual confusion (as it would, if being valuable was part of the concept). Compare 'abuse' again. Anyone who wondered whether abuse might not be wrong in any way does not know what he is talking about. The same cannot be said about someone who wonders about the normative properties of achievements. This shows

\(^{36}\)There is a debate about whether the evaluative and descriptive content of thick concepts can be disentangled. Cf. Elstein/Hurka (2009) and references there. I think that they can be disentangled. But whether or not that is generally true, it appears relatively unproblematic to distinguish a non-evaluative concept of achievement from an evaluative one that can be defined in terms of it.

\(^{37}\)Through 'creative' accounting measures Fastow was able to make the public (including Wall-Street analysts) believe for years that Enron was a thriving company. He became extraordinarily wealthy in the process, while laying the ground for the greatest bankruptcy in American history (at the time). Cf. McLean/Elkind (2003).
that an account of 'achievement' as a thick ethical concept would fail criterion (3). That being said, it bears repeating that there is room for more than one concept here. Griffin's distinction between accomplishments and achievements is conceptually sound. I disagree with Griffin about whether all achievements (non-evaluative concept) are accomplishments (thick evaluative concept), and in particular with his idea that only achievements of something independently worthwhile are even in the market to be accomplishments (i.e. valuable achievements). But these differences are substantive disagreements about the normative status of some (non-evaluative concept) achievements (I will discuss these questions later on). And thus a non-evaluative concept of achievements is needed to make these disagreements intelligible.

4.2 Can Achievements be Evil or Mundane?

One might have worried that the CRG account is too permissive in that it allows the competent attainment of morally trivial and even outright evil goals to count as achievements. But once we reject the notion that 'achievement' is a thick evaluative concept, we can see that this is as it should be. The suggestion that only the attainment of intrinsically valuable goals should count as achievements flies in the face of the fact that many paradigm cases of achievements (such as most athletic achievements) involve the achievement of morally trivial goals. And even if the suggestion is weakened to just exclude evil goals, it should be resisted. While we should (usually) resent it when people competently reach their evil goals, it is still true that they are achieving them. And while there are many (normatively important) differences between Stalin and Mandela, they also have something in common in virtue of both having achieved many of their political goals.\footnote{Compare Nozick's discussion of creative activity: “While our concern here is with the creation of something desirable or valuable, we can specify the more general notion of creative activity as an activity that produces..."} I think it is an interesting question whether what Mandela and Stalin have
in common is something that has a bearing on the question of how good their lives were. If that is so, we need a way to talk about that question, and I think that the term 'achievement' captures their commonality quite nicely. Whatever else is true about the two of them, they were both achievers.\textsuperscript{39} As discussed in the last section, we might think that Mandela's but not Stalin's achievements were also accomplishments (i.e. valuable achievements). But, again, this is a substantive dispute that will be picked up in the axiological part of this project.

A related worry is that some competently reached goals are just too insignificant to count as achievements. I competently reached my goal of getting to my office today but it would be odd to call that an achievement. This worry has caused Gwen Bradford to distinguish between two senses of 'achievement', one of which includes a significance clause.

We might put it this way: there is a sense of the word “achievement” in which every little thing we do, every aim we accomplish is an “achievement.” But there is another sense of the word “achievement,” which seems to be reserved for exceptional accomplishments – those endeavours that are particularly noteworthy in some respect, and evoke a sense of awe, admiration, and of being impressed. It is achievements in this latter, narrow sense that we aim for in our lives.\textsuperscript{40}

One way of interpreting that passage is that exceptional achievements are somehow different in kind from more mundane CRGs (like arriving at my office); and the class of exceptional achievements is the one that we should be focusing on, when embarking on an axiological investigation of achievements. If that is the suggestion, I think that it is misguided.

\textsuperscript{39} One might think that instead of achievements Stalin just had successes. But this does not capture the element of competence. What Stalin has in common with Mandela, he does not have in common with Homer Simpson who saves Springfield's nuclear power plant by hitting on just the right button after a lucky round of 'Eenie meenie miny moe'.

\textsuperscript{40} Bradford (2010), 6.
In order to satisfy criterion (2) (the anti-mongrel clause), an account of exceptional achievements would have to do one of two things. It could provide an account according to which exceptional achievements are only loosely related to achievements in the broader sense, rather than being a subclass of them. Such an account might be possible but it is clearly not what Bradford intends. Alternatively, one could carve out a class of exceptional achievements by specifying one or more dimensions along which achievements (exceptional and mundane) can be ranked, along with a threshold for each dimension below which an event does not qualify as an exceptional achievement. While there clearly are some plausible dimensions for ranking achievements, I am less sanguine about the existence of thresholds.

Let us say (with Bradford) that one important dimension is how much effort the agent has invested in reaching her goal. According to the current suggestion there would have to be an amount of effort below which an achievement goes from exceptional to mundane. I find that hard to believe. Instead, it seems clear to me that effort provides us with a continuum from the most mundane (opening a can of beer) to the most exceptional (finishing a double deca ultratriathlon) achievements without any clear-cut thresholds. While it is plausible to say that something that requires a lot of effort is (ceteris paribus) a greater achievement than something that requires very little effort, I do not see any reason to think that this is a difference in kind.

An account of achievements that included an effort threshold would have to provide a motivation for it. I can see two ways in which this might be attempted. The first, that can be dismissed out of hand, is to take recourse to ordinary language. To be sure, it is likely that introducing arbitrary thresholds along dimensions such as effort will increase the fit between a conception of achievements and the ordinary use of the term. But we have already moved away from accepting ordinary language as the final arbiter in conceptual analysis. If the only
justification for a threshold was that ordinary speakers are employing it, this would be no justification at all. It is also worth noting that ordinary speakers are wildly inconsistent as to where they place such a threshold. That being the case, the theorist would still have to make a pick which would appear to be completely unmotivated.

A better way to motivate the threshold would be to say that ordinary speakers have a reason for employing it: what ordinary speakers are indicating is that only CRGs above a certain threshold have value. While I do not think that a threshold view about value is plausible, this is not a battle I want to fight here. Instead, I would like to point out that this way of motivating the threshold transforms the concept of achievement into a thick evaluative one. I have given my reasons for resisting that move above. It is worth debating whether achievements below a certain threshold (of effort, say) are valuable in the same way that achievements above it are. But in order to even have that debate, we need to have a non-evaluative concept to start from.41

A third way of motivating a threshold would be to find a natural threshold in the dimension along which achievements are ranked rather than in the notion of achievement itself. It is hard to see how this could be done for dimensions that are continuous (like effort expended). But there are properties of events that are not continuous in the way effort expended is. If one of the relevant dimensions for whether an achievement is significant is whether it has such a property, this would provide a natural threshold that could distinguish exceptional from mundane achievements. Unfortunately, I do not see any promising candidates. One might think that an achievement has to be in some sense unique in order to qualify as significant. This may initially seem promising: uniqueness is an on/off property, as it were (either something is unique or it is not) and a lot of exceptional achievements seem to have it. Being the only one to ever do x, the

41The analogy to knowledge might be of some help here. Even if you generally think that knowledge is valuable, you might think that trivial bits of knowledge (such as how many sheets of paper are on my desk) are not valuable. But this does not undermine their status as instances of knowledge.
first one to ever do x, the one who does x to the highest degree and so on seem to be properties of achievements that make them stand out as exceptional. However, the standard of uniqueness is certainly too strict. If I am the second person to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, or one of five people who are able to run a mile in less than 4 minutes, or am successfully fighting for the 7th most important political cause, these are still clearly exceptional achievements. If anything, it is rarity not uniqueness (which is just a special case of rarity) that is an important dimensions along which to rank achievements. Rarity, however, is a continuous dimension; just like effort.

I think (and will argue in chapters 2-4) that there are three relevant dimensions determining the magnitude and value of achievements: effort, difficulty, and competence. All three of these are continuous in the way just discussed and so I do not think that thresholds delineating a special class of exceptional achievements can be had. I thus conclude that Braford's idea that an account of achievements should capture the sense of 'achievement' in which it is only applied to exceptional achievements is mistaken. Such an account would be hard pressed to satisfy criterion (2) and thus poses no threat to the CRG account's passing of criterion (1) (even if it outdid the CRG account in terms of fit with ordinary language).

5. Is the CRG account too restrictive?

So far I have considered various suggestions to the effect that not all CRGs are achievements. I now turn to the worry that not all achievements are CRGs. I take the biggest challenge of that kind to be the suggestion that it is not required for the agent to have a prior goal in order for an event to count as an achievement. Before I get to that, let me briefly consider whether the success and competence conditions might also be challenged.
5.1 Windfalls and Failures

Consider a politician who for a long time has harboured the ambition to become the leader of her party. But, even after being a committed member for decades, constantly (but ineptly) trying to move up the party hierarchy, she is nowhere near that position. However, when a tragic accident kills the entire top brass of the party at a convention, she becomes the new leader, because the party's constitution calls for the longest tenured member to take over in such a moment of crisis. Now, on any reasonable conception of competence, she did not reach her goal competently (as long as we assume that she did not have anything to do with the accident). But is not her ascent an achievement still? If we asked her what her greatest achievements are, becoming the party leader would almost certainly make the list.

However, in the case as described, I think that few people will feel inclined to agree with the politician. Her winning the party leadership was a windfall, like winning the lottery, and a windfall is not an achievement (when she lists her achievements, is she just listing significant positive life events?). However, consider a slightly less artificial example in which the party constitution does not have the rather silly longest-tenure clause. Instead, there is an emergency convention called and she wins the leadership in an election, because people respect her commitment and experience. Are we still willing to discount her assessment that becoming party leader is an achievement of hers?

I think the answer is that, yes, becoming the leader is an achievement of the old lady's, but it is a lesser achievement than if she had won the leadership without the help of the tragic accident. While this may seem obvious, it is worth spelling out why it is the case. There are two reasons. First, even if we were to think that the way in which she ascended is too infused with luck for it to count as an achievement, we would still have to acknowledge that she achieved
something. Once the tragedy happened and the emergency convention was called, the politician set herself a new concrete goal: to win the emergency election. And that is a goal she reached competently. So this would be an achievement; it would be a lesser achievement, because to win the emergency election was a less difficult goal than to become the leader when she first set out to do that. Second, however, even considering her original goal we cannot say anymore that her reaching this goal was a complete windfall. After all, through her continued commitment to the party, she had put herself in a position in which she was considered a viable emergency leader. Thus, reaching her difficult original goal was reached maybe not completely competently but definitely more competently than in the original scenario.

This goes back to a point alluded to in section 4.2. Competence comes in degrees and it is one of the dimensions along which we can measure achievements. Reached goals lie on a continuous scale from absolutely lucky to completely competent. The more competently a goal is reached, the more of an achievement it is; the less competently it is reached, the more it counts as a windfall. Is there a competence threshold below which an event is not an achievement? Presumably there is a threshold, albeit a vague one, with regards to when it is natural to call an event an achievement. However, the only conceptually significant threshold would seem to be zero. If a goal was reached as the result of pure unadulterated luck, this event would not be (like) an achievement at all. But events featuring less than impressive competence are still of the same kind as achievements. I will have more to say about the question of thresholds in part II.

I think that the argument of this section does not depend on the details of my particular conception of competence (that I will develop in chapter 2). However, there is one significant feature of the notion of competence at work here that should be mentioned in order to avoid confusion. When I talk about competently reached goals, I take competence to be a property of
the process of reaching the goal (as executed by the agent), not as a property of the agent. That is to say that in order to do something competently, I do not necessarily have to be generally competent (in the sense in which this would be a stable feature of my makeup as an agent). For example, I might be what is ordinarily considered a competent tennis player, while my beating you in a particular match was mostly due to luck; in that case I did not beat you competently in my intended sense. Or I might beat you competently even though I would not ordinarily be considered a competent player (more about this in chapter 2).

The next question is whether the success condition is really necessary. I think that this is much easier to answer. Without success there can be no achievement. It is clearly impossible to achieve a goal without reaching it. Or, in yet other words, the pursuit of a goal (competently or not) without success is not an achievement but a failure. However, there is a legitimate worry about the CRG account in the neighbourhood, which is the worry that failure and achievement are not mutually exclusive. It is possible (common even) that failing in one's endeavours is accompanied by and breeds great achievements. As will become clear in the next section, however, this point is better construed as a worry not about the success condition but about the condition that the agent has to have a goal.

5.2 Goals

Coming Close

A motivational speaker might advise you that “there is no achievement without goals.” At least one motivational author (Robert J. Mckain) is reported to have said this.

\[42\]
And whether having a goal is such a feature might be doubted. Consider the former French cyclist Raymond Poulidor.

*Eternal Second:* Known as 'the eternal second', Raymond Poulidor finished the Tour de France as the runner up three times. Another five times he came in third; but he never won.

It seems hard to deny that Poulidor's podium finishes are achievements. But, of course, no one would say that what he achieved was to win the Tour de France. The success condition is vital for any plausible account of achievements. Rather, what he achieved was placing second (or third). The problem for the CRG account is that it seems that 'placing second' was not a goal that Poulidor had and, thus, that one can achieve something without having it as a goal.

One might respond, however, that surely winning the Tour was not Poulidor's only goal. In particular, we might think that anyone who has the goal of coming in first must also have the goal of finishing in the top three. Compare what Thomas Hurka has to say about the respective goals of himself and Wayne Gretzky when playing hockey.

> When I shoot the puck in hockey, my intention is usually to put it somewhere near the net. When Gretzky shoots, he intends not only what I intend but also to pick the spot the goaltender has left open, which is in the upper right corner, and a few inches across. He has all my intentions plus many more, namely, those that specify his precise goals. Because of this, he accomplishes more goals in a game than I do...  

The idea here is that a precise goal (such as Gretzky's) comes in a package with a whole bunch of less precise goals of a similar kind. But is this really the case?

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43 Hurka (1993), 124-5.
Hurka claims that when Gretzky gets his shot off with the goal of putting it 'in the upper right corner, and a few inch across', he also has the goal of 'putting it somewhere near the net'. But we do not know this. We certainly cannot infer it from the fact that the achievement of the more precise goal entails the achievement of the less precise one. It is not a matter of conceptual truth that we have as a goal everything that is straightforwardly entailed by our goals. Imagine, for example, that one of your goals is to beat your friend at tennis. Now, you beating your friend at tennis entails 'either you beating your friend at tennis, or you being beaten by your friend at tennis'. But this is decidedly not a goal you have. If you lose the match and I tell you that you achieved one of your goals, even though you might have failed to achieve another, more precise, goal, you will be unlikely to agree. I might try to point out that what I said is just the same as saying that your less precise goal was to engage in a competitive tennis match with your friend, but again you might beg to differ. You might say that if there was a disjunctive (or less precise) goal at all, it was to 'either win, or not play'. Similarly, Gretzky might not agree that 'putting the goal somewhere near the net' was one of his goals. His goal was simply to hit the exact spot which gave him the best chance of scoring. If he were to put it anywhere else near the net, his shot would simply be a failed attempt (and he might have preferred to pass the puck instead).

But the point should not be overstated. While it is not conceptually necessary that what is entailed by your goals is your goal also, it will nevertheless often be true. In Poulidor's case, for example, it seems at least likely that finishing in the top three was something that he aimed at. And if that is right, Poulidor did achieve a goal of his. Of course, we should then say that his achievement was to place in the top three (or top 2) rather than that his achievement was to come in second, but that seems right (we do not, after all, want to say that, had he won, he would have failed to achieve his goal of coming in second).
Saying this invites difficult questions about the nature of goals. After all, if we had asked Poulidor whether his goal was to finish in the top three before the race, we quite possibly would have gotten a sincere negative reply. And who are we to second guess what someone else's goals are? I will not venture into the philosophy of mind far enough to come up with a fully worked-out account of the nature of goals. However, let me briefly sketch the way I think about goals. This sketch should facilitate the discussion of whether goals are a necessary part of achievements as the CRG account claims.

In one sense, a goal is an event that an agent aims at. In another sense goals are intentional mental states with success conditions. In that way they are a lot like desires and beliefs. Goals in the first sense are the intentional content of goals in the second sense. Goals in the second sense share the world-to-mind direction of fit with desires but their success conditions are a bit more demanding. While the success condition for a desire is just that the event that is its intentional content obtains, the success condition for a goal requires, in addition, that the person whose goal it is plays some role in bringing about this obtaining. On the other hand, goals are not necessarily intentions. While many people think that having an intention to do X entails a belief that one will do X, there is no such requirement for goals. Or rather, the requirement is much weaker: in order for me to have X as my goal, I must believe that it is possible for me to reach X. Importantly, goals (like intentions and beliefs) do not need to be

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46There is a further question as to whether this is a difference in the logical properties of the mental states 'goal' and 'desire' respectively or just a difference in the intentional content. In the latter case, goals would not really be different from desires, they would be desires for an event plus a desire for playing a role in its coming about. This is Brentano's view as reported by Chisholm. Cf. Chisholm (1986), 22-3. I think that this is not the best way of thinking about the difference between goals and desires and that, instead, the success conditions of goals are not fully specified by their intentional content but also by the fact that they are goals (just as the success conditions of a state of disbelief are not just given by its intentional content but by the fact that it is a state of disbelief rather than belief) but nothing I go on to say hangs on that question.
consciously entertained. It can be your goal to finish reading this chapter before lunch without you ever consciously thinking 'I want to read this chapter before lunch'. I do not have an answer to the metaphysical question as to what goals (or mental states in general) really are – maybe they are configurations of the brain, maybe they are behavioural dispositions, maybe they are something else entirely. But, given that the presence or absence of a conscious thought is not a reliable indication of whether there is a goal, we need some other epistemic crutches. In that vein I would like to propose two conditions for someone to have event X as their goal. First, having X as a goal (in conjunction with the rest of the agent's mental makeup) explains why the agent is acting as she is. Second, the agent would recognize and endorse X as her goal, under certain ideal conditions.

Instead of going into more detail about these two conditions, let us put them to use. Take *Eternal Second*. If Poulidor's only goal had been to win the tour, why did he not stop racing as soon as it became clear that he had no chance to win anymore? Moreover, why did he try to fend off the attacks of racers ranked closely behind him in the standings? The best explanation is that even though his most important goal (and the only one he thought about) was to win, he also had the goal of finishing in the top three (or some similar goal). And under certain ideal conditions he would have recognized and endorsed that one of his goals was to finish in the top three. It might be objected that the reason he continued racing is that that is what was expected of him. But that is beside the point. Maybe he did not have a desire to finish in the top three unless he could finish first but one does not have to desire an event to make it one's goal. So maybe the reason he continued to pursue a top three finish was not grounded in his desires but in some external expectations. But whatever his reasons for doing so, he still adopted a top-three finish as

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47Note that this is still a far cry from the earlier suggestion that every event that is entailed by one's goal is one's goal also. Many top riders, for example, quit the Tour once it becomes clear that they cannot reach their goal of finishing in the top ten, say. Even though finishing in the top ten entails finishing, finishing outside the top ten would not fulfil any of their goals.
a goal. It is a legitimate worry whether the achievement of goals that we adopt for reasons in some way external to us is valuable in the same way as more autonomous achievements are. However, I can see no merit in the suggestion that such goals are not goals. Even when you are brainwashed into adopting a particular goal, this unfortunate history does not take away from the fact that, still, you are now holding this goal.

Given my understanding of goals, then, the CRG account can explain why Poulidor's podium finishes were achievements: even though he would not have put it that way, finishing on the podium was one of the goals he had. But even if Poulidor had not had this goal, I think that his case would not be a decisive counterexample to the CRG account. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Poulidor did not have the goal of finishing in the top three but only the goal of coming in first. He comes in second. In this case, the CRG account would have to say that his coming in second was not an achievement and that seems counterintuitive. However, I think what the CRG account can say about this case is good enough. Winning the Tour de France is a complex project and in order to achieve it one must achieve a whole lot of subgoals along the way (think of all the training camps and then all the little stratagems during the race as well as goals like 'not losing time on this particular stage' and so on). If you end up coming in second, it is safe to assume that you achieved many of these subgoals. Even if the CRG account does not render your second place finish itself an achievement, it does credit you with a lot of achievements that led to your finishing second. I would think that, in that case, to call your finishing second an achievement would just be a convenient shorthand that refers to all the goals you achieved during your (ultimately failed) quest for victory.

A related point is worth mentioning. Ordinary language does not always distinguish between achievements and the recognition of achievements. Winning the Nobel Prize, for
example, would usually be thought of as an achievement, but there are surely many Nobel laureates who did not aim at winning it. However, I think that the CRG account gets things right here. Winning the Nobel Prize itself is not the achievement, but rather the Nobel Prize is handed out in recognition of exceptional achievements. The general point is that while we can often trust ordinary language to identify situations in which there are achievements, ordinary language is too messy to always correctly identify what exactly the achievement is.

**Impossible Standards**

The athlete who comes in second is one character that may cast doubt on the CRG account's goal requirement – the tortured artist is another. Take Franz Kafka whose works surely are achievements but who thought so little of them that he wanted all of them burned after his death. Does this not show that he fell short of reaching whatever goal it was that he had when writing? More generally, the challenge for the CRG account is this: it seems as if it has to deny achievement status in all cases in which the reach exceeds the grasp.

Of course, this is just a new way of presenting essentially the same challenge considered in the last section. And we might say about Kafka essentially the same things that I said about Poulidor: first, Kafka achieved many subgoals on his way to achieving whatever it was he was trying to achieve and calling his writings an achievement is a convenient shorthand for referring to these achievements; second, it is possible that Kafka, though failing to reach the lofty standards he would have found acceptable, also had some more modest goals that he did reach (we might ask, again, why he would have bothered to finish *Die Verwandlung* once he realized that it was not going to be up to the standard he was trying to reach). Most importantly, however,
we would probably say that Kafka did not really fail to achieve his goals as a writer. It seems more plausible that he simply failed to appreciate the quality of his own works. In other words, he failed as a critic of his own work rather than as an author.

However, Kafka's case, more than Poulidor's, puts pressure on the recognition criterion for having a goal. While we could probably sit down Poulidor and get him to acknowledge that indeed one of his goals was to finish in the top three, it is harder to imagine that Kafka would have ever acknowledged that one of his goals was to finish *Die Verwandlung* in its current form. However, I think that there is a host of explanations available why Kafka, or tortured artists in general, would deny that they reached a goal in completing a piece, even if that was indeed the case. First, some tortured artists may not really care intrinsically about the quality of their art but instead are trying to find relief from their suffering through it. If that fails (they are still in anguish) they might feel like they failed to reach their goal, which they have; but at the same time they still achieved *a* goal – even though it might have been one that they adopted for instrumental reasons only. Similarly, as seems likely in Kafka's case, the artist may aim at producing a certain effect: either a certain emotional reaction in their audience, or simply success and admiration. The artist might not be aware that he actually reached (or is on his way to reaching) that goal. Or he might have failed to reach that goal but, again, he did reach *a* goal which he (falsely) hoped would lead him to achieve another. Further, some artists might fear that being satisfied with a piece (admitting, to themselves or others, that it constitutes reaching a goal) will take away part of the motivation they need to do their best work. 48 When introducing the recognition condition, I spoke vaguely of 'recognition under certain ideal conditions'. That was meant to rule out cases in which the failure to recognize one's goals can be explained in

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48 This is also true for for some athletes. Witness the following statement, attributed to former tennis champion Virginia Wade: “I always felt that I hadn't achieved what I wanted to achieve. I always felt I could get better. That's the whole incentive.”
ways like the ones just discussed. While I will not try to replace the fiat ('certain ideal conditions') with something more concrete, I hope that these cases point to an intuitive notion of what I have in mind.\footnote{\textit{However, one possible misunderstanding would be to construe these ideal conditions, too demandingly, along the lines of requiring psychoanalysis. I do not want to say that it is my goal to hurt my friend's feelings (or kill my father), just because I have some subconscious desire to that effect which offers some explanation of my behaviour.}}

\textbf{Cloudy Goals}

There is, however, another problem that is well illustrated by the goals of artists (tortured or not). Artists will often begin a project without a clear idea as to what the final product will be like. In a way that is what makes them artists rather than artisans. While artisans have a product in mind and set out to make it, artists embark on a creative process without any preconceived notion of where it is going to take them (this is, of course, not intended as a rigorous way of distinguishing artists from artisans). Does the CRG account, then, have to say that (most of) what we usually think of as artistic achievements are not achievements at all? I do not think so.

First, it is important to remember that goals, being events in Kim's sense, can be processes and not just the end point of processes. While my goal may be the eradication of malaria, my goal may also be to be engaged in a creative process. In that case the end product of that process is not really my goal but only a byproduct of my achieving the goal of following where my creative powers lead me. And there is certainly a lot of art where it is the process rather than the product that we admire and think of as an achievement. Second, as mentioned before, I think that many artists do have rather well defined goals concerning the outcome of their creative process. While an artist might not know what her next piece will look like, she might have a goal concerning the effect her goal will have on the audience (be it an emotional,
intellectual, or monetary reaction). A lot of artistic achievement, it seems to me, is of that kind. Similarly, an artist might be aiming at a piece that is *dramatic* or is a novel reflection of an aspect of everyday life. And while it might be impossible to determine (especially in advance) what exactly it would take for such a goal to be reached, there is no reason to think that there is no fact of the matter. Yet another possible goal that an artist may have comes into view when we distinguish two phases of creative processes: generating ideas and selecting ideas. The latter is an important part of being a good artist. And it is not far fetched to think that artists have the goal to select and develop those of their ideas that are most worth developing. A further wrinkle occurs when artists set out knowing that part of the artistic process will consist in specifying their initially cloudy goals (entrepreneurs might be an even better example for this). In cases like this the final goal cannot be fully identified before the process starts (and sometimes not even before it is almost finished). But that, again, does not mean that there is no goal. It is just that the specification of sub-goals along the way is an essential part of reaching this particular goal – and thus of the achievement.50

This short and incomplete discussion should suffice to demonstrate that the CRG account has ample resources to accommodate various forms of artistic achievements. However, not all that is commonly called artistic achievement *should* be accommodated by an account of achievements. If something is an impressive product of a creative process, that does not yet make it an achievement (even if we might be inclined to *call* it that). A creative achievement involves, I think, the person *using* their creative powers in order to achieve some goal. If, on the other hand, some creative idea simply pops into my head, this is not an achievement. Possessing unusual creativity is no more an achievement than possessing unusual height. Both of them need to be used in order to create impressive achievements. This is not to pooh-pooh creativity.

Uncontrolled creative processes can be wonderful and often produce impressive results. Maybe the products of creative processes are intrinsically valuable (or maybe just engaging in creative processes is); but even then, this would not make them achievements.\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{Difficult Routes to Simple Goals}

The case of Kelin illustrates a final worry about achievements and goals.

\textit{Personal Best}: Kelin is going for a run. Turning onto a main road, she sees another runner in front of her who appears to be in some kind of race. He is going at a rather fast pace and wearing a numbered tag on his jersey. As she is running behind him, he loses his tag. She shouts to let him know but he does not hear her, so she picks up the tag and tries to catch up with him. Unbeknownst to Kelin the runner in front of her is trying to set a new Canadian marathon record. After some five kilometres, Kelin catches up with him and hands him the tag. Even though she had been planning on going for a long run that day, she is so exhausted that she sits down in the next bar to have a drink and then takes the subway home. Later, when she maps her run, she realizes that she set a new personal best for five kilometres while chasing the runner.

Kelin's case might seem to be a problem for the goal requirement. Beating her personal best seems to be an achievement but it is not a goal she pursued. The case is not that difficult to account for within the CRG account, but it points to an important way in which the account departs from ordinary language.\textsuperscript{52} According to the CRG account Kelin's achievement was not to beat her personal best, but rather to catch the other runner. Now, 'catching the other runner' might

\textsuperscript{51}For an account of the intrinsic value of creativity cf. Nozick (1989), chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{52}The case would be a bit more difficult to account for if Kelin did not in the end catch the runner. I think that such a tweaked version of \textit{Personal Best} could be handled by combining my treatment of \textit{Personal Best} in this sub-section and the treatment of \textit{Eternal Second} in the first sub-section on goals.
not quite convey what was impressive about the achievement. But I do not think that that is a problem. Referring to an achievement simply by the achieved result always leaves out a lot of information about the achievement (which is not just the result but an extended event culminating in the result). In order to know how impressive an achievement is, we will need some of that information.

It might be objected that 'catching the other runner' does not just under-describe the achievement; it mis-describes it. Admittedly, 'beating her personal best' would be the more natural description of Kelin's achievement. But here I want to bite the bullet. Natural language about achievements tends to focus on the most impressive or unusual aspect of them. That is a useful way of talking as it helps to gauge how great an achievement we are talking about. So, when Kelin tells her story she might want to say 'I beat my personal best' rather than 'I chased down some guy'. But in terms of the CRG account the bringing about of the goal pursued by the agent is the achievement. Sometimes the goal will be the most salient feature of the event in which case the CRG account agrees with ordinary language. But sometimes it will not; in which case the CRG account and ordinary language will diverge. But this divergence from ordinary language does not threaten the CRG account. It would do so, only if an alternative account was available that captured more of ordinary language and thought about achievements (criterion (1)) and was able to coherently pick out a homogeneous class of phenomena (criterion (2)). It seems to me that the prospects of passing criterion (2) are dim for any account trying to capture whatever is most impressive or unusual about each of all the different events we call achievements.

53There is another possibility: Kelin might just have a long-standing goal to better her time for 5k. In that case, the CRG account does credit her with an additional achievement. But not all cases will be like that. Your goal might be to catch a mouse and, before you know it, you have chased it all the way up Mount Everest. Your achievement, strictly speaking, was that you caught that mouse (not that you climbed Everest which was not your goal). But, of course, that is not what is impressive about it.
6. Conclusion

I have argued that, for the purpose of an axiological investigation, achievements are best understood as competently reached goals (CRGs). The CRG account does not fully mirror ordinary language about achievements, but I have argued that no theoretically useful conception could hope to do so. I have also argued that achievement is a descriptive rather than a thick evaluative concept. Finally, I have defended the CRG account against the charge of descriptive inadequacy by considering objections to the effect, first, that it is too permissive (declaring events to be achievements that are not) and, second, that it is too restrictive (denying achievement status to events that are achievements). I hope to have convinced the reader that the CRG account can pass muster as formulating the well-behaved core of our ill-behaved ordinary concept of achievement. However, for those who remain unconvinced it is worth pointing out that the rest of my project does not require that CRGs are achievements. All it requires is that CRGs are an axiologically interesting class of events. I will, however, continue to call them achievements. In Richard Brandt's words:

Whether or not [my] proposed usage deviates from that of common speech […], it is useful to name an important and interesting concept, and henceforth I shall use it in that sense, with no further meaning or connotation.  

54Brandt (1979), 12.
PART II

Measuring Achievements
Prologue to Part II

1. Introduction

In this part of the dissertation, I turn to questions about the magnitude of achievements. What makes one reached goal more of an achievement than another? I argue that the magnitude of an achievement is determined by three factors, or dimensions, along which achievements can be ranked. These are the dimensions of *competence, difficulty,* and *effort.* The following three chapters provide a detailed discussion of each dimension respectively. Providing this account of the magnitude of achievements serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it completes the conceptual analysis begun in part I. On the other hand, it sets the stage for the discussion of the value of achievements in part III. If achievements are intrinsically valuable, we should expect that, ceteris paribus, achievements of greater magnitude are more valuable. Thus, the factors determining the magnitude of achievements need to be accounted for by whatever story we want to tell about the value of achievements. In this prologue, I will comment on two issues that concern all three dimensions of magnitude. The first is whether there are significant thresholds along any or all of these dimensions. The second is the relationship between the magnitude of an achievement and its value. To facilitate my discussion of these points, I will begin with a very brief sketch of my accounts of competence, difficulty, and effort as developed in subsequent chapters.
2. Competence, Difficulty, Effort

There are many suggestions in the literature as to what factors influence the magnitude of achievements. Here is an (incomplete) list: difficulty,\(^\text{55}\) effort,\(^\text{56}\) rationality of the goal,\(^\text{57}\) extent,\(^\text{58}\) complexity of the goal,\(^\text{59}\) self-sacrifice on part of the agent,\(^\text{60}\) intrinsic value of the goal,\(^\text{61}\) comprehensiveness of the goal.\(^\text{62}\) In considering these suggestions it is helpful to impose some order. One way of thinking about this starts from the observation that an achievement involves an agent, a goal, and a process by which the agent reaches the goal. We can order the suggestions by whether they concern a property of the agent, the goal, or the process. I do not mean to suggest that every suggested factor (or even just the factors that I endorse) falls neatly into the three categories of agent, goal, and process. Borders are fuzzy here and some features could be categorized differently from the way I do it. Nevertheless, this is a convenient way of dividing up the logical space. Ultimately, I endorse one property from each of the three categories as a factor in the magnitude of achievements. I do not assume, however, that there has to be one and only one feature of each agent, goal, and process, that is pertinent to the magnitude of achievements. It just happens to work out that way. Competence, on my account, is a feature of the process, difficulty of the goal, and effort of the agent. Accordingly, whenever I discuss rival views, I do so in the context of the chapter in which I develop an account of the view that belongs in the same

\(^{55}\) Cf. Griffin (1986); Bradford (2010) and (2013).


\(^{57}\) Cf. Raz (1986); Scanlon (1998).


\(^{60}\) Cf. Portmore (2007).


\(^{62}\) Cf. Raz (1986); Griffin (1986) and (2008).
category. For example, I consider the suggestion that the intrinsic value of the goal is a factor in the magnitude of achievements in chapter 4, where I also develop my own goal dimension (difficulty).

Another preliminary remark concerns my use of the ordinary language terms 'competence', 'difficulty', and 'effort'. In the next three chapters, I develop accounts of what I take to be the three dimensions of the magnitude of achievements. As I think that these accounts are similar to what we usually mean by 'competence', 'difficulty', and 'effort', I commandeer these words as technical terms. I have only a limited interest in seeing how well these dimensions actually line up with our ordinary concepts of competence, difficulty, and effort. I do think that, with some qualifications, the dimensions I develop could be defended as reasonable approximations of those ordinary concepts (the most important qualifications will be discussed in the respective chapters). But if this turned out not to be the case, the implications for my project would be merely terminological.

The dimension of competence captures the idea that an event is more of an achievement the less luck is involved in reaching the goal. I operationalize this notion by saying, very roughly, that a goal is reached competently to the degree that the actions of the agent made success likely. Thus, I think of competence as a feature of the process of reaching a particular goal, rather than as a feature of an agent. The dimension of difficulty is also spelled out in terms of probability of success. A goal is difficult to reach, if it is unlikely to obtain given that a hypothetical standardized agent acts in pursuit of the goal. In my conception, difficulty is an agent-neutral dimension in the sense that I consider the same goal as equally difficult for two agents, even if one of them is vastly more talented and would not think of the goal as a difficult one.63 Thus, the

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63 This is a noteworthy exception to my claim that the accounts I give are reasonably good approximations of the natural language terms that I use to describe them. The term 'difficulty' is ambiguous between the agent-neutral concept that I am calling difficulty and an agent-relative concept according to which the same goal can be more
dimension of difficulty captures the thought that certain goals are more impressive than others, independently of how hard or easy they might be to reach for a particular individual; and reaching such goals is more of an achievement than reaching more pedestrian ones. Taken together the two dimensions of competence and difficulty are a measure of the degree to which the actions of the agent improved their chances of success. The achievements with the greatest magnitude according to these two dimensions are the ones where an agent's action make an event highly probable that would have been very improbable without her intervention. Here we might think of a politician whose campaigning and policy efforts result in new laws that make her political objectives very likely to obtain, when those had been very unlikely to obtain under the previous legal regime. The two dimensions can also sometimes balance each other out. Making an event that was very unlikely to begin with somewhat likely may still rank low on the competence scale, but this is countered by ranking highly on the scale of difficulty. Thus, reaching such a low probability goal (one may think of getting a base hit in baseball as an example) might be all things considered similar in magnitude to an achievement that involves making an already very likely event just a little more likely (one may think of a relief pitcher getting a few outs to finish a blow out of the opposing team). In the latter case, the achievement would rate low on the difficulty scale but high on the scale of competence. How exactly the two dimensions combine to determine the magnitude of achievements is a question that is better left until later when a fuller treatment of each dimension has been given.

Because I think of difficulty as agent-neutral, there is an important aspect of the magnitude of achievements that is not captured by it. It seems clear that, ceteris paribus, a reached goal is more of an achievement if it was harder to reach for the particular agent whose
goal it is. My walking to the office every day is not a particularly impressive achievement. But for someone with a serious bodily impairment, completing two 500m walks every day might be quite an achievement indeed. This is captured by the third dimension: effort. Effort here is understood, again roughly, as the percentage of available mental and physical resources an agent allocates to a task. And, ceteris paribus, the more effort an agent puts into achieving a particular goal the more of an achievement is her eventual success.

3. Thresholds

With this bare bones sketch of my three dimensions on the table let me turn to an issue that arises for all three of these dimensions. This is the question whether there are thresholds along them below which a reached goal is not an achievement at all. This is a question that relates the topic of this part back to the conceptual analysis from part I (and I touched on the question in chapter 1, sections 4.2 and 5.1). If there were such thresholds, passing them would be a necessary condition for some event to be an achievement. Thus, the fact that I did not introduce such thresholds in part I is a giveaway that I am not sympathetic to the view that there are such thresholds.\(^{64}\) Let me briefly explore the issue here.

Once it is accepted that a given dimension is important for determining the achievement status of an event, there are three ways in which one can think about thresholds on this dimension. The first would be to hold what I will call a pure threshold view. A pure threshold view about dimension X claims that events are achievements only if they are above that

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\(^{64}\)I should say that the necessary conditions for achievement that I introduced in chapter 1, in particular success, could be construed as dimensions along which I accept a threshold. On my view a goal being 'almost reached' is no more an achievement than it not being reached at all. In practice, however, my view allows for continuity along the success dimension, because most cases in which a goal is 'almost reached' will be cases in which many subsidiary goals actually have been reached. Cf. chapter 1, section 5.2.
threshold, and that dimension X has no further role to play in determining the magnitude of the achievement. All that matters is whether the event is above or below the threshold. A mixed threshold view agrees that an event is not an achievement unless it passes the threshold. But, in contrast to the pure threshold view, it allows that above-the-threshold events are achievements of greater magnitude the higher they score on dimension X. Finally, according to a no threshold view about dimension X, an event cannot fail to be an achievement in virtue of scoring too low on dimension X. An event's X-score is simply a partial measure of its magnitude as an achievement.\(^{65}\) One could have any of these three kinds of views about any dimension without being automatically committed to the same view about other dimensions (as the discussion of Hurka's view shows below, this is not a mere possibility). My acceptance of three dimensions thus leaves me with 27 possible combinations of views about thresholds. I will begin my argument for accepting a no threshold view about all three dimensions by arguing against mixed threshold views.\(^{66}\)

Gwen Bradford argues for mixed threshold views about both competence and effort.\(^{67}\) In chapter 1, I argued against her mixed threshold view about effort, claiming that the only viable way of motivating such a threshold would seem to be to take recourse to considerations of value and say that only goals that are competently reached with a certain minimum amount of effort are valuable. I pointed out that this way of motivating a threshold would transform the concept of

\(^{65}\)One may say that in the limiting case of an X-score of zero, the event is an achievement of magnitude zero which seems close to equivalent to saying that it is not an achievement at all.

\(^{66}\)I take the arguments that follow to be applicable to questions about magnitude as well as questions about value. It is possible that, while there are no thresholds along the dimensions of competence, difficulty, and effort as far as the magnitude of achievements is concerned, there still are such thresholds when it comes to the value of achievements. However, if this was true of the value of achievements qua achievements, I would worry that my conception of the magnitude of achievements may fail criterion (3) from chapter 1. Cf. section 4 of the current chapter.

\(^{67}\)As discussed in chapters 2-4, Bradford (1) dismisses what I call difficulty and (2) provides accounts of effort (which she calls difficulty) and competence that are different from mine. However, these differences have no bearing on the plausibility of mixed thresholds.
achievement into a thick evaluative one, which seems undesirable. Bracketing that last concern for a moment, I would like to add that the problem of motivating the existence of any threshold (as opposed to motivating a particular threshold level) is particularly acute for mixed threshold views; and it is very doubtful that this need for motivation could be satisfied with a story about value. All threshold views need to explain why it is that events below a certain level of effort (or whatever the dimension may be) are of a different kind than those above it. If one holds a mixed threshold view, however, this explanation also needs to account for the alleged fact that above the threshold differences in effort make a difference to the magnitude of an achievement, but below it all events are equal with regards to achievement status (or value, if that is the route the mixed threshold theorist wants to go). Assume the effort threshold is at level 5. How come that reaching a goal with effort level 8 is more of an achievement (or more valuable) than a goal reached with effort level 6, while a goal reached with effort level 4 is no more an achievement (or no more valuable) than a goal reached with effort level 1?

Note that I am not claiming that such a story could not in principle be provided. Think, for example, about the way that utility is gained from food. Below a certain threshold (the amount needed for survival) the utility of food is zero. Being just below the threshold of survival is arguably no better than having no food at all. At the same time it seems true that above the threshold of survival different amounts of food are associated with different levels of utility. Why, then, should we not accept a similar story about the relationship between achievements and effort? The difference is that in the case of food and utility there is a more or less well understood mechanism that explains why differences below the threshold do not matter, while differences above it do. I have a very hard time seeing what the analogous mechanism could be in the case of achievement and effort (or, for that matter, competence or difficulty). Until some kind of story is provided why differences below a threshold make no difference to an event's
achievement status (or value) but differences above the threshold do, I take the burden of proof to lie with the mixed threshold theorist.

Turning to pure threshold views, I think that such views lack even superficial plausibility when applied to the dimensions of difficulty and effort. If either difficulty or effort are dimensions affecting an event's achievement status at all, it seems clear that they affect the magnitude of achievements. That is to say that achieving a more difficult goal is more of an achievement than reaching a less difficult goal; and reaching a goal after needing to put in more effort is more of an achievement than reaching it with less effort. If these claims are (ceteris paribus) correct, as I think they are, pure threshold views about these dimensions are non-starters. The real debate about these dimensions is between mixed threshold views and no threshold views. As I explained above, I take it that in this debate the burden of proof lies with the proponent of the mixed threshold views, and it is not easy to see how it could be discharged.

The most plausible candidate dimension for a pure threshold is competence. One way of seeing the plausibility of a pure threshold view about competence is to look at the case of knowledge. Competence is the anti-luck condition for achievement and thus plays a role analogous to the one justification (plus an anti-Gettier condition) plays for knowledge. And most people who think about knowledge work with a pure threshold view about this anti-luck dimension: below a certain threshold of justification a true belief does not qualify as knowledge at all, and above it a higher degree of justification does not correspond to a higher degree or magnitude of knowledge. Unsurprisingly, Thomas Hurka, who goes to great lengths in exploiting
the similarities of knowledge and achievement, holds a pure threshold view about competence (which he appears to combine with a no threshold view about difficulty).

How plausible a pure threshold view about competence is depends on one's conception of competence. Combining my own view about competence with a pure threshold view, for example, has unappealing consequences. Above, I briefly mentioned that getting a base hit in baseball is usually an achievement with a low competence but a high difficulty score. That is because, on my conception of competence, high competence implies a high probability of success, while getting a base hit is something that even the best hitters manage to do in only about a third of their attempts. Combining this view with a (pure) threshold view would have the result that there are no offensive achievements in baseball. We may call this implication the problem of the base hit. The problem of the base hit is not an isolated phenomenon that only appears in the context of baseball. It appears whenever someone successfully reaches a goal while beating the odds. A runner who beats three equally matched opponents, a politician who wins an unlikely majority, and a researcher who succeeds in finding a cure for a novel disease may all be instances of successes that are reached despite success being unlikely and would thus not be achievements on a threshold view.

That my view of competence in combination with a pure threshold view generates the problem of the base hit may, of course, be taken as a sign that there is something amiss with my conception of competence rather than as a problem for the idea of a threshold. This is a suggestion I cannot fully address here – the defence of my conception of competence will have

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69 While I claim that Hurka's views about extent, precision, and complexity can be captured by my notion of difficulty, this requires substantial argument (see chapter 3). Moreover, Hurka does not explicitly discuss whether he thinks that there is a threshold along any of these dimensions, so the claim that he holds a no threshold view about difficulty is an educated guess.
to wait until chapter 2. It is worth pointing out, however, that Hurka's view, though different from mine, also generates the problem of the base hit. Hurka's view is that in order for a reached goal to be an achievement, the agent needs to have a justified belief that they will succeed. But someone who is about to beat the odds will usually lack justification for such a belief. Thus, if Hurka wants to keep the analogy with knowledge intact, he will either have to live with the problem of the base hit or reconsider his conception of knowledge (maybe along broadly Bayesian lines) by doing away with a pure threshold view about epistemic justification.\textsuperscript{70}

There are other conception of competence which do not have the problem of the base hit. In chapter 2, I discuss Bradford's account which makes competence a matter of knowledge about the process by which the goal is reached and Greco's account which conceptualizes competence as a matter of using abilities. Neither of these accounts generates the problem of the base hit. But, as I will show, there are other reasons to reject these conceptions. If something like Hurka's conception or mine is the best conception of competence, I take the problem of the base hit to be a decisive reason to reject a pure threshold view about competence.

Before leaving the topic of thresholds, I would like to consider the following objection to no threshold views like mine. It might be claimed that cases of very low scores on any of the three dimensions are clear cases of events that are not achievements. For example, tying my shoelaces is no achievement simply because it is too easy (both in the agent-neutral sense captured by my conception of difficulty and in the agent-relative sense captured by my

\textsuperscript{70}More generally, rejecting a pure threshold view about competence, leaves us with two options. We could (1) accept that there is a disanalogy between knowledge and achievement regarding the role of the anti-luck condition, or (2) rethink our conception of knowledge (along broadly Bayesian lines). My inclination would be to do the latter, but that is a project for another day.

The idea would be that achievement is an interesting concept only if it captures something valuable. Insofar as we think the same about knowledge we should keep the analogy intact and reject the pure threshold view about epistemic justification. But maybe there are some other reasons for being interested in knowledge and the valuable equivalent of achievement on the epistemic side is something else. If that was the case, the disanalogy would be unsurprising.
conception of effort). Similarly, winning the lottery is clearly not an achievement and (at least part of) the explanation is that the success in this case is not reached competently. If these claims are true, there has to be a threshold somewhere.

However, if this is the best that proponents of threshold views can come up with, I am happy to bite the bullet. Of cases like this, a no threshold view would claim that they are tiny achievements while a pure or mixed threshold view would claim that they are not achievements at all. If we were to accept that achievements are valuable, a no threshold view would claim that such events have a tiny amount of value, while pure or mixed threshold views would say that they are not valuable at all. In deciding between these two options, I find it hard to believe that anyone could be very confident about their judgement. I know that I am not. Hence, cases like this do not move me and provide no intuitive data points. Thus, I am comfortable to decide such cases with reference to broader theoretical considerations. In other words, I am happy to say that cases like that are tiny achievements, not because I confidently judge them to be, but because I find thresholds problematic for the reasons adduced above.

4. Magnitude and Value

In speaking about the magnitude of achievements I have been careful to avoid the locution 'great(er) achievement'. My reason for doing so is that that phrase is ambiguous between an achievement of great magnitude and an achievement of great value. As an ethicist my main interest is ultimately with the value of achievements but, since I argued that 'achievement' is not a thick evaluative concept, I cannot assume that the magnitude of an achievement equals its

\[71\text{It may be worth pointing out here that, to my mind, the intuitive pull towards saying that there is no achievement at all is much stronger in cases like the lottery, than in cases like the shoelace. I take this to be congruent with the earlier observation that the case for a threshold is strongest when considering the dimension of competence.} \]
value. It is perfectly conceivable that some events that are achievements of great magnitude are nevertheless not very valuable. Consider the achievement of Anders Breivik who, in July 2011, killed 69 teenagers on the Norwegian island of Utøya, competently and successfully executing a clever plan. This was arguably an achievement of considerable magnitude but, at the same time, it seems very doubtful that we would want to say that it was an achievement of considerable value. It seems, then, that we can discuss the magnitude of achievements without committing ourselves to positions about the value of achievements.

Compare pleasure. Here too, saying that some event A is more pleasant (a pleasure of greater magnitude) than another event B does not, by itself, commit one to the claim that A is more valuable than B. At the same time, however, I will be arguing in part III that achievements are valuable. And if that is true, we should expect there to be some kind of connection between the magnitude of an achievement and its value. Moreover, unless there was such a connection, we may doubt whether the CRG account in conjunction with my views about magnitude passes the third of the criteria of adequacy for an account of achievement I outlined in chapter 1: that it satisfies our theoretical, and in particular our axiological, interests in achievements. In this section, I briefly comment on this connection; a fuller treatment will follow in part III.

There are two extreme positions about the relationship between achievements' magnitude and value and neither of them is plausible. On the one hand is the position that an event's value is fully determined by its magnitude as an achievement. As the case of Breivik shows, this view is at odds with strongly held beliefs about particular cases. Moreover, such a view would entail that achievements are either the only value or some kind of master value in the presence of which all

_72_ If you are inclined to doubt the first part of this sentence, you might be operating with the thick evaluative concept I termed (following Griffin) 'accomplishment' in chapter 1. To see that there is also a non evaluative concept of achievement, consider that there surely is a sense in which Breivik's killing spree was more of an achievement than his making breakfast that morning.
other values are reduced to zero. This, too, is hard to believe and there is virtually nobody who holds such a position.\textsuperscript{73} On the other hand, one might think that there is absolutely no relationship between an event's magnitude as an achievement and its value. This position could, in principle, come in one of two flavours. The first would be to accept that achievements are intrinsically valuable but to deny that an achievement's magnitude is any kind of measure of its value. I can find no plausibility in such a view. It would be like saying that pleasure is intrinsically valuable while denying that how pleasant an event is has any systematic relationship to how valuable it is. Alternatively, one may simply deny that achievements are intrinsically valuable. In this case it would be unsurprising that the magnitude of an achievement is no indication of its value. Of the positions considered so far this is the only reasonable one (and the only one that people actually hold). I will return to the question whether achievements are intrinsically valuable in part III. For the discussion at hand, I will assume that they are. If this assumption turns out to be false, the rest of this section would be superfluous; the implications for the following three chapters, however, would be minimal.

If we accept that achievements are intrinsically valuable but are not the only thing that is so, we need to occupy a position between the two extremes just discussed. What makes the position that the value of an event is fully determined by its magnitude as an achievement so implausible is the implication that the fact that an event is an achievement swamps all other considerations about its value. The natural solution to this problem is to introduce the notion of an event's \textit{value qua achievement}. If we assume that there are different properties in virtue of which an event can be valuable, there is conceptual room for a kind of partial value of an event corresponding to each of them. A complex event that is an achievement may, for example, also constitute (or contain) an instance of pleasure, and/or an instance of knowledge. Assuming that

\textsuperscript{73}Nietzsche, on some readings, might be an exception. Cf. Hurka (2007).
knowledge, pleasure, and achievement are all intrinsically valuable, we may say that such an event is valuable qua knowledge, qua pleasure, and qua achievement. In this case there are two further questions. First, what determines each of the individual partial values? second, what is the relationship between the partial values and the overall value of the event? Let me address these questions in order.

I think that an event's value qua achievement is equal to (or determined by) its magnitude as an achievement. The more of an achievement an event is, the more value qua achievement it has. Here is why. I agree with W.D. Ross that when events are intrinsically valuable, being intrinsically valuable is a resultant property that they have in virtue of (some of) their other properties. That is to say, in the current context, that an achievement is valuable in virtue of some of its (non-evaluative) properties. We might ask which properties of events can serve as the basis for value. Without attempting a full answer to this question, we may say that accepting the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable commits us to the following. The properties of an event that are necessary and sufficient conditions for it to be an achievement are sufficient to form the resultance base on which the event is (pro tanto) intrinsically valuable. This is just what it means to say that events are valuable in virtue of being achievements, which in turn is just another way of saying that achievements are intrinsically valuable. If being an achievement is one source of intrinsic value, then an event is (pro tanto) intrinsically valuable in virtue of its properties that make it an achievement. From this it is but a short step to the conclusion that the more of an achievement an event is, the more valuable (qua achievement) it must be.

74Cf. Ross (1930), 121-3.

75I borrow this terminology from Dancy (2004).

76This does not follow with logical necessity. It is possible that an event has property X in virtue of property Y, but that differences in degree of property Y do not determine differences in degree of property X. But if we set X as 'being valuable' and Y as 'being an achievement', it seems to me that the last sentence describes a mere conceptual possibility.
words, the degree to which an event exemplifies the property of being an achievement is exactly the degree to which it is valuable qua achievement. This, of course, is tantamount to saying that the value of an achievement (qua achievement) is nothing but its magnitude.

Let us turn, then, to the question how an event's value qua achievement is related to its overall value. The simplest view about this would be summative. Returning to the above example of an event that contains value qua achievement, qua pleasure, and qua knowledge, the summative view holds that the overall value of this event is simply the sum of those values. Taking a hint from G.E. Moore's famous principle of organic unities, however, we should not simply assume such summativism.

The value of a whole must not be assumed to be the same as the sum of the values of its parts.77

Moore's examples of organic unities are quite different from the example we are considering right now. He probably would not have considered the different aspects of an event (such as that it is an instance of achievement, pleasure, and knowledge) as 'parts' of the event.78 Others, such as Roderick Chisholm, have developed a notion of parthood according to which such aspects would be parts of the event.79 We do not need to decide this question here. For even if aspects of an event are not parts, we may accept a principle analogous to Moore's that also covers aspect values; i.e. a principle that denies that it is self-evident that the value of an event is simply the sum of its aspect values. According to such a principle, then, we would need to look at the event as a whole to determine its overall value. How helpful its value qua achievement is in doing so is an open question. Thus, accepting such a principle opens the door for a wide variety of views

77Moore (1903), 28.


about the relationship between overall value and value qua achievement. Two possible features of such views deserve mention here. First, one may claim that the value qua achievement of an event can be defeated by other features of an event.\(^8\) Such a view might have some plausibility, for example, about achievements where the agent was brainwashed into adopting the goal in the first place. Second, one may claim that an event's value qua achievement might in fact be switched, so that the contribution the value qua achievement makes to the overall value is negative. Such a view may be held about achievements with an intrinsically evil goal, such as Breivik's. The idea here would be that the event that is his achievement is also an instance of a horrible vice and that the viciousness of his actions does not just outweigh their value qua achievement but gives that value a negative valence; so that the fact that his evil deeds constitute an achievement makes them even worse than they would otherwise be.

I will not discuss these questions in detail here, as they are questions about value and as such belong in part III. I wanted to briefly raise them here, however, to drive home the following methodological point. When consulting our intuitions about what makes an achievement 'great', we need to be careful to distinguish between magnitude and value. If an achievement is intuitively not all that great (or not great at all), is that evidence that it is not much of an achievement, or is it evidence that it is not a very valuable achievement? I think that, while it takes some effort, we can pry these two judgements apart. In the interest of conceptual clarity this is an effort worth making.

\(^8\)Cf. Chisholm (1968-9).
5. Conclusion

In this prologue two part II, I aimed to do three things. First, I provided a preview of this part of the project by giving a very short overview over my views about competence, difficulty, and effort, that I am going to lay out in more detail in the following chapters. Second, I explained how my views about magnitude are related to and complete the conceptual analysis from part I. Third, I connected this part of the project to part III by explaining my thinking about the distinction between an achievement's magnitude and its value and by pointing to some ways in which the two may be related.
Chapter 2: Degrees of Competence

1. Introduction

Nobody is going to congratulate you on a great achievement, if you win a lottery jackpot. By contrast, one only needs to google-search 'Warren Buffett achievement' to find a plethora of writers falling all over themselves describing Buffett's outstanding achievements. What Buffett and someone who wins a lottery jackpot have in common is that they both have made hugely profitable investments. What distinguishes them, of course, is the amount of luck involved.

Virtually everybody agrees that luck and achievement are antithetical. If something is a lucky success, it is not an achievement and vice versa. That is the thought I am trying to capture, when I say that achievements are goals that are reached competently. In this chapter, I will discuss what competence amounts to in this context. Thus, while I think that the resulting account is fairly close to our everyday notion of competence, its being so is not required. What I am after in this chapter is an account of an anti-luck condition for achievements. I say 'anti-' rather than 'no-luck', because there are very few, if any, cases in which a goal is reached without any luck involved. That being the case, I think that the anti-luck condition does not provide a sharp distinction between achievements and lucky successes. Rather, all reached goals lie on a continuum between 'absolutely lucky success' on the one side and 'absolutely non-lucky success' (i.e. absolute achievement) on the other. It is not true, then, that there can be no achievement in

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81 There is one big difference between the everyday use of the terms 'competence' and 'competent', and my account of reaching competently. The former two often imply that an agent has a stable disposition to act (in my sense) competently.

82 That is one of the reasons why the following advice (attributed to Tony Robbins) is moronic: “if you want to be successful, find someone who has achieved the results you want and copy what they do and you'll achieve the same results”. Another such reason might be inferred from the fact that in 2000 Robbins had to pay $650,900 in damages over charges of copy right infringements and plagiarism.
the presence of luck. The truism that luck is incompatible with achievement simply means that the more luck is involved in reaching a goal, the less of an achievement it is; or so I will argue.

Thus, this chapter has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it continues the conceptual analysis from chapter 1 by proposing an account of the competence condition of the CRG account. On the other hand, this chapter is the first of three discussing the measurement of achievements. How competently a goal is reached is one of the dimensions determining the magnitude (and ultimately the value) of a given achievement. These two aims are closely connected but I will discuss them sequentially. This will allow me to speak, for the better part of the chapter, as if there was a sharp distinction between an event being either an achievement or a lucky success. Such talk will facilitate straightforward exposition when engaging competing accounts of the anti-luck condition. I will drop this pretence in the last part of the chapter.

The accounts of the anti-luck condition for achievements in the literature can be divided into two camps. Some authors such as Duncan Pritchard and John Greco think that the anti-luck condition is a matter of abilities. Others propose to spell it out in terms of epistemic states. I will sketch the epistemic accounts of Gwen Bradford and Thomas Hurka and argue that they are inadequate. I will then consider Greco's abilities based account. I argue that it fails too. Following that I will develop my own account based on a modal safety condition. The basic idea is that a goal is reached competently if the actions of the would-be achiever make success likely. More precisely, a goal is reached competently (and thus an achievement) to the degree to which the actions of the would-be-achiever make success likely.
2. Epistemic Accounts

Consider what I will call

Bradford's Slogan: in order for someone's causing of an event to count as an achievement this person has to know what they are doing.\(^{83}\)

In a way Bradford's slogan seems to be obviously true. For, at first glance, it just seems to be an expression of the thought that an account of achievements needs to include an anti-luck condition. However, Bradford's slogan is not quite as innocuous as that. Expressing the need for an anti-luck condition in this way stacks the deck in favour of a specific class of conceptions of such a condition: those that spell it out in terms of knowledge.

Different versions of such epistemic accounts are offered by Bradford and Hurka. I will briefly discuss these accounts in the following two sections. I think that the ways in which they fail are instructive and provide reasons to believe that epistemic accounts are not a promising route to take.

2.1 Bradford's Competent Causation

Competent causation is the term that Bradford uses to describe the kind of relationship between agent and goal that satisfies the anti-luck condition for achievement.\(^{84}\) Starting from the slogan that achievement requires that the agent knows what she is doing, she develops an account of

\(^{83}\) Cf. Bradford (2010), 94.

\(^{84}\) Cf. Ibid., 93.
competent causation in terms of justified true beliefs (which she treats as a proxy for knowledge).\textsuperscript{85}

Bradford begins with the observation that when we are consciously causing something, we have a set of beliefs about the causal effects of our actions. For example, when I am trying to move my car from A to B, I believe that stepping on the gas pedal will accelerate the car, that turning the steering wheel to the left will move it to the left, that taking a right at the second traffic light is the quickest route to B, and so on. According to Bradford, the more of my beliefs about the causal chain that leads from my actions to the result are justified and true, the more competently am I driving my car from A to B.\textsuperscript{86} For Bradford, then, competent causation is a matter of degree.\textsuperscript{87} She adds that determining the degree of competence is not merely a matter of counting justified true beliefs but also of weighing them. Beliefs are weightier the more of the causal chain they concern. So my belief that moving down my foot will exert pressure on the gas pedal counts for less than my belief that moving down my foot will result in the car accelerating which in turn counts for less than my belief that the actions I am performing will lead to me and my car ending up at B.\textsuperscript{88}

Finally, the degree of competence with which an activity is carried out depends on the kind of activity it is. More specifically, it depends on how much there is to know about that activity. Bradford thinks that the degree of competence equals the weighted sum of the JTBs that

\textsuperscript{85}It goes without saying that the following sketch of Bradford's view does not do justice to the sophistication of her account of competent causation. However, it should suffice as a reference point for my current purposes.

\textsuperscript{86}Cf. Bradford (2010), 94-5.

\textsuperscript{87}While the talk of degrees of competence might suggest that Bradford agrees with me that there is no clear line between lucky successes and achievements, this is not the conclusion that she wants to draw. Instead, she thinks that there is a threshold of competence above which one counts as achieving and below which one has a lucky success. Cf. Ibid., 95. Since she does not specify where this threshold would lie or how to determine it, I find it hard to engage that claim. In any case, the objections I put forward against Bradford's view are independent of the question whether there is such a threshold.

\textsuperscript{88}Cf. Ibid., 97-8.
the agent has about the activity divided by the weighted sum of the possible true beliefs one could have about the causal chains involved in the activity. This allows her to account for the apparent fact that I need to have fewer justified true beliefs to meet a given level of competence when engaging in a simple activity (such as tying my shoes) than when doing something more complicated (such as building a complicated nanomachine).  

There are two problems with this account. First, it falsely implies that every justified true belief about an activity an agent may (fail to) have increases (decreases) the degree of competence with which she engages in that activity. Second, the account implies that a large body of propositional knowledge about an activity is sufficient for a high level of competence in carrying it out; that too is false.

According to Bradford, no single justified true belief is necessary for a high degree of competence but rather a sufficiently large subset of the truths about the activity needs to be known. And every justified true belief pertaining to the activity makes the person who has it more competent at it. This latter claim is what I want to dispute. There are a lot of things one can know about an activity without that knowledge having any effect on how competently the activity is carried out. Consider Bradford's example of Rudy:

*Competent Driver:* Rudy is driving his Smart Car. He is a good driver but he does not know much about cars. He thinks that the car is powered by something like a giant Duracell under the backseat that makes the car go.

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89Cf. Ibid., 98-101.

90Cf. the discussion of the 'basic belief' ibid., 105-11.

91Cf. Ibid., 95.
Bradford's analysis of the case is that Rudy is competently moving his car from A to B, but he is not competently causing the pistons in the engine of the car to move. This seems right. Bradford goes on to contend, however, that Rudy would be a more competent driver, if he knew how the engine worked. This is implausible. To be sure, Rudy has much to learn about cars and doing so would presumably make him more competent in some respects (for example he could be a more competent mechanic, or he could talk about cars more competently). But it would not make him drive from A to B more competently. All the knowledge that is relevant to how competent a driver he is, is about what he has to do while driving. When giving out driver's licenses we do not award any extra points for knowledge about how the engine works. Nor should we. A driver's license attests that its holder can competently drive; and knowledge about engines is not relevant to that.

The example of driving can also serve to illustrate the fact that no set of justified true beliefs is sufficient for competence. Rudy's son Ben might know everything there is to know about how cars work, about what one has to do when driving, about how to react to unforeseen events on the road and about the route from A to B. If Ben has never been in a car before, no amount of such knowledge will make him a competent driver. As Gilbert Ryle puts it:

> A soldier does not become a shrewd general merely by endorsing the strategic principles of Clausewitz; he must also be competent to apply them. Knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or any other maxims.  

Bradford thinks that this is because, when Rudy presses down the accelerator, he has no beliefs about pistons whatsoever. I think it would be better to say that Rudy lacks goals pertaining to pistons.


Ryle (1949), 31.
Thus, competently reaching a goal is not a matter of knowing many truths about how to reach the goal. To be sure, the two are correlated to some degree; in general somebody who knows much about an activity is more likely to carry it out competently than someone who knows little about it. But, as the examples of Rudy and Ben show, competence and knowledge can come apart.  

2.2 Hurka's Justified Optimism

Being well informed about the causal chains that are leading to success is not what separates achievement from lucky success. Part of the problem with such a proposal, as we have seen, is that knowing many of the details of a process is irrelevant to whether or not this process constitutes competent pursuit. Thomas Hurka's proposal for an anti-luck condition does not have this problem. Hurka's idea is that in order to fulfil the anti-luck condition “[w]e must accompany each of our goals by a justified belief that we will achieve it.” That is to say that in order to achieve a goal, rather than reach it luckily, I will have to have a justified belief that I will be

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95 Bradford, like me, is careful to point out that her account does not have to track our everyday notion of competence, since 'competent causation' is simply a technical term describing the anti-luck condition. Cf. Bradford (2010), 105. However, the account does not become more intuitive, if we think about it in those terms explicitly. If Rudy learns more about how cars actually work, his driving from A to B does not become less lucky. Similarly, a hockey player does not eliminate an element of luck from his play, if he buckles down to study the physics underlying his smooth skating.

Ben's case, however, might look less problematic now. While he clearly is not a competent driver we might be tempted to credit him with an achievement (having met the anti-luck condition), if he uses his knowledge to get from A to B without making any mistakes (and maybe even avoiding an accident that would not have been his fault by reacting in the exact right way). However, in this scenario it could not have just been Ben's knowledge that made him succeed, for we can easily imagine someone who knew all the things he knew and wrecked the car on the first five meters. It seems the correct description of the case would be that Ben had not only knowledge about driving but also an unusual talent to turn this propositional knowledge into some form of “body knowledge”. This talent allowed him to skip the step that most people need to take in order to become competent drivers: practice. For most people practice supplies what is needed above and beyond knowledge to become competent (non-lucky) drivers. In Ben's case practice was not needed, because he had an unusual talent. But still, even in his case, knowledge is not sufficient to meet the anti-luck condition; It is just that in his case what is needed beyond knowledge was provided by talent.

96 Hurka (1993), 106.
successful before I start out. This account handles the cases of Rudy and Ben with ease. Rudy is, while Ben is not, justified in believing that he will safely drive from A to B.

Right off the bat one may worry about (the practical analogue of) Gettier-type cases. What if an archer with a justified belief that she will hit the target is startled by a strange noise just when she is about to release the arrow, which shoots up in the air in a completely unintended angle but hits the target nevertheless because of an unexpected gust of wind? This would seem to satisfy Hurka's anti-luck condition but surely is no more an achievement than Gettier's classic examples are instances of knowledge. But we should not assign too much weight to such worries. It is fair to assume that Hurka, just like Bradford, simply uses JTB as a stand-in for knowledge. It is worth pointing this out though, as Hurka's anti-luck condition seems a lot less intuitive once formulated in terms of knowledge explicitly. It sounds at least a bit strange to say that reaching a goal is a lucky success (not an achievement), unless the agent knew in advance that she would succeed.

This strangeness is borne out by the fact that Hurka's anti-luck condition does not allow for achievements by pessimists. Consider the following case.

*Able Pessimist:* Karl does not think much of his abilities as a philosopher. However, he loves doing philosophy and, being independently wealthy, he decides to give it a shot and applies to graduate school with the goal of obtaining a PhD. As a matter of fact, Karl is excellent at doing philosophy. He is accepted into a prestigious

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97This example is an adaption from Pritchard (2010), 35.
99Hurka does not discuss whether his condition is meant as a merely necessary or also a sufficient condition. If the latter, Gettier cases might be handled by further conditions. The following arguments, however, show that his condition is not necessary either.
program and finishes his PhD being regarded one of the best students coming out of his program in a long time.

It seems to me that Karl achieved his goal. However, he fails Hurka's anti-luck condition, because he did not know that he would succeed. That is not because he lacked the ability or the competence to succeed, but simply because he did not think he would. But whether I am optimistic or pessimistic about my chances of success should have no bearing on whether my success is an achievement or not.

Maybe the spirit of Hurka's view can be preserved by focusing not on Karl's actual justified belief (or knowledge) but rather on the fact that Karl would be justified in believing that he will succeed, if he were to form such a belief. There are two problems with this suggestion. First, note that it does not matter that Karl's reason for not believing in himself is that he is a pessimist. Consider his cousin Carla, who is just as able, enthusiastic, and wealthy as Karl, but unlike Karl she is not generally pessimistic. Also unlike Karl, however, she has excellent (though misleading) evidence that she is not a good philosopher, because she has consistently received negative feedback from senior philosophers. If Carla persists and gets her PhD, it would still be an achievement, but it would not be true that she would have been justified in believing that she would succeed. There is a more general worry about proposals like Hurka's lurking here that I will only flag for now. Consider somebody who succeeds in winning a competition against a group of equally good or superior opponents. For example, if four equally good runners are racing each other, it seems clear that, before the race starts, none of them will be justified in believing that they will come in first. But we would not want to rule out, on that account, that the eventual winner's victory constitutes an achievement. As this kind of case may appear to present a problem to my own view as well as Hurka's, I will return to it below (section 6).
The second problem for Hurka's revised view is that we need to know what justifies (or would justify) Karl's belief that he will succeed. Hurka does not say much about this question, except for a short note that he has a consistency model of justification in mind.\textsuperscript{100} However, that will not do. It might well be the case that it would be inconsistent for Karl to think that he will have success in graduate school. The problem here does not lie with Hurka's internalist picture of epistemic justification. No formal account of epistemic justification could answer to our purpose.\textsuperscript{101} What we need, instead, is a substantive answer to the question what it is that justifies people when they think that they will be successful. If one wanted to stay in the framework of an epistemic anti-luck condition, the natural answer would seem to be to look to things the agent knows about how to achieve the goal. Karl, while lacking the belief that he will succeed at it, has all kinds of justified true beliefs about how to get a PhD. So maybe we should just specify how much the agent has to know about how to reach the goal in order to count as achieving. But we have been down this road before – this was Bradford's suggestion – and found it a dead end. It must be something else that justifies the belief that one will reach one's goals.

I think the solution is quite simple: what usually justifies an agent in believing that they will reach a goal is that they have evidence that they can reach it competently. Of course, we still need to know what that means exactly. But, nevertheless, we can now see the fundamental problem with epistemic accounts of the anti-luck condition. These accounts get things backwards. While it is true that Rudy has a justified true belief that he will successfully drive from A to B, this is not what explains why he acts competently when he does. Rather, that he can competently drive from A to B explains why his belief that he will succeed is justified. Similarly, Karl's competence in obtaining a PhD is not constituted by the fact that 'were he to form a belief

\textsuperscript{100}Cf. Hurka (1993), 106.

\textsuperscript{101}As the case of Carla shows, Karl might have had misleading evidence about his talents too. And it might be that his pessimistic outlook produces true beliefs more often than not.
that he will be successful this belief would be justified'. Rather, such a belief would be justified, because of the fact (if he became aware of it) that he is indeed competently pursuing his PhD.

Having a justified true belief that one will succeed is a somewhat reliable proxy for being competent. That is so, because in ordinary circumstances being competent justifies such a belief. That is why Hurka's account delivers the right verdict in many cases (such as Rudy's and Ben's). It fails to deliver the correct results in cases where being competent does not lead the agent to have a justified belief (as in the case of Karl) or where an agent has a justified belief despite not being competent in reaching the goal (as in practical Gettier cases). But even when the account gets the right result it does so for the wrong reasons. It treats what is a somewhat reliable proxy for competence (justified true belief in success) as a constitutive account of competence. I conclude that the anti-luck condition for achievements should not be spelled out in terms of JTBs or knowledge.

3. Abilities

3.1 From Knowledge to Ability

I opened my discussion of epistemic accounts with Bradford's Slogan: in order for someone's causing of an event to count as an achievement this person has to know what they are doing. Since I have argued that epistemic accounts of competence fail, it seems that Bradford's slogan must be false. There is, however, another possibility: maybe we should understand the slogan as a statement about knowing how rather than about propositional knowledge.

The distinction between propositional knowledge and knowing how was made famous by Ryle. In The Concept of Mind, he claims that knowing how is “the ability ... to do certain sorts of
things."\textsuperscript{102} Later on he explains that an ability is “a disposition, or complex of dispositions.”\textsuperscript{103} This contrasts with propositional knowledge which is “a relation between a thinker and a true proposition.”\textsuperscript{104} In explaining the distinction, Ryle gives the following example that I will cite here, because it is reminiscent of my critique of Bradford's epistemic anti-luck condition:

It should be noticed that [a] boy is not said to know how to play [chess], if all that he can do is to recite the rules accurately. He must be able to to make the required moves. But he is said to know how to play if, although he cannot cite the rules, he normally does make the permitted moves, avoid the forbidden moves and protest if his opponent makes forbidden moves.\textsuperscript{105}

Ryle's claim that knowing how cannot be reduced to or defined in terms of propositional knowledge has been challenged by Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson.\textsuperscript{106} Following their influential paper, there is an ongoing debate about this question which is, however, immaterial for current purposes.\textsuperscript{107} What is at stake in that debate is whether ascriptions of knowing how are linked with propositional knowledge or with abilities. Very roughly, Ryle and his followers think that to say that someone knows how to X is to say that this person has the ability to X, while those in the Stanley/Williamson camp claim that to say that someone knows how to X is to say

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{102}{Ryle (1949), 27.}
\footnote{103}{Ibid., 33. In the quoted passage, Ryle actually speaks of skills rather than abilities but he uses the terms interchangeably.}
\footnote{104}{Stanley/Williamson (2001), 411.}
\footnote{105}{Ryle (1949), 41.}
\footnote{106}{Cf. Ryle (1971); Stanley/Williamson (2001).}
\footnote{107}{Noë (2005) provides a powerful critique of many of Stanley/Williamson's main claims. Further discussions include Koethe (2002); Snowdon (2004); Hetherington (2006); Bengson/Moffett (2007); Adams (2009).}
\end{footnotes}
that this person knows that 'this' is the correct way to X. What neither side denies, however, is that there is a difference between propositional knowledge and abilities.\(^{108}\)

Regardless of the outcome of the debate about knowing-how ascriptions, there is at least an initial plausibility to the claim that knowing how is a matter of abilities. Thus, an account of the anti-luck condition for achievements in terms of abilities would provide an explanation of the initial attractiveness of *Bradford's Slogan*.

### 3.2 Success Because of Ability

The idea that the anti-luck condition for achievements is a matter of abilities has been recently developed by John Greco.\(^{109}\) Greco's larger project is to defend an account of knowledge. One of the main challenges to anyone undertaking that project is to account for the apparent fact that knowledge is incompatible with luck. Greco argues that knowledge is a form of cognitive achievement. As achievements are incompatible with luck also, the hope would be that whatever rules out lucky successes as achievements would also rule out lucky guesses and Gettier cases as instances of knowledge. I am sceptical about the prospects of this larger project.\(^{110}\) However, Greco's account of achievements is interesting, and one could accept it while rejecting the further claim that knowledge is always a kind of achievement. Greco says that what distinguishes achievements from lucky successes is that an achievement is a *success because of ability*.\(^{111}\)

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\(^{108}\) Stanley/Williamson do argue that having an ability entails some kind of propositional knowledge. Cf. Stanley/Williamson (2001), 442–4. But having whatever piece of propositional knowledge is required would still not be sufficient for having the corresponding ability.

\(^{109}\) Discussions of similar ideas can be found in the collection of papers by Sosa (1991), as well as Riggs (2002), and Pritchard (2010).

\(^{110}\) For some strong objections to the project cf. Lackey (2007).

\(^{111}\) Cf. Greco (2003) and (2010).
requires some explanation. We need to know, first, what Greco means by 'ability' and, second, what he means by 'because of'.

Let us take the second point first. When he says that achievements are successes because of ability, Greco says that “[t]he term “because” is here intended to mark a causal explanation.” In other words, a success is an achievement, if and only if, the fact that the agent had an ability explains why she was successful. This seems to handle cases like Able Pessimist and Competent Driver. Karl's philosophical abilities explain his success in pursuing a PhD, which is thus correctly classified as an achievement. And Rudy's drive is an achievement, as it is his ability to drive that explains why he reaches B safely. The account also looks promising when considering lottery winners, as their abilities do not seem to be what explains their success. Of course, these assessments cannot be more than preliminary until we know more about abilities. In addition, however, we need to know what counts as an explanation.

Greco says that an account of (good) causal explanations would provide criteria for singling out one of the partial causes leading to an event as salient. He does not provide a full account of explanatory salience, but he takes it that two elements of such an account are fairly uncontroversial. These are that salience is sensitive to (a) our purposes and interests and (b) what is normal or usual. While I agree that this kind of context-sensitivity is probably part of the best account of causal explanations, we should be wary to introduce it into an account of achievements. Greco's resulting account of knowledge (as cognitive achievement) is a version of attributor-contextualism, i.e. the view that whether a knowledge-ascription is true depends partly on the circumstances of the person who makes it. For example, it could be that I was asserting

112 Greco (2010), 71.
113 Cf. Ibid., 74.
114 Cf. Ibid., 74-5.
truly that Charlemagne knew such and such, while some historian making the same assertion at a conference would be speaking falsely. Whatever the merits of attributor contextualism as a theory about the appropriateness of knowledge ascriptions, this kind of context sensitivity needs to be kept out of an account of what achievements are. Whether Charlemagne's conquest of Saxony was an achievement, for example, does not depend on the context in which we talk about the question. This should be particularly clear, if we think (as Greco does) that achievements have intrinsic value. Surely whether an event is intrinsically valuable cannot depend on the context in which it is discussed.\textsuperscript{115} Thus, if Greco is right that causal explanations are context-sensitive, we do best not to wed our account of achievements to them.

Maybe the spirit of Greco's account could be retained by focusing on how much of a causal role the agent's ability played in bringing about her success (rather than on whether that role ensured explanatory salience). But now we encounter a second problem with Greco's account: it is doubtful whether what he calls abilities have any causal power. Greco understands abilities to be a kind of dispositional property.\textsuperscript{116} He thinks that someone has an ability to do X, if and only if were this person to try to do X there would be a good chance that she would succeed.\textsuperscript{117} The talk of 'a good chance' is to be understood in a modal way. That is to say that having the ability to do X means succeeding when trying to do X in many or most of a set of a relevantly close possible worlds.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115}Many people would in fact say something stronger: namely that whatever is intrinsically valuable is necessarily so. But there is disagreement about this question; for discussion cf. Korsgaard (1983); Hurka (1998); Kagan (1998); Dancy (2004).

\textsuperscript{116}This is similar to Ryle's view. For example, cf. Ryle (1949), 33.

\textsuperscript{117}Abilities, on this picture, while implying more than the mere possibility of success, do not guarantee it. There is a sense in which we can speak of someone having the ability to do X, iff it is possible for this person to do X. But this sense of 'ability' is not of interest here for it would be trivially fulfilled by all states of affairs that are in the market for achievement. If someone has, as a matter of fact, brought about his goal, it must be the case that it was possible for him to do so.

\textsuperscript{118}Greco (2010), 77.
In deciding which possible worlds are relevantly close, Greco employs a double strategy. The first part is to rely on an intuitive notion of closeness. Second, the nature of an ability will help to fix the set of relevant possible worlds. Greco points out that we always think of abilities as being tied to some set of environments and conditions. When we say that Derek Jeter has the ability to hit fastballs, for example, we implicitly understand that this ability is tied to a set of favourable environments and conditions. We do not mean that he could hit a fastball, if he had sand in his eyes or if he was currently in an active war zone.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 76-7.} No matter how close these possible worlds might be, they are not part of the relevant set, because the ability is implicitly indexed to exclude such worlds. Greco concludes that abilities have the following structure.

\textit{Ability:} S has the ability to X (where X is indexed to conditions C and environments E), iff S has a high success rate in doing X over the set of relevantly close possible worlds (where that set includes only worlds in which S is in C and E).\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 77.}

I find it hard to wrap my head around the idea that abilities, thus understood, could cause (or causally explain) anything. I do not want to get into questions about the nature of causation here, but let us assume that causing an event is either constituted or closely accompanied by making that event likely. Clearly, that I \textit{am} likely to succeed cannot be what \textit{makes} me likely to succeed. But this is what saying that my ability (in Greco's sense) causes my success would come to.

What seems right is that, in order for my reached goal to be an achievement rather than a windfall, I need to make success likely. That is to say that I have to \textit{do} things that make it likely that I will succeed. This contrasts with Greco's picture according to which I have to \textit{be} such that I am likely to succeed. This leads to another point. To say that I have an ability (in Greco's sense)
is akin to saying that I am likely to do the things that, in turn, make my success likely. In other words, to have an ability is to have a somewhat stable disposition to do these things (and be successful). But why should it be part of the anti-luck condition for achievement that I have such a stable disposition? Consider the following case.

*Clutch Strikeout:* Ricky is pitching in a clutch situation in a big game. The bases are loaded with nobody out, so he cannot afford to walk the batter or let him put the ball in play. Throughout his career Ricky has had trouble with his command and he does not usually excel in high pressure situations. Moreover, his past numbers against the opposing batter are dreadful. Everyone is surprised that the manager does not pull him from the game. Failure is overwhelmingly likely. On this particular occasion, however, Ricky throws three nasty curveballs down and away in the zone to strike out the batter.

It seems to me that Ricky's success is an achievement. It is not true, however, that he succeeds in most nearby possible worlds. In a lot of these worlds, he cannot find the strike zone, serves up a base hit, or uncorks a wild pitch. Thus, (at least according to Greco's notion) he could not have succeeded from ability, since he does not even have the required ability.

4. A New Conception

4.1 Making Success Likely

We have seen that Greco's model of achievement as 'success because of ability' is flawed. But it is not too far off. Greco is right, I think, that the anti-luck condition for achievements has to do with the relationship between the agent and the likelihood of success.\(^{121}\) He goes wrong when he

\(^{121}\)Here, as in the following chapter, I take it that talk about (nomically) possible worlds and talk about objective probability are interchangeable. Cf. Pollock (1990), 72-3.
locates the required source of likelihood in the agent's dispositional makeup, i.e. her abilities. As I said above, the agent does not need to be such that success is likely, instead she has to act such that success is likely. This means that a full reductive conception of the anti-luck condition requires a theory of action. As defending such a theory is a task that cannot be carried out here, I will simply help myself to the disputed notion of action. The remainder of this section is dedicated to circumscribing the exact role to be played by action and to laying the groundwork for the notion of 'degree of competence' as one of the dimensions that determine the magnitude of achievements.

Consider Duncan Pritchard's necessary condition for an event to count as lucky.

(L1) If an event is lucky, then it is an event that occurs in the actual world but which does not occur in a wide class of the nearest possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions for that event are the same as in the actual world.\textsuperscript{122}

Combined with the claim that achievement excludes luck, (L1) correctly classifies many cases as not being achievements. Consider, for example, young Jerry's win of the big track race in high school in the Seinfeld episode The Race. Jerry wins, because nobody (but his friend George) realizes when he accidentally starts 2 seconds early. In most nearby possible worlds somebody would have noticed Jerry's early start. Thus, his winning the race is a lucky event according to (L1).

As Pritchard recognizes, one might complain about the apparent vagueness of the locution 'relevant initial conditions' in (L1). Pritchard argues that this is not a problem. He thinks so partly, because he thinks that we have a good enough intuitive grasp of what the relevant

\textsuperscript{122}Pritchard (2005), 128.
initial conditions are going to be.\textsuperscript{123} Moreover, he thinks that the vagueness might actually be an asset as it captures a corresponding vagueness in our everyday concept of luck.\textsuperscript{124} In light of my critique of Greco's account, however, we should at least specify the following: the relevant initial conditions include the actions taken by the agent. Here, then, is a first pass at an anti-luck condition.

\textit{Anti-Luck 1}: An agent pursues a goal competently, iff the goal obtains in many or most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions, including her actions, are the same as in the actual world.

\textit{Anti-Luck 1} will not quite do. For it is possible that I am making one of my goals likely through actions that I am performing for entirely unrelated reasons. Take the case of Kyle and Tony.

\textit{Fresh Money}: Kyle has recently taken over his dad's business and things are not going so well. In order to keep the business going he needs some cash but has been turned away at the bank. Knowing that his old friend Tony, who is an event manager, has a track record of getting bankers to look at loan applications favourably, Kyle calls him up and asks for help. Tony is happy to oblige, but today he is busy on behalf of the big music festival he is currently planning. That same night Tony places an order for some ten thousand litres of beer with a local brewery. Unbeknownst to him that brewery is Kyle's business. When he calls Kyle back the next day, he is happy to discover that his friend's liquidity problem has been solved.

According to \textit{Anti-Luck 1} Tony achieved his goal of keeping Kyle's business solvent. But that seems wrong. We clearly need some restriction on which of an agent's actions count as part of the relevant initial conditions. And the natural thing to say here is that one can pursue a goal competently only if one actually pursues it in the first place. And while Tony \textit{has} the goal of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{123}Cf. Ibid., 131-2.
\textsuperscript{124}Cf. Ibid., 143 n.12.
\end{footnotesize}
keeping Kyle's business afloat, he is not *pursuing* that goal when he places his order for beer. However, we should not use too strong a notion of pursuit here. Consider, for example, the suggestion that only those actions count that are performed with the primary purpose of reaching the goal. This would be too strong. Suppose I would like to lose some weight; but suppose also that I often sleep in and – having recently moved further away from my office – find myself having to either run the 3k to work or take a cab so as not to be late. I choose to run, realizing that running would also help with my goal of weight loss. If I lose weight as a result, it seems that I have achieved my goal. But my primary goal in running was not to lose weight but not to be late. It is not necessary, then, that my actions are performed primarily in order to reach the goal. What is necessary (and what distinguishes this case from *Fresh Money*) is that I have to be aware that my actions are making my goal more likely.\(^{125}\) This, then, leads to

\[\text{Anti-Luck 2: An agent pursues a goal competently, iff the goal obtains in many or most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely.}\]

4.2 Practical Gettier Cases

*Anti-Luck 2* can, I think, pass muster as an account of competent pursuit. But, as I noted in chapter 1, it might not be enough that an agent competently pursues and reaches her goal. She must reach it *through* her competent pursuit. This will be true in most but not all cases that combine competent pursuit and success. Cases that feature both competent pursuit and success

\(^{125}\) This is not to say that I have to consciously think about the goal. It is enough that I would realize, if asked, that I was making my goal more likely.
but lack the right connection between them are the practical analogue of Gettier cases. Here is an example.

*Young Millionaire*: Oliver has the goal of becoming a millionaire by the age of 24. Thorough research of the market and probing of his talents have led him to the justified belief that the best way to reach this goal is to found a porn company. For a while things are going swimmingly. Oliver is very adept at handling the porn business and, as he is nearing his 22nd birthday, is well on his way to reach his goal. However, shortly after his 22nd birthday a new government is elected (pulling a major upset) promptly prohibiting all porn-related business. However, when Oliver's rich uncle Tobi learns about his nephew being in the porn business, he is so outraged that he dies of a heart attack. As Oliver is Tobi's closest living relative he inherits most of his money and has reached his goal.\(^\text{126}\)

In *Young Millionaire* Oliver competently pursues his goal (as correctly diagnosed by *Anti-Luck* 2) and he reaches it, but he does not reach it *through* his competent pursuit. The problem is that the causal chain leading from his actions to his success is a deviant one.\(^\text{127}\) It seems that we need to exclude such deviant causal chains. At this point, we might be tempted to return to an epistemic view like Bradford's. Bradford, remember, suggested that an agent needs to have true beliefs about (most of) the causal chain leading from her actions to success. An account along these lines could handle *Young Millionaire*, as Oliver's beliefs about how his actions are going to lead to his reaching his goal are false. However, as we have seen before, Bradford's view excludes too much. People can achieve their goals without much knowledge about the causal chains leading from their actions to success.

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\(^{126}\)This story is an elaboration of an example given by Portmore (2007), 3.

\(^{127}\)There is a similar analysis of Gettier cases in Alvin Goldman's early work. Cf. Goldman (1967). But my purpose here is not to develop an anti-luck condition that would also work for knowledge.
Alternatively, we can try to fine-tune the modal modelling to exclude deviant causal chains. Consider

*Anti-Luck 3:* An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff both

1. the goal obtains in the actual as well as in many or most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely; and

2. this remains true throughout the event that is the achievement.

This proposal handles *Young Millionaire.* While Oliver's success is likely at the outset, it becomes unlikely once his business is being outlawed. One might worry, however, that *Anti-Luck 3* would be too restrictive. In many cases some time passes between someone's competent action and the resulting success. What if, during that interval, it became very likely (even though it was not so at the time of the action) that something interfered with the normal causal chain but then (luckily) this danger passes? In such cases of 'bad-luck-almost' we should still want to ascribe achievement. This problem is less severe, though, than it might seem; for we can interpret the 'relevant initial conditions' clause as taking care of such cases. There is nothing in the notion of, or motivation for, this clause that requires us to interpret the term 'initial' in a temporal way. So, if in the time between action and success nuclear holocaust becomes overwhelmingly likely but is then narrowly avoided, we might say that success remained likely throughout, because it obtained in most possible worlds with the same relevant initial conditions, the last clause excluding all the worlds in which there is nuclear holocaust, before success can occur.
But it is also not clear whether *Anti-Luck 3* is not too permissive still. In *Young Millionaire*, we could stipulate that when the new government is elected this event has two effects on Oliver's plans: it makes the success of his business very unlikely and it makes the sudden death of his uncle Tobi very likely (it would not be too hard to fill in the details). It is tempting to think that, generally, the proposal is in trouble whenever there is an event that reduces the likelihood of the most likely causal chain going through while, simultaneously, increasing the likelihood that a different causal chain will lead to success. But this generalization is too quick, as the case of Lloyd shows.

*Correlation Trade:* Lloyd is a trader at an investment bank. He has figured out an almost risk-free way to make some money in the mortgage derivatives market. He looks for a collateralized mortgage obligation (CMO) that is on the brink of being hit by massive defaults. Then he shorts the senior tranches (making a bet that the CMO is going to fail), while buying the high-yield equity tranches. If, as is overwhelmingly likely, the CMO fails he will win his original bet and this will more than offset his costs for buying the equity tranches. If, however, the CMO pulls through, the equity tranches will yield more than enough to cover his costs for shorting the seniors. Via some sort of deviant causal chain (and to Lloyd's surprise) the CMO does not fail and he makes a handy profit on the equity tranches.128

Both Lloyd and Oliver reach their goals as the result of a causal chain that was not likely to occur at the outset. But Lloyd's profits are an achievement whereas Oliver's riches are not. This shows that it is not so much the *fact* that the actual causal chain was unlikely that undermines Oliver's claim to achievement. Instead, it seems the problem is that the actual causal chain was not accounted for in Oliver's plans. To see this more clearly consider the case of Felix.

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128This kind of 'dutch booking' is possible only if the market is blatantly failing to price assets efficiently – as was the case in the run up to the financial crisis of 2008.
Young Millionaire 2: Felix has the goal of becoming a millionaire by the age of 24. He has a justified belief that the best way to reach this goal is to start an online dating site. Felix is good at running this business and well on his way to his goal, when shortly after his 22nd birthday the military stages a coup and promptly shuts down the internet for half a year. While this was a very likely event (the coup had been planned for years), this fact was well hidden from members of the public like Felix. After the generals solidify their grip on power they compensate online merchants with a generous lump-sum if they can show that they ran a successful business before the coup (this too was very likely to happen, as it was the generals' plan all along). Felix qualifies and is awarded enough to be a millionaire.

Here Felix's actions made success likely, success remained likely and it was likely to come about via the actual causal chain right from the start, even though Felix had a different causal chain in mind. If we want to deny that Felix achieves his goal in Young Millionaire 2, we need to further revise Anti-Luck 3. But since we do not want to exclude cases like Correlation Trade it is not obvious how to do this.

**Goals and Processes**

I can see three ways of dealing with cases like Felix's. The first is to deny that Felix actually reached his goal. We might want to say that his goal is under-described and that what he really aims at is not just to be a millionaire by age 24 but to make himself into one in a particular way. This does not address the problem head on and does not ultimately solve it. But there is nevertheless considerable merit to the proposal and it is worth dwelling on for a moment.

When describing a goal, we will necessarily describe an event that is less than fully determinate. Less than fully determinate events always obtain in virtue of more determinate
events (which in turn obtain in virtue of even more determinate events, and so on until a fully
determinate event is reached). For example, [John, raising a hand, t] may obtain in virtue of
[John, raising his right hand, t]. A more fully determinate event in virtue of which a less fully
determinate event obtains is sometimes called the latter event's ontological ancestor.\textsuperscript{129} But, of
course, the description of a less than fully determinate event leaves it open exactly which events
are its ontological ancestors – in the example above, [John, raising his left hand, t] would have
been an equally good candidate. Consequently, if we describe a goal (a less than fully
determinate event), there are many (probably infinitely many) fully determinate events that have
ontological descendants that look just like the goal we described. This is as it should be, for
when I set myself a goal, I will often not care in virtue of which more determinate event it
obtains (I can reach my goal of beating you at PingPong either by beating you 11-5 or by beating
you 11-8). But it should be equally clear that we will usually not accept every event with an
ontological descendant that looks like our goal as fulfilling it. If I wanted John to raise a hand, I
would not have gotten what I wanted, if John cut off my hand and raised \textit{it}. In other words, the
description of the satisfaction conditions of a goal will always be imprecise (we cannot after all
give a very long list of fully determinate events, as that would literally take forever).

This lack of precision might be partly a feature of the goal itself. That is to say that there
could be some fully determinate events of which it is not clear whether they fulfil the goal. That
being said, goals are typically a lot more precise than our descriptions of them. My description
of my goal as beating you at PingPong does not exclude many events that nevertheless clearly do
not fulfil my goal. We can take a hint from the fact that if I beat you after you lost your right
hand in a car accident, I will probably not agree that my original goal has been reached.
Generally there will be a fact of the matter as to whether an agent who has a goal would

\textsuperscript{129} Zimmerman (2001), 56-7.
recognize a particular event as fulfilling that goal. And this counterfactual recognition condition (subject to some of the difficulties discussed in chapter 1, section 5.2) delineates the set of events that count as the agent reaching the goal.

Imagine talking to Felix as he sets out with his business. He tells you that he is doing this in order to become a millionaire while still young. You might probe what his actual goal is by asking him to imagine some scenarios in which he is rich and young and tell you whether in these scenarios he would have reached his goal. Some scenarios are obviously in (involving his business being a big success) and some are obviously out (involving hyperinflation meaning that a million dollars will not even cover rent for a month). Now, if you ask him about the scenario described in Young Millionaire 2, it is not unreasonable to think that Felix would tell you that it would not constitute reaching his goal. As I said above, he might say that his goal was not just to have a million dollars, but to make himself into a millionaire. While there is a distinction between a goal and the process of reaching it, this distinction is often blurred by the fact that people include parts of the process in their goals. A mountaineer, for example, does not just want to stand on top of a summit, but to reach it in a certain way. Similarly, Felix and Oliver might have goals that exclude the ways of reaching their millions described in the Young Millionaire scenarios. And if so, their cases cease to be problematic; for we knew all along that there is no achievement without success.

**Biting the Bullet**

I suspect that many cases which at first glance look like practical Gettier cases can be handled in the way just described, i.e. by pointing out that in these cases the agents did not really reach their
goal. But this response is not always going to cut it, because it could well be the case that Felix, or someone like him, would think of himself as having reached his goal in *Young Millionaire 2*. In other words, it is not necessary that an agent's goal implicitly excludes all the ways of reaching a goal we would intuitively think of as lucky. This leads me to the second way of responding to cases like the *Young Millionaire* scenarios, which is to bite the bullet, accept *Anti-Luck 2*, and admit that these are cases of achievement. This seems like a desperate move, but it might not be completely implausible. If you were to tell Oliver and Felix that theirs were lucky successes rather than achievements, they might rightly point out that they would not have succeeded, if they had not put in hard work and devised good plans. If Oliver had not been a rising star in the porn industry, his uncle Tobi would not have read about him in the newspaper, and if Felix had not run a strong business, he would not have qualified for the government handout. Thus, both of them can make a credible case that their success is due to their competent pursuit of their goals. Biting the bullet in these cases, then, might seem to be more plausible than meets the eye.

But it will be objected that, even though Felix and Oliver in some sense succeeded through competent pursuit, they did not reach their goals in the way they intended. That sounds certainly right but it is not quite clear whether the complaint can withstand scrutiny. A lot hangs on how we understand the locution 'the way they intended'. After all, there is a way in which they reached their goals exactly in the way they intended: they intended to start successful companies and this would make them rich – and that is what happened. The reason why we are uncomfortable accepting this version of the story is that Oliver and Felix had false beliefs about the causal chain leading from their actions to their successes. And so we might be tempted to understand 'the intended way' more demandingly as involving true beliefs about this causal
chain. And so, again, we reach a point where a view like Bradford's seems well motivated. Thus, if we do not want to bite the bullet, we might want to revisit epistemic conditions.

4.3 An Epistemic Enabling Condition

The third possible response to the Young Millionaire scenarios, then, is to take another look at epistemic anti-luck conditions. While we have seen that such proposals by themselves are bound to be inadequate, they might prove useful when combined with a condition based around modal safety. In my discussion of Bradford, I argued (1) that no set of JTBs about the causal chain from action to success can be sufficient to rule out luck and (2) that some such JTBs do not contribute to the elimination of luck. The lack of sufficiency is less of a problem in the current context as we are not looking for an epistemic condition that can rule out luck all by itself. But the second point is still pertinent. For we do not want the epistemic part of the anti-luck condition to assign significance to (the absence of) JTBs that are irrelevant. Recall Competent Driver. Rudy's false beliefs about how cars work did not make his successful drive a lucky one. This means that we must be careful to formulate our epistemic condition in a way that does not make Rudy subject to the same criticism as Oliver and Felix: that even though his actions made success likely, he did not bring about his success in the way he intended.

The crucial difference between Rudy on the one hand, and Felix and Oliver on the other is the following. Correcting Rudy's beliefs would not provide him with a reason to change his plans, but the same cannot be said of Felix and Oliver. In Young Millionaire there is an event that Oliver does not foresee (the prohibition of porn), and had he foreseen it, he should not have acted as he did. Young Millionaire 2 is similar. Had Felix foreseen the military coup, he should not
have acted as he did. Of course, had he foreseen both the military coup and the later government handout he might have acted as he did; but in that case, we should have no qualms to call his success an achievement. In this case, his situation would be akin to Lloyd's in *Correlation Trade* (the same goes for Oliver foreseeing Tobi's heart attack). The problem with Bradford's proposal is that it does not discriminate between (the absence of) JTBs that make a difference to the way the agent should act in pursuing his goal and those that do not. But it is only the former that can plausibly play a role in an anti-luck condition for achievements. I propose

*Anti-Luck 4*: An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff both

(1) the goal obtains in the actual as well as in many or most nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely; and

(2) the agent justifiably regards her plan a good one (her actions as making success likely) and there is no event of which it is true that (a) it obtains in the actual world, and (b) the agent does not foresee this, and (c) had the agent foreseen it, she would not have been justified in regarding her plan a good one, and (d) there is no other event that also obtains in the actual world and knowing this would have restored justification.\(^{130}\)

*Anti-Luck 4* combines a modal safety condition with an epistemic enabling condition that assigns significance only to those false beliefs the correction of which would make a difference to the quality of the agent's plans. In a way this epistemic condition is closer to Hurka's epistemic view.

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\(^{130}\)Clause (d) is meant to deal with cases in which the agent is unaware of defeated defeaters of their plans. Imagine that in *Young Millionaire* the government prohibits all porn related business but that this law is immediately struck down by the courts. Oliver does not foresee either of these events, but his business success in such a scenario would still be competently reached.
than to Bradford's. Like Hurka's view it ignores most of the beliefs an agent may or may not have about the causal chain from action to success. But unlike Hurka's view it does not assign significance to a belief about success – instead it focuses on justified beliefs about the adequacy of the means taken and on possible defeaters of the justification of such beliefs.\footnote{Note, however, that this does not do away with the main problem for Hurka's view identified in section 2.2, that the view gets the order of explanation backwards. If clause (2) of Anti-Luck 4 was proposed as a freestanding anti-luck condition, it could still be charged that it is not the justified belief that the plan is good that constitutes competence but rather it is the fact that the plan is good which, both, constitutes competence and justifies the belief.}

It bears mention that, although I developed \textit{Anti-Luck 4} with the help of, and in response to, rather convoluted scenarios, it is not just a gerrymandered ad-hoc proposal designed to handle these particular cases. Instead, it expresses two simple and compelling ideas about how to distinguish achievements from lucky successes. The first (expressed in condition (1)) is that the actions taken must make success likely (to some degree – more about this presently); the second (expressed in condition (2)) is that \textit{that} (condition (1)) is why the agents performs these actions.

5. Degrees of Competence

In the introduction to this chapter, I said that there is no sharp distinction between achievements and lucky successes. Instead there is a continuum between absolutely lucky successes on the one side and absolutely non-lucky successes (i.e. absolute achievement) on the other. In other words, every reached goal is reached with a degree of competence and the higher this degree, the more of an achievement is the event. For ease of exposition, however, I have so far proceeded as if there was a sharp distinction between achievements and lucky successes. It is now time to be a little more precise.
My argument in the last section was somewhat inconclusive, as I did not arrive at an unequivocal recommendation as to whether we should accept *Anti-Luck 2* or *Anti-Luck 4*. The former requires biting the bullet in the *Young Millionaire* scenarios, the latter avoids this by adding an epistemic condition to the modal safety condition of *Anti-Luck 2*. Fortunately, how this question is resolved does not have hugely important consequences for the remainder of my project. I will develop two accounts of degrees of competence in this section – one with and one without the epistemic condition. Despite my suspicion that the epistemic enabling condition is indispensable, I will refer to the simpler model throughout the remainder of the dissertation. This will make for an easier exposition and the cases I will discuss will not require the more complex model.

### 5.1 The Simple Model

If we decide to bite some bullets and make do without an epistemic enabling condition, we can take *Anti-Luck 2* as a starting point and, incorporating the insight that there is no sharp dividing line but only degrees of competence, arrive at

*Competence (simple)*: An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff

1. the goal obtains in the actual world; and to the degree to which
2. the goal obtains in the set of nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely.
This model is quite straightforward. The idea is simply that the greater the share of nearby possible worlds in which the agent succeeds, the greater is her degree of competence. Thus, if (given my actions) I reach my goal in half of the nearby possible worlds, my degree of competence is .5. If you pursue a similar goal but (given your actions) you succeed in three quarters of the nearby possible worlds, your degree of competence is .75. Given that your degree of competence is higher than mine your success is, ceteris paribus, more of an achievement. I think that this also means that it is, ceteris paribus, a greater achievement. But this is a more contentious claim and can only be defended after something has been said about other factors that might not be equal (I will say something about this in section 6 and provide extensive discussion in the next chapter).

5.2 The Epistemically Enabled Model

If we do not have the stomach to call the young millionaires achievers, the picture gets more complicated. We now have to work from Anti-Luck 4 and incorporate the epistemic condition. The problem is that it is not obvious what we should say about cases in which the epistemic condition is violated. The simplest way of dealing with such cases would be to say that if the epistemic condition is violated the agent's degree of competence is zero. But this is not plausible. To see this consider that this view would treat the successes of the young millionaires as less competently reached than the success of someone who won a lottery after buying one of X tickets (where X stands for a number large enough to make the reader unhappy with that implication).
It is tempting to say that the degree of competence of someone who fails the epistemic account on behalf of not foreseeing event E should be assessed by incorporating E into the 'relevant initial conditions'. In *Young Millionaire*, for example, we could say that Oliver's degree of competence is equivalent not to the share of possible worlds in which he acts as he does and succeeds, but to the share of possible worlds in which he acts as he does, and the prohibition of porn comes into effect. But for reasons adduced above this will not do. For it is entirely possible that E, while making success via one causal chain unlikely, is making it equally likely via a different one. As I said before, the prohibition of porn may have the double effect of reducing Oliver's chances as a businessman, and improving his chances of losing his rich uncle. Thus, the view currently considered would force us to bite the exact same bullets that the epistemic condition was meant to save us from. This should not be surprising. The epistemic condition was introduced to give some role to the subjective state of the agent – the idea was that objective likelihood of success is not enough, if the agent has no reasonable awareness of it. Thus, the way that E figures into determining the degree of competence cannot simply be a matter of updating the objective likelihood of success given E.

The very spirit of the epistemic condition, then, demands that E is accommodated in a way that makes reference to the epistemic position of the agent. One option would be to simply focus on what the agent would believe about her chances of success, if she knew that E will obtain. But this gives too much leeway for agents who fail to take evidence into account in the right way. For example, Oliver may simply continue to believe (irrationally) that his chances of success are quite high, even after learning that his business model will become illegal. Thus, we need to focus on the beliefs that the agent should have, if her evidence included the fact that E will obtain. I will say, then, that in cases where the epistemic condition is violated on account of
E, the agent's degree of competence equals the share of possible worlds in her evidence-relative set of nearby possible worlds in which she succeeds.\textsuperscript{132} This results in the somewhat convoluted

\textit{Competence (enabled):} An agent competently pursues and thereby reaches a goal, iff

(1) the goal obtains in the actual world;

and either

(2) the agent justifiably regards her plan as a good one (her actions as making success likely) and there is no event of which it is true that (a) it occurs in the actual world, and (b) the agent does not foresee this, and (c) had the agent foreseen it, she would not have been justified in regarding her plan as a good one, and (d) there is no other event that also obtains in the actual world and knowing this would have restored justification; and to the degree to which

(3) the goal obtains in the set of nearby possible worlds where the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to reach the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely;

or

(4) if condition (2) fails on account of event E, to the degree to which

(5) the goal obtains in the evidence-relative set of nearby possible worlds where (i) E obtains and (ii) the relevant initial conditions are the same as in the actual world. The relevant initial conditions include those of her actions that she (a) performs explicitly in order to the goal or (b) performs while being aware that they make the goal more likely.

\textsuperscript{132}Cf. Parfit (2011), 150-60.
More prosaically, including the epistemic condition complicates the computation of degrees of competence in the following way. If an agent's degree of competence is not determined by her objective chances because she fails to foresee E, her degree of competence is determined by what she should think her chances are given E.

6. Defying the Odds

My anti-luck condition ties degree of competence to the likelihood of success. But from a certain point of view this may seem completely wrongheaded. Can there not be cases of achievement where success is unlikely? Even more problematically, consider my further claim that a higher degree of competence makes for a greater achievement. Does it not seem that many events are great achievements not just despite success being unlikely, but precisely because (or in virtue) of that fact? It is a natural thought that defying steep odds makes for great achievements.

Recall that, in section 2.2, I flagged a problem for Hurka's account. When four equally good runners go into a race, each with the goal of winning, none of them could be justified in believing that she will win. Thus, according to Hurka's anti-luck condition, no matter who wins the race and no matter in what fashion, it will not count as an achievement (this is, of course, just another instance of the problem of the base hit). Although my anti-luck condition is substantially different from Hurka's, it may seem to deliver a similar result. For each of the runners it is true that she will win the race in roughly 25% of nearby possible worlds. But would we really want to say that the eventual winner reached her goal competently to such a low degree? Moreover, if we add more equally good runners in such a scenario, the odds the winner will have to overcome get
ever steeper. But surely we would not want to say that the success of someone who beats thirty opponents is less of an achievement than the success of someone who beats three.

I think it is true that, ceteris paribus, beating thirty opponents in a race is more of an achievement than beating three. And it is also true that, ceteris paribus, the latter goal is more likely to be reached than the former. But I do not think that this is a problem for my modal anti-luck condition. The first thing to note is that the phrase 'success is unlikely' glosses over the question regarding the relevant initial conditions for a modal assessment of likelihood. It is an important part of my anti-luck condition that the relevant initial conditions include the agent's actions in pursuit of her goal. Thus, as long as success is likely given my actions, my account does not rule out successes that are unlikely before figuring in my performance. This is important, because the idea that defying the odds is a hallmark of achievements derives its plausibility from the idea that the agent does something in order to beat the odds. My anti-luck condition does not rule out beating the odds; it only rules out cases of defying the odds through luck. That is how it should be.

It may be charged, however, that it remains the case that my anti-luck condition does not accommodate the intuition that it is, ceteris paribus, more of an achievement to (actively) beat the odds when they are steep. This is true but not problematic. It is, after all, not the job of an anti-luck condition to provide a complete account of the magnitude of achievements, but only to determine how much of an achievement a reached goal is regarding the dimension of competence and luck. There are other factors that help to determine how much of an achievement a given event is. The factor that is most pertinent here is what I will call the difficulty of the goal. If a goal involves beating steep odds, the goal is a difficult one. And, ceteris paribus, the more difficult a goal the more of an achievement is reaching it (I will discuss
difficulty in more detail in chapter 3). This gives some content to the ceteris paribus clauses invoked throughout this section and the last. Beating thirty opponents in a race might be more of an achievement than beating three, even though the latter was done more competently. All else is not equal here, since beating thirty is a more difficult goal.

To see how the competence condition can make a difference even when difficulty is kept (roughly) constant, consider the following two winners of races. Jacques Anquetil won the Tour de France in 1964. On July 12th, leading his rival Raymond Poulidor by 56 seconds, he went into a difficult stage suffering from indigestion. On their way up the Puy de Dome mountain, Poulidor was in much better shape than Anquetil and could have easily taken off and made up the 56 seconds. However, Anquetil exerted great effort to hide the fact that he was struggling, occasionally riding up to Poulidor and cracking smiles at him. Poulidor was fooled by the bluff. Thinking that he would not be able to shake off Anquetil, he did not attack until it was too late for him to make up more than 14 seconds. Contrast Anquetil's story with Yohan Blake winning the 100m dash at the 2011 world championships in Daegu (South Korea). Blake won the race in a very respectable 9.93 seconds. However, it seems almost certain that he would not have won the race had Usain Bolt not been disqualified for a false start just minutes earlier. Both Anquetil and Blake defied the odds in that neither of them was likely to win their race. Anquetil's success, however, was made (more) likely by his actions, whereas Blake's was not. That is why Anquetil's winning the Tour de France was (more of) an achievement, whereas Blake's winning the world championship was (more of) a fluke.

There are situations in which we think of an event as an achievement where success was unlikely, even given the actions taken by the agent. Take, for example, getting into a highly competitive academic program where there are so many excellent applicants that the last stage of
the admissions process becomes more or less random. Even doing everything they could to distinguish themselves will give outstanding applicants only so much of a chance of being admitted. Or take a pitcher on a baseball team with an anemic offence trying to get a win against a team with great pitching. Even pitching seven or eight shutout innings will give him only so much of chance. These cases would be difficult to handle for any account that insists on a threshold of competence providing a sharp distinction between achievements and lucky successes. But my account correctly classifies them as being somewhat of an achievement in terms of the competence dimension, while still allowing that (depending on other factors) they might be great achievements overall.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that neither the epistemic views of Bradford and Hurka nor Greco's abilities-based view provide an adequate account of the anti-luck condition for achievements. Utilizing a modal safety condition, I developed a new conception of the anti-luck condition. Further, I developed an epistemic enabling condition but left it open whether this condition is needed. Denying that there is a threshold of competence providing a sharp distinction between achievements and lucky successes, I have developed my anti-luck condition as an account of *degrees of competence*. On the view developed here a goal is reached competently to the degree to which the agent's actions made success likely. Degree of competence is one dimension along which achievements can vary and one of the factors determining their magnitude as achievements (how much of an achievement, or how great an achievement, they are). This last claim remains somewhat under defended in this chapter. It will be easier to mount a defence of it after a second such dimension – *difficulty* – has been explored in some detail, which is the task of chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Difficulty

1. Introduction

It is very natural to think that how much of an achievement a given event is depends partly on features of the goal that is being reached. In the last chapter, for example, I took it to be rather uncontroversial that, ceteris paribus, it is a greater achievement to win a race against 30 opponents than one against three. A natural way to express that thought would be to say that an event is more of an achievement if the goal was more difficult to reach. However, the ordinary notion of difficulty contains a number of ambiguities. An important one, for example, is that 'difficulty' is ambiguous between an agent-neutral concept of goals that are difficult regardless of who attempts to reach them and a concept of 'difficulty for' according to which difficulty is agent-relative in the sense that the same goal can be very difficult to reach for one agent but not for another. A second ambiguity is that we can think of tasks or goals as difficult because they require a lot of effort or, alternatively, because success seems unlikely. To discuss these ambiguities in the ordinary concept of difficulty is the purpose of section 3. In this chapter, I am mainly concerned with agent-neutral difficulty and, in section 4, I develop an account of it as one of the factors that determine the magnitude of achievements. I will show that this notion is able to subsume other features of goals that have been suggested as such factors such as precision, extent, complexity, and uniqueness. In section 5, I discuss the connection between the factor of difficulty developed in this chapter and the factor of competence developed in the last. Taken together, these dimensions provide a measure of how the actions performed in pursuit of a goal change the likelihood of its obtaining. I will begin in section 2, however, by very briefly
considering the idea that the magnitude of an achievement is partly a function of how valuable the reached goal is.

2. Intrinsic Value

If we think that the magnitude of achievements is partly determined by features of the achieved goal, one suggestion might be that it is the value of the goal that plays this role. In chapter 1, I argued that there is an interesting non-evaluative concept of achievement and that, once we focus on that concept, an event being an achievement does not require that the goal is valuable. In chapter 7, I will consider the suggestion that a valuable goal is necessary for an achievement to be valuable. As I argued in the prologue to part II, however, the question about value is distinct from the question about magnitude and it is the latter that concerns us here. In other words, we need to consider the idea that goal G being intrinsically more valuable than goal H should lead us to conclude that, if all else is equal, achieving G is more of an achievement than achieving H. I think that this is not the case.

One author that we might read as endorsing such a claim is Hurka. In a discussion of the value of game-playing as a paradigmatic case of the value of achievements, Hurka argues that one factor that influences the greatness of an achievement is the value of the achieved goal.

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133 This suggestion bears some resemblance to Dworkin's 'model of impact'. Cf. Dworkin (1995), 242-4.

134 As Hurka never distinguishes between magnitude and value, it is not quite clear whether Hurka really believes this, or whether the passage I am about to cite is about the overall value (rather than the magnitude) of the achievement. One reason for thinking that Hurka is not concerned with questions of magnitude here is that this position would be inconsistent with what he says in *Perfectionism*, where he rejects the view that we should measure achievements by looking at the evaluative status of goals: “Our account of quality must therefore reject moralism … It must measure the worth of beliefs and ends using only formal criteria, and none tied to their specific content.” Hurka (1993), 114.

However, he discusses the difference between Mandela and Woods in the same way in which he discusses the differences between game players – and he never signals that there is a shift in what is being discussed.
This implies that excellence in games, though admirable, is less so than success in equally challenging activities that produce a great good or prevent a great evil. This seems intuitively right: the honour due athletic achievements for themselves is less than that due the achievements of great political reformers or medical researchers. Whatever admiration we should feel for Tiger Woods or Gary Kasparov is less than we should feel for Nelson Mandela.\footnote{Hurka (2006), 233-4.}

I take it to be fairly uncontroversial that Mandela deserves more admiration than Kasparov and Woods. However, Hurka (on the current reading) thinks that this is partly so because Mandela's is the greater achievement, and that this is so in virtue of it being the achievement of a valuable state of affairs. Is this plausible? I think that comparing Mandela to great game players is not the best kind of case for deciding this issue. First, the achievements are not very similar on other potentially important dimensions. Many other features (such as complexity, extent, self-sacrifice, or effort) that may be suggested as making a difference for magnitude are arguably exemplified to a higher degree by Mandela than by Kasparov and Woods (although competence might be a conspicuous exception). Second, we might hope for a stronger contrast in value than the one between a great good and a morally trivial outcome. I propose, then, to compare the political achievements of Mandela to the political achievements of Genghis Khan. I know little enough about Genghis Khan that I have an easy time stipulating that his pursuit of Mongolian hegemony was equally challenging, complex, etc. as Mandela's pursuit of the end of apartheid and a peaceful, unified South Africa. So let us assume that this is the case. Let us also agree that while Mandela's goals were intrinsically valuable, Genghis Khan's were intrinsically evil.\footnote{If I am being unfair to Genghis Khan here, I might have to fall back on a version of Hitler.} Now, with these stipulations in place, would we say that Mandela deserves more admiration than Genghis
Khan? Certainly. Are Mandela's achievements more valuable? Maybe. Are Genghis Khan's achievements of lesser magnitude, that is are they less of an achievement? No! I think in a cleaned up case like this the intuitive judgement is clear and powerful. Genghis Khan (in my idealized version) and Nelson Mandela differ in many respects, but the magnitude of their political achievements is not one of them.138

3. Ambiguities in 'Difficulty'

Few authors have explicitly distinguished between the question how much of an achievement a given event is, and the question how valuable such an achievement is. Among the few that have drawn this distinction there appears to be a consensus that difficulty is one, if not the, factor determining the magnitude of an event as an achievement. James Griffin for example (in brushing aside questions about the magnitude of achievements as unimportant) remarks that

bare achievements, though difficult, can themselves lack point or substance; walking
on one's hands from Oxford to London is a remarkable deed … but [it] lacks
worth.139

Similarly, Gwen Bradford writes

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137 I will return to this question in chapter 7.

138 I find the intuitive judgement I report here almost irresistible. In some conversations, however, I have encountered people who are not quite as convinced by cases like this. Hence, I think it is worthwhile to remind the reader that I am trying to carve out a non evaluative concept of achievements here. Insofar as such a concept is useful, it makes sense to cleanse it from normative content (even if that should turn out to be somewhat revisionary).

I would like to suggest that difficulty might play a role in determining the magnitude of achievements. It seems plausible that achievements that are very difficult are greater than those that, other things being equal, are less difficult.\footnote{Bradford (2010), 92.}

This is certainly a plausible claim. In fact I think it might be a truism. That is to say that one way of conceptualizing the concept of difficulty would be as 'that which makes for sizeable achievements'. If the link between difficulty and magnitude of achievement is as trivial as that, however, it would appear that the concept of difficulty is not particularly helpful in illuminating the factors that make achievements sizeable. However, 'difficulty' is not just the name that we give to (a subset of) the factors that determine the magnitude of achievements. We also have an independent pre-theoretical understanding of difficulty. The problem is that this pre-theoretical notion of difficulty contains a number of ambiguities. When we say that an activity is difficult or that a goal is difficult to reach, we may mean a couple of different things. Thus, saying that difficulty is a dimension determining the magnitude of achievements comes with two dangers. The first is that we mistakenly ascribe importance to features that, while part of our ordinary language practices regarding 'difficulty', do not influence the magnitude of achievements. I discuss an example of this mistake in section 3.1. The second is that, in attempting to get rid of the ambiguities of the ordinary term and develop an orderly conception of difficulty, we throw out some features that do make a difference to how much of an achievement a given event is. That is the mistake I discuss in sections 3.2 and 3.3. In all of this I am drawing heavily (though critically) on Bradford's rich account of difficulty.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., chapter 2.}
3.1 Difficulty Relative to Kind

Bradford claims that whether an activity is difficult is always relative to the kind of activity it is. Undoubtedly, this is part of how we use the word 'difficult'. When we say, for example, that a certain Sudoku is difficult, it is understood that we mean that it is a difficult Sudoku, i.e. that it is more difficult than many or most Sudokus. Bradford, being impressed by this feature of ordinary language about difficulty, incorporates it into her account of the magnitude of achievements. As she is well aware, however, any activity belongs to not just one (or even a few) but numerous classes (or kinds) of activity. Indeed “[t]he number of kinds to which an activity belongs is virtually limitless.” This, in turn, means that one and the same activity can be difficult as an activity of one kind but not difficult (or less difficult) as an activity of another kind. Take, for example, running the Paris marathon. Finishing the Paris marathon is difficult (for most people – more about that shortly) when contrasted with the class of races held in France; but it is easy (because it has a flat course) when compared to the class of marathons.

Since Bradford thinks that some degree of difficulty is necessary for something to be an achievement at all, she concludes that “whether or not something is an achievement depends in part on the particular background against which we determine difficulty.” I find this hard to believe. It seems to me that the concept of achievement does not allow for this kind of contextualism. If we were interested in the semantics of the ordinary term 'achievement', we might or might not find that it is partly fixed by context. But as part of an account of what achievements are this must be a mistake. That Bradford would subscribe to this kind of contextualism about achievements seems particularly puzzling given that she accepts that

142 Cf. Ibid., 80-91.
143 Ibid., 82.
144 Ibid., 90.
achievements are intrinsically valuable. This would seem to commit her to the extraordinary claim that one and the same activity can be intrinsically valuable when looked at in one context but not be valuable when looked at in another. This I find even harder to accept.\footnote{Note that this is similar to my criticism of Greco in chapter 2.}

I conclude that if the best conception of difficulty requires this kind of context sensitivity, difficulty cannot play the important role in the analysis of achievements that many people think it does. It seems to me, however, that there is also clearly a sense in which difficulty is not relativized to kinds of activities in this way. We might say that even a very difficult Sudoku is less difficult than doing moderately difficult calculus. Moreover, there appears to be no absurdity in saying that there can be classes of activities every member of which is difficult (the class of difficult activities may be a particularly salient example). Just as a heavy mouse is lighter than a light elephant, and it is this sense we should be interested in when trying to estimate an animal’s food intake from its body weight, it is the sense in which (almost) every marathon is more difficult than (almost) every stroll to the convenience store that we should be interested in when thinking about the magnitude of achievements.\footnote{Note that in the non-relativized sense of difficulty that I am interested in, it makes little sense to say that of a particular goal or activity that it is very difficult (or not very difficult). When it comes to such absolute statements, Bradford is right that they are always relative to some contrast class. But we can make non-relativized comparisons.}

3.2 Unlikelihood and Effort

According to Bradford, difficulty is a feature of activities that comes in two different kinds. Activities are \textit{e-difficult}, if they require a lot of intense effort; they are \textit{u-difficult}, if they are unlikely to be successfully completed.\footnote{Cf. Bradford (2010), 35-6.} Running a marathon is difficult, because it requires a lot
of effort (even though one might be quite likely to succeed), and winning the lottery is difficult, because the chances of success are very low (even if it requires little effort to do it). Having distinguished these two forms of difficulty, Bradford immediately goes on to contend that u-difficulty has no role to play in determining the magnitude of achievements. Her argument trades on what she calls 'pure unlikelihood cases', such as winning the lottery or seeing a shooting star.\textsuperscript{148} We do not think that winning the lottery or seeing a shooting star is a sizeable achievement. But since these are activities that are very u-difficult, u-difficulty cannot be a factor in the magnitude of achievements.\textsuperscript{149}

This argument rests on a mistake. What pure unlikelihood cases show is that u-difficulty is not a sufficient condition for something to be a considerable achievement. But this should be unsurprising. After all, difficulty is supposed to be only one dimension of magnitude. And there is a natural explanation for why we would think that pure unlikelihood cases are not achievements (or very small ones): cases like that are lacking in competence! In fact, this is so almost by definition. For in order for a case to be a pure unlikelihood case, it must not be contaminated by effort. But any action the agent may take in order to increase the likelihood of success is going to involve some amount of effort. Thus, success has to be unlikely (otherwise it would not be an unlikelihood case at all), and the agent can do very little to increase the chances of success (otherwise it not be a pure unlikelihood case). Hence, pure unlikelihood cases are bound to be cases of very low competence and this is sufficient to explain why we do not think of them as much of achievements.

Pure unlikelihood cases, then, cannot serve as test cases for whether u-difficulty is important for the magnitude of achievements. Instead of eliminating effort from our test cases we

\textsuperscript{148}Cf. Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{149}Cf. Ibid., 42-3.
need to just keep it, as well as competence, constant. If we want two cases of reached goals in which the level of effort and competence is equal and yet one of them was more u-difficult, we need some other factor which explains why the other nevertheless involved the same amount of effort. Having ruled out bad luck (by virtue of keeping competence constant), the natural thought is that one agent was more skilled, or went about his task in a more efficient way. Consider

*Haystack*: Lisa and Dave are each trying to find a needle in a haystack in their respective barns. However, Lisa's haystack is five times as big as Dave's. Accordingly, her initial chances of success are five times worse than Dave's which are reasonably high. Dave immediately goes to work sifting through the hay. Lisa, on the other hand, uses the first five minutes to burn down her haystack and then begins sifting through the ashes; this plan increases her chances of success to the same level as Dave's. Both put in equal effort (Dave's 20 minutes of searching equal Lisa's 15 minutes of searching plus the effort spent on burning the hay) until they both find the needle after 20 minutes.

In *Haystack*, it seems to me that Lisa's success is more of an achievement than Dave's. Moreover, the reason for that seems to be that she reached a more difficult goal. But this cannot be in virtue of having put in more effort for, by hypothesis, she did not. She also did not reach her goal more competently – at least not in the technical sense of the term which I argued in the last chapter is the one important for achievement. There is, of course, another sense in which she *did* reach the goal more competently. That is the sense in which competence signifies the use of skills or execution of a good plan. These factors are relevant here. But their role is not to serve as a measure of the achievement themselves, but rather as an explanation for why it was that Lisa could reach a more u-difficult goal with the same level of competence and effort as Dave reached the less u-difficult goal.\(^{150}\)

\(^{150}\)It may be tempting to resist this move and say that the exercise of skill/execution of plan is itself the measure of achievement. I do not think that there is anything wrong with this move in principle. I simply struggle to see how
Other things being equal, reaching an unlikely goal is more of an achievement than reaching a more likely one. The reason why Bradford overlooks this fact is that she focuses on cases where the agent does nothing (or very little) to change and overcome the odds. Those are indeed cases where the agent is not to be credited with a significant achievement. Alas, the reason for that is not that u-difficulty has no impact on the magnitude of achievements, but that in cases like that the agents do not reach their goals competently.$^{151}$

3.3 Agent-Neutral vs. Agent-Relative Difficulty

To say that the difficulty of a goal is agent-relative means that one and the same goal may be more difficult to reach for me than for you. That seems right. Setting up a Jenga tower is more difficult for my three year old niece than it is for me. Moreover, it also seems plausible to think that, if I were to successfully complete an activity that is more difficult for me than for you, it would be more of an achievement than if you did. It is more of an achievement, for example, when someone who lost an arm successfully ties their shoelaces than when I do. That being said, there is also another sense of difficulty that is not agent-relative. To see this consider that it is perfectly natural to think that in a game of Jenga I can do more difficult moves than my niece. More generally, adults tend to be able to do more difficult things than children, talented people can do more difficult things than average people, and after acquiring a specialized skill one can do more difficult things than before. All of these claims presuppose an agent-neutral concept of difficulty.

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151 One could make the analogous mistake and think that e-difficulty does not matter for the magnitude of achievements. As I am concerned with u-difficulty here, I will defer the argument that this would indeed be a mistake to chapter 4.
In the face of this ambiguity there are a number of options for thinking about the relationship between achievements and difficulty. One is to say that agent-neutral and agent-relative difficulty each contribute to the magnitude of achievement. Another is to decide that only one of them counts. Either option may or may not be combined with an attempt at reducing one of the concepts of difficulty to the other. I am a friend of the first option and are going to develop agent-neutral difficulty in this chapter and agent-relative difficulty in the next. To illustrate that it would be a mistake to disregard the agent-neutral concept I will here briefly discuss the problems that Bradford gets herself into by doing just that.

Bradford thinks that, ultimately, difficulty is always agent-relative (we will encounter her reductive account of agent-neutral difficulty below). This leads her to saying that the following event is no (significant) achievement

> Virtuoso. Heifetz, the great violin virtuoso, effortlessly tosses off a flawless performance of the complex Paganini caprices.

Bradford presents this case as a possible objection to her account of difficulty. What this case might be thought to show, she suggests, is that there is a third form of difficulty (besides e-difficulty and u-difficulty) – c-difficulty. C-difficult activities would be activities that are difficult in virtue of being complex. The important thing to note here is that c-difficulty would be an agent-neutral form of difficulty. We could just look at an activity and determine whether it is complex without knowing anything about who it is that will attempt the activity.

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152 If the first option is combined with a reduction of one type to another, this would lead to the view that the one fundamental concept of difficulty influences the magnitude of achievements in different ways. My own view could be described that way (agent-neutral = relative to standardized agent).


154 Ibid., 46.

155 While it is true that we sometimes say things like ‘this is complex for me but not for you’, all we mean by that is that I usually do less complex things than ‘this’, whereas you are doing things that are just as complex or more
be doing something difficult in playing the complex Paganini caprices, even though it neither requires effort on his part nor is it unlikely that he will succeed. Bradford, however, rejects the notion of c-difficulty and agent-neutral difficulty more generally. She thinks that the right thing to say about a case like *Virtuoso* is that (1) because Heifetz is so good, he does not do anything difficult and (2) that we can explain the appearance to the contrary by pointing out that what he does *would be difficult* for almost everyone else (including most talented violinists) – this is her reduction of agent-neutral difficulty to agent-relative difficulty.¹⁵⁶

I am sympathetic to Bradford's claim that c-difficulty is not a genuine third form of difficulty. It seems quite plausible that the intuitive appeal of c-difficulty can be explained by the fact that complexity is typically a feature of an activity that leads to one of the other forms of difficulty: playing the Paganini caprices is something that typically requires great effort (e-difficulty); if one is not willing to put in that effort, one is unlikely to succeed (u-difficulty). The more important question, however, is the one about agent-neutral and agent-relative difficulty. It is true that Heifetz's performance is not difficult for him. At the same time it seems to me that his performance does constitute a sizeable achievement and that it does so in virtue of being difficult. Thus, *Virtuoso* appears to show that agent-neutral difficulty is an important dimension for the magnitude of achievements. This becomes particularly clear when we compare *Virtuoso* with

*Novice*: Billy Bob, after three weeks of receiving violin instructions, effortlessly tosses off a flawless performance of the alphabet song.

It seems clear that Billy Bob's performance is a lesser achievement than Heifetz's. But Bradford cannot allow this, because neither of them does anything that is difficult for them. However, she

thinks that there is a looser sense in which Heifetz's performance does come out as (more of) an achievement:

[N]othing prevents us from saying that [Heifetz's performance] is an achievement (sans “for”) insofar as the difficulty condition is satisfied: relative to the comparison class of talented violinists, the performance is difficult, even though it is not difficult for Heifetz. Similarly, then, the performance is an achievement, even though it is not an achievement for Heifetz.\textsuperscript{157}

Unfortunately, this will not do. For there is something that prevents us from saying what Bradford wants to say here. The problem is that in \textit{Virtuoso} it was Heifetz who performed the caprices – not any of the other talented violinists. And that means that none of the other violinists can be said to have achieved anything. Thus, Heifetz's performance has to be an achievement \textit{for him}, if it is to be an achievement at all. That is because if there is nobody who achieved something, then there is no achievement.\textsuperscript{158} The best we could say along the lines of Bradford's suggested solution is that the performance \textit{would have been} an achievement for some other talented violinist, if they had done it. But if Heifetz's performance is not an achievement for him, then there is nobody who achieved something, and hence no (actual) achievement.

Even if the idea of achievements without an achiever could be somehow made to work, it still would not be a good description of what is going on in \textit{Virtuoso}. It simply seems wrong to deny that his flawless performance is an achievement for Heifetz. The intuitive verdict on \textit{Virtuoso} is that Heifetz's performance is an achievement for him. Of course, we might try to

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{158} To say otherwise is like saying that if Jimmy who hates chocolate is forced to eat a snickers bar, there is pleasure “sans for” (it is not pleasure for Jimmy), because relative to the relevant comparison class (most children Jimmy's age) eating chocolate is pleasant.
explain away this intuition (although I do not think that Bradford's way of doing it works). But, we should ask, what we would gain in doing so.

I can see two potential reasons for saying that Heifetz's performance cannot be an achievement. First, on Bradford's account significant achievements have to involve an agent-relative difficult process and *Virtuoso* does not fit the bill. But citing this as a reason to reject the intuitive verdict on *Virtuoso* would be question begging, since whether or not agent-relative difficulty is necessary for significant achievements is what is at issue. Second, one may think that activities that an agent carries out routinely cannot be achievements ipso facto. Consider Bradford's case of Dr. Bob whose typical work day

is filled with difficult, albeit routine, surgeries. … One day, however, a very unusual case is presented to Dr. Bob. Dr. Bob is required to perform a rare and remarkable—and remarkably difficult—surgery, and he carries it out with success.159

Bradford claims that only the remarkable surgery is an achievement for Dr. Bob. Whereas what he does on a typical work day is not.

After all, an ordinary day for Dr. Bob is what he does every day: an average day for Dr. Bob is routine surgeries, which he is required to perform all the time. It would be strange to say that getting through every ordinary day is an achievement for him.160

It is important to note here that the routine surgeries that are Dr. Bob's daily bread and butter are still supposed to be difficult in the agent-relative sense.161 So why are they not achievements?

One explanation would be if there was what we may call the

159 Bradford (2010), 88.

160 Ibid.

161 Cf. Ibid.
Rarity Requirement: In addition to being difficult achievements also must be somewhat unusual or rare or “[stand] out from the background as difficult.”

The rarity requirement would explain why Heifetz's performance is not an achievement. Tossing off the Paganini caprices effortlessly is something he does (or can do) all the time. If we accept the rarity requirement, then, we would have a reason for trying to explain away the intuitive verdict in *Virtuoso*. Should we accept the rarity requirement? I believe the answer is no.

Consider Dr. Bill (a colleague of Dr. Bob's). While Dr. Bob is busy everyday conducting appendectomies, Dr. Bill is the hospital's top surgeon who routinely handles the more complicated cases. His typical work day involves surgeries that are just as complex (and difficult for him) as Dr. Bob's remarkable surgery. Now, if we accept the rarity requirement, we will have to say that, after Dr. Bob performs his remarkable surgery, he leads Dr. Bill in terms of achievements by a score of 1-0. That seems wrong. More generally, accepting the rarity requirement will force us to claim that someone who routinely engages in challenging activities (such as Dr. Bill) will have no or very few achievements. The optimal strategy for boosting one's number of achievements would be to adopt a daily routine that presents few and easy challenges and do something difficult every so often. While this might not be a bad way to live, it is implausible to think that such a life would involve more achievements than, for example, Dr. Bill's. These are, I think, compelling reasons to reject the rarity requirement. Moreover, I do not think that we lose anything by giving it up. When Bradford says of Dr. Bob that “[i]t would be strange to say that getting through every ordinary day is an achievement for him”

\[163\] I could not agree less. There are jobs (and maybe Dr. Bob's is one of them) where getting through the day without making a major mistake is a complex and difficult affair. Why would we not want to

\[162\] Ibid., 89.

\[163\] Ibid., 88.
credit someone like this with an achievement every day? When achievements become the norm in someone's life, they (and others) might come to stop appreciating them in the way unusual achievements are appreciated. What does not happen, however, is that their activities are not achievements anymore.\footnote{This claim must be qualified. There are all kinds of mechanisms by which routine undermines achievement. Most prominently, activities that are routinely performed will presumably require less and less effort on part of the agent. However, this is not how the cases of Dr. Bob and Dr. Bill are constructed – it is stipulated here that the surgeries they perform remain difficult for them.} Thus, I conclude that we should reject the rarity requirement. Doing so, will leave us without any reason to reject the intuitive verdict in *Virtuoso*: Heifetz's flawless and effortless performance of the Paganini caprices is an achievement for him.

What all of this shows is that not all achievements are difficult *for* the achiever and that not all differences in magnitude can be accounted for by agent-relative difficulty. This is not to deny that agent-relative difficulty is one of the dimensions that determine the magnitude of achievements. In fact, I think that Bradford is right that agent-relative e-difficulty is a factor in the magnitude of achievements; I will have more to say about this in chapter 4. The problem with Bradford's view is that she thinks that this dimension can explain all differences in the magnitude of achievements. This view commits her to implausible claims such as that Heifetz's performance in *Virtuoso* is no more of an achievement than the equally effortless playing of the alphabet song by a novice violinist; or that Dr. Bob's daily achievements are equal to Dr. Bill's.\footnote{It might be suggested that in cases in which the an agent is able to do something (agent-neutrally) difficult without much effort, the achievement lies not so much in that performance itself but in the acquisition of the skills that allow her to do that. But that response goes only so far. After all, some people are simply very talented and do not need to exert much effort in order to acquire impressive skills.}
3.4 Where to from Here?

As we have seen the words 'difficult' and 'difficulty' contain (at least) three important ambiguities. This is important to recognize when developing an account of how the magnitude of achievements is related to difficulty. I have argued that we should disregard the way in which the term 'difficulty' can be relativized to kinds of activities. How much of an achievement solving a given Sudoku is, is not dependent on whether we think of it as member of the class of Sudoku's or as a member of the the class of things one can do while sitting in front of the fireplace. When it comes to the distinctions between e-difficulty and u-difficulty, and between agent-relative and agent-neutral difficulty, I have argued that it is a mistake to disregard (as Bradford does) either u-difficulty or agent-neutral difficulty. I see no reason to think that one has to choose just one side as important for achievements with regard to these distinctions. However, I agree with Bradford that, insofar as e-difficulty is important for achievement, it is an agent-relative dimension. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that agent-neutral u-difficulty is also a factor in the magnitude of achievements. I think that this is the right way to align these distinctions; the proof of this claim will be in the plausibility of the resulting account of the magnitude of achievements.

Finally, a word about terminology. From now on, whenever I will use the term 'difficulty' without qualification, I will be talking about agent-neutral u-difficulty – of which I will give a detailed account below. I will discuss the dimension of agent-relative e-difficulty under the heading of *effort* in chapter 4. This is not meant to imply any kind of conceptual or metaphysical priority of u-difficulty over e-difficulty, or of agent-neutrality over agent-relativity. One simply has to use terms somehow and this is the usage I find to make for the most intuitive exposition.
4. Difficulty and Magnitude

In this section, I will develop the notion of difficulty as a factor determining the magnitude of achievements. In the terms introduced above my conception will utilize u-difficulty, i.e. the notion that a goal is more difficult, if it is less likely to be reached. My conception is, very roughly, that a goal's degree of difficulty is determined by the likelihood of the goal's obtaining prior to the agent's actions in pursuit of it. My conception will be agent-neutral, i.e. the difficulty of a goal will not be a matter of which agent attempts to reach it. In order to ensure agent-neutrality, the I utilize the (counterfactual) likelihood of the goal being reached, given that a standardized agent in the same position as the actual agent attempted to reach it.

In order to motivate my view, I will begin by discussing two features of goals (precision and extent) that intuitively make a difference to the magnitude of achievements (4.1). I proceed to show that these intuitive dimensions can be captured by the notion of u-difficulty (4.2). I then raise the issue of agent-neutral vs agent-relative u-difficulty (4.3 and 4.4) and utilize the notion of a standardized agent to arrive at an agent-neutral account (4.5).

4.1 Precision and Extent

Let me begin by drawing attention to two features of goals that seem to influence the magnitude of achievements both of which are extensively discussed by Hurka: precision and extent. There are many examples of more precise goals making for greater achievements than less precise ones. In arts class in high school, for example, I was always struck by how my more artistic classmates would have very detailed plans for how they wanted their finished products to look (even if these plans evolved over time), while I was just aiming at somehow fulfilling the general
instructions our teacher had given to us. Clearly, when I succeeded it was less of an achievement than when they did. Similarly, part of what makes certain rap performances an achievement is that the flow of the artist depends on him rapping the words at the precise millisecond that he does. Another example, this one given by Hurka, we have already encountered in chapter 1. It involves the respective goals of Wayne Gretzky (who is trying to put the puck in “the spot the goaltender has left open, which is in the upper right corner, and a few inches across”), and a lesser hockey player who is just trying to put the puck “somewhere near the net”. It seems clear that (1) reaching Gretzky's goal would be a greater achievement, (2) Gretzky's goal is more precise, and (3) that (1) is true in virtue of (2). Now, it might be tempting to say that what is going on here is simply that Gretzky achieves more goals, for he achieves all the goals that the lesser player achieves (he too puts the puck 'somewhere near the net') and the further goals that the lesser player does not even have. Indeed, this is how Hurka seems to think about the situation. But, as we have seen in chapter 1, we cannot simply infer from the fact that someone holds a somewhat determinate event as a goal that he also holds as goals all the less determinate events that would necessarily obtain, if his goal were to obtain. If Gretzky hits the post, he might not have reached any goal of his – not just fewer goals than if he had hit the exact spot he was aiming for. Thus, we cannot explain that reaching a more precise goal is a greater achievement than reaching a less precise one by pointing to the greater number of goals achieved in the former case. What we need is an account of precision and its role in the magnitude of achievements that is independent of the number of goals achieved.

Hurka discusses extent as one of two dimensions of generality – the more general the goal the greater the achievement (the other dimension of generality is what he calls 'hierarchical

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166 Hurka (1993), 124.

167 In fact Hurka's view appears to be that precision consists in a greater number of – for lack of a better term – embedded goals. Cf. Ibid., 124-5.
dominance'; it will be discussed under the heading of 'complexity' in section 4.4). According to Hurka, a goal is extended “if its content stretches across times and objects, including persons.”

If you have the goal of putting on your best suit this fine Sunday morning, your goal concerns only one person on one day. By contrast, if you try to organize a surprise party for your friend's birthday, you affect a whole group of people. Similarly, your plan to pursue a PhD involves one person but over an extended period of time. Thus, both of these goals are more extended than the first one and reaching them does seem to be more of an achievement. Put differently we can say that the magnitude of an achievement is a matter of “how much of the world [the goal] includes.” Extent explains why it is, ceteris paribus, a more impressive achievement to implement an infrastructure program on the federal level, than to fix three potholes in the neighbourhood. It also explains why it is more of an achievement to rise to the very top in a sport that is played by many people in many countries (such as soccer) than in a sport that is played by an eccentric few.

I think that Hurka's claims regarding precision and extent are for the most part correct. It seems clearly true that more extended and more precise goals usually make for greater achievements. I will now try to show, however, that the intuitive appeal of precision and extent can be captured by the underlying dimension of u-difficulty. More precise and more extended goals are usually less likely to be reached than ones that are less so. When they are not, they do not make for achievements of greater magnitude.

Cf. Ibid., 116.

Ibid.


Hurka claims that his views about extent have historical precedent in the works of Aristotle and Nietzsche. Cf. Hurka (1993), 130; 142-3; (2007), 23; (2011), 100; 102.
4.2 Difficulty – the basic idea

The basic idea behind my notion of difficulty is that an event makes for a more difficult goal the less likely it is to obtain. I should say here that I take talk of probability to be equivalent to talk about quantities of nomically possible worlds (or histories of the world) and I will resort to possible worlds language, whenever I find it to make for a more intuitive exposition.\textsuperscript{172} I do not mean to suggest that probability can be reductively analyzed in terms of nomically possible worlds.\textsuperscript{173} I am here following John Pollock who, while thinking that such an analysis would be bound to be circular, nevertheless considers it a helpful 'characterization' of probability.\textsuperscript{174} Thus, when I say that an event occurs in most nearby possible worlds, I take this to be equivalent to saying that the event is (or was) likely to occur. Readers who have qualms about this use of possible worlds talk are invited to make the required substitutions.

To see how this notion captures Hurka's claims about extent and precision let me begin by saying that a difficult goal is a plan to bring about a big change to a big chunk of the world. We can think about both the “change” and the “chunk” part of that sentence in terms of possible histories of the world. Saying that a goal includes a big chunk of the world means that its conditions of satisfaction are incompatible with a large set of possible histories of the world. And the larger the set of possible histories of the world that is being ruled out the bigger is the chunk we are talking about.\textsuperscript{175} For example, if Dr. Evil's goal is to eliminate all life from the universe

\textsuperscript{172}This is not an unusual way of thinking about probability. For example, cf. Pfeifer (2006).

\textsuperscript{173}Such an analysis may or may not be possible. The main problem with such a project would seem to be a Bertrand style paradox. Given that there are uncountably many possible worlds, there are infinitely many possible ways of measuring a set of possible worlds. It is not easy to see how one could pick 'the right' one without resorting to probability – thus making the proposed analysis circular. Cf. Hájek, A. (2012), section 3.1.

\textsuperscript{174}Cf. Pollock (1990), 72-3.

\textsuperscript{175}Here is one of the points where some readers may find the possible worlds terminology confusing. How could one set of possible worlds be more sizable than another unless the latter was a subset of the former? While I find this way of talking helpful in characterizing the idea that one event is less likely than another that is not contained in it, readers who understand the latter but not the former are, again, invited to make the required substitutions.
for all future times, his goal is incompatible with any possible history of the world in which there exists any kind of life anywhere in the future. That is a large set of possible histories and thus his goal counts as quite difficult. Assuming that the set of all possible histories of the world is constant, we can say, alternatively, that the chunk in question is bigger, the smaller the set of possible histories that it is compatible with.

Recall Hurka's description of the extent of goals (which I take to be meant to capture the same notion that I am after when talking about the size of the chunk). A goal is extended “if its content stretches across times and objects, including persons.”¹⁷⁶ Say I have a goal that involves only myself: I want to run three miles today. This goal is compatible with all the histories of the world in which I do in fact run three miles today. This is a very large set of histories. Whatever other people do and whatever I do on any other day of my life is compatible with me running three miles today. Now imagine that, instead, my goal is to bring it about that everyone in my department is running three miles today. The satisfaction conditions for this goal rule out all the histories in which any of my colleagues are not running three miles. Thus, as the extent of my goal is increasing (my goal involves more people) the set of possible histories that are compatible with it is decreasing. The same is true when my goal becomes more temporally extended. Say I want the department to run together not just today but once every week for a year. Again, the set of histories that are compatible with this further extended goal is correspondingly smaller.

Thinking about the difficulty of a goal in terms of sets of possible histories of the world, then, can capture the same concerns that underlie Hurka's notion of extent. It is quite easy to see that it also captures the notion of precision. Take Hurka's hockey example. A professional might

get a shot off with the goal of shooting the puck to a particular spot a few inches wide. There is a set of possible histories that is compatible with this goal. Compare the amateur whose goal it is to put the puck somewhere near the net. The set of possible histories compatible with this goal is considerably larger. Having a goal that is more precise is to have a goal with conditions of satisfaction that are compatible with a smaller set of possible histories. In other words, having a goal that is more precise – just like having a goal that is more extended – is one way in which one can have a goal that is more difficult (alternatively, we could say that the puck is more likely to be in the larger than in the smaller area).

That a goal is more difficult the larger the set of possible histories of the world that are incompatible with it seems intuitively right. If I adopt a goal that commits me to prevent a larger set of possible histories from occurring, my goal is, ceteris paribus, more difficult than if I am committed to prevent a smaller set of possible histories from occurring. However, things are not always equal. It also matters which histories are in the respective sets. Ruling out some histories of the world is more difficult than others. This is why I said that it matters not only how big the chunk of the world is that my goal stretches across; it also matters how big of a change my goal implies to that chunk.

Imagine a politician sets herself the goal that every single one of her 400 million constituents has health insurance. This goal involves a sizable chunk of the world (400 million is a lot of people and presumably the idea is that these people will have health insurance for the rest of their lives and that future generations will have it too); so it looks like this is a difficult goal. But what if there already is universal healthcare in the jurisdiction in question? Now it seems that the goal is actually not very difficult. Since having \( X \) as a goal, clearly requires that it would still be possible that \( \neg X \), it might even seem like it is not a goal at all. This would be too quick,
however. Our politician's goal is temporally extended and it is still possible that universal healthcare will be revoked. Maybe the reason that she adopted this goal was that she perceived that this might be imminent. Or maybe she fears that the state will not be able to keep subsidizing healthcare for much longer. Whatever the details of the case may be, the point is that these details make a difference to how difficult her goal is.

Thinking a bit more about the health-care example helps to see that the notion of 'a big change' cannot simply be one that compares what the world is like at the time the goal is adopted with what it would be like if the goal was reached. Imagine that there currently is universal healthcare and politician A wants to keep things that way. But she is fighting a losing battle as funds are depleted and public opinion has turned against continuing the program. Her rival, politician B, has the goal of revoking healthcare. If we simply compared the respective goals of politician A and politician B to the status quo, we would have to conclude that B's goal involves the greater change. However, it seems clear that A's goal is more difficult.

The fact that maintaining the status quo can sometimes be a difficult goal shows that the notion of change that figures into difficulty has to be modal. Again, it will be helpful to think about possible histories of the world. We saw above that a goal's difficulty is a matter of how large a set of histories is ruled out by its conditions of satisfaction. This claim needs to be qualified, however. While every ruled-out history makes my goal more difficult, not every ruled out history does so to the same degree. The contribution that ruling out a particular history makes to the difficulty of my goal is a function of how close by this possible history is. Ruling out a nearby possible history counts for more than ruling out a faraway one. This is why politician A's goal is more difficult than politician B's. Given the way things are going in their shared country, most nearby possible histories involve no universal healthcare and A is trying to prevent all these
nearby possible histories from becoming actual. On the other hand, while politician B is trying to prevent all possible histories that do involve universal healthcare, these possible histories are further away and thus his goal is less difficult.\textsuperscript{177}

Returning to the language of probability, we may say that goals that are more precise or more extended are events that are, ceteris paribus, less likely to obtain. This is particularly easy to see when other things \textit{are} equal. We can find paradigmatic cases of that kind by comparing two goals one of which specifies a subset of the events specified by another. That the puck is in the upper left corner of the net is a more precise goal than that it is somewhere near the net and the latter has to be less difficult, i.e. more likely, as the set of events that fulfils the former is a subset of the events that fulfil the latter. Similarly, consider the set of events that fulfil my goal of running three miles today. The sets of events that fulfil my more extended goals of making my department run three miles today and making my department run three miles every week are proper subsets of the former set, and thus the obtaining of these more extended goals has to be less likely than the obtaining of the less extended one. I conclude that in all but the most unusual cases (to which I will briefly return below) a more extended or a more precise goal is also a goal that is less likely to be reached. This latter feature is what I want to focus on, hoping to streamline the account of the magnitude of achievements.

\textbf{4.3 Which Probability?}

While I do not wish to engage the difficult debate about the nature of objective probability in general, there is the related issue of what state of the world we should take as given when asking

\textsuperscript{177}It may turn out that the best way of explicating the notion of the 'nearness' of a possible world reduces it to considerations of numbers of possible worlds. In that case what I say here about nearness of possible worlds would be, while not false, redundant.
how likely an event is to obtain. How this question is resolved will have a major impact on the measure of difficulty (and it will determine whether the measure of difficulty is agent-relative or agent-neutral). An easy way to see this is to consider that usually an event becomes more and more likely as an agent continues to competently pursue it. Since we do not want to say that a goal becomes less and less difficult as it is competently pursued (thus driving down the magnitude of almost every achievement to zero by the point it is reached), we need to know how to establish a baseline probability, as it were, that determines the difficulty of the goal.

When thinking about examples like the healthcare cases discussed in the last section, a very simple solution might suggest itself:

Difficulty 1: the difficulty of goal $G$ equals $1 - p$; where $p$ is the probability of $G$'s obtaining, measured at the moment that the agent adopts $G$.

At first glance, this seems to deliver the right results in cases of this type. If there is a two thirds chance that universal healthcare will be in place for the next 20 years and a one third chance that it will not, then it seems right to say that trying to bring about universal healthcare is half as difficult as preventing it. However, a moment's reflection shows that Difficulty 1, while providing an answer as to when we should take a reading of the probability of $G$'s obtaining, has left a more difficult question untouched. For the very fact that a given agent adopts some event as their goal will typically have an effect on the probability of that event's obtaining. And we need to ask whether we should take this effect into account or not. Unfortunately, each option has some unappealing implications.

Suppose we decided that we will ignore the effect that the agent's adoption of the goal has on its obtaining. To keep things simple, we might express this by endorsing
Difficulty 2: the difficulty of goal $G$ equals $1 - p$; where $p$ is the (counterfactual) probability of $G$'s obtaining, measured at the moment at which the agent adopts $G$, and given that the agent does not adopt $G$.

But it should be apparent that this has unacceptable consequences. Consider the case of Josh.

Creature of Habit: Josh walks to work every morning. Without ever thinking about it, he always takes the same route to the point that he is always walking on the same side of each street. He is not obsessive about this, he simply adopted the habit and there is no reason to change it. One day, out of the blue, he adopts the goal of changing things up by crossing at an earlier traffic light and walking on the other side of the street.

Now, according to Difficulty 2, Josh's goal is extremely difficult, for unless he had adopted the goal it was extremely unlikely that he would walk on the other side of the street. But this seems clearly wrong. And at least part of why it seems wrong is that, once he adopted the goal, its obtaining became overwhelmingly likely.

We may be tempted, then, to say that we should take the fact that the agent adopted the goal into account. We might endorse something along the lines of

Difficulty 3: the difficulty of goal $G$ equals $1 - p$; where $p$ is the probability of $G$'s obtaining, measured at the moment that the agent adopts $G$, and given that the agent adopts $G$.

Difficulty 3 delivers the right result in Creature of Habit. Given that Josh adopts the goal of changing his route, his doing so becomes very likely and thus his goal is not very difficult which seems correct. But note that Difficulty 3 introduces agent-relativity into the notion of difficulty. Thus, without a further notion of agent-neutral difficulty we would be back to the problems I
raised for Bradford's account. Going back to *Virtuoso*, it is apparent that, according to *Difficulty* 3, performing the Paganini caprices is not a difficult goal in this case; for given that Heifetz adopts the goal, he is very likely to succeed. The same goal would, however, be very difficult for most other people. It is not obvious whether we should accept that (u-)difficulty is agent-relative in this way.

At this point it bears repeating what I said in section 3, namely that under the heading of the ordinary term 'difficulty' there are two factors – one agent-relative, one agent-neutral – that can make an event more of an achievement than another. To drive home that point consider the following case.

*Two Sport Athlete*: Loving both soccer and basketball, Steve devotes equal time and effort to both sports receiving equally good training. As it turns out, he has much more talented for basketball. At the end of high school he is taken in the first round of the NBA draft, while his soccer career is going nowhere.

If the magnitude of achievements was wholly agent-relative, we would probably have to say that (during high school) Steve's soccer achievements are equal to his basketball achievements (or at least that he achieved equally difficult goals). But that is not right; Steve achieves more in basketball than in soccer. UCLA’s legendary coach John Wooden liked to say that “in basketball as in life there are only varying levels of achievement in relation to potential.” But this is not true. To be sure there is achievement in relation to potential, but there is also achievement in absolute terms. There is a sense in which we typically achieve more in areas where we have more potential; and those with more potential (such as Wooden) will typically achieve more than the rest of us.
I think that the agent-relative sense of 'difficulty' is best spelled out in terms of effort. To make this plausible consider

_Bench Press:_ Arnold Schwarzenegger and Derek Parfit meet at the gym and discover that they have identical goals for today. Each of them wants to bench press 70kg 24 times. Both achieve their respective goals.

Again, there is one dimension along which Schwarzenegger's achievement equals Parfit's; after all they achieve the same thing. But there is also a sense in which Parfit's success is more of an achievement. This is the sense that Bradford wants to capture with her agent-relative notion of e-difficulty. And I agree: the reason why Parfit's success is more of an achievement is because he has to put in more effort. I will explore this notion in chapter 4. In this chapter, however, I will try to use u-difficulty to capture the agent-neutral dimension of achievement – the dimension along which Schwarzenegger's and Parfit's achievement are equal, and Steve achieves more in basketball than in soccer.

### 4.4 Talent and Position

In order to keep the account of difficulty agent-neutral, then, we need to disregard the difference in probability of success that is the result of one agent being simply better than others at reaching a certain goal. However, this does not mean that we should disregard all factors related to the agent that make a difference to the probability of success. Even though the distinction is not clear cut and is difficult to draw, we ought to distinguish two ways in which the probability of a goal is influenced by features of the agent whose goal it is. On the one hand some agents _are_ better than
others at reaching certain goals, on the other some agents are better situated than others to reach certain goals. Consider

*Champions League*: Both I and FC Barcelona's Lionel Messi adopt the goal of scoring a goal in a Champions League match.

There are two ways in which I am much less likely to succeed than Messi. First, he routinely plays in Champions League matches whereas for me this is just a distant dream. Since it is impossible to score in a match in which one does not play, he is much better situated to reach his goal than I am. Second, however, even if I was given the chance to play in the same number of Champions League matches, I would still be much less likely to score than Messi, simply because I am not as good a soccer player as he is. I submit that these two ways – call them position and talent – in which being Messi makes success more likely than being me deserve different treatment. Being better at soccer does not diminish the difficulty of Messi's soccer related goals – even though it clearly enhances the probability of success. But the fact that my current circumstances make success comparatively unlikely does increase the difficulty of my goal. Suppose that Messi and I were teammates receiving the same amount of playing time for a season. Does it not seem that there is one dimension along which scoring goals would be just as much an achievement for him as for me? That he is a more talented soccer player does not diminish his achievements (at least not along the agent-neutral dimension currently under consideration); rather it explains why he achieves so much more than I do.\(^{178}\) However, it would be more of an achievement for me than for Messi along the very same agent-neutral dimension to score in a Champions League match, given that I am not currently on the roster of a team that

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\(^{178}\) There might be some temptation to say that my scoring a goal would be more of an achievement than Messi’s. But I think that this is simply because it would be a more unusual event in my life (and I would be bragging about it to no end). Compare the earlier discussion of the rarity requirement.
has any kind of hope of competing in the Champions League.\textsuperscript{179} This is easy to see, if we imagine that I was actually Messi's lost and forgotten but equally skilled twin. Without any history of playing professional soccer, living in Toronto, playing rec-league, the road to a Champions League goal would still be very long for me. I would have to catch the attention of scouts, secure a contract on an elite club, convince the coach that I am actually the real deal, and so forth, just to get the chance to play. All that the actual Messi has to do for that chance, by contrast, is to stay healthy, and keep showing up to practices and games.

The upshot of Champions League, then, is twofold. First, facts about an agent such as talent or resolve do not make a difference to how difficult their goals are. Difficulty, in this sense, is a dimension of achievement that conflicts with the egalitarian idea that as long as people make the most of their talents everyone's achievements are equal. Instead, those with more talent and resolve will tend to reach more difficult goals and thus their achievements will be, ceteris paribus, more considerable. This somewhat 'elitist' view of achievement seems correct to me. That people with greater talents and resolve achieve more (and are, in that respect, living better lives than the rest of us) may not be fair; it is true nonetheless. Second, however, how one is situated with regards to one's goals does make a difference to how difficult those are. For a girl in Afghanistan finishing high school may be just as unlikely as becoming a university lecturer is for a white boy in England. If both of these goals are competently reached, I want to say that they are, ceteris paribus, equally sizeable achievements. The difficulty dimension is not 'elitist' to the point where it would say that those with favourable social and economic starting-positions will achieve more. It seems likely that such people will in one respect or another live better lives (I will return to this point below). But I think that this is not best captured by saying that they achieve more (or that the goals they achieve are more difficult). The girl with the high school

\textsuperscript{179}I intend no insult to my rec-league teammates with this statement.
diploma in Afghanistan may have a worse life in all kinds of ways than the white male university lecturer in England (one of which is that she got a lesser education) – but their educational achievements are on a par.

Ronald Dworkin, in his discussion of what he calls 'the model of challenge' of the good life, distinguishes between factors that are limitations to how much we can achieve and parameters that define what we should think of as an appropriate challenge. For example, treating an agent's talents as a parameter, on that picture, would mean to claim that achievement is always relative to talent; if we both achieve all that we could given our respective talents, our achievements would be equal. To treat talent as a limitation, on the other hand, is to say that how much talent an agent has does not figure into the measurement of his achievements; rather his talents (or lack thereof) provide the limit of how much the agent will be able to achieve. To take a different example, imagine that Noah and Sarah are playing darts and that Noah will throw 10 darts but Sarah will only throw 5. If we treat number of darts thrown as a parameter, Noah will have to get twice as many points as Sarah for an equal achievement; if we treat it as a limitation, their achievements are just a matter of the points they will score and Sarah will probably achieve less.

Despite the fact that Dworkin is out for bigger game than I – he is trying to give an account of the good life, rather than just of a component of it – his discussion of what makes for greater or lesser achievements is an interesting and fertile ground to explore here. Using Dworkin's terminology, we can say that my view treats position as a parameter and talent as a limitation. Dworkin, by contrast, never quite comes out and says which factors he considers

\[180\text{Cf. Dworkin (1995), 253-8.}\]

\[181\text{As I am using his arguments in a somewhat different context, I do not claim to directly engage them. Dworkin's arguments might or might not work in their original context whether or not they work here.}\]
parameters and which limitations. In fact, he thinks that “no philosophical model can decide [the issue]”\(^{182}\). That being said, we can take a clue from the fact that he is open to the idea that being materially well off may lead to one's meeting more valuable challenges.\(^{183}\) And, on the other hand, he resists the idea that “of two artists [whose lives were good] in virtue of the art they created, the one who has created better art has for that reason had a greater life.”\(^{184}\) This suggests that he would take the opposite position from the one I have advocated, namely that talent is a parameter, whereas position is a limitation.\(^{185}\)

Consider also the possibility that everything about an agent was considered as either a parameter or a limitation. The former would lead to the complete agent-relativity of achievement. How much of an achievement reaching a given goal is would be entirely determined by what it would take for \textit{me} (meaning the person that I actually am with all my strengths and weaknesses) to reach it from the position that I actually currently inhabit. This is close to Bradford's position that I argued against in section 3.3. Conversely, we might think that, if not the magnitude of an achievement, at least the dimension of difficulty is completely determined without reference to the agent or her position in life. This would be to treat both talent and position as limitations. This is arguably Hurka's view.\(^{186}\)

Thus, accepting the distinction between talent and position leaves us with four possibilities for thinking about the difficulty of goals as a factor in the magnitude of

\(^{182}\text{Dworkin (1995), 254.}\)

\(^{183}\text{Cf. Ibid., 260.}\)

\(^{184}\text{Ibid., 249.}\)

\(^{185}\text{Dworkin appears to think that the model of challenge has to be construed this way with what he calls 'the model of impact' being the only alternative. The model of impact measures the goodness of a life by the effects it has on the rest of the world. But as my discussion shows there are many different ways of thinking about the model of challenge that do not collapse into the model of impact.}\)

\(^{186}\text{For position as a limitation cf. Hurka (1993), 129. For talent as a limitation cf. Hurka (2011), 173-4.}\)
We can say that both talent and position are parameters affecting the difficulty of a given goal (Bradford); that both talent and position are limitations affecting how difficult a goal we can reach (Hurka); that talent is a parameter and position a limitation (Dworkin); or that talent is a limitation and position a parameter (this is my view). The views that treat talent as a parameter strike me as rather hopeless. It seems just undeniable that there is an important sense in which more talented people tend to achieve more (difficult goals) than less talented ones. The view that position too is a limitation, however, is a serious contender. Indeed, one might make a claim against my view that position is a parameter, similar to the one I just made against talent as a parameter: is it not obvious that there is an important sense in which privileged people tend to achieve more? Imagine two equally gifted and diligent musicians; one grows up poor without any access to proper instruction or good instruments, while the other is groomed his whole life learning from the best teachers under the best conditions. The former becomes a good pianist; the latter becomes the best pianist in the world. Is it not clear that the latter has achieved more? And does this not show that position is a parameter? I admit that cases like this are intuitively compelling. On the other hand, I remain confident that cases like Champions League, and the case of the Afghan girl and the English boy, support the view that position does while talent does not affect the difficulty of goals and thus the magnitude of achievements. To decide between these views, then, we cannot solely rely on intuitions about particular cases. Some theoretical underpinning is needed.

I think that my position is supported by the way that the notion of achievement is connected to the notion of credit. To say that something is an agent's achievement is to give

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187 I cannot address worries about how exactly to draw this distinction. I admit that doing so will be very difficult and there will be fuzzy borders.

188 This move would not be available, if, like Dworkin, I was trying to give an account of the good life rather than of achievements as a component of it. Thus, when I say that the notion of credit can help us to decide what to treat as parameter and what as limitation, I am not contradicting Dworkin's claim (cited above) that we cannot decide this
him credit for his success, and to say that something is more of an achievement is to give him more credit. I submit that being talented does not undermine the ability to take credit for achieving a particular goal but being favourably situated does. Suppose that you learn of a successful businessperson that she was able to tap into the wealth and network of her well-connected parents; you might judge that her achievements are not such a big deal after all, for she cannot claim credit for the part of her success that is due to these resources being at her disposal. If, by contrast, you learned that she was blessed with an incredible talent for running her business, this would clearly not diminish her achievement at all. While it is plausible that she could not claim credit for having these talents, they are part of who she is and so she does get to take credit for the good results that spring from them.

What, then, about the intuitive claim that privileged people tend to achieve more? What I think we should say here is this. What privilege can do is to put you in a position in which you can achieve goals that are more easily recognized as impressive achievements. It may even allow you to achieve goals that are more important along some (ethically) relevant dimension. Princess Diana, for example, arguably achieved a lot of morally important goals through her charitable work; she could not have achieved these goals had it not been for her privileged position. But this does not mean that her position allowed her to have achievements of greater magnitude as achievements. Furthermore, a 'privileged' position in the sense that is pertinent here does not necessarily have to come with conventional privileges. An agent might just find themselves at a juncture where what they do makes a tremendously important difference. A supreme court justice might be the deciding vote to break up a tie about a vital issue, a soccer player may take the decisive penalty in the world cup final, or a political prisoner may be in a position to reveal a

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question with a philosophical model. The notion of an overall good life that he is interested in, is not connected to credit in the way in which the notion of achievement is (this is one reason why trying to fully explicate the former notion in terms of the latter would be a mistake).
plan to topple an unjust regime to the authorities. When these agents make up their minds what they will try to do and achieve their goals, these achievements might be much more important in all kinds of ways than what someone in a less vital spot could have achieved. Some of these ways may be important to how good a life these people are living. But what I want to deny is that they make a difference to how much of an achievement their successes are. Of achievement is true what they say of 'real power': it is simply not the kind of thing that 'can be given', because to the degree to which you cannot take credit for your success, it is not an achievement.

One may worry, however, that if this notion of being able to take credit does all this important work, the distinction between talent and position is actually the wrong one to fix on. For it will often be the case that agents actually can take credit for being in a position that is favourable for achieving their goals. Going back to *Champions League*, it is not as if the fact that Messi plays in Champions League games and I do not is simply the result of brute luck or some such. Messi can surely take credit for being in a position in which the path to scoring in Champions League games is a short one.

In response to this worry, I would like to suggest that, in cases like this, being well situated to reach a goal is itself an achievement that can be distinguished from the achievement of getting from this good starting point to the goal itself. This allows us to say both that someone in a worse starting position has, ceteris paribus, a more difficult goal, and that the overall achievements of someone who can take credit for their superior starting position are not diminished by that starting-position. In *Champions League* we would say that, overall, Messi's achievement of scoring a goal in a Champions League match is just as great as if I did it; at the same time, however, looked at from where we are right now it would be more of an achievement for me to do it. That these two claims are compatible is easy to see once we recognize that Messi
already boasts many impressive soccer related achievements. This way of treating *Champions League* also allows us to preserve a difference between it and the case of the different educational opportunities for the Afghan girl and the white English boy. In the latter case the superior starting position of the boy is not an achievement but merely the result of brute luck. Thus, in his case my view does not imply that his finishing high school is overall just as much of an achievement as it is for the girl. And that seems right.  

There is, however, another potential argument for treating position as a limitation. Assume that achievements of greater magnitude make for a better life. If we say that people in superior social and economic starting positions tend to have greater achievements, this gives us a reason to improve people's position. Treating position as a parameter eliminates that reason. Call this the *Argument from Poverty*. The first thing to say about this argument is that it is doubtful whether these kinds of considerations are admissible as an argument about the nature and/or value of achievements. Compare virtue. I take it to be a reasonable position that (1) virtue is as easily obtained for poor as for privileged people, and (2) a life is better if lived virtuously. Whatever the overall merits of this kind of view, it would strike me as odd to object to it by pointing out that its truth would deprive us of a reason to help underprivileged people (though if helping underprivileged people is a virtuous thing to do, it would also supply such a reason).  

Second, however, it is not obvious that treating position as a limitation will have the effect of putting people with a superior *economic and social* position at an advantage in terms of achievement. There are clear examples where this is the case. Think of academic and scholarly

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189 The worry about fuzzy borders in the distinction between talent and position should be somewhat alleviated by my treatment of this last worry. For if we are not sure whether to treat a skill as a talent or as a feature of the situation, it will often not matter. These are going to be cases of acquired skills (otherwise they will clearly fall in the category of talents). But acquired skills will almost always be either talents – in which case they do not take away from the difficulty, or the result of prior achievements – which then balance the loss in difficulty.

190 Some people may make the opposite argument here: that virtue is easier to obtain in the absence of privilege and that this gives us a reason not to give people privileges.
achievements. While not true in every case, there is certainly a presumption that people from a privileged background will be able to reach greater heights; the same is true of business achievements. The case is less clear in the artistic realm. While a privileged background may afford you the leisure and education that can help to make a great artist, a life without struggle may make it harder to find the right inspiration. Similarly, it may be that achievements in the realm of social reform are easier to pursue if one does not come from a strong social and economic starting-position. My point here is not that any of these claims are true. I am simply pointing out that 'position' as it figures into achievement is not necessarily the same as 'social and economic position'. The former is concerned with what kind of challenges one is in a position to assail. Unless we can somehow show that this coincides (at least mostly) with social and economic position, we should be wary that the argument from poverty may have unwelcome consequences. If it turned out that people are in the best position to compose great music while heart-broken, would that supply us with a reason to break hearts? What if being tortured gave people amazing literary talent?

Moreover, I think we need not be too concerned about losing one reason for helping the poor. Achievements are not the only good thing in life, and there are plenty of things that the poor are lacking and that give us reason to improve their lot. Finally, at least in an unequal society in which rich and poor live closely enough to be aware of each other's lifestyle, there is one achievement related way in which the poor will tend to do worse than the rich. Seeing the things that their rich neighbours have and do, the poor might be liable to adopt goals that they end up not reaching. While reaching such goals would be more of an achievement for them than for their rich neighbours, failing to reach them is not an achievement at all. For all these reasons, I conclude that the argument from poverty fails to provide convincing reasons to treat position as a limitation. Thus, I will continue to treat it as a parameter.
4.5 A Standardized Agent

Our account of difficulty, then, needs to control for the agent's talents and resolve, while taking into account how this agent is situated. I propose the following.

\textit{Difficulty}: the difficulty of goal G equals \(1 - p\); where \(p\) is the (counterfactual) probability of G's obtaining, measured at the moment that the agent adopts G, and given that a \textit{standardized agent that is situated like the actual agent} adopts G.

This account says that Messi achieves difficult goals on the soccer pitch with regularity; put a standardized agent in Messi's position and let him try to reach the goals that Messi does and he will be very unlikely to succeed. At the same time my goal of scoring in a Champions League match is even more difficult, for putting the same standardized agent into my circumstances will result in an even lower likelihood of success. Similarly, a standardized agent in the socio-economic situation of an Afghan girl is much less likely to finish high school than a standardized agent in the situation of a white English boy. Thus, finishing high school is a more difficult goal for an Afghan girl than for a white English boy.

If the arguments from above are correct, these are the right results, but whether the account can actually deliver them depends on the availability of the notion of a standardized agent. How should we think about such an agent? As a a first approximation we may be tempted to think of someone who possesses the talents and resolve that are relevant to the achievement of the goal in question to a normal degree. But thinking this way has the following problem. If the standardized agent is to represent 'normality' for all potential agents (including young children, higher animals, angels, transformers, etc.) it is pretty much hopeless to think that we could ever get any fix on what level of talents and resolve would be 'normal'. If, on the other hand, we restrict the class of agents to something more manageable (such as 'normally developed adult
human beings'), we reintroduce a kind of relativity to our measure of difficulty. Jumping 2 metres high is very difficult for a normally developed adult human but not very difficult for a normal transformer – and thus we have again lost the ability to say something we should want to say, namely that, when it comes to jumping, transformers tend to achieve more than humans.

Note also that once we accept a measure of difficulty that is relativized to a certain class of agents, it is not quite clear why we should stop short of an endless proliferation of measures of difficulty any number of which might be applicable to a given agent at a given time. Jumping two meters high is more difficult for a 'normal' woman than for a 'normal' man, it is more difficult for a 'normal' senior than for a 'normal' person in their 20s, it is also more difficult for a 'normal' person living in the middle ages than for a 'normal' person living today and so on. While there is a sense in which all of these relativized notions of difficulty are perfectly legitimate, we should not use them to measure achievements. They represent different versions of a half-way house between an agent-neutral and an agent-relative conception of difficulty. But between the latter two we should be able to capture all that is relevant to the magnitude of achievements. For example, we might think that it was quite the achievement for Aunt Mary to jump two metres high given that she is an elderly woman (and that it would have been even more impressive if someone like her had done so 500 years ago); but the best way to capture this is by going fully agent-relative and saying that it was quite an achievement because it was so difficult for her. But what if, despite being an elderly woman, this was quite easy for super-athletic Aunt Mary? I think that in this case the fact that she is an outlier in some of the categories she belongs to does not enhance her achievement. The right thing to say about a case like this is that her achievement is equal to that of some of the young men who jump equally high, but that it is unusual for a person like her to have such sizeable athletic achievements.
At this point it looks like the idea of a 'normal' agent does not help in conceptualizing a standardized agent. However, this might not be a problem at all. Note that the role of the standardized agent in *Difficulty* is simply to provide a kind of measuring rod. It is akin to the 'metre' or 'kilogram', as it were. The fact that there is at best a very tenuous sense in which a metre is any kind of 'normal' length does not make any trouble for our use of it as a measurement. If we had arbitrarily decided that the metre was 6.853 times as long as it in fact is, we would say that the Nile was only a 1000 metres long. This fact does not lead to any anxiety over the true length of the Nile, or over the question whether it is truly longer than the Yukon. Similarly, we do not need to hitch our standardized agent to a plausible notion of a 'normal' agent. We can simply stipulate what the standardized agent should be like. How much talent and resolve we decide the standardized agent has will have an impact on which numbers we use to express the difficulty of a given goal; but this is not a difference that matters. If our standardized agent is a lot like a transformer, jumping two metres high is going to have a difficulty level near 0; if the standardized agent is more like an old lady, it will be near 1; in either case it will come out as more difficult than jumping one metre which will be more difficult than jumping 20 centimetres.

However, there are two important differences between measuring length and measuring difficulty and each of them introduces some limitations to the way we can use a scale generated by *Difficulty*. First, unlike length, the difficulty scale will not be a cardinal scale. This is due to the fact that the relationship between an agent's capacities and the likelihood that they will reach their goal is non-linear. As the agent becomes more and more able their chances of success will approach 1; as they become more and more inept they will approach 0. Given that the difficulty of a task is defined relative to a somewhat arbitrarily chosen standardized agent, this means that
we should not put too much stock in cardinal comparisons. Thus, we cannot confidently say, for example, that making two free throws is $X$ times more difficult than making one (as we could if we had a ratio scale), nor that the difference in difficulty between making one free throw and making two is $x$ times that of the difference between making two and three (as we could if we had a cardinal scale).

While it would be nice to have a cardinal or a ratio scale, I am not sure how much of a problem this limitation is. It seems doubtful that our pre-theoretical notion of difficulty allows for the kind of comparisons that cardinal and ratio scales make possible. If this is correct, it might be a feature rather than a problem of the present view that it does not allow for measurements of difficulty that we cannot really make sense of independently of the newly developed technical apparatus. In any case, I take it that this limitation is not serious enough to derail an otherwise promising account.

The second important difference between difficulty and length is that the standardized agent, unlike the metre, is multi-dimensional in that the standardized agent has a variety of different skills and talents. This is problematic for comparisons of goals that are dissimilar and

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191 A simple example may show this. Suppose we are trying to measure the difficulty of making a number of consecutive free throws in basketball. Suppose further (for simplicity's sake) that in determining the capacity set of the standardized agent we have the choice between two options one of which would result in a likelihood of success of 0.5 on each individual free throw, the other would set this number at 0.3. Now consider the difficulty scores for making 1, 2, 3, and 4, consecutive free throws on these assumptions respectively. Given the first option they would be: 1 free throw (ft): 0.5; 2ft: 0.75; 3 ft: 0.875; 4 ft: 0.9375. Given the second option they would be: 1 ft: 0.7; 2ft: 0.9; 3ft: 0.973; 4 ft: 0.9919. As this example shows, the ordering of difficulty scores is unaffected by the choice of standardized capacity level, but the absolute levels and ratios of the scores are not.

192 I say that we cannot say these things confidently rather than that we cannot say them at all. The reason is that we can say these things with whatever degree of confidence we have in our choice of the capacity set of the standardized agent.

193 It would be particularly nice to have such scales if we wanted to make decisions under (inevitable) uncertainty. If we could make cardinal comparisons between two achievements, we could calculate the expected values for pursuing them.

thus have little overlap in the kinds of capacities required to reach them. To see this consider first what happens when we compare two goals of a very similar kind; for example, think of two basketball players who each want to make a certain percentage of their free throws. As we have seen, it does not make much of a difference for this comparison at which point we fix the basketball talents of the standardized agent. If the standardized agent has great hand-eye coordination, for example, the absolute numbers for both goals will be quite small, if the standardized agent is less gifted the numbers will go up. In either case, however, the ordering of the two goals in terms of difficulty remains unchanged. But now imagine that we want to compare the basketball achievements of Michael Jordan with the intellectual achievements of Stephen Hawking. Here things are getting a lot more tricky. While it still makes little difference how much talent the standardized agent has in absolute terms in any one area, the proportions in her capacity set matter a great deal. If the mix of athletic and intellectual capacities of our standardized agent resembles Jordan's, Hawking's achievements will come out more difficult; if the standardized agent more closely resembles Hawking, Jordan will look more impressive.

This limitation is more serious than the first one. Note, however, that it shows up in the right place. Comparisons between achievements of very different kinds are hard to make and the conception of difficulty developed here explains why by locating the source of this problem in the indeterminacy of the capacity set of the standardized agent. In fact, an account that provides an easy algorithm for making such comparisons would be suspect; most likely it would be an oversimplification. We should say a bit more, however, about the nature of this indeterminacy. I can see three ways of thinking about it. First, we may think that we are faced with a mere epistemic problem. We do not know what the set of capacities is that the 'correct' standardized agent has; but if we did, this would be the end of our problems. This is tempting but I suspect the problem is deeper. That is because it is not even clear to me what kind of information we are
missing here. A second option would be to simply accept that there is no fact of the matter. This would lead to (at least an area of) incomparability between achievements of vastly different kinds. When comparing the achievements of Mozart, Gretzky, and Lincoln we might simply have to say that they are incomparable, on a par, or some such. A third possibility would be to say that this is a place where there is room for some stipulation and choice between different (moral) ideals. Choosing one set of capacities for the standardized agent will give the most clout to athletic achievements, choosing another to political achievements and so on. Earlier I disregarded the notion that the standardized agent needs to be a 'normal' agent. This is important here, for it means that if we opt for stipulation, we are making a choice between different measures of achievement and not (as one may be tempted to think) between different conceptions of 'normal human nature' or some such.

That being said, the way of dealing with the indeterminacy closest to my heart involves some appeal to human nature. It combines the second and third options just described by stipulating a standardized agent whose capacities are within certain ranges which are determined with a view to plausible rankings of achievements. For example, a standardized agent that is so athletic and so dumb that Gretzky's achievements look less difficult than simple arithmetic would be outside the plausible range, whereas standardized agents that rank Gretzky more highly than Hawking or Hawking more highly than Gretzky would both be acceptable. As I am mainly interested in achievements as a component of a good human life, I think it natural to make 'man the measure of all achievement'. Thus, in absolute terms, the ranges of capacities I would prefer for the standardized agent would make them not too different from you and me (except that,

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For discussions of incomparability and related concepts cf. the papers in Chang (1997).
unlike you and me, the standardized agent would not have any particular strengths and weaknesses).

In conclusion, the notion of a standardized agent in Difficulty leads to some limitations in our ability to measure and compare achievements along this dimension. However, since these limitations track, for the most part, limitations in the pre-theoretical notion of the magnitude of achievements, I think that Difficulty can pass muster despite them.

5. Further Intuitive Dimensions

In this section I return to a claim made in section 4.2: that Difficulty subsumes other features of goals that are plausibly thought to contribute to the magnitude of their achievement. I discussed the dimensions of extent and precision above. I will now discuss the further dimensions of 'uniqueness' and 'complexity'. I will also argue that whenever these intuitive dimensions do not coincide with difficulty they make no contribution to the magnitude of achievements.

5.1 Uniqueness

In my discussion of Bradford's view about difficulty we encountered the suggestion that in order for an event to be an achievement it has to stand out as as rare or unique. While I rejected the idea that this is a necessary condition for achievement, we might think that there is a connection between uniqueness and the magnitude of achievements. Maybe an event is more of an

\[196\] Note that while this would ground the scale of difficulty in human nature it would still be applicable to non-human agents (whether they be aliens, groups, or God). Of course, depending on how different these other agents are from humans, this measure of difficulty might not tell us much about how likely such agents are to succeed in a given task.
achievement, if the goal is in some way or other special, unique, or rare. The thought is certainly familiar.

Why is climbing Mount Everest judged as an impressive accomplishment? Because few have been able to do it. As more teams reach the summit, its significance as a mark of mountaineering [excellence] declines. Those who seek to demonstrate exceptional [excellence] then seek new and more difficult routes.\(^{197}\)

In considering this suggestion we need to distinguish two kinds of cases. Sometimes uniqueness is part of the goal content. For example, Robert F. Scott and Roald Amundsen each had the goal to 'lead my expedition to the South Pole first'. Similarly, some of the people who end up in the Guinness Book of Records might set themselves the goal of 'completing a task that has never been attempted before'. On the other hand, there are also cases where someone has a goal that simply has never been reached before, but that this is so is in no way part of the goal content. One might think, for example, that constructing and erecting a building standing 1km tall would be a remarkable achievement, in virtue of it being (a) the tallest building in the world, and (b) the first one to crack the 1000m mark. This judgement could be made, independently of whether the person(s) who constructed and erected the building was aware of these milestones.

It is relatively easy to show that cases where the uniqueness is part of the goal content can be straightforwardly captured by Difficulty. Having any sort of uniqueness as part of your goal content makes success less likely, because it will usually introduce more ways in which you could fail. Take any goal G and add a uniqueness condition, so that the goal becomes something like 'first one to G'. The events that satisfy the success conditions of 'first one to G' form a subset of the events that satisfy G and thus it is plain that success in pursuing the former goal is less

\(^{197}\)Nicholls (1989), 30.
likely.\textsuperscript{198} Robert Scott is a great illustration. Had his goal simply been to lead an expedition to the South Pole there would have been plenty that could have gone wrong. However, adding that he wanted to be the first person to do so meant that his goal now excluded an additional set of possible histories. Among them was the actual history in which he made it to the South Pole, but someone else got there first. Thus, \textit{Difficulty} delivers the highly intuitive result that a goal that involves uniqueness is, ceteris paribus, more difficult than one that does not.

What about cases where uniqueness is not part of the goal content but an achievement just happens to be unique in one way or other? Consider the following case.

\textit{That Mountain}: Chris is on a vacation somewhere in the mountains and he is really intrigued by one of the surrounding peaks. He adopts the goal to climb that mountain. After a week of preparations he sets out, everything goes well, he reaches the peak and returns home safely. As it turns out, nobody has ever climbed that particular mountain before, but Chris does not know this. A few weeks later, Jon is vacationing in the same region. He too is intrigued by that mountain, and he too stages a successful climb to the summit without any regard to its mountaineering history (or lack thereof).

Is Chris' climb more of an achievement than Jon's? I do not think so. Part of the reason is that Chris cannot take credit for the uniqueness of his achievement. It was just luck that he happened to be the first one there. This is a difference from the case where the uniqueness is part of the goal content. If it had been Chris' goal to be the first one to climb that mountain his goal would have been more difficult and his success more of an achievement – other things being equal, that is. It is worth noting here that having goals that involve uniqueness will tend to make things unequal in that it will often have a negative effect on competence. After all, whether or not

\textsuperscript{198}Strictly speaking this does not have to be the case. In the limiting case the set of events that satisfies 'first one to G' could be identical to the set that satisfies G.
someone will reach a given summit before you is something that will often be largely out of your control. I will elaborate on this connection between difficulty and competence in section 6.

But now suppose that Chris later finds out that he was the first one to climb that mountain. He might be thrilled. He might think, moreover, that his climb was more of an achievement than he had previously thought. Not only did he climb that mountain, but he was the first one to do so! Is he wrong? Yes and no. I think that in cases like this the uniqueness of a given achievement serves as an indicator of difficulty. Given the modal nature of difficulty we are never quite able to tell exactly how difficult our goals are. If we find out that a particular goal of ours is unique in one sense or another (e.g. we are the first one to reach this goal), we can take that as an indication that the goal has been a difficult one. That, after all, can explain why it is that nobody has ever reached it before. Moreover, attempting something that has never been done before might be difficult for that very reason. As Roland Huntford puts it somewhat dramatically:

A gulf separates the man who goes first from everyone who comes after. The pathfinder is denied the comfort of knowing that what he is attempting has already been proved possible.\(^\text{199}\)

Of course, difficulty is not the only possible explanation for the uniqueness of a goal. Sometimes the reason why we are the first one to reach a goal of a particular kind is that our goal is just quirky (nobody else ever thought of attempting to crawl around this particular city block backwards on all fours). But in those cases I do not think that the uniqueness of the achievement is a reason to think it is of greater magnitude.\(^\text{200}\)

\(^{199}\)Huntford (1999), 421.

\(^{200}\)It might be worth noting here that the people in the Guinness Book of Records are not in there simply for doing something first, but their feats are also difficult in the sense developed here. You cannot get into the Guinness Book by doing something anyone could do (even if nobody had yet thought to do it).
The intuitive appeal of uniqueness or rarity, then, can be accounted for by **Difficulty**. Uniqueness can be related to difficulty in two different ways. Some goals are difficult in virtue of involving uniqueness; this happens when the uniqueness is part of the goal content. Other goals are difficult independently of their uniqueness, but their uniqueness indicates that they are so. If neither of these connections with difficulty is present (as in the case of quirky goals), uniqueness does not enhance the magnitude of achievements.

This last point generalizes to other intuitive features such as precision or extent. I am not sure that there can be cases in which a more extended or a more precise goal is not, ceteris paribus, more difficult. But if there were such cases, I would suspect that they would provide counterexamples to the importance of the intuitively important dimensions of precision and extent rather than showing that difficulty fails to subsume these aspects of the magnitude of achievements. Consider the old joke that the difference between a rock guitarist and a jazz guitarist is that the former plays three chords in front of a 1000 people, while the latter plays 1000 chords in front of three people. This might be thought to be relatively close to a case where extent and difficulty come apart. If this were so, I would be inclined to think that the jazz guitarist is achieving more (as he is doing something more difficult but less extended). In fact, I do not think that jazz guitarists are achieving more than rock guitarists, but that is because I do not think that the number of chords is a good measure of difficulty. If someone were to convince me that the successes of, say, Justin Bieber involved no difficulty, the fact that they are very extended would not sway me to think of them as much of an achievement.
5.2 Complexity

I began this section by introducing Hurka's notions of extent and precision that, I argued, are subsumed by difficulty. I will close by arguing that another plausible claim by Hurka – that achievements are more impressive when they involve greater complexity – can be so subsumed too. The central notion in Hurka's account of the complexity of achievements is that of *hierarchical dominance*. Hierarchical dominance is a feature of intentional states such as beliefs, intentions, or goals.

An intentional state … is dominant if it has many others subordinate to it in a rational hierarchy, either because it is used to explain them (beliefs), or because they are means to it ([intentions and goals]).

The idea here is that what makes a goal more dominant is that it involves a “complex subordination” of other goals that are held (at least in part) because reaching them would help to achieve the more dominant goal. Here is Hurka comparing chess and checkers.

To achieve checkmate, a grand master adopts a series of substrategies aimed at developing his pawn structure, creating attacking positions, and so on. Each substrategy has further goals subordinate to it, and the result is a more ramified structure than anything needed in checkers.

And on the complexity of Mountain climbing:

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201 Hurka (1993), 116.
202 Ibid., 117.
203 Ibid., 123.
Mountain-climbing requires many steps before feet reach a peak, and because each aspect of a trek – equipment, route selection, conditioning – has component parts, again complex relations among ends are involved.\textsuperscript{204}

One might be tempted to say that we can account for the greater magnitude of achieving complex goals simply by pointing to the fact that a greater number of goals are achieved in the process. That achieving a complex goal involves a greater number of achievements is of course true (and it is important not to overlook this fact). However, according to Hurka this is not enough to account for the greater magnitude of achieving complex goals. He points out that achieving a goal that requires the achievement of six subgoals is, ceteris paribus, more of an achievement than achieving seven unconnected goals. And it is even more of an achievement, if the subgoals in turn are organized in hierarchies themselves (e.g. goals H and I are subgoals to the overall goal G; J and K are subgoals to H; L and M are subgoals to I).\textsuperscript{205}

A further aspect of Hurka's view that needs to be on the table is the role he gives to diversity. The more diverse the subgoals that I am planning to achieve in order to achieve my more general goal, the more complex is my goal:

\begin{quote}
... the best practical endeavours have varied subplans, requiring actions of different types. This variety is often found in politics. Where a reformer may have to master economic theory, negotiate agreements, raise funds, and deliver speeches, all as a means to a final political goal.\textsuperscript{206}
\end{quote}

Hurka's view on the complexity of achievements can be summarized as follows. The magnitude of achievements is (partly) a matter of the complexity of the goal that was achieved. A goal's

\textsuperscript{204}Ibid., 123-4.
\textsuperscript{205}Cf. Ibid., 116-8.
\textsuperscript{206}Ibid., 118.
complexity, in turn, is a function of the subgoals that are intended as means to achieving it. Three features of the subgoals are relevant (1) their number, (2) their diversity and (3) their complexity. In other words, the more, the more complex, and the more diverse subgoals I achieve as means to my goal, the more complex is my goal and the more of an achievement my success (if I do, in fact, achieve my goal via these subgoals).

I think that complexity thus understood makes success unlikely in just the way that is captured by Difficulty. Consider the two features of complexity – number and variety of subgoals. It is fairly easy to see that the number of subgoals can be captured by difficulty. Hurka comes very close to saying so himself:

In one sense, complex activities are difficult because there are many ways they can go wrong: The more elements they contain, the more chances for failure.

In other words, increasing the complexity of a goal by adding to the number of subgoals is to make success less likely. Thus, according to Difficulty, goals that are complex in virtue of having many subgoals are more difficult.

Diversity is not quite as easily captured. Indeed, I do not think that it can be fully done. However, I am not convinced that this is such a great loss. Difficulty can capture the diversity of subgoals contingently. That is to say, it is usually the case that a goal that is more complex in virtue of having diverse subgoals will be more difficult, but this need not be so. It is usually the case, because if there are not only many ways in which things can wrong but many different

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207 There is no circle here when complexity of the subgoal is inserted into the account of complexity of the goal. There is a bit of a regress but this regress is not vicious – it stops, unproblematically, at subgoals that do not have subgoals.

208 The third element (the complexity of the subgoals itself) is ultimately also a matter of number and diversity of its subgoals and so on – up until the point where there are no subgoals.

ways in which things can go wrong, some of these ways are bound to be hard to avoid. In other words, if my goal involves many different kinds of subgoals it rules out a varied set of possible histories and some of them are bound to be nearby histories. But, of course, this does not have to be the case. It is perfectly conceivable that a goal involves a wide variety of subgoals none of which is particularly prone to create problems. Is the achievement of such a goal an achievement of greater magnitude than of a comparable goal with less diverse subgoals? I am not sure. I think that there might be a slight intuitive pull to say yes, but for me this pull is not strong enough to give up on the idea that complexity can be captured by Difficulty and to thereby complicate the measurement of achievements by adding another dimension.

Hurka might disagree. He contrasts the political reformer from above with an assembly line worker.

...a reformer may have to master economic theory, negotiate agreements, raise funds, and deliver speeches, all as a means to a final political goal. … A worker on an assembly line makes many movements as the means to earning his day's pay, but all are essentially the same. All are movings of this lever or pushings of that knob. … The many individual ends in the worker's hierarchy are of few different kinds, making for limited dominance.”

But this comparison relies on a skewed setup. The subgoals of the reformer in this example are themselves highly complex – delivering a speech or raising funds will require the reaching of many subgoals. The pushings and movings of the assembly line worker, on the other hand, are very plain – quite possibly they do not involve any subgoals at all. Thus, it is unclear what our intuitions are responding to in this case; it might be the diversity of the subgoals but it might as

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210 This is not because the standardized agent has particular weaknesses like real people do; but because a varied task is unlikely to contain only simple sub-tasks.

211 Hurka (1993), 118.
well be their complexity. I am inclined, then, to say about diversity what I said about extent and precision at the end of section 4.6. In most cases diversity and difficulty will march in concert. By itself, however, diversity does not increase the magnitude of achievements.

6. Difficulty and Competence

In my discussion of uniqueness, I said that incorporating a uniqueness condition in the content of one's goal typically has two effects: the goal becomes more difficult, and it becomes harder to reach it competently. This point generalizes. Other things being equal, a goal that is more difficult is also bound to be harder to achieve with the same level of competence than a goal that is less difficult. This is an unsurprising result of my accounts of difficulty and competence, and it fits well with everyday experience – if you want to reach a more difficult goal you will have to work harder or rely more on luck. It is worth dwelling on the way in which my accounts of difficulty and competence deliver this result, for this will enable us to see more clearly the plausibility of regarding both of them as dimensions determining the magnitude of achievements.

Both Difficulty and Competence trade on the likelihood of success. According to Difficulty, a reached goal is more of an achievement, the more unlikely the goal was to obtain before the agent acted in pursuit of it. According to Competence, a reached goal is more of an achievement, the more likely the goal was to obtain after the agent acted in pursuit of it. This means that, put together, the two dimensions measure the difference in probability of the goal's obtaining that is made by the agent's activities in pursuit of the goal. That is why, other things being equal, a more difficult goal will be less competently reached than a less difficult one – as long as 'other things' includes the agent's actions. Let me return to the example with which I
started this chapter. If you try to win a race against three equally strong opponents your goal is somewhat difficult, but not as difficult as if you had 30 opponents – the likelihood of success is higher in the former than in the latter case. Now suppose that we keep what you do constant; you dash the 100m in 11 seconds, say. Given your actions the likelihood of success in the four person race is still a lot higher than in the 31 person race – it is more likely that one of 30 people will have been faster than that one of three was. Thus, your victory in the four person race is more competently reached than in the 31 person race. This means that it is ultimately your actions that determine how much of an achievement it is when you reach a goal. How highly you set your goal is less of a factor for, keeping your actions fixed, a gain in difficulty will be countered by a loss in competence and vice versa. This picture of difficulty and competence as interlocking dimensions of the magnitude of achievements is an extremely attractive one. Athletes often say that they need to play well so as to 'give themselves a chance'. If my arguments are correct, this expression lines up perfectly with two important dimensions of achievement. To give yourself a chance is to improve the likelihood of success. And the degree to which you do this, is a measure of how much of an achievement it is when you succeed.
Chapter 4: Effort

My proudest moments in life – getting a full scholarship to go from South Africa to Stanford University, being selected as a Rhodes Scholar national finalist, winning a bronze medal for table tennis at the Maccabiah Games in Israel, known as the Jewish Olympics – have all come through hard work, with no shortcuts. Goldman Sachs today has become too much about shortcuts and not enough about achievement. It just doesn't feel right to me anymore.212

1. Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that there is an agent-neutral dimension to the magnitude of achievements. In other words, if two agents reach the same goal with the same degree of competence there is one dimension along which their achievements are of equal magnitude. It must be admitted, however, that magnitude also seems to have an agent-relative dimension. Swimming 1000 meters is more of an achievement for a third grader than for Michael Phelps; walking to the grocery store is more of an achievement for my aunt who has Parkinson than for me; and proving a mathematical theorem would be more of achievement for me than for John Nash. In this chapter, I develop the idea that all these differences can be accounted for by the notion of effort. This could be done under the label of difficulty – for, as we have seen in chapter

212Smith (2012).
3 (section 3.2), one of the things that we mean when saying that something is difficult is that it requires (lots of) effort. As I used 'difficulty' in the last chapter to describe the different notion of unlikelihood of success, however, I think it better to avoid terminological confusion and not use the same term again. Moreover, I do not think that anything is lost when speaking directly in terms of effort and how it affects the magnitude of achievements rather than first analyzing difficulty in terms of effort, and then achievements in terms of difficulty.

In the next section, I will argue that effort does in fact provide a way to capture the thought that there is something agent-relative about the magnitude of achievements. In section 3, I dispel some ambiguities in the everyday notion of effort and develop a conception of effort as the deliberate allocation of a percentage of available resources. In section 4, I argue that it is this form of effort that captures the agent-relative dimension of the magnitude of achievements, while another notion of effort (roughly: the total amount of resources allocated to a task) also plays a role but this is subsumed by the dimension of competence as developed in chapter 2. In sections 5 and 6, I discuss two puzzles about my view as developed here.

Before I begin, let me make a caveat. I said, in the prologue to this part that, when examining claims about the 'greatness' of achievements, we should try to keep our intuitions about an achievement's magnitude apart from those about its value. Personally, I find this a bit harder to do when thinking about effort than when thinking about competence and difficulty. I am confident that the latter two are dimensions in the magnitude of achievements regardless of what their status may be with regards to value. With effort, on the other hand, I am not quite so sure. I am confident that more effort makes for greater achievements. I am not quite so sure whether it makes for events that are 'more of an achievement'. Now that may just be me and I will not let this deter me from doing the best I can to provide an account of effort as a dimension
of magnitude. I register the concern here for two reasons. First, there might be readers who have the same worry. Second, this indeterminacy of intuition is mirrored by a theoretical concern as to whether effort makes a difference to the value that events have *qua* achievements. This is an issue I will return to in chapter 5 (section 3.2).

2. The Importance of Effort

Gwen Bradford and Simon Keller both put effort front and centre in their accounts of the magnitude of achievements.\(^{213}\) And that reaching a goal through a lot of effort enhances one's achievement can almost seem like a platitude. Effort certainly enhances some of the psychological perks of achieving. Everyone knows how satisfying it is to finish a day of successful hard work; even the food tastes better after that. While this last phenomenon is probably partly explained by increased desire for food due to physical or mental exertion, the general feeling of satisfaction mirrors an attitude that we take towards the achievement of others. We admire it when people achieve their goals by means of hard work. And so it is only consistent that we should feel satisfaction after reaching a goal through intense effort ourselves.

There is a bit of a complication here in that there appear to be circumstances in which this does not hold. In some circumstances we seem to have more esteem for people who reach their goals effortlessly. Thinking back to college, for example, there was a general sense that doing well was more admirable when done without much effort. But this phenomenon does not, to my mind, undermine the claim that generally we judge effort to enhance achievement. The reason why effortless achievement is sometimes regarded more highly is simply that success with low effort is usually taken as an indication for a high level of capability. This is particularly plausible

when the success is sustained, thus making luck a less likely explanation.\textsuperscript{214} I submit that, when we admire effortless achievement, we are not so much evaluating the achievement but the capabilities of the achiever. Once this is distinguished from the concept of the achievement itself, it becomes clear that achieving the same result with the same level of competence is actually more of an achievement for the person with less capability who overcomes that deficit through effort.\textsuperscript{215}

Another data point is the respect we feel for people who show great persistence in the pursuit of their goals. If this phenomenon was limited to cases where we judge the goal in question to be worthwhile in itself, we might explain it by saying that we admire the person for their virtue. People who continuously put great efforts into helping the poor would be an example of that. And certainly we do (and should) admire the virtue of people who keep working towards valuable goals. But this is not the whole story. We also admire the persistence of people who continue to pour great efforts into reaching their goals even when these are in themselves morally trivial. Think of someone who is trying to learn a new skill that they have not much talent for, or to reach a trivial personal best in some kind of amateur athletic endeavour. Of course, there is always the danger that a pursuit like this carries too high a cost in terms of missed opportunities to do something else. But looked at by itself it seems that such persistence is admirable; and a good explanation for that is that success that is the result of a lot of effort is a considerable achievement.

So effort seems important for the magnitude of achievements. A second way of making this plausible is to show that thinking about effort helps to capture the sense that the magnitude

\textsuperscript{214}Cf. Weiner (1974).

\textsuperscript{215}It is worth noting here that, according to John Nicholls, effortless achievement is valued in competitive contexts – where it makes sense that we would want to be like the people who do not need to put in as much effort. Whereas in non-competitive settings satisfaction with success is higher when effort is required. Cf. Nicholls (1989), chapter 6.
of achievements is partly an agent-relative concept. Many of the cases that prompt us to think that the magnitude of achievements is agent-relative are cases in which two people achieve a similar result but one of them has to put in a lot more effort. Two of the examples I started this chapter with are of that kind. Swimming 1000 meters does not require much effort from a world class swimmer, nor do I have to exert myself to reach the grocery store. By contrast, the third-grader and my aunt with her disability have to put in a lot of effort to reach these respective results. The sense that reaching these results is more of an achievement for them can be straightforwardly explained if we say that, ceteris paribus, more effort means more considerable achievement.

Other cases are less clear. Take the example of proving some simple mathematical theorem. I said that doing so would be more of an achievement for me than for John Nash. We can spell out the scenario in ways in which this too is explained by differences in effort. Given that my mathematical instincts are not as good as Nash's, I am likely to have many more false starts, and when I eventually get on the right track it will take me a while to recognize this and work through all the steps. If this is what happens, my proving the theorem being more of an achievement than Nash's can, again, be explained by my putting in more effort. But what if I sit down, happen to have an idea that works right away, and work through the proof with the same amount of effort as Nash (whose greater ease in working through the proof is balanced by making one false start)? Is there not some temptation to think that the proof was still more an achievement for me than it was for him? If we are inclined to think this, we might wonder whether we should look to the fact that Nash was more likely to complete the proof than me, i.e. whether agent-relative u-difficulty is important here. This temptation should be resisted.
First, it is worth repeating that in some cases the conception of difficulty developed in the last chapter accounts for differences in the magnitude of the achievements between two agents who put in equal effort to reach seemingly similar goals. The word 'seemingly' in the last sentence is key, for the account developed in chapter 3 makes the difficulty of the goal partly a function of how an agent is situated with regard to the goal. For example, a white middle class boy with parents who are academics is situated in a way that makes obtaining a PhD a much less difficult goal for him than for a shepherd's daughter in the middle east. If the girl is so gifted that she reaches that goal without putting in more effort than the boy, her achievement is more considerable despite equal effort.

However, that situation is quite different from the one comparing the mathematical achievements of Nash and myself. The different chances of success in the latter case are not due to position but to talent. And, I argued, having more talent does not diminish the difficulty of a goal (that is why my notion of difficulty is agent-neutral). The question is whether there is a sense in which reaching a goal is more of an achievement simply in virtue of the agent having less talent. And the answer to this is no; or rather, it is so only if the lack of talent was overcome in the right way, namely by putting in more effort. In the case of Nash and myself I did not overcome my lack of talent through hard work, I overcame it through luck. And we should not say that reaching a goal is more of an achievement when there was more luck involved.

When having to choose between (a) denying that Nash's achievement in the above scenario is lesser than mine, or (b) claiming that luck is systematically achievement enhancing,
the choice is clear: (b) is simply too implausible. Moreover, once we make explicit that the way that I overcome the lack of talent in this scenario is via luck, the temptation to say that my achievement was more considerable all but disappears. What is left of it may be explained by pointing out that I am likely to attach more importance to, or feel more satisfaction about, this particular achievement than Nash. And to explain this, we do not need to turn to the magnitude of the achievement. I might be happy because, knowing my mathematical talents, I expected having to put in more effort than I did. Alternatively, being unsure about my talents, I might conclude that I am actually quite gifted and take satisfaction in that thought. Finally, Nash's appreciation of trivial mathematical achievements may have been dulled as they are routinely part of his life, while the same is not true for me. This explains why I would attach more importance to the achievement, but is no reason to think that it is actually more of an achievement (compare the discussion of Dr. Bob and Dr. Bill in chapter 3).

There is good reason, then, to think that effort is a factor in the magnitude of achievements. To say that a goal that was reached through more effort rather than less is more of an achievement is plausible in its own right. Saying this, moreover, produces a plausible interpretation of the idea that one dimension of the magnitude of achievements is agent-relative, i.e. that reaching goals of equal (agent-neutral) difficulty can be more of an achievement for one agent than for another.

3. What the Eff?

I agree with Bradford (and Keller) that effort is correlated with the magnitude of achievement. However, I disagree with Bradford when it comes to what else needs to be said about this. She
engages in a long discussion about the amounts and patterns of effort that are necessary to establish difficulty and, via difficulty, achievement.\textsuperscript{217} I do not think that this discussion, though interesting and illuminating as a discussion of difficulty, is necessary for an account of the magnitude of achievement. This is partly because much of that discussion is premised on the notion that there are thresholds along the dimension of effort that make a difference for the magnitude of achievements, and I have argued against that view above. On the other hand, Bradford does not think that she needs to say anything about the nature of effort.

\begin{quote}
I gather that effort is familiar to everyone. The phenomenon of exerting effort is something that virtually everyone experiences every day: from something as basic and mundane as getting out of bed in the morning to more elaborate and intensive ventures, such as running a business, or completing a marathon (you may be exerting effort right now as you force yourself to read my dissertation!). Being philosophers, our impulse is to analyze everything that comes our way. Yet I will take effort as \textit{primitive}. I'll remain neutral as to whether or not it actually \textit{is} a primitive. … So I will proceed on the assumption that effort is primitive, and with the hope that nothing I go on to say would be undermined by a further analysis.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

I think that, contrary to Bradford's hope, some of her later claims do depend on a particular and controversial way of understanding effort. Thus, it would be important for her to answer the question as to what exactly she wants to measure when she proposes the \textit{eff} as a unit of the amount of effort (hence the title of this section).\textsuperscript{219} I think ordinary usage of the term 'effort' ranges over different phenomena which results in its eliciting conflicting intuitions. Thus, if effort is to play an important role for the analysis of achievement (or any other concept), it is

\textsuperscript{217}Bradford (2010), 58-91.
\textsuperscript{218}Ibid., 57-8.
\textsuperscript{219}Cf. Ibid., 62.
necessary to clarify what exactly one means by 'effort'. This is not to pick on Bradford. An equally unanalyzed notion of effort is used by numerous authors engaged in discussing a variety of concepts including achievement, desert, attention and competence.220

3.1 Effort as Dedication of Resources

In this and the following two sections I discuss scenarios that show that there are (at least) three ambiguities in the use of 'effort'. The first two ambiguities can be dispelled. The last one, however, points to the need to distinguish two concepts of effort. Consider first

A Tale of Two Brothers: Kyle and Cody are brothers. Cody is a lumberjack and Kyle a philosopher. When Cody gets home at night, he is tired. He thinks that his job requires a lot of effort, while his brother gets to just sit around all day. When Kyle gets home at night, he is tired. He thinks that his job requires a lot of effort, while his brother gets to just mindlessly cut down trees.

Kyle and Cody are thinking about different kinds of effort; mental and physical effort respectively. And insofar as each is thinking about one of these kinds only, they are each correct to think that they are exerting a lot more effort than the other. This, however, does not strike me as a deep conceptual difference. Both physical and mental effort involve the intentional employment of limited resources that are in some sense internal to, or part of, the agent. The difference between Kyle and Cody lies simply in what kind of resources they are using up. I do not wish to pretend to know any of the relevant science here, but we can imagine that Cody's job involves burning a lot more calories than Kyle's, while the latter is using up all of his mental

capacities with little room for attending to anything but his work (it hardly needs saying that usually these two forms of effort are exerted in concert).

We may or may not find that ultimately mental and physical effort can be reduced to a single notion of effort. That would depend on whether there is some meaningful way in which we can speak of an amount of mental resources as equivalent to some amount of physical resources. But this is not something we need to worry too much about in the current context. As long as we accept that each form of effort is a factor in the magnitude of achievements, it does not matter much whether we treat them as two different factors or as one factor. And the contribution each makes to the magnitude of achievements can even be used as a way of converting one form of effort into the other. For example, we might say that the mental effort Kyle needs to exert to write a book contributes more to the magnitude of his achievement than the physical effort Cody exerts when carrying his chainsaw to the truck. So, the fact that there are these different kinds of effort does not pose much of a problem for anyone who wants to employ the notion of effort without further analysis. To put in effort is to dedicate certain kinds of resources to a task. That there are different kinds of such resources is not a deep conceptual problem.

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221 From rough ordinal comparisons like that we might be able to work our way up to fairly precise comparisons. We might find that some amount of physical effort is on a par with some amount of mental effort (that is to say neither is more effortful nor are they equally effortful) but that would still not inhibit our ability to speak meaningfully about quantities of effort in general. Cf. Chang (1997), introduction.

222 Bradford (2010), 59-60. That worry is somewhat analogous to a worry that is sometimes expressed in discussions of hedonism, where it is said that the pleasure of smoking a cigar cannot be compared with the pleasure of hearing a symphony. Cf. Brentano (1889), 28; for discussion cf. Feldman (2004), 45-9.
3.2 Forcing Oneself

Consider next

**Math Test:** Billy and Liz are classmates in elementary school. They are both equally gifted when it comes to maths and right now they are taking a test that is not very hard but does require them to focus for 15 minutes. Billy is fascinated by math and dives right into the test. Liz, on the other hand, does not really like math. While completing the test, she is constantly tempted to think about the novel that she is reading for her English class. Both Liz and Billy score 90% on the test. Since they are equally gifted and achieved the same result, their teacher concludes that they must have put in equal effort. However, Liz, but not Billy, is exhausted after the test.

In **Math Test** we encounter some more serious problems. The fact that Liz is exhausted after the test seems to indicate that she exerted more effort than Billy. At the same time there seems nothing wrong with the teacher's reasoning that equal ability and equal results on an equal task indicate equal effort on part of the students. The same ambiguity can be observed in what Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in their work on flow states in sport, have termed *the apparent paradox of effortless effort*.\(^{223}\)

Sport involves varying degrees of physical effort, and all sports lift the level of effort above average. To perform ... requires a commitment of mental and physical energies to the task. Athletes are pleasantly surprised, when, instead of working harder, they feel they are working more easily to achieve high standards of performance during flow.\(^{224}\) ... And it is this process, of the body, and mind

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\(^{223}\) Jackson/Csikszentmihalyi (1999), 122.

\(^{224}\) Ibid., 75.
performing at the limits of their capacity and yet doing so effortlessly, that

eventually produces total absorption, or the merging of action and awareness.²²⁵

What both the apparent paradox of effortless effort and Math Test point to is that sometimes when we judge whether an activity was effortful we do not just look at how many resources (physical or mental) we have used, but also at whether or not we had to force ourselves to do so. In Math Test Billy and Liz, being equally gifted, both have to dedicate the same amount of mental resources in order to score 90% on the test. But only Liz has to force herself to do so. That is why she is exhausted afterwards. Billy, on the other hand, is in flow (or something close to it), he does not need to force himself at all – in that sense his taking the test is effortless. Nevertheless, he spent just as many mental resources on the task as Liz – and in that sense his taking the test was effortful. The same applies to the athletes Jackson and Csikszentmihaly describe. In one sense they are exerting enormous effort in virtue of dedicating mental and physical resources to their performance. In another sense, they do not exert effort at all – they are not forcing themselves.

We might think, then, that what explains the apparent paradox of effortless effort is that there are two different concepts of effort: dedicating resources and forcing oneself. If that was right, authors using the notion of effort should clarify which of these they are using. I think it is true that both of these notions affect our intuitions about effort. However, I do not think that forcing oneself actually latches onto a distinct concept of effort.²²⁶

Why does Liz have to force herself to focus on her math test? What is the difference between Liz on the one hand, and athletes in flow and Billy on the other? The difference is that

²²⁵Ibid., 19. Emphasis added.

²²⁶Neither do Jackson/Csikszentmihaly: “In fact a great deal of effort is expended but because the athlete is not forcing her actions, it can seem as though the performance is proceeding spontaneously.” Ibid., 74. Emphasis added.
Liz is being tempted to do something else, whereas Billy and the athletes are not. For whatever reason, thoughts about her novel keep becoming salient in Liz' consciousness during the test. She constantly has to force herself not to give in to the temptation to follow these thoughts instead of using her mental energy to focus on the math task. But, of course, fighting temptation is a mental task itself. Thus, in order to exert an equal amount of effort as Billy on the math test, Liz needs to accomplish the *further task* of holding temptation in check. If this is right, we should not say that Liz is exerting a different kind of effort – the forcing-oneself kind – in addition to the mental effort both her and Billy are exerting. Rather, Liz is exerting more of the same kind of effort, because she is actually pursuing a more difficult (or an additional) goal.

Imagine that you and I are each trying to carry a big TV out of our respective living rooms. We are both equally strong, the TVs are equally heavy, we are equally well rested, and the distance we have to carry the TV is the same. The only difference is that you have an eight year old son who is unhappy with the idea of getting rid of the TV, and is trying to pull you and the TV back into the living room. Chances are you are going to spend more effort on the task than me. But that is not because you have to exert a different kind of effort in addition to the physical effort we are both exerting – the forcing-your-son kind. Forcing your son to let you walk out is just an additional task and thus your goal is more difficult than mine. Of course, there is a difference between this case and the Billy and Liz case. The additional task in your case is the result of factors external to you, while the the additional challenge Liz faces is created internally. But I do not see why that should matter. Imagine a variation of *Math Test* in which some cruel experimenter shows Liz her favourite candy bar every three minutes during the test. Now the temptation (the additional mental task) is created externally, but this does not seem to change anything about the situation in terms of effort.

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I conclude that forcing oneself is not the hallmark of a second kind of effort (in addition to the resource dedication kind introduced above). Instead, having to force oneself is the mental task of fighting of tempting distractions. Performing this mental task requires resources and is thus effortful. Because we rarely find ourselves so locked into a particular activity that we are oblivious to tempting distractions, the task of fighting them is a constant companion to effortful activity. That explains why we might come to regard it as a necessary condition for effort and are prone to describe flow states as effortless. However, flow states are not effortless; they are free of salient tempting distractions. The *apparent paradox of effortless effort* would be more accurately described as the (not even apparently paradoxical) phenomenon of *temptationless effort*. On a conceptual level, then, we can put the worry about forcing oneself to rest. However, we need to be careful when mining our intuitions about effort. The absence of forcing oneself does not necessarily mean the absence of effort – it just indicates that the task is, in one respect, easier than it could be.

### 3.3 Percentage and Absolute Amount

The following scenario is adapted from an example Bradford gives.

_Fairy Godmother_: Betty and Steph are running buddies. Betty is participating in a 10k track race, while Steph is cheering her on from the sidelines. Ten minutes into her run, unbeknownst to Betty, the Fairy Godmother of Abilities magically endows her with the capacity to exert far more effort than ever before – 10 times her original max. The Fairy Godmother endows Betty with this ability for five minutes, and then reduces her max back to its original level. … But Betty continues to exert intense eff-minutes at the same rate even during this interlude. The increase in capacity is
completely unperceived by her. Steph, however, is in the know about the activities of the Fairy Godmother. Steph is cheering Betty on to try harder, but Betty signals that she is trying as hard as she can. At first Steph accepts that, but once the magic has been worked, she starts yelling again, telling Betty that she can try harder now. Betty does not react to that and falls just short of beating her previous personal best. Steph comments that this is, because during those magical five minutes she did not put in enough effort. Betty replies that she was working just as hard during those five minutes as during the rest of the race. Steph is unmoved. She claims that to exert full effort means to make the most of your abilities. And during the five minutes when Betty's ability to exert effort was souped up, she did not make the most of this ability.

I believe that this dispute between Betty and Steph is the result of them using two genuinely different notions of effort. Betty would probably agree with the following passage from Bradford.

Now it's possible that there is a universal maximum effort for all human beings – no one could ever exert more than this maximum, and everyone is capable of it. … But it seems far more likely that different people are capable of exerting different maximum levels of intense effort. It just seems to be true that some people can try harder than others. Steph (her role in the scenario being my addition to Bradford's story) would beg to differ. On her understanding of effort there has to be a 'universal maximum effort for all human beings'.

Before I can describe the two different notions at play here, however, we need to set aside one possible but misleading interpretation of the phrase 'different people are capable of exerting

\[^{228}\text{Cf. Bradford (2010), 78-9. If you think that this scenario involves a conceptual confusion, hold that thought. I will address this worry below.}

\[^{229}\text{Ibid., 76-7.}\]
different levels of intense effort'. It would be tempting, for example, to say that someone with ADD is capable of exerting less effort while reading a book than someone without that affliction. However, it is important to keep in mind the lesson from *Math Test*. If someone with ADD is trying to read a book, they are actually engaging in a much more difficult task than someone else who is trying to read the same book. For someone with ADD all kinds of tempting distractions are going to become salient and, if they are to complete the task of reading, they will have to fight off these temptations, which is going to require a lot of their mental resources. Thus, it is true that they are less capable of exerting effort on the task of reading the book, but that is because they are simultaneously attempting another task. A case like that does not show that some people are actually capable of exerting more effort any more than the TV carrying case in the last section. There too, it is true that you are capable of exerting less effort in carrying your TV than I am, but this is due just to the fact that some of your efforts are directed towards the task of fighting off your belligerent son.

With that out of the way, we can ask whether it really does seem true, as Bradford claims, that 'some people can try harder than others'. What would it mean for that to be true? I think it would have to mean that some people simply have more resources at their disposal than others. And it does seem to be true that some people have more mental and/or physical resources than others. There is, then, a notion of effort that makes it true that some people can exert more of it than others. According to this understanding the maximum capacity of effort for a given person is the amount of internal (physical and mental) resources at that person's disposal. This is the notion of effort that Betty has in mind.

However, there is also another notion of effort. This notion of effort is familiar from discussions about distributive justice. A common form of luck egalitarianism claims that wages
should be distributed according to effort. And the underlying reason for that suggestion is that our effort level is something that we have control over and can claim credit for. For an example of this position take the following quote from Wojciech Sadurski.

> Two main alternative measures of desert are usually suggested: effort or objective contribution. It should be clear from the preceding remarks that I consider effort to be the principal criterion of desert, mainly because 'contribution' or 'success' reflect, among other things, factors which are beyond our control and thus for which we cannot claim any credit. \(^{230}\) … [This stance entails] the irrelevance of natural abilities to desert. \(^{231}\)

The merits of this kind of luck-egalitarian position in debates about distributive justice need not concern us here. What is relevant for my current purposes, however, is that this position would be internally unstable if it employed the notion of effort developed so far. If, as this notion implies, my effort level is simply a matter of how many resources I employed in a given task and some people happen to have more resources than others, effort fails the luck-egalitarian test for a desert base. \(^{232}\) Our maximum effort level would be just another 'factor beyond our control'.

Another way of seeing that there are two different notions of effort at play here is that from a luck-egalitarian point of view the fairy godmother of abilities in Bradford's scenario seems to be out of her element. She trades in abilities, after all, and abilities and effort are two very different things. As luck-egalitarians see it, abilities are resources whereas effort is the degree to which resources are put to use. In that sense *Fairy Godmother* is conceptually confused. It is impossible to increase the capacity to exert effort. Instead, exerting effort to

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\(^{230}\) Sadurski (1985), 134.

\(^{231}\) Ibid., 150.

degree $X$ just is to make use of some other capacity to degree $X$. What happens when the fairy godmother is supposedly increasing Betty's capacity to exert effort must be this: the fairy godmother makes additional physical or mental resources available to Betty. Since Betty does not know this, she continues to use just as many resources as before. In the sense in which effort simply consists in the dedication of these kinds of resources to a task she is working just as hard as before. However, she is now using a smaller part of her available resources. This is what Steph has in mind when she reproaches her for not trying hard enough. And this is also the notion that luck-egalitarians have in mind. What part, or percentage, of the resources available to a person they dedicate to their work should determine their wage, because it is that – not the absolute amount of resources available to them – which is sufficiently controlled by the agent. According to this second notion of effort, it is a matter of conceptual truth that every person's maximum level of effort is equal. One's effort level is the percentage of one's internal resources (physical and mental) that one employs to a given task. No matter how many resources one may have, the maximum level will be 100%.

I think that the following analogy illustrates the difference between the two concepts of effort quite nicely.

*Financial Effort*: Donald Trump's goal is that candidate A will win the election. Ronald Chump, on the hand, backs candidate B. Both men think that donating money to a Super PAC associated with their candidate is the only way in which they can influence the election and thus they both set out to make a 'financial effort' to bring about their respective goals. Trump makes a series of donations totalling 31 million dollars – which equals 1\% of his net worth. Chump also makes a series of donations, his totalling 2500 dollars – which equals 50\% of his net worth.
In one sense, Trump has made a tremendous financial effort, whereas Chump's effort is sizeable but nowhere near Trump's. But, of course, Trump has donated just one percent of his net worth to the Super PAC, whereas Chump has donated 50% of his. In this sense, Chump has made a much greater financial effort than Trump. These days the differences between people when it comes to finances are much more dramatic than when it comes to physical and mental resources. However, the same two notions of effort apply in both cases. Effort can mean either the total amount of internal resources dedicated to a task, or the percentage of available resources dedicated to a task. In the first sense, Bradford is right to say that 'some people can try harder than others'; in the second sense this is not only false, but necessarily so.

4. Effort and Achievement

I began this chapter by suggesting that effort is one of the factors that determine the magnitude of achievements. But I have now argued that there are two different notions of effort. Let us call them 'effort (p)' (for percentage) and 'effort (a)' (for absolute amount) respectively. This raises the question which kind of effort is the one that is relevant for the magnitude of achievements. The answer to this question is that they both are, but in different ways.

One role that effort plays in determining the magnitude of achievements is that it is a factor in determining the level of competence of the process by which the goal is reached. Recall that I conceptualized competence as, roughly, the likelihood of success given the agent's actions. Now, how likely the agent is to reach her goal is partly a function of how much effort she exerted. To make this idea more vivid consider the following simplified way of thinking about actions. An agent's actions generally involve a combination of effort and skill and this
combination (together with facts about the goal) determines the likelihood of success. As a general rule skill and effort can to some degree be substituted for each other; a less skilled agent can make up for her lack of talent with great effort, while a lazy agent may compensate his lack of effort through great skill. Keeping skill-level constant, then, we should generally expect a correlation between effort and likelihood of success, i.e. competence. And that means that effort, via competence, has an achievement-enhancing effect. Now, it is pretty clear that this role can be played only by effort (a). When one of two equally skilled agents puts in extra effort (i.e. resources) they will generally be more likely to be successful, and that is so independent of how much effort they could have put in. Potential additional resources simply have no bearing on the likelihood of success as long as they remain untapped. Thus, it is effort (a) that enhances achievement via enhancing competence.

That effort enhances competence, however, does not account for the kind of agent-relativity we are concerned with in this chapter. While a third-grader's swimming of 1000 meters is more effortful than Michael Phelps', this extra effort leads to (at best) equal competence. The sense that the extra effort also makes for a more significant achievement is not captured by the observations made in the last paragraph. If we accept that more effort makes for more achievement even if competence and difficulty are held constant, we have to focus on effort (p). Effort (p) is the notion that captures how hard it was for the particular agent in question to reach their goal with a given level of competence. And it is this notion that accounts for the agent-relative aspect of the magnitude of achievements.
5. Intensity and Duration

The idea of conceptualizing effort as a percentage of resources dedicated to a task comes with the following complication: a percentage of what? Above I spoke of ‘available resources’, but it is not clear how to calculate those. There is no such problem for effort (a). When we say that effort is simply the amount of resources dedicated to a task we can, in principle, simply calculate that amount by multiplying the average intensity level during a task (how many resources are on average being used up at any moment during the task) with the time the task is being engaged in. But for effort (p) we need to compare that amount to some conception of available resources. How are we to think about this latter notion?

The puzzle can best be seen by focusing on duration. Clearly, the longer a period we take into consideration, the more resources will be available. So we need to decide how long a period we should use for our comparison. One possibility would be to look only at the moment at which effort was the most intense. But this is clearly not right. If Pedro works for 10 hours at half his maximum possible intensity, and Amir works for one hour at 60% of his maximum intensity, it would clearly be wrong to say that Amir put in more effort (p). Alternatively, we might take into account all and only those times during which the agent acted in pursuit of the goal. If, for example, I reached a goal by working with half my maximum intensity for an hour on Monday and then with 90% of my maximum intensity for an hour on Wednesday, we would say that my effort level in reaching this goal was 70%. But this, too, seems wrong; for on this picture duration would not matter at all. Consider that my neighbour Andreou worked two hours on Monday at half his maximum intensity and then two hours on Wednesday at 90%. According to the current picture, we would have to say that he did not put in more effort (p) than I did which seems absurd. A third option would be to say that what counts is the interval between adopting
the goal and reaching it. This would take care of the case of me and my neighbour, but it gives undue prominence to someone who takes fewer breaks. Say that my other neighbour, Calvin, works for two hours at half his maximum intensity on Monday and then another two hours at 90% on Thursday. It does not seem right to say that he worked less hard than Andreou simply because he did his second shift one day later.

I propose that the duration we should focus on is the interval between adopting the goal and the last moment when it is possible to reach the goal. What this latter moment is will be dictated either by the goal content, or by particular events that are important for the goal. For an example of the former, think back to the *Young Millionaire* scenarios from chapter 2. Here the goals included a definite deadline (the young men wanted to be millionaires before their 24th birthdays). For an example of the latter, imagine someone having the goal of gaining recognition from some other person. This goal can only be reached for long as the second person is alive. The limiting case of a deadline being provided by circumstances is the death of the agent herself. Whenever there is nothing else limiting the amount of time the agent has to reach a goal, the time interval we should focus on in calculating effort (p) is the time between the adoption of the goal and the agent's death.

The obvious advantage of this suggestion is that it provides a very natural rendering of the phrase 'available resources'. If the agent wants to reach her goal, she can try from the moment she adopts the goal up to the last moment when it is possible that the goal will be reached. If she does not do enough in the early stages or things go badly, the goal might become impossible before the deadline that is dictated by the goal content (or the circumstances) at its conception. Cases like this might be quite difficult to handle for an account that wanted to extend something like my model to give an account of (valuable) failure. For my current purposes I can ignore such cases, as they are not even in the market for being achievements.
about their case, namely that they have put in equal effort and that their achievements are, in that respect, on a par.

A problem arises though if their goals come with different deadlines. Say that Andreou's goal was to be done by Friday, while Calvin had given himself until Sunday (each adopted the goal on Monday morning). Now my proposed view says that Andreou exerted more effort (p) than Calvin, because the interval he had to complete the task was shorter and, thus, he had fewer resources available of which, in turn, he used a larger share. While it may seem counterintuitive, I think that this is actually the right result. Andreou's goal required him to use up a larger share of the resources available to him up to the time he had given himself, and, partly in virtue of this fact, his achievement seems a little more considerable than Calvin's. A related worry would be that people who die young get extra amounts of effort (p) for free, as it were, because their available resources (against which the resources they actually exert are measured) are reduced by their untimely death. Again, however, this seems right to me. Someone who achieved some temporally open ended goal while dying at 30 has in one sense achieved more than someone who achieved the same goal while living a few decades longer. The notion that effort (p) is achievement-enhancing seems to me to be closely related to the idea that an event becomes more of an achievement if the agent 'puts more of herself into it'. And if someone spends the same amount of effort (a) in a life that is short as someone else whose life is long, the former person has 'put more of herself' into her project than the latter. Thus, I conclude that the current suggestion can pass muster: an agent's effort (p) in pursuing a goal is equal to the percentage of

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\[234\] Insofar as this reply fails to convince, it is worth pointing out that the way the scenario is described invites the interpretation that at some point Calvin set himself a new goal of finishing on Thursday (when he did). But this would, of course, change the situation to one in which he exerted just as much effort (p) as Andreou.


\[236\] This suggests that effort (p) is a plausible partial measure of what I will call, in chapter 5, conative commitment.
possible effort (a) that he did exert; 'possible effort (a)', in turn, is to be understood as the maximal amount of effort (a) that the agent could have exerted between adopting the goal and the latest point when the goal could be realized.

6. Wasted Effort

There is one last question about effort that needs our attention. Suppose that Ahmed and Boris are both reaching similarly difficult goals with similar levels of competence, but that Ahmed expends a lot more effort in the process than Boris. According to all I have said so far, Ahmed's success is more of an achievement than Boris'. Suppose further, however, that the reason Ahmed expended more effort was that he engaged in some of the following behaviour: at some point in the process he continued with a strategy that he had already decided was not going to work; at another time he put in very intense effort when less effort would have been sufficient; at yet another time he used an effort intensive trial and error strategy, instead of investing a few minutes to figure out a the best way to proceed; and so on. The question is whether only productive effort, i.e. effort that was really needed, should count towards the magnitude of achievement. If some efforts are not needed maybe they should not count towards the magnitude of achievements. Such efforts would be wasted.

The position that every bit of effort in pursuit of the goal should count has the attraction of simplicity. Adopting it would save us the task of devising a criterion for distinguishing productive from wasted effort. Nevertheless, we should reject this position. Expending more effort than is needed does not (always) increase one's achievement. This statement needs to be qualified. People who exert more effort than is necessary to achieve a particular goal will often

\[237\] I borrow the phrase 'productive effort' with this meaning from Keller (2004).
do so because they have adopted a further goal that exceeds the original one. For example, they might adopt the goal of finishing a task faster than originally planned, or they might try to do a better job than their original goal prescribed. This may or may not be the result of the recognition that they have more resources available than necessary to accomplish the original goal. An agent in a case like this achieves more than another who expends less effort and reaches only the original goal. But this is because the former achieved further (or more difficult) goals; not because her achievement of the original goal involved more effort. In fact, one may even think that exerting unnecessary effort diminishes an achievement. Is it not more of an achievement to reach a goal with the least amount of effort needed, rather than to hassle unnecessarily? Here, again, we need to be careful not to overlook the achievement of a further goal. An agent might have the goal to accomplish a task with the least amount of effort possible (many students appear to have goals of that type), in which case it is an achievement when she does so. But, again, this does not have an impact on the magnitude of the achievement of the original goal itself.

Some efforts, then, make no difference to the magnitude of achievements. What counts is necessary effort. But how are we to distinguish wasted from productive effort? One way of doing this – we may call it 'the objective view about wasted effort' – would go something like this. Take the combination of the goal and the agent (with all her attributes) and determine what the least amount of effort is that she would have to exert to reach the goal with the level of competence that she did. This is the amount of productive effort for that particular agent to reach that particular goal with that particular level of competence. There is certainly a sense in which this is the level of effort that was productive, whereas anything more than that would be wasted. There are, however, significant problems with the suggestion.
The objective view about wasted effort requires answers to some difficult questions about the agent. In order to preserve the agent-relativity of the effort dimension, it is imperative that the amount of effort that is deemed productive is the amount that the particular agent in question would have needed to expend – hence my parenthetical remark in the last paragraph that we need to think about the agent ‘with all her attributes’. This, however, threatens to trivialize the notion of productive effort. For, we might think, if we truly consider all of the agent's attributes, she could not but have exerted the exact amount of effort that she actually did. Even if we stop short of this kind of determinism, we face uncomfortable questions. Consider some of Ahmed's behaviours from above. Maybe trial and error is Ahmed's standard modus operandi. If so, is it clear that there is a sense in which he could have saved effort by concocting the best strategy beforehand? Or maybe Ahmed is just the kind of guy who always goes all out when doing anything. If so, is there a real sense in which he could have reached the goal with less effort? These are not rhetorical questions. They are hard questions and an account like the objective view about wasted effort needs to answer them.

I am not sure how an objective account would answer such questions. But it would be important to do it in a way that is not in tension with the motivation behind considering effort an important dimension in the first place. I said above that including effort as a factor in the magnitude of achievements captures the common idea that something being hard for the agent makes for a more significant achievement. Alternatively, we may say that what effort is meant to capture is how much overcoming of obstacles (of all shapes and kinds) an agent actually engaged in to reach her goal. And it seems to me that in Ahmed's success through trial and error, for example, his failed attempts are part of the obstacle he actually overcame and thus reaching the goal was hard for him in the required sense. At the same time, however, when he exerts effort on a strategy he has already concluded is not going to work, it is not plausible to say that the goal
was harder to reach for him; he does not actually overcome any obstacles here (at least not ones that lie on his path to the goal). It is not clear how the objective view could account for this.

So we might have to go subjective and take the perspective of the agent into account. But this does not have to be all that much of a departure from the objective view. We might simply introduce some belief of the agent as the criterion that helps us to distinguish the courses of action that are open to the agent from those that are not. I propose that we count as productive all the effort that the agent expends in pursuit of the goal, except any effort that she herself believes to be unnecessary in the sense that it does not make a difference to her chances of success. Put in terms of the objective view, the fact that the agent believes that her effort is not needed gives us reason to think that she actually could have pursued her goal while putting in less effort. Absent such a belief pursuing her goal with less effort would not have been open to her, because it would have amounted to not really pursuing the goal at all.

This reinforces the notion that effort is an agent-relative dimension; not only do different people need different amounts of effort to reach similar goals, but how much of their expended effort counts as productive is a function of how they approach and think about the task. At the same time, this proposal solves the problem of how to determine which attributes and behaviours of the agent should be considered 'part of the package'. It does not matter whether Ahmed is actually free to change his ways of doing things, it only matters whether he thinks his effort makes a difference or not. With regards to the three ways above in which I imagined Ahmed to 'waste' effort the current proposal delivers the following verdicts. The effort involved in his trial and error procedure is productive effort. In the case in which he tries harder than he has to, the verdict depends on his subjective state: if he believes that he is trying harder than he has to, the

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238 This is at least the most likely scenario. But we could fill in the details in a way in which this was not the case.
extra effort is wasted; if not, it is productive. And in the case in which he continues to pour effort into a strategy he has already decided is not going to work, the effort is wasted. These are plausible results.\textsuperscript{239} I conclude that only productive effort is a measure of the magnitude of achievements. And productive effort is all effort that the agent expends in (successful) pursuit of the goal unless she believes that this effort is not going to increase her chances of success.

Let me clarify this proposal this by considering two versions of an objection that misconstrues it. It might be argued that my proposal is either circular or, at least, gets things backward. If the agent needs to know that her effort is wasted in order for it to be true that it is wasted, there appears to be a tight circle. For she can know that her effort is wasted only if it is true that her effort is wasted and what she truly believes had better not be that she truly believes that her effort was wasted. However, this worry would be misplaced, for my account requires merely that the agent believes her effort is not needed. But this still might seem to reverse the order of explanation.

Surely, the natural way to think about the relationship between the facts about wasted effort and the agent's beliefs about them is as follows. The agent has a belief about whether her effort is wasted or productive and this belief is either true or false in virtue of the facts about the matter. By contrast, what I may seem to suggest is that the agent's belief about whether her effort is wasted determines the facts about the matter – the belief is self-validating. This picture is particularly unattractive because it seems likely that the agent will form her belief about whether her efforts are wasted on basis of a different view about wasted effort (imagine her deliberating about the question: she will surely be looking for evidence other than what her own beliefs are).

\textsuperscript{239} One may think that a trial and error procedure should not count as achievement enhancing. But I think there are other reasons for thinking that trial and error usually makes for lesser achievements. Most notably trial and error procedures usually involve less difficulty than strategies that were thought out in advance, because the latter involve specific subgoals (they are 'complex' in Hurka's sense) and thus offer more ways in which the agent may fail.
And thus we end up with a belief that is (a) formed on the basis of a false view about its subject matter and (b) self validating. That is a rather unappealing combination indeed.

But this version of the objection also misunderstands my position. The distinction between wasted and productive effort that I am trying to draw is the distinction between effort that enhances achievement and effort that does not. It is not the distinction between effort that makes a difference to the chances of success and effort that does not. According to (some versions) of the objective view these distinctions are co-extensive, but according to my view they are not. The belief that the agent has is a belief about on which side of the second distinction her efforts fall. That belief, in turn, (partly) determines on which side of the first distinction her efforts fall. Thus, her belief is neither self-validating, nor (necessarily) formed on a false view about its subject matter. Finally, that her belief that her effort does nothing to increase her chances is a necessary condition for her effort to count as wasted is well motivated. For there is a sense in which it is true, that absent such a belief she could not have achieved her goal with less effort.

7. Conclusion

I have argued (1) that effort is an intuitively plausible candidate for being a factor in the magnitude of achievements, (2) that treating effort as a factor in the magnitude of achievements allows us to capture the sense in which the latter notion is agent-relative, (3) that we need to distinguish between effort (a) and effort (p), and (4) that it is effort (p) that plays the role for the magnitude of achievements outlined by (1) and (2). I have further argued that the relevant time span from which effort (p) is to be calculated is from the adoption of the goal to the latest
possible time the goal could have been reached; and that 'unnecessary' effort enhances achievement only insofar as the agent is not aware that the effort is not needed.
Part III

*The Value of Achievements*
Prologue to Part III

1. Introduction

Having spent the first two parts of the dissertation carving out a conception of the nature of achievements, I now turn to questions about their value. These questions are ultimately the most interesting ones for the ethicist; but their discussion is also needed to vindicate the conceptual analysis of the first two parts. I said, in chapter 1, that one of the criteria for an adequate account of the nature of achievements (criterion 3) is that such an account can accommodate our philosophical interests in achievements. Only if it proves useful in the following discussion of the value of achievements, does my conception of achievements as competently reached goals pass that test.240

In this part, I will utilize the CRG account to argue for the following three claims. First, achievements are intrinsically valuable; or, more precisely, the properties that make an event an achievement make the event a bearer of intrinsic ethical value. Second, the best explanation for why achievements are intrinsically valuable is based on the idea that certain relations between mind and world are intrinsically valuable, and achievements necessarily instantiate such relations. As these relations can be characterized as forms of harmony between mind and world, I call this view harmonism. Third, the value that events have in virtue of being achievements cannot be defeated (although it can be outweighed). That is to say, whenever there is an achievement there is something good about the situation, even though it might have been better overall if the achievement had not occurred.

240 We may say 'if and only if' but with the following reservation: we might have other philosophical interests in achievement and maybe the CRG account does not help with those. Unless there is an account that illuminates those other interests and also helps with questions about value this would not undermine the CRG account's standing as an important account of achievements.
Defending these claims is the task of the following three chapters. Chapter 5 lays out the principles of harmonism and explains how they provide philosophical underpinning for the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable. It is here that the CRG account's usefulness for axiological inquiry really comes to the fore. I turn to alternative ways of explaining the value of achievements in chapter 6. Here, I take on the idea that the value of achievements lies in their role of redeeming self-sacrifice, as well as the (more prominent) idea that achievements are valuable in virtue of instantiating forms of human perfection. Finally, in chapter 7, I argue against the idea that the value of achievements is conditional in the sense that it can be defeated by the presence or absence of other factors such as the endorsement of success, the authenticity with which the agent holds the goal, or the inherent badness of the achieved goal.

In this prologue, I will do some necessary ground clearing. I begin by clarifying the phrase 'intrinsically valuable' (section 2). I then make an initial case for the plausibility of the claim that achievements are indeed worth valuing for their own sake – call this the achievement intuition (section 3). In section 4, I elaborate briefly on the notion of value qua achievement (introduced in the prologue to part II), before explaining my dialectical strategy for this part of the dissertation (section 5). I will conclude this prologue, in section 6, by defending the achievement intuition against three common debunking strategies.

2. Ethical Value

According to the achievement intuition, achievements are intrinsically valuable. Let me elaborate on this latter notion. Below I will discuss Roger Crisp's attacks on the idea that achievements are intrinsically valuable. However, Crisp's position (while certainly hostile to) need not ultimately
be incompatible with the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable in the sense that I am interested in. Crisp wants to defend hedonism; but he defends it as a theory of prudential value or well-being (I will use these terms synonymously here). In other words, his position is that nothing that is not enjoyed by a person can be good for that person. That does not rule out the possibility that things that are not enjoyed can have other kinds of value. And Crisp is careful to acknowledge that possibility. In discussing a character named “R” who is writing a great novel but does not get any enjoyment out of either the process of writing or the completion and subsequent success of his work, he writes:

We might well think that R's accomplishment is admirable, as part of a good human life. Or we might think it makes her life more meaningful in some sense. But is it plausible to think that it could make her life better for her if she herself does not enjoy what she does or reflection on it, and in that sense does not care about these things?²⁴¹

Crisp, of course, thinks that the answer is no. But the issue is contentious and Simon Keller, discussing an analogous case, explicitly claims that the answer is yes.²⁴² While my own intuitions are in line with Keller's in this case, they are not very strong and I would like to remain neutral on this question. I am not sure whether the achievement intuition is best captured by placing the value of achievements within the category of prudential value or outside of it. And, in any case, this question is not my current concern as I am not trying to give an account of well-being.

What I am interested in is whether achievements have what Michael Zimmerman has called ethical value.²⁴³ This is not to be confused with what is sometimes called moral value.

namely a form of value that things possess in virtue of having some properties that are particular to the moral realm, such as a noble character. Ethical value, by contrast, can be born by all kinds of events. For some events (or objects) to have intrinsic ethical value means that “there is a moral requirement to favor them (welcome them, admire them, take satisfaction in them, and so on) for their own sakes.” If this was intended as a reductive analysis, we would need to know more about what makes such a requirement a 'moral' one. I am not sure whether Zimmerman regards this as a problem. I, in any case, just want to use the concept to characterize rather than define the concept of ethical value. I am confident that readers already understand what ethical value is and simply want to remind them of the notion. Put bluntly it is the kind of value we usually have in mind when we say that the world is a better place in virtue of something or other being the case. It is the kind of value that G.E. Moore means when he says that the first questions of ethics are: “What is good? And What is bad?” and “that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good.”

To illustrate the conceptual distinctions drawn so far it might be helpful to consider the items on W.D. Ross' list of objective goods. The list includes knowledge, pleasure, virtue, and distribution of pleasure in accordance with virtue (justice). Of these four virtue and justice are plausible candidates for moral value (though Ross himself thinks that virtue is the only moral

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244 Cf. Ross (1930), chapter 7.
245 It does not matter for my purposes here, but I take the bearers of intrinsic value to be concrete events (or state of affairs). For a defence of that view cf. Zimmerman (2001), chapter 3.
246 Ibid., 24.
247 Maybe 'moral' requirements are the kind that are in some way closely related to praise and blame? But maybe there are also non-moral forms of praise and blame (aesthetic praise and blame?).
248 Moore (1903), 3.
249 Ibid., 10. Emphasis added.
250 Cf. Ross (1930), 140.
Knowledge, pleasure, and virtue, but not justice, are plausible candidates for prudential value as they are located within a person's life (although, of course, some will want to restrict this to either pleasure or virtue). But all four of them, according to Ross, are bearers of ethical value as I use the term.\textsuperscript{252}

While the different forms of value are conceptually distinct, there are relations among them one of which is important for current purposes: values of one kind may themselves be bearers of value of another kind. The point I want to make here can be expressed alternatively by saying that being a bearer of one kind of value may be in virtue of what an event has another kind of value. For example, it is very plausible that prudential value is a bearer of ethical value; i.e. any event that has prudential value has ethical value in virtue of that fact. In yet other words, a person being well off is an event that is ethically valuable. Welfarists make the stronger claim that prudential value is the only bearer of ethical value (just as certain moralists might claim that moral value is the only bearer of ethical value). I do not want to engage the debate about this stronger claim, but I take the weaker claim to be true. When I say that achievements are bearers of ethical value, I intend that claim to be neutral between saying that achievements have prudential value and thus ethical value, and saying that achievements have ethical value despite not having prudential value.\textsuperscript{253}

Finally, the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic value cuts across all forms of value discussed here. However, since I am only concerned with ethical value in this project, I will use the terms 'intrinsic value' and 'instrumental value' to refer to intrinsic ethical value (being...

\textsuperscript{251}Cf. Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{252}Other prominent forms of value are aesthetic value and perfectionist value. For a similar classification cf. Sumner (1996), 20-5.

\textsuperscript{253}For the analogous suggestion that knowledge may have ethical value without having prudential value cf. Belshaw (2012), 8. However, while I do not want to commit myself to the position, I am leaning towards saying that all achievements have prudential value.
ethically valuable for its own sake) and instrumental ethical value (being instrumental to something of intrinsic ethical value) respectively. Moreover, when talking about intrinsic value, I will often simply speak of ‘value’ or ‘valuable’ without further qualification.

3. The Achievement Intuition

I believe that achievements are valuable in the sense just discussed. I also believe that I am not particularly unusual in that regard. Many people both value achievements and would judge on reflection that achievements are valuable. Achievements (or lack of achievements) appear to be the kind of thing that plays a large role in deathbed assessments of one's own life; just as it plays an important role for how we think about the quality of other people's lives. We take pride in our own achievements and admire the achievements of others. Moreover, it seems clear that many people routinely sacrifice other goods (such as pleasure or happiness) in order to pursue achievements. Gwen Bradford expresses a common and powerful intuition, then, when she says that “[a]chievements are, if anything is, on the 'objective list' of the things that can make a life a good one.” This is what I call the achievement intuition.

While philosophers have not expended much effort on discussing achievements, they have, at least over the last couple of decades, generally acknowledged the force of this intuition. Thus, one of the lessons of Nozick's experience machine is often taken to be that we care about really achieving our goals instead of just having the same (or rather introspectively

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254 I am not being unmindful of the cross distinctions final/instrumental and extrinsic/intrinsic. Cf. Korsgaard (1983); Rabinowicz/Roennow-Rasmussen (1999). The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic value (in those more exact terms) does not matter for my purposes, however, and using the more traditional 'intrinsic' instead of 'final' makes for a more elegant exposition.

255 Bradford (2013), 204.
indistinguishable) experiences as if we did. More recently Duncan Pritchard has used the value of achievements as an unproblematic premise in a possible argument leading to the conclusion that certain epistemic states are valuable. As he puts it: “If [a] species of understanding constitutes a cognitive achievement, ... then we have a straightforward explanation available to us why it is finally valuable.” Finally, even those who ultimately want to resist the achievement intuition feel its pull. Crisp, for example, in his defence of hedonism, takes achievements as the primary target when arguing against bearers of intrinsic value other than pleasure and enjoyment.

Naturally, not everyone is on board with the achievement intuition. Some people do not even have the intuition that achievements are valuable at all, others think that the intuition points towards instrumental not intrinsic value, while yet others think that the intuition can be debunked. My project here is not so much to convince those who do not have the achievement intuition; at least not directly. Instead, I will try to develop a plausible axiological framework which vindicates the achievement intuition. Such a framework will give those who, like me, think that achievements are intrinsically valuable something to rally around; and it challenges those who want to deny it to come up with an (at least) equally plausible framework which has no room for the intrinsic value of achievements. I will say more about this argumentative strategy in section 5.

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257 Pritchard (2010), 63.
4. A Note on Value qua Achievement

Suppose that an event that is an achievement is also intrinsically valuable. As we have seen before, the event might be complex and there might be other (intrinsic or relational) properties influencing its value. In fact, we know that the class of events that are achievements is huge and its members vary wildly in terms of what kinds of values they exemplify apart from the value of achievements. Thus, discussing the overall value of achievements does not promise to be a very useful task. Instead, I will be concerned with the notion of Value qua Achievement that I briefly introduced in the prologue to part II. It hardly needs saying that this is not a further category of value on equal footing with ethical value. To say that an event has value qua achievement is just to say that the event has (some of its) intrinsic ethical value in virtue of being an achievement, i.e. in virtue of the properties that make it an achievement. I would like to propose the following two conditions as a defeasible guide for determining whether some quantity of value is value qua achievement.259

*Conditions for Value qua Achievement (VqA):* An event has value qua achievement

iff

(a) some of its value is grounded in properties without which the event would not be an achievement and

(b) these properties would not be a ground of (as much) value, if the event was not an achievement.

Let me illustrate how these conditions work (this paragraph contains a lot of undefended controversial claims about value – I assume their truth here merely for the purpose of illustrating VqA). Take an achievement that has the following two features. First, the goal that is achieved is

259To give these conditions a more robust status would threaten to prejudge questions about defeat discussed in chapter 7.
itself intrinsically valuable. Second, in one way or another the event is pleasant for the person whose achievement it is. Now assume that this event is intrinsically valuable to degree 10 and that the pleasure taken by the agent is valuable to degree 5. The five units of intrinsic value that the event has in virtue of being pleasant are not value qua achievement. For even if the event was not pleasant it would still be an achievement (condition (a)); and even if the event was not an achievement, the pleasure would still be valuable (condition (b)). The remaining five units might be value qua achievement but we need to know more to ascertain this. Suppose, again for the sake of argument, that there are two units of value grounded in the display of virtue that is the pursuit of a valuable goal. These two units of value are also ruled out as value qua achievement by condition (b); virtue has its value independently of, for example, success. Whether or not condition (a) is also violated here is less clear. One cannot achieve a goal without pursuing it. So it would seem that without the (valuable) pursuit, the event would not be an achievement. But the question raises further issues. In particular, it is not obvious how to make sense of the idea what an event would be like without some of its properties.

I do not want to pursue this issue here. VqA is intended only as a rough and ready heuristic to help us pick out the value that is germane to our question whether achievements as such are intrinsically valuable. The motivation for the two conditions of VqA can be put thus. Without condition (a) there could be achievements that do not have value qua achievement. While this might turn out to be the case in some sense, it would then be more precise to include the conditions under which achievements have such value in the term for it. For example, we might speak of 'value qua virtuous achievement'. Without condition (b), on the other hand, value qua achievement could occur outside of achievements; and that seems absurd.
5. Theorizing about Value

How one should go about arguing for the claim that something is intrinsically valuable in the sense explored in section 2 is not entirely obvious. So let me make some brief methodological remarks. I think it is plausible that claims about what is intrinsically valuable represent philosophical bedrock in the sense that there is no underlying metaphysical fact in virtue of which it is these kinds of things rather than others that are intrinsically valuable. That being the case we should not be surprised to find that we cannot find out whether such claims are true by employing scientific methods. I think that in thinking about these questions, we have no choice but to start with our own intuitions about these questions.

Intuitionism as a moral epistemology is the view that there are some basic moral facts that we can know on the basis of intuiting them. That is to say that we can have non-inferential justification for holding beliefs about such basic moral facts. That view is often portrayed as having two very implausible features. First, it posits a mysterious faculty that allows us to directly perceive (self-evident) moral facts. Second, our intuitive judgements so understood are “either infallible or justificationally indefeasible or both.” This is, however, a caricature of the view. In Ross' *The Right and the Good* – the most prominent exposition of intuitionism – there is nothing that would commit him to either of these features. Ross thinks that our apprehension of basic moral facts (whether they concern prima facie duties or intrinsic value) is comparable to the way in which we apprehend self-evident logical truths or mathematical axioms. Only insofar as we have a mysterious faculty that allows us to do the latter, do we need such a faculty

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261 Ibid, 32.
262 Cf. Ross (1930), 32-3.
to do the former. As to the supposed infallibility of intuitions, Ross is quite explicit that “some of them ... have to be rejected as illusory.” He seems to be following G.E. Moore's lead in that regard who, after discussing intuitions as a possible source of knowledge, cautions that “in every way in which it is possible to cognise a true proposition it is also possible to cognise a false one.”

This last point, however, invites the question how we can tell a mistaken intuition from a veridical one. Ross mentions that we should trust our intuitions only after we have reached a certain level of maturity. In the same vein he suggests that it is the moral convictions of not just anyone but of “thoughtful and well-educated people” that should form the basis of our moral theories. Apart from these general requirements about the person whose intuitions are in question, he also quite sensibly insists that the content of the proposition that is judged needs to be properly understood. So there are some warning signs in the presence of which we should be careful not to put too much stock in our own (or someone else's) intuitions. That being said, is there anything that can be done by way of arguing for or against claims about intrinsic value (other than to impugn the person whose judgement is in question)? Some scholars are quite pessimistic on that count. John Finnis, for example, after observing that claims about basic human goods are ethical first principles, concludes that “[a]t this point in our discourse (or private meditation), inference and proof are left behind (or left until later), and the proper form of discourse is: '… is a good, in itself, don't you think?'”

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263 For discussion of this point cf. Hurka (forthcoming), chapter 5, 3-4.
264 Ross (1930), 41.
265 Moore (1903), x.
266 Cf. Ross (1930), 33.
But this is manifestly dissatisfying. Apart from the fact that Finnis' 'proper form of discourse' is hardly a form of discourse at all, it is hard to see what one should do in cases of disagreement. The problem would be not only that we will sometimes (or often) be unable to convince, but that Finnis seems to deny that there is even any way in which we could try. This might not be so bad, if we could expect near universal agreement when it comes to first principles. But as Sidgwick observes:

... all, or almost all, *soi-disant* ethical first principles are denied to be such by at least respectable minorities; hence we naturally expect our moralist not merely to propound his first principles, but also somehow to provide us with rational inducements for accepting them. … it seems absurd that we should not be able to explain to each other why we accept one first principle rather than another.^[269]

I think that it would be a mistake to think that we can somehow find a more secure foundation for an ethical theory than our pre-philosophical convictions about its subject matter.^[270] But Sidgwick is right to insist that this should not preclude the possibility of rational argument.

At this point a brief clarification of the phrase 'first principles' is in order. For a claim like 'achievements are intrinsically valuable' to be a first principle could mean one or both of two things. First, it might mean that a claim like this belongs to the class of claims that we can know intuitively. In this sense, 'first principles' refers to the starting points of ethical inquiry. The sense in which these come first is temporal – they are the first thing that we come to know (or believe). Second, for something to be a 'first principle' could mean that there is no further (more general) principle that can be appealed to for an explanation of it. As I said above, I take it to be very

^[269] Sidgwick (1879), 106.

^[270] Scott Soames argues that the recognition of this mistake is one of the two most important contributions of analytic philosophy in the 20th century. Cf. Soames (2003), xi-xii.
plausible that claims about intrinsic value are first principles in the first sense. When it comes to the second sense, however, things are a bit more complicated.

Thomas Hurka helpfully distinguishes between 'external' and 'inherent' explanations of moral phenomena. An external explanation attempts to provide an account of a moral phenomenon in terms of either non-moral facts, or phenomena that concern a different part of the moral realm. For example, one may try to derive what are the human goods from empirical facts about what all humans desire. I suspect that no such external explanation for claims about intrinsic value would succeed. Inherent explanations, however, are a different story. Such an explanation

derives a moral claim from another that is more abstract but concerns the same subject and uses similar concepts, so the explaining claim is continuous with the one it explains. The former claim must have its own intuitive appeal if it is to explain, and if it does, connecting the explained one to it increases to some degree our justification for believing the latter. But the explanation does not ground what it explains in something radically different. It just extracts its core idea and states it more abstractly.

This gives some content to the idea that it is “[i]ntuitions appropriately reflected upon”, rather than any old intuitions, which “are unavoidable in ethical theory.” Showing that our individual claims about intrinsic value are supported by one or more plausible general principles would certainly have to count as a 'rational inducement' for believing them.

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271 Hurka (forthcoming), chapter 6, 32-3.
272 Ibid., chapter 6, 33.
This, of course, is reminiscent of the method of reflective equilibrium that Rawls (claiming to follow Sidgwick's lead) famously introduced in *A Theory of Justice*\textsuperscript{274} (though his derivation of the principles of justice from the hypothetical agreement in the original position is an example of an external, rather than an inherent, explanation).\textsuperscript{275} Rawls basically suggests that, in recognition of the fallibility of our intuitions, we supplement intuitionism with a coherentist element so that our beliefs about moral matters are increasingly justified if they are consistent with one another. We find traces of such a coherentist element in Ross too:

...the moral convictions of thoughtful and well educated people are the data of ethics, just as sense perceptions are the data of a natural science. Just as some of the latter have to be rejected as illusory, so have some of the former; but as the latter are rejected only when they conflict with other more accurate sense perceptions, the former are rejected only when they conflict with convictions which stand better the test of reflection.\textsuperscript{276}

While we start with the intuitions of mature people who understand the content of the propositions they judge and take the time to carefully reflect on them, coherence offers an additional criterion that helps us to decide when to give up on a certain intuitive judgement.

The point is very explicitly formulated by A.C. Ewing. Ewing points out that our 'intuitive' judgements do not always carry the sense of certainty that Ross seems to have in mind (because the term 'intuition' carries the connotation of certainty Ewing suggests to speak of 'direct cognition' instead).\textsuperscript{277} Instead we often simply recognize certain ethical claims as probable.

\textsuperscript{274}Cf. Rawls (1972), 41-53. However, whether Sidgwick actually used this method is controversial. Cf. Singer (1974); Skelton (2010).

\textsuperscript{275}Cf. Hurka (forthcoming), chapter 6, 32-3.

\textsuperscript{276}Ross (1930), 41.

\textsuperscript{277}Cf. Ewing (1959), 66.
A proposition ostensibly cognized directly by us may not present itself to us as absolutely certain but as having an inherent plausibility. We may think we see its truth but not be quite sure whether we really do so.\textsuperscript{278}

He continues to recommend coherence as a criterion to confirm such propositions.

In these cases and in cases where there is conflict between different people in what they claim to see immediately, confirmation by other ethical beliefs becomes important. It is one of the commonest arguments against an objective ethics that ethical disputes end in a clash of 'intuitions' and there is no way of deciding between 'intuitions'. But this argument assumes wrongly that in ethics there are not available any tests such as those which can be brought under the general heading of 'coherence' that may be applied to supplement or refute the ostensible direct cognitions to which the criticism refers.\textsuperscript{279}

As Ewing points out this method does not only help in private meditation but it also makes rational discourse possible. When faced with disagreement we can try to persuade our opponents by showing how our position coheres with positions that are common ground already or are plausible in their own right. Claims of the form 'X is intrinsically valuable' lend themselves to this way of proceeding as we can explore both their downstream implications and upstream principles about value that they are implications of.\textsuperscript{280} Downstream from the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable would be claims about particular cases involving achievements. Upstream would be 'inherent explanations' in the form of more general axiological principles that lend support to the claim about achievements. Such upstream support would take the following form. There would have to be a plausible principle proclaiming that events with

\textsuperscript{278}Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{279}Ibid., 72-3.

\textsuperscript{280}For examples of the latter strategy cf. Hurka (2001a), 8 and 30-1; (1993) chapter 1.
such and such properties are intrinsically valuable and it would have to be the case that all achievements do have such and such properties. In chapter 5, I will argue that the principles of harmonism provide this kind of upstream support.

In closing this section let me clarify my dialectical strategy in this part of the dissertation by drawing attention to an important limitation of my project. In the debate about what kind of things have intrinsic value there is a divide between those who think that nothing can be intrinsically valuable unless it involves something that is experienced as satisfying or enjoyable, and those who deny that claim. The most straightforward version of the former view is classical hedonism, but there are many other (more plausible) views that belong in that camp. The latter view is instantiated by various 'objective list' theories of the Good (or of well-being). This is the kind of view that I am defending. Much ink has been spilled by trying to come up with decisive counterexamples to the general stance of those on either side of this divide. While some of these examples (such as Nozick's experience machine) have been very influential, I think that this strategy has reached its limits. After hundreds of thought experiments there are still thoughtful people on each side of the divide, and I do not think that a few more clever cases could change that.

Thus, I will not speak directly to those in the (very broadly) hedonist camp, trying to convince them to give up on intuitions they have about certain cases. Instead, my strategy will be to construct the best possible version of an objective list theory. In the spirit of the coherentist intuitionism described above this means that I will try to construct a theory of the Good that

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281 Cf., e.g., Sumner (1996); Adams (1999); Feldman (2004); Haybron (2008).

282 One might be tempted to call the two camps 'subjectivists' and 'objectivists' respectively. But there are different ways of applying these terms in this context and so I think it best to steer clear of using that terminology. Cf. Haybron (2008) and Keller (2009) for a use that is in line with the distinction I am trying to draw here. Cf. Sumner (1996) for a use that is not.

accommodates the judgements that I find most attractive (among them the achievement intuition) and unifies them in a theoretically compelling way.

6. Debunking the Achievement Intuition

Before I can get to the positive project of constructing an objective list theory of the Good, I need to play defence against one strategy used by a few of the many philosophers who resist the notion that achievements are intrinsically valuable. This is the strategy of debunking the achievement intuition. In other words, some authors will try to dismiss the achievement intuition by telling a story that explains why so many people would mistakenly think of achievements as intrinsically valuable.

Such stories typically start with the observation that achievements often (if not always) are very closely linked to other values. And this is, of course, true. Achievements are, for example, quite often instrumentally valuable. But having instrumental value is just one way in which achievements may be connected to intrinsic value. One may also think that what we mistake for the intrinsic value of achievements is really the value of virtue when we pursue a worthwhile goal. This story would seem to gain plausibility from the fact that the achievement intuition disappears (for some people) once we consider the achievements of evil goals. However, it is hard to see how such an account could explain the sense that the achievement of ethically trivial goals (think of athletic achievements) is valuable.

Let us return to instrumental value. It is not just that achievements have instrumental value, if the circumstances are just right – for this is true of everything (even a cancer may have instrumental value, if the circumstances are just right). Instead, there are at least three ways in
which achievements have an inherent tendency to be instrumentally valuable. First, the goals that people set for themselves will often (though by no means always) be good for them or others. Achieving such goals realizes these valuable events. Second, we often find achieving a goal quite satisfying and pleasant. Insofar as such positive emotions are intrinsically good, achieving our goals is instrumentally valuable because it helps to bring them about. Third, the process of striving for a goal often has positive externalities. Most obviously, the person engaged in the pursuit might find the activity pleasurable or satisfying. But often there are also other externalities which are either instrumentally or intrinsically valuable – such as building the virtue of perseverance, forming friendly bonds with others involved, or the acquisition of new skills or knowledge.

That achievements have, as it were, a strong tendency to come in a package with such other values is an important premise for the debunkers. For without this tendency the debunking project would be hopeless from the start. When it comes to ethical value, achievements are clearly not like, say, rocks or waste products. Rocks and waste products can be instrumentally valuable, but it is not characteristic of them to be so. Achievements typically are instrumentally valuable. So the debunkers, while denying that achievements are intrinsically valuable, can hold on to a distinction in value (that cannot plausibly be denied) between waste products and achievements: only the latter are characteristically such that they are usually accompanied by intrinsic value. But while this observation gets the debunking project off the ground, it cannot do more than that. For while the debunker can avoid having to place achievements in the same axiological category as waste products and rocks, she does place achievement in the same category as other characteristically instrumentally valuable things, such as medical procedures.

Of course, a debunker does not have to take recourse to this way of drawing a distinction. She might instead opt to pursue the more ambitious project of debunking even a weakened version of the achievement intuition that only maintains that achievements are more valuable (in some way) than rocks and waste products.
And that still does not seem to be the right kind of company for achievements. The intuition remains that achievements are, while medical procedures are not, worth having for their own sake. This is the intuition that the debunker has to convince us is mistaken.

The most explicit attempt at debunking the achievement intuition is Roger Crisp's who suggests three debunking strategies. The first of these starts from the observation that achievements are often accompanied by enjoyment and happiness, moves on to claim that we humans tend to slide from valuing things instrumentally to valuing things intrinsically, and suggests that the achievement intuition is an instance of this process. The observation about the link between achievement and happiness seems correct. It corresponds with ordinary experience and is well established by psychological evidence. The further claim about the slide from instrumental to intrinsic valuing is also somewhat plausible. Crisp takes inspiration for this claim from J.S. Mill's analogous statements about the way that people value money. And it seems true that (some) people come to value money intrinsically, and it seems obvious that money is, in fact, not intrinsically valuable.

None of that, however, cuts any ice against the achievement intuition. For the way in which people value money intrinsically is not analogous to the achievement intuition. Most people whose behaviour clearly indicates that they have come to value money intrinsically, would nevertheless judge on reflection that money is merely instrumentally valuable. The same cannot be said about achievement. People do not just value achievements intrinsically, they also judge on reflection that achievements are intrinsically valuable. This difference between our

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285 He actually provides seven strategies. However, four of them apply explicitly only to the prudential value of achievements while leaving intuitions about ethical value untouched. Cf. Crisp (2006), 637-642.

286 Cf. the references at Sheldon/Elliot (1999), 484.

thinking about money and achievement exposes a fatal flaw in Crisp's first strategy: it does not even take aim at considered judgements like the achievement intuition.\textsuperscript{288}

Next, Crisp offers what I call the \textit{rational self-deception strategy}. It takes as its starting point the well known paradox of hedonism: if we consciously try to enjoy ourselves and become focused on the enjoyment, we end up with less enjoyment than if we had pursued other aims.\textsuperscript{289}

Thus, it might be rational for us to pursue achievement instead of enjoyment, in order to gain more enjoyment. And, according to Crisp, it will usually be easier to pursue achievement, if we believe that it is valuable for its own sake.\textsuperscript{290} Thus, to believe that achievement is intrinsically valuable would be rational, even if it was not true (assuming that enjoyment is intrinsically valuable).

There are at least two problems with the rational self-deception strategy. First, it is highly doubtful that focusing on the value of achievements is a good strategy for obtaining enjoyment. People who focus on achievement might actually deprive themselves of the enjoyment that usually comes with the process of striving. In fact, it is not clear that believing in the intrinsic value of achievement is even a good strategy for gaining achievements. There might well be a 'paradox of achievementism': focusing on the value of achievement instead of on the performance of the immediate task at hand leads one to achieve less than one otherwise would.

\textsuperscript{288} Moreover, it might be worth pointing out that this strategy might be thought to be neutral between the value of happiness and achievement. For just as there is convincing evidence that achievement leads to happiness, there is ample evidence that the reverse is true also, i.e. that happy people are more likely to achieve their goals. Cf. Lyubomirski et al. (2005). It might be that achievement leads to happiness more reliably than happiness leads to achievement. But as long as the latter effect is as significant as suggested by the psychological research, the debunking argument against the 'happiness intuition' could still be made. Thus, if I think that achievement is intrinsically valuable and you think that happiness is, we could each run a debunking argument against the other's position. More generally, there is ample evidence that happiness leads to all kinds of desirable outcomes. Cf. the references in Gruber et al. (2011). The fact that this does not make us doubt the intrinsic value of happiness reinforces the point made above. As long as intuitions about intrinsic value survive cool reflection, Crisp's first strategy does little to undermine them.

\textsuperscript{289} Cf. Sidgwick (1907), 403 and 405-6. Cf. also Kant (1996), 4:395.

have. As John D. Rockefeller allegedly put it: “if your only goal is to become rich, you will never achieve it.” Second, rational self-deception is not something that can be done at will. And it certainly does not seem like most people decide consciously at some point that they will value achievement. Of course, we often deceive ourselves without consciously deciding to do so. Apart from the fact that it is doubtful in what sense such a process would qualify as “rational” self-deception, it seems unlikely that this will happen in the case of believing in the value of something as demanding as achievement. Self-deception occurs naturally when the attained belief offers some kind of easy comfort. But the thought that achievement is intrinsically valuable does not fit that mold. Instead it seems to make demands on us, such as to be ambitious and follow through with our plans. So I do not see how we could slip into rational self-deception about the value of achievement (except in unusual cases where a person has nothing left but her past achievements and convinces herself that these are very valuable). At least at the individual level this seems highly implausible.

However, if it were somehow advantageous to believe that achievements are valuable, this might open the door for a debunking argument involving an evolutionary explanation of such beliefs. This is Crisp's third suggestion. The idea is that if it can be shown that certain beliefs about value offer a clear evolutionary advantage, we have reason to think that we hold them for that very reason. This, in turn, should make us doubt whether such beliefs are also true. For it is not clear why believing normative truths would offer evolutionary advantages. Thus, their truth does not seem to figure into the explanation of why we hold these beliefs.

According to Crisp, the achievement intuition is a particularly good candidate for being debunked that way. After all, those of our early human ancestors who achieved more in the field

\[\text{\textsuperscript{291}}\text{Cf. Jackson/Csiszsentmihalyi (1999), chapter 7.}\]
and during the hunt would have had a better chance of survival. I think that this kind of strategy is generally problematic, but I do not need to not pursue this point here. For, within the context of the discussion of what is intrinsically valuable, this strategy is not available for Crisp or anyone who puts trust in our judgements about the intrinsic value of pleasure and positive emotions, and the disvalue of negative emotions and pain. In fact, it would seem that the evolutionary advantages of seeking physical pleasure and avoiding pain are far more apparent than anything that could be said about achievement. And the point does quite plausibly generalize to positive and negative emotions. Thus, it seems to me that if we want to have a conversation about intrinsic values at all, we do best not to bring in evolutionary debunking arguments. As Henry Sidgwick put it some 130 years ago:

Some writers really seem to think that the mere fact of a belief having been caused
is a ground for distrusting it, unless we can show that its causes have been such as
to make it true. But this doctrine lands us at once in universal scepticism.

At least in the realm of judgements about intrinsic value this seems right on the money to me.

Having discussed and dismissed three possible strategies of debunking the achievement intuition, I confidently take the ball to be in the debunker's court. Insofar as we can trust our judgements about intrinsic value at all, there is no reason to think that the achievement intuition is suspect. While defeasible (as any source of epistemic justification), it deserves to be taken seriously. In the next chapter, I turn to the task of embedding it in a broader axiological framework.


\[^{293}\text{For debate of the general strategy cf. e.g., Singer (2005); Street (2006); Green (2008); Berker (2009) and (forthcoming); Shafer-Landau (2012).}\]

\[^{294}\text{Cf. Fredrickson (1998).}\]

\[^{295}\text{Sidgwick (1879), 110-1.}\]
Chapter 5: Achievement and Harmony

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will show how my account of achievements as competently reached goals (CRGs) can be used to substantiate the intuition that achievements are intrinsically valuable. This discussion serves a dual purpose. First, I issued a promissory note in chapter 1 with regard to the third of my criteria of adequacy for an account of achievements. I said that whether my account passes this criterion – that it should satisfy our theoretical, and in particular our axiological, interests in achievements – would depend on the success of the axiological part of my project. By arguing that there is good reason to think that CRGs are intrinsically valuable I will make good on this promise. If achievements are CRGs and CRGs are intrinsically valuable, then we can understand why achievements often are (and should be) thought to be intrinsically valuable. In a way, then, the arguments in this chapter complete the argument of chapter 1.

But second, the same arguments are also meant to provide support for the achievement intuition. I want to argue that when we attach value to our achievements, we are not mistaken. To this end, I present two axiological principles which imply that achievements are intrinsically valuable. I argue that, apart from their inherent intuitive plausibility, these principles also have the advantage of being able to accommodate other plausible values. Further adding to their cachet is that they are each plausible renderings of the idea that life is better if we are in tune, or in harmony, with the world around us. I begin, in section 2, by saying a bit more about that last idea. I then turn to my two axiological principles. They are both centred around the notion of correspondence between mind and world; according to the first principle such correspondence is valuable when it obtains in a non-accidental way (section 3.1); the second principle says that
such correspondence is valuable when accompanied by a positive orientation towards the world (section 3.2). In section 4, I return to the notion of harmony between mind and world and briefly discuss how my two principles fit into a broader axiological framework based on that notion.

2. The Importance of Connecting with Reality

I will argue that achievements are valuable because in achieving our goals we establish a connection between us and the world outside ourselves. There are at least two kinds of such a connection that I take to be intrinsically valuable and achievements embody both of them. I will discuss these connections – non-accidental correspondence and positive orientation – in section 3. First, however, let me say a bit more about the general premise that being in harmony with the world makes a human life intrinsically better.

In one of the most well-known recent philosophical discussions of intrinsic values, Robert Nozick claims that the following does not describe a very good life.

Suppose there was an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain.\footnote{Nozick (1974), 42.}

By hypothesis the experience machine would facilitate the best possible experiences (narrow content). Despite that, most people's intuitive reaction to the thought experiment is that they would not want to be plugged in to the experience machine and that somebody who was plugged in would miss out on something valuable. As Nozick puts it, “[w]e learn that something matters
to us in addition to experiences by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we
would not use it.”\footnote{Ibid., 44.} The thought experiment has been remarkably well received and is often
taken to be a decisive objection to all pure mental state theories of value.\footnote{Cf., e.g., Griffin (1986); Kymlicka (1990); Sumner (1996).} These arguments are
often too quick. We should not pretend, moreover, that Nozick's intuitive reaction to the case is
universal or cannot be challenged.\footnote{Cf., e.g., Kawall (1999); Bradley (2009), 10; De Brigard (2010); Belshaw (2012).} That being said, however, those who are moved by the
thought experiment are a respectable majority and thinking about the experience machine can be
a useful heuristic. In particular, reflection on the kind of things that would be absent in a life
spent on the experience machine can help to draw our attention to events that intuitively are
intrinsically valuable.

Nozick himself makes three suggestions to that effect. The first two are that, instead of
just having valuable experiences, it is important that we actually \textit{do} certain things and \textit{be} a
certain kind of person. His third suggestion is that it is valuable to be connected with reality.

Thirdly, plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a
world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct. There is
no actual contact with any deeper reality, though the experience of it can be
simulated.\footnote{Nozick (1974), 43.}

The way Nozick puts the point here is less clear than one would hope. Moreover, contrasting
'man-made' with a 'deeper' reality and doing so in terms of importance suggests an element of
spirituality and religiousness that is not an essential part of the intuition that we want to be
connected with reality (would we think differently about the experience machine if it was
constructed by some benevolent spirit?). I think what lies at the heart of Nozick's suggestion is the simple and attractive idea that Christopher Belshaw expresses thus:

   And what often we want is a conformity between how things are out there in the world, and how they appear to us on the inside. Even if it is of some value, we don't think that a life in which we merely seem to do things, merely seem to know what's happening, can possibly be as good as a corresponding life in which the doing and knowing are real.\textsuperscript{301}

Whether or not we think that reality contains spiritual elements, it seems that our lives are better when we are 'in touch' with it.

   It might be objected that the lesson from the experience machine is not that connecting with reality is intrinsically valuable. One alternative view is that what goes wrong on the machine is just that people do not get what they want. After all, the intuitions are often expressed with phrases such as 'we want more than experiences', 'we care about things other than experiences', and so forth. But while these formulations may suggest that the experience machine points us towards a preference or desire based theory of the good,\textsuperscript{302} this is not what Nozick had in mind.

   Notice that I am not saying simply that since we desire connection to actuality the experience machine is defective because it does not give us whatever we desire ... Rather, I am saying that the connection to actuality is important whether or not we desire it – that is why we desire it – and the experience machine is inadequate because it doesn't give us that.\textsuperscript{303}

\textsuperscript{301} Belshaw (2012), 7. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{302} This is the conclusion that James Griffin draws. Cf. Griffin (1986), 9-10.

\textsuperscript{303} Nozick (1989), 106-7.
Although Nozick does not have any special authority on the question of what we should conclude from the thought experiment, he has it right here. It is not just that I myself do not want to go on the experience machine, because I happen to desire a connection with reality. Rather, I think that there would be a loss involved if anyone went on the machine, because I \textit{judge} that being in touch with reality is objectively valuable. The thought experiment draws my attention to that judgement, not to my desires.

A second alternative interpretation would be to say that a connection with reality is not itself valuable, but that it is a prerequisite for other things to be valuable. Fred Feldman, among many others, takes this line. He thinks that instances of pleasure are the only bearers of intrinsic value, but concedes that pleasures that are taken in non-existent intentional objects might be worthless (or at least seriously diminished in value).\textsuperscript{304} But again, I do not think that this is the most plausible description of what makes life on the experience machine a bad choice. In Stephen Luper's words:

\begin{quote}
What is bothersome [about life on the experience machine] is not that we will have been deprived of a better sort of pleasure than we might otherwise have had, but rather that we will have been deprived of other things that are good in themselves...\textsuperscript{305}
\end{quote}

According to a plausible and popular outlook, then, a connection with reality is intrinsically valuable and an important part of a good life. But this is probably not true of just any connection with reality. What exactly, then, are the kinds of connections that bear this value?


\textsuperscript{305} Luper (2009), 91.
3. Correspondence

In the passage cited above, Belshaw suggests that there should be some kind of conformity between reality and the way we represent it. Similarly, Thomas Hurka has argued at various places that there are forms of correspondence between mind and world that are intrinsically valuable.\(^{306}\) As this is a very natural way of thinking about being connected with reality, I take this to be a suggestion worth exploring. Following Hurka, I propose to operationalize the notion of correspondence as follows: (one valuable way of) being in touch with reality obtains when the intentional content of a mental state corresponds to what is actually the case.\(^{307}\)

This claim needs to be qualified. First, it cannot be true of all intentional mental states. To see this consider the case of disbelief. To disbelieve a proposition is to have an intentional mental state, but if the content of this disbelief actually corresponds to reality, the person is not thereby in touch with reality (au contraire). Similar considerations apply to other kinds of intentional mental states, such as imagining something, or being anxious about something. What these examples show is that only some of our intentional mental states are, as it were, aimed at correspondence with reality. We may say that such mental states have success conditions that are fully determined by their intentional content.\(^{308}\) And it is only those mental states that put us in touch with reality through such correspondence.\(^{309}\)

Second, mere correspondence is not enough to constitute enough of a connection between mind and world to make claims about value plausible. If the correspondence was simply an entirely accidental isomorphism, it would be a stretch to call this relationship a connection. Like


\(^{307}\) Cf. Hurka (2011), 76.

\(^{308}\) Cf. Searle (1983), 10-1.

\(^{309}\) For a similar line of thought cf. Keller (2009).
Leibnizian monads, mind and world might be corresponding without ever interacting in any way. We can imagine, for example, someone whose hunches are, due to sheer chance, always right (the scenario is unlikely but not impossible); while such a person's mind would be corresponding to, it would not be connected with, reality.

3.1 Non-Accidentality

One way in which correspondence between mind and world actually constitutes a connection is when this correspondence is in some way or other *non-accidental*. What exactly this non-accidentality requirement comes to may differ for different mental states. In fact, the example of Leibnizian monads, while illustrative of the need for something beyond correspondence, might be one in which there *is* a connection rather than mere correspondence. After all, the correspondence here is supposed to be not accidental at all but rather the result of God's plan. Whether something like this would be the right kind of non-accidentality is an open question that would need to be answered in the context of thinking about a particular type of mental state.\(^{310}\)

The current suggestion, then, is that non-accidental correspondence between mind and world is a valuable way of being connected to reality. Using the notational conventions introduced in chapter 1, we can capture this idea as follows:

*The Non-Accidental Correspondence Principle (NAC)*: Events of the form \([x, \text{having an intentional mental state the success conditions of which are (a) given by its intentional content and (b) non-accidentally satisfied, } t]\) are intrinsically valuable.

\(^{310}\)The question is actually a pressing one in the context of the value of knowledge. If something like pre-established harmony makes for a valuable connection with reality, we could accept an account of knowledge along the lines of safe true belief while still being able to tell a story about why knowledge is valuable.
I take NAC to be a plausible rendering of the claim that being in touch with reality is an important part of a good life. Moreover, NAC has consequences that many people find intuitively convincing. Most notably, according to NAC both knowledge and achievements are valuable.

Consider knowledge. While there is considerable disagreement about how to conceptualize knowledge, it seems clear that instances of knowledge are events of the type described by NAC. Knowledge involves belief which is the kind of mental state that is aimed at correspondence with reality.\(^{311}\) And if this correspondence obtains in a non-accidental way (what this comes to exactly is a much discussed problem in epistemology), our beliefs constitute knowledge. Thus, if NAC is true, all instances of knowledge are intrinsically valuable. This is a result that resonates with large parts of philosophical tradition as well as with the convictions of many ordinary people. Philosophers since (at least) Plato have asserted that knowledge is intrinsically valuable.\(^ {312}\) The more recent development of 'value epistemology' takes the intrinsic value of knowledge to be beyond reasonable doubt, making it a necessary condition for a successful definition of knowledge that it is compatible with knowledge being intrinsically valuable.\(^ {313}\) And knowledge is not just a preoccupation of philosophers (although they are probably the only ones who could have dreamed up the idea that it is the only good);\(^ {314}\) that knowledge is good (and not just instrumentally) is something that many of us (philosophers or not) are committed to.\(^ {315}\) A poetic expression of the sentiment comes from the explorer Fridtjof

\(^{311}\) This is not to endorse a correspondence theory of truth. Rather, it is to endorse the truism that truth is objective, i.e. that true beliefs “portray the world as it is.” Lynch (2004), 12. Any theory of truth (and of knowledge) will have to capture that thought.


\(^{313}\) Cf. Riggs (2008); Greco (2010); Pritchard (2010).

\(^{314}\) Diogenes Laertius ascribes that view to Socrates. Cf. Diogenes Laertius (1853), 68.

Nansen who, in a speech to the Geographical Society in Christiania (Oslo), explained that his motivation for exploration had nothing to do with instrumental gains but rather was fuelled by

the power of the unknown over the human spirit ... It drives us into Nature's hidden powers and secrets, down to the immeasurably little world of the microscopic, and out into the unprobed expanses of the Universe. ... it gives us no peace until we know this planet on which we live, from the greatest depth of the ocean to the highest layers of the atmosphere. This power runs like a strand through the whole history of polar exploration. In spite of all declarations of possible profit in one way or another, it was that which, in our hearts has always driven us back there again, despite all setbacks and suffering.\textsuperscript{316}

We should, of course, not overstate the measure of agreement on the question whether knowledge is intrinsically valuable. There are ordinary people who would not judge on reflection that knowledge is intrinsically valuable. And there is also a veritable strand of philosophical thinking about the Good that denies that knowledge has intrinsic value. Most notably this includes thinkers in what I called, in the prologue to this part, the (very broadly) hedonist camp. As I said then, however, it is not my strategy here to try and change the intuitive reactions of such people, but to support claims (thought plausible by many) that such things as knowledge or achievements are intrinsically valuable by embedding them in a coherent and intuitive framework.\textsuperscript{317}

In this context, NAC has at least two sources of support: as a rendering of the idea that a connection with reality is important, it is attractive when looked at by itself; and it entails an

\textsuperscript{316}Huntford (1999), 197-8.

\textsuperscript{317}It may be worth noting that these intuitions are felt even by some who are unimpressed with Nozick's thought experiment. After explaining at length why no effective arguments can be constructed out of intuitions about the experience machine, Belshaw nevertheless admits: “I continue to suspect that there is something amiss in the mental state theorist's position, and to believe that ordinary knowledge of, and engagement with, the world contributes significantly to our lives being worthwhile.” Belshaw (2012), 9.
intuitively plausible claim about the value of knowledge. Thus, the NAC is exactly the kind of principle that could offer what I called 'upstream support' for the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable; if achievements are instances of NAC, this would give us further reason to believe that they are intrinsically valuable and it would even, in a certain sense, explain that fact.

Given the account of achievements as competently reached goals in chapter 1, showing that achievements are instances of non-accidental correspondence is an exceedingly easy task. Goals are mental states that are clearly aimed at correspondence with the world, such correspondence obtains when the goal is reached, and to the degree that it is reached competently this correspondence is non-accidental in a way that amounts to a connection between mind and world. Thus, achievements are valuable according to NAC. Moreover, the dimensions of competence and difficulty provide a measure of the strength of the connection between mind and world. As we saw in chapter 3, these two dimensions taken together provide a measure of how much of a difference to the chances of success the agent's actions have made. Thus, the more of an achievement along these two dimensions an event is, the less accidental is the correspondence between mind and world. These two dimensions of the magnitude of achievements, then, play an analogous role as factors in the value of achievements. I thus conclude that, given criterion (3) and NAC, the achievement intuition and the CRG account mutually support each other.

A different way of putting the point made in this section is that, if knowledge is intrinsically valuable, it would be surprising if achievements were not. Achievements and knowledge are, as it were, mirror images of each other. They are structurally analogous events. The main difference between them lies in the direction of fit between mind and world, and that difference does not seem to make an axiological difference that favours knowledge. It does not seem right to say either that fitting the world to the mind is less valuable than fitting the mind to
the world, or – what is closely related – that our beliefs are axiologically more important than our goals. So it seems that the value of knowledge resides in the structure that it shares with achievements. And that, of course, is just what the non-accidental correspondence principle captures.

A similar thought is expressed by Bigelow et al. in the following passage:

Whether one is “in touch with reality” is not simply a matter of one's beliefs matching the world but of the world fitting one's desires, hopes etc. Facts about whether there is a “match” between various of one's mental states and the world constitute one important element in assessing well-being. \(^{318}\)

But desires and hopes present a somewhat different case. For with them it does not seem immediately obvious that non-accidentality is required for a valuable connection with reality. While a lucky hunch does not make my life intrinsically better, a fulfilled hope or desire might – no matter how accidental this match may be. If that is correct, it might indicate that the non-accidentality clause applies only to some kinds of mental states, while for others mere correspondence is enough. But I do not think that this is the conclusion we should draw. Instead, fulfilled hopes or desires are instances of a different kind of connecting with reality. What makes these instances of correspondence valuable is not their non-accidentality. Instead, these are cases where the correspondence is accompanied by a positive orientation towards the world.

\(^{318}\) Bigelow et al. (1990), 132.
3.2 Positive Orientation

The positive Orientation Principle

I propose, then, that a second way in which correspondence between mind and world constitutes a valuable connection occurs when the correspondence is accompanied by a positive orientation of the mind towards the world. Why should we think that? The general idea is that life is better if we represent the world accurately and find that it measures up to our standards. To the degree that I am positively oriented towards the world the world is fitted well to myself. And that seems like something that makes my life go well. Conversely, insofar as my attitudes towards the world are negative, I find myself in a world that is hostile and that seems like something that makes my life go badly.

I take it, then, to be a plausible idea that combining correspondence with a positive orientation towards what is represented is intrinsically valuable. We may say that to be positively oriented towards an event is to have a pro-attitude towards it. Pro-attitudes are characterized by a world-to-mind direction of fit and include such attitudes as wanting, desiring, taking pleasure in, being happy about, craving, wishing, etc. Thus, we may formalize the current suggestion as follows.

The Positive Orientation Principle 1 (PO1): Events of the form [x, having a pro-attitude towards an obtaining event, t] are intrinsically valuable.

PO1 will need to be refined. But first let me briefly address a fundamental worry one might have about the idea that a positive orientation towards an event is intrinsically valuable. Even if the idea is accepted to be generally attractive, some people will doubtlessly insist that a principle like

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319 The notion of direction of fit helps to characterize pro-attitudes but it is not obvious what lies behind the metaphor. Cf. Anscombe (2000); Humberstone (1992).
PO1 needs to be restricted to exclude pro-attitudes towards events that are themselves regrettable. If someone takes pleasure in the torture of innocent children, for example, this can certainly not be intrinsically valuable. This is an objection that I take very seriously. But I will postpone discussing it until chapter 7. The reason is that, in the context of this dissertation, this objection can be lumped in with the claim that evil achievements cannot be intrinsically valuable. Such worries will arise whenever I make a general argument designed to show that all achievements are valuable qua achievements – a version of it could also be levelled against the arguments about non-accidental correspondence in the last section, for example. My response to this challenge, which I will defend in chapter 7, is that evil achievements are intrinsically valuable qua achievement, but that they have other properties in virtue of which they have negative intrinsic value. Readers who expect not to be convinced by that line are invited to follow the arguments in this chapter under the assumption that the conclusion eventually needs to be reigned in to exclude evil achievements (and other forms of being positively oriented towards evil).

Remote and Extrinsic Pro-Attitudes

The worry just mentioned is one about the intentional objects of our pro-attitudes. But, even abstracting from the intrinsic features of their objects, pro-attitudes come in many different shapes and forms. And we might think that PO1 needs to be restricted so that only some of them come out as valuable. Two features of pro-attitudes are particularly salient in this context. The first is whether the pro-attitude is intrinsic or extrinsic. The former occurs when an agent has a pro-attitude towards an event for its own sake. The latter occurs when an agent has a pro-attitude towards an event E (solely) because she believes (rightly or wrongly) that E stands in some kind
of relation towards another event F towards which the agent is positively oriented. The most straightforward examples of extrinsic pro-attitudes involve causal relations: I am pleased to hear that the traffic is moving well on the expressway, because I believe that this will lead to me being able to spend more time with my girlfriend, which I desire intrinsically.

A second distinction is between pro-attitudes towards events that I will call 'proximate' and 'remote' respectively. The general idea is that some events that we take a pro-attitude towards are at considerable distance to the event that is the pro-attitude being taken. But it is not at all an easy task to give substance to the metaphor of distance here. Consequently, the distinction between remote and proximate events is not easily drawn (it goes without saying that the difference between remote and proximate events is one of degree). However, for our current purposes the details do not matter much and a few examples will illustrate the general idea. First, consider the temporal distance that might lie between pro-attitudes and their objects. Maybe I have a desire that Croatia will be a global superpower in 3000 A.D.; or maybe I take pleasure in the fact that the sun will eventually explode. These are remote events. By contrast, when I am happy about today's weather forecast, or hope that the Blue Jays beat Baltimore tonight, my pro-attitudes are towards proximate events. Temporal distance is a relatively easy case. For a more difficult one consider Derek Parfit's 'stranger on the train' example: you meet a stranger on a train, learn that he is ill, and form a desire that he will recover; you never hear of him again.\textsuperscript{320} It would seem that the stranger's recovery is a remote event for you. But it is not obvious in what sense there is a distance between your pro-attitude and its object. There need not be any temporal distance and there need not be much spatial distance either (there are plenty of strangers around where most of us live). Maybe the explanation is that you do not have attitudes towards events that are related to the stranger's recovery, and that is partly because you lack the knowledge

\textsuperscript{320}Cf. Parfit (1984), 494.
required to form such attitudes (you do not know what his family life is like, or what his continued illness or death would mean for his employer – if he has one). As I said, how exactly the distinction between proximate and remote events is drawn is less important here than getting the general idea on the table.

The intrinsic/extrinsic and proximate/remote distinctions are important, because one may think that we should restrict a principle about the value of positive orientation to be applicable only to pro-attitudes that are (a) intrinsic and (b) proximate. In the example I gave above, for instance, it is only my fulfilled desire to spend more time with my girlfriend that has a positive impact on my life; the merely instrumental pro-attitude towards the smooth traffic does not count on top of that. We can see that, when we imagine that it is actually not true that the traffic moving well will lead to me being able to spend more time with my girlfriend (she took the train). It would seem now that my life is not made better by my positive orientation towards the state of the expressway. Similarly, we may think that when a 15 year old desires to have four children 20 years hence, his being a father of four at 35 makes his life better, only if he still has a positive orientation towards that then. The stranger on the train example, of course, is taken to show the same thing: that a remote desire like that has no influence on the value of one's life.\footnote{Note that there are desire theorists who report the opposite intuition about such cases of remote desires. Cf. Wessels (2011), chapter 5.} However, while I agree that these cases show a need for PO1 to be refined, the suggestion that it should apply only to intrinsic and proximate pro-attitudes is too simple.
Desire and Taking Pleasure

To address these problems systematically consider two further distinctions between pro-attitudes. Some of our pro-attitudes are directed at events that we believe to obtain; some are directed at events where we lack such a belief. Each of these mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive options includes a large number of pro-attitudes. I will use the phrase 'taking pleasure' as a technical term for all pro-attitudes towards events that we believe to obtain; and I will use the term 'desire' to refer to all pro-attitudes towards events where we lack such a belief. One reason why it is helpful to make that distinction is that it lines up nicely with another: desires (but not taking pleasure) are the kind of pro-attitudes that come with varying levels of commitment to bring about the desired event – call that 'conative commitment'; by contrast, taking pleasure (but not desire) comes with varying levels of what is sometimes called 'hedonic tone'.

The first of these statements may appear uncontroversial. When I already believe that an event obtains, I cannot make a commitment to bringing it about. I may make a commitment to protect the event (maybe by prolonging it) but in that case I am desiring the continued obtaining of the event – a different event of which I do not believe that it already obtains. However, it is worth noting that this way of looking at things assumes a somewhat narrow notion of conative commitment. According to this notion a conative commitment may be made either by doing something to bring about the desired event or by resolving to do so. A wider notion of conative commitment would also allow that one makes a conative commitment simply by being disposed in a way that one would do something about bringing about the desired event under the right circumstances. According to this wider notion of conative commitment, many instances of taking pleasure would also come with conative commitment. After all, if I believe that there is ice cream in the fridge and take pleasure in that fact, I might very well be disposed to make it the case that
there is ice cream in the fridge under the right circumstances. Part of what would make circumstances right, in this case, is that I did not have the belief that there was already ice cream there.\footnote{Note that the narrower notion does not imply that at some point or other the agent actually does act. If the person has resolved to act in pursuit of the goal, such resolve will usually be defeasible and sometimes even conditional. The difference between such resolve and a mere disposition to act under the right circumstances is psychological.}

I will return to the wider notion of conative commitment below. Whenever I speak of conative commitment without qualification, however, I intend the narrower notion. Conative commitment, then, is a property of desires and a dimension along which we rank different desires. On the one end of the spectrum there are mere hopes or wishes which come with no, or almost no, conative commitment; on the other end there are goals that the agent firmly resolves to bring about, or puts lots of effort into bringing about.

To say that instances of taking pleasure, but not of desire, come with variations in hedonic tone might be more controversial. Two objections may be made. First, some people may doubt whether there is such a thing as 'hedonic tone'; second, it is perhaps not obvious that desires do not have hedonic tone. The term 'hedonic tone' is C.D. Broad's and describes an indefinable introspectible quality that according to the internalist model of pleasure is the common feature in virtue of which an experience counts as an instance of pleasure.\footnote{Cf. Broad (1930), 229-30; Sumner (1996), 87-91; Hurka (forthcoming), chapter 9, 2.} This model of pleasure has been frequently challenged by the \textit{heterogeneity objection}. According to that objection there simply is no single identifiable quality of pleasantness that is common to all experiences we call pleasures. However, I agree with Roger Crisp that this “argument is spurious. Enjoyable experiences do indeed differ in all sorts of ways; but they all feel
Shelly Kagan's influential analogy with loudness is useful here. Loudness is a quality that cannot be experienced independently of the particular sounds it is a quality of. Similarly, hedonic tone is not something that can be experienced by itself but is a quality of other experiences or mental states. This means that experiences of pleasure will be qualitatively different. But this does not imply that there is not a single introspectively identifiable dimension of pleasantness any more than the fact that a violin sounds different from a drum implies that we cannot compare the two in terms of loudness.

The internalist model of pleasure is usually presented as a model of sensory pleasure, but some pro-attitudes have hedonic tone also (in fact, I think that it is only those pro-attitudes that deserve to be called 'attitudinal pleasures')

*Good News:* Returning from a week long vacation without access to any news sources, Franklin reads up on current events and takes pleasure in two recent developments. First, his country has won the FIFA world cup; second, there has been a ceasefire agreement in a civil war in some faraway country.

If Franklin is like most people I know, there will be a marked difference in hedonic tone between these two instances of taking pleasure. His pro-attitude towards the ceasefire agreement will have very little, if any, hedonic tone. This will be in stark contrast to his pro-attitude towards the world cup victory. One way of seeing this is that Franklin would probably have trouble answering (or even understanding) the question whether the pleasure taken in the ceasefire agreement is stronger than the pleasure of eating a delicious chocolate bar. By contrast, the pleasure taken in the world cup victory would seem to be easily comparable to a sensual pleasure like eating

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324 Crisp (2006), 629.
chocolate (or at least this comparison is no more difficult than a comparison between two sensory pleasures).

Now, if it is granted that hedonic tone is a property that some of our pro-attitudes have in common with pleasurable sensations, why should we deny that desires ever have hedonic tone? One might have the view that to have a desire is to be in a state of deficiency and always unpleasant. But such a view is probably too grim. As Abraham Maslow points out, it is not always true that being in a state of desire is unpleasant or something we would like to rid ourselves of.

One can accept and enjoy one's needs and welcome them to consciousness if (a) past experience with them has been rewarding, and (b) if present and future gratification can be counted on. For example, if one has in general enjoyed food and if good food is now available, the emergence of appetite into consciousness is welcomed instead of dreaded.

However, while desires do not have to be unpleasant, I do not think that it is the desire itself that has hedonic tone in cases like that. Rather, a desire will often be accompanied by an instance of taking pleasure where the intentional object of the latter attitude is the contemplation of the desired event. Thus, when I desire to drink a cup of coffee, I might experience a pleasant state of mind. But, I submit, the hedonic tone in that case is not a property of my desire but rather a property of my taking pleasure in the contemplation of having a cup of coffee.

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328 Maslow (1962), 28.
329 According to some theorists, desire basically just consists in being disposed to take pleasure in the contemplation of the desired event. Cf. Schroeder (2014), section 1.2.
Just like conative commitment is a dimension along which we can rank different instances of desires, so we can rank different instances of taking pleasure along the dimension of hedonic tone. On the one end of the spectrum we find mere judgements that some event is satisfactory (by some standard); on the other end are attitudes like 'being euphoric about' an event.

The Positive Orientation Principle Refined

Armed with a number of ways of distinguishing pro-attitudes let us now return to the task of refining PO1. I propose the following.

The Positive Orientation Principle (PO):

Clause 1: Events of the form [x, having a pro-attitude towards an obtaining event E, t] are intrinsically valuable to the degree that the pro-attitude involves hedonic tone (in the case of taking pleasure), or conative commitment (in the case of desire).

Clause 2: Events of the form [x, having an intrinsic pro-attitude towards an obtaining and proximate event E, t] are intrinsically valuable; the degree of value is a function of the strength of the pro-attitude and the degree of proximity of its object.

Clause 2 of PO is the suggestion that I rejected as simplistic above: only those pro-attitudes count that are neither remote nor extrinsic. I am not entirely sure whether PO should include this clause. I will have to say a bit more about that question below.

Clause 1 is the truly interesting part of PO. According to this clause, pro-attitudes towards obtaining events vary in value in accordance to where they fall on the scales of hedonic tone or
conative commitment. Thus, according to clause 1, it would not be valuable to merely judge it a
good thing that E obtains; it is only to the degree that the taking pleasure in E involves hedonic
tone that something valuable is happening. Thus, in *Good News* Franklin's taking pleasure in the
world cup is valuable, while his taking pleasure in the ceasefire agreement is not (or only
minimally). Similarly, if I merely wish that event E shall obtain, its obtaining would not create
value in my life; on the other hand, to the degree that I make E my goal and try to bring it about,
its obtaining does make my life better.

Note that clause 1 makes no mention of the distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic
pro-attitudes, and proximate and remote events. I think that this is as it should be. When you
make an event your goal and invest effort in it, you make a commitment to that event regardless
of whether you just want it as a means to an end, or whether it is very remote. By making such a
commitment you are making that event a part of the world that matters to you. If the event comes
to obtain, a part of the world is like you have chosen it to be, and your choice was made in a way
that bestows personal significance on that part of the world. To be positively oriented in such a
way towards a significant part of your world is exactly the kind of thing that motivated PO in the
first place. I think that analogous things can be said about instances of taking pleasure that
involve hedonic tone, although it might be a bit more controversial to say that hedonic tone
bestows personal significance on the object of an attitude in the way that making a conative
commitment does. While I find the idea attractive and think that it holds the promise for an
explanation of the value of pleasure, this is not an idea that I can pursue here.

Let us briefly turn to clause 2. According to this clause, pro-attitudes towards obtaining
events are valuable regardless of conative commitment or hedonic tone, but only if the pro-
attitude is intrinsic and (to the degree to which it is) directed at a proximate event. I said above
that I am not entirely sure whether PO should include this clause. Let me explain my doubts. First, clause 2 may almost seem redundant. Many, if not most, events that will be valuable per clause 2 will also have value per clause 1. This is particularly true of instances of taking pleasure. Most instances of taking intrinsic pleasure in a proximate event will have at least some hedonic tone. The connection is maybe a little less tight in the case of desire, but even here I would think that many instances of intrinsically desiring a proximate event will come with at least some level of conative commitment.

We must not overlook the fact, however, that clause 2 utilizes a different metric to determine the degree of value of a pro-attitude. According to clause 2, a satisfied pro-attitude's value is determined by its 'strength' instead of its degree of hedonic tone or conative commitment. This might help with the worry about redundancy but it does so only if a measure of an attitude's strength is available that is independent of the notions of hedonic tone and conative commitment. I am not sure whether this is the case. Fred Feldman, talking about instances of taking pleasure, insists that the amount of pleasure taken

is not to be confused with the strength, or “vividness”, of any feeling or sensation. It is purely a matter of strength of attitude.\(^\text{330}\)

He continues to say that

there should be no serious obstacle to the introduction of talk about the strength of someone's attitudinal pleasure. Such talk means nothing more than this: sometimes we are pleased to some degree about something. Sometimes we are more pleased about one thing than we are about another.\(^\text{331}\)

\(^{330}\)Feldman (2004), 64.

\(^{331}\)Ibid.
But this is not all that helpful. We are being told what the strength of an attitude does not come to. In addition we are told that the strength of an attitude of taking pleasure is a matter of how pleased the agent is by the object of her attitude. This surely reeks of tautology.\textsuperscript{332} I do not mean to suggest that there really is no conception of attitude strength available apart from hedonic tone or conative commitment. I just am not sure what such a conception would look like.\textsuperscript{333} This leads to my third worry about clause 2. As I am not sure what the strength of a pro-attitude would come to, I am hesitant to allow that it could determine the attitude's value. Suppose, for example, that the strength of a pro-attitude was a matter of how important the agent judges the event to be. I am doubtful that in this case strength of attitude would be a measure of value. Another suggestion would be to explicate strength of attitude in terms of the wide notion of conative commitment mentioned above. As we have seen this is a dimension that is applicable to instances of taking pleasure as well as desires. This is a suggestion worth exploring but it is not a straightforward one. Would the measure of strength be a matter of how close the 'right' circumstances are to the actual ones? or how much action the agent would take if the circumstances were right? A combination of those two? What if it was impossible that the circumstances are right (we will encounter an example of that shortly)? Until such questions are

\textsuperscript{332}Feldman illustrates his notion of the strength of an attitude as independent from any feeling or sensation with the following thought experiment. A neuroscientist succeeds in making himself incapable of feeling any bodily pleasure or pain. When he realizes that his formula works, the scientist takes great pleasure in the fact that he is not feeling any pleasure or pain; after a while he becomes less pleased; and as he begins to fear that the effects might be permanent, he begins to be displeased by the fact that he is not feeling any pleasure or pain. Cf. Feldman (2004), 64-5.

While this thought experiment nicely illustrates that not all pleasures involve bodily sensations, I still find it hard to make sense of Feldman's notion of attitude strength apart from the notions of hedonic tone and conative commitment. It would be nice, if Feldman, in addition to distinguishing his notion of strength from the intensity of bodily feelings, could say more about what exactly he does mean by the strength of an attitude (it seems to me that the most straightforward way of thinking about what Feldman's neuroscientist is going through is in terms of hedonic tone – first he is euphoric about his success, later he becomes anxious).

\textsuperscript{333}For the suggestion that the strength of a desire is determined by the hedonic tone of the contemplation of the desired event cf. Wessels (2011), chapter 3.
answered, I am not confident that wide conative commitment can play the role that clause 2 assigns to strength.

All of this might point towards excluding clause 2 from PO. But things are not so simple because it seems that it has an important role to play. Note that some of the cases that are being routinely levelled against hedonism to motivate desire accounts of well-being might be cases that do not involve either hedonic tone or conative commitment. Suppose that I have a 'strong' desire that my wife does not cheat on me regardless of what I do (here is a case in which actively pursuing the goal would be self-defeating and thus circumstances could never be right for action). The fulfilment of this desire would be made valuable by clause 2 only. The event is proximate and I desire it intrinsically but I will not do anything to bring it about. Is my life better, if that desire is fulfilled than if she cheats behind my back and I never find out? If the answer is yes, we should probably also say that the strength of the desire determines the degree to which this is true. Or suppose that as you lie on your own deathbed you find out that your only child has cancer. You desire very much that they will recover but you know that you cannot do anything about it. So there is no (narrow) conative commitment on your part. But, again, many people would think that this is a desire the fulfilment of which would make your life better. People have conflicting intuitions about cases like this, and my own intuitions have shifted over the years so that I am not very confident in them. It is with less than full conviction, then, that I recommend including clause 2 in PO. Fortunately, though, this question is not all that important for my current interests. For it is clause 1 that is most pertinent to the value of achievements.\footnote{Hurka suggests that achievements are \textit{more} valuable when the achieved goal is desired intrinsically. Cf. Hurka (1993), 126-7. This suggestion would be in line with the version of PO that includes clause 2.}
Achievements as Positive Orientation

Clause 1 of PO clearly implies that competently reached goals are intrinsically valuable. Goals are a form of desire and they come with a healthy dose of conative commitment – otherwise they would not be goals. Moreover, insofar as effort is a measure of conative commitment, PO also renders effort – one of the dimensions of the magnitude of achievements – a factor in how valuable a given achievement is. Yet again, the CRG account delivers the result that, ceteris paribus, the more of an achievement an event, the more valuable it is.

Let me add here, however, that it is not entirely clear whether the value events have according to clause 1 of PO is truly value qua achievement. Suppose that Matthew has the desire that the lawn behind his house be mowed. This is a pro-attitude and according to clause 1 of PO its fulfilment will be valuable to the degree that Matthew's desire involve conative commitment. Now, Matthew might just go out the next day, put in some effort and mow the lawn. The effort appears to be a measure of his conative commitment and so the effort dimension of the magnitude of achievements corresponds to the value per clause 1. But note that the same level of conative commitment could be manifested in other ways. Matthew might, for example, firmly resolve to mow the lawn the next day, but by the time he wakes up, his son has already done so. Or he may hire a reliable contractor for a good chunk of money. In both of these cases, his conative commitment far outstrips his effort. And so the value that the event has as of PO outstrips the magnitude of his achievement.

Recall condition (b) of VqA from the prologue to this part: for some amount of value to be value qua achievement it has to be the case that the properties that ground the value would not be a ground of (as much) value, if the event was not an achievement. Now, we might think that the case of Matthew shows that this condition is violated. The fulfilment of his desire has value,
according to PO, because and to the degree that he is conatively committed to bringing the
desired outcome about. But conative commitment is not necessarily a measure of achievement.
What this appears to show is that, while the value of being positively oriented towards the world
is necessarily realized whenever a goal is achieved, the same value can be realized by events that
are very similar in most respects but are not achievements (to the same degree). If that is enough
to violate the spirit of condition (b) of VqA, PO does not describe value qua achievement.

Even if that turned out to be the case, however, it would still remain true that all
achievements are valuable according to PO. Moreover, while effort would lose its status as a
measure of value qua achievement (which may prompt us to rethink its status as a dimension of
magnitude), it would still remain a (partial) measure of the value of events that are achievements.

4. Value and Harmony

I began this chapter by drawing attention to the fact that it seems to be an important part of a
valuable human life to be 'in touch' or 'in harmony' with reality. I take this to be the important
insight that can be gained from Nozick's experience machine thought experiment. I proceeded to
suggest two forms that such a valuable connection might take. The first occurs when there is
non-accidental correspondence between certain states of minds and events in the world, the
second when we are positively oriented towards obtaining events. I have argued that achieving
our goals is a way to establish both of these kinds of connections with reality. In this section, I
will offer a brief sketch of how the principles developed in this chapter might fit into a broader
axiological system.
In the little discussed chapter on intrinsic value in his *Philosophical Explanations*, Nozick makes the striking suggestion that “degree of organic unity is the basic dimension of intrinsic value, accounting for almost all differences in intrinsic value.”\(^{335}\) Nozick thinks that (almost) all value is organic unity, i.e. that events are intrinsically valuable iff, and to the degree that, they display “unity in diversity”.\(^{336}\) I do not think that this view of Nozick's is correct, but it does contain an attractive core. I will try to isolate that attractive core idea by sketching a view that, while inspired by Nozick, is less ambitious in scope but more ambitious in terms of precision.

Nozick's discussion of value as organic unity begins with a consideration of aesthetic value. He observes that (with some regularity) the 'things' considered to be valuable in the artistic realm tend to be those that in some way or other unify diverse or otherwise unrelated elements such as physical materials, ideas, or form-elements.\(^{337}\) He proceeds to touch on an impressive array of realms in which value vocabulary is used. He discusses the value of organisms, ecosystems, scientific theories, organizations, societies, systems of belief, and mystical experiences.\(^{338}\) The value of all of these, he claims, is a function of their degree of organic unity, i.e. of how diverse the elements are that they unify and of how tightly they do so.\(^{339}\)

This is a hugely ambitious project and it seems not unreasonable to think that this might be its downfall. In any case, in order to make the view more manageable, I propose, as a first step, to disregard most of the realms that Nozick discusses and restrict discussion to the values

\(^{335}\)Nozick (1981), 418.

\(^{336}\)Ibid., 416.

\(^{337}\)Cf. Ibid., 415-6.

\(^{338}\)Cf. Ibid., 416-22.

\(^{339}\)Cf. Ibid., 416.
that can be found within a human life; more precisely, to the ethical value that can be found within a human life. This last clarification is worth making here, for when Nozick discusses different 'realms of value',\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 418-9} it is not clear whether he means (a) that ethical value can be found in different realms, or (b) that there are different kinds of value to be found in these different realms. If it was the former, I would find many of his claims implausible; I do not think that organizations, for example, have intrinsic ethical value. If, on the other hand, his discussion of certain realms concerns other kinds of value (such as aesthetic value) it would not be germane to my current interest (although it would be interesting to find out that there is a structural similarity between the bearers of different kinds of value). This is a rather radical trimming down of Nozick's project, and it leaves us with the much more modest (but still very ambitious) claim that human lives are valuable to the degree to which they display organic unity.\footnote{This claim is quite different from Moore's view (of which it is reminiscent) that “the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, ... [which] are highly complex organic unities”. Moore (1903), 188-9. Moore identifies a small set of specific combinations of events as valuable and terms these combinations organic unities in virtue of the fact that their value exceeds the sum of the values of their parts. On the view currently under consideration it is unity itself that is valuable, and any instance of it in a life would be valuable.}

At this point we must ask what is to count as a unifying relationship; and it is here that Nozick's discussion disappoints. He begins by saying that different realms might have different unifying relationships and provides some examples of what is and is not to count as a unifying relationship in the aesthetic realm:\footnote{Cf. Nozick (1981), 418 and 426.}

A number of different paintings might be unified by a theory in art history or aesthetics, or by a plan that sequences how they are viewed in an exhibition. However, making color slides of each painting, placing them atop another, and then shining light through the stack so that a dull gray is cast upon a screen does not
constitute, in the artistic realm, a relevant unification of the paintings. Nor does putting all the slides in the same box.\footnote{Ibid., 426.}

These are compelling examples. But how we are to deduce from them a general notion of 'unity' in the aesthetic realm remains mysterious. Why does placing the slides into the same box not unify them (or the paintings they are made from) in the relevant way? The intuitive answer is that doing so does not have aesthetic value. But this answer would threaten to trivialize Nozick's view. If the view is to have substance, it must not define unifying relationships as those that bestow value. Nozick does not fall in this trap by giving the intuitive answer; but neither does he give a different answer. His discussion of what unity consists in in the aesthetic realm does not go beyond giving examples.

Nozick makes some more concrete suggestions in the different context of discussing what attitudes are appropriate towards valuable events. He starts out with the claim that having a pro-attitude towards valuable events is itself valuable.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 429-32. What I call pro-attitudes Nozick refers to as 'V-ing'.} He continues to explain this finding as an instance of organic unity. Pro-attitudes towards valuable events are valuable, according to Nozick, because the verbs describing pro-attitudes “are verbs of unification; the relationships they specify establish and embody complex unities of the person with (what realizes) the values.”\footnote{Ibid., 432.} This language suggests that a person can establish unity with an event by taking a pro-attitude towards it. Taken together with the claim that unity is valuable, this suggestion would be equivalent to the positive orientation principle. But, of course, this cannot really be Nozick's
view, for he does not think that having a pro-attitude towards an event is always valuable; it is so only if the event in question does not itself have negative intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{346}

If an event does have negative intrinsic value, Nozick thinks that it is valuable to take a con-attitude towards it (e.g. hating, resenting, or trying to destroy it).\textsuperscript{347} If this too is to be understood in terms of organic unity, it seems to call for a different understanding of unity. And Nozick does provide one.

The disunifying character of [con-attitudes] can match the disunity of the disvalues.

In [having a con-attitude] toward disvalues, our relationship mirrors its object, and so the total situation has its own degree of unity.\textsuperscript{348}

Now the suggestion appears to be that unity can be established by mirroring the object of one's attitudes. This would seem to make the earlier half-hearted embrace of the positive orientation principle obsolete. For if con-attitudes mirror the negative value of events, pro-attitudes presumably mirror their positive value, and it would be \textit{that} which establishes unity rather than the inherently unifying nature of pro-attitudes. An interesting test case, which Nozick unfortunately does not discuss, would be pro-attitudes towards ethically indifferent events. My own view, of course, is that such pro-attitudes would be valuable as instances of PO.

Hurka points out that the organic unity view at first glance seems to allow Nozick to accommodate values like knowledge and achievement, for we might think that 'unity' denotes the correspondence relationship as employed in NAC.\textsuperscript{349} This would be another way in which we

\textsuperscript{346}Cf. Ibid., 433.

\textsuperscript{347}Cf. Ibid., 429-32. What I call con-attitudes Nozick refers to as 'anti-V-ing'.

\textsuperscript{348}Ibid., 433. Emphasis added.

might interpret Nozick's 'mirroring'. Hurka, for one, does not think that Nozick uses 'unity' consistently. He complains that in explaining the value of knowledge and achievement

...'unity' means one thing, correspondence to something that is real, whereas [in explaining the value of pro-attitudes towards value] it means another, a positive orientation toward what need not be real.\textsuperscript{350}

This criticism is a little too quick. As we have just seen, positive orientation towards value might be best understood, within Nozick's system, as a special case of appropriate attitudes towards events (whether they be valuable or disvaluable). And one might think that the same is true of correspondence to something real. This is somewhat plausible in the case of knowledge. Just as we might think that desiring what is valuable and hating what is disvaluable is appropriate and hence good, we might think that believing what is true is appropriate and hence good. This would lead to the view that the one fundamental unifying relationship would be that one element is an appropriate response to another.\textsuperscript{351}

However, it is hard to see how this 'appropriate response principle' could explain the value of either achievements or pleasure. More importantly, I do not think that we are doing justice to Nozick's view, nor the intuitively attractive idea at the core of it, by trying to reduce all unifying relations to the same kind. Nozick would probably be surprised by Hurka's critique to the effect that his use of 'unity' is "papering over"\textsuperscript{352} different unifying relations. Nozick is quite openly embracing the idea that there can be different kinds of unifying relations.\textsuperscript{353} His failing is not that he pretends that there is only one unifying relationship, for he thinks that there can be

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\textsuperscript{350}Hurka (2001b), 39.
\textsuperscript{351}Such a view requires that we treat the notion of appropriateness as a primitive. For views of this kind cf. Brentano (1889), 17; Ewing (1939), 14.
\textsuperscript{352}Hurka (2001), 39.
\textsuperscript{353}Cf. Nozick (1981), 417; 418; 421; 426.
many. The problem is simply that he does not tell us what they are and in what ways they are unifying.

This is where the work done earlier in this chapter becomes germane. The non-accidental correspondence principle and the positive orientation principle are clearly distinct from each other; yet they each specify a way in which we can be related to events outside ourselves in a valuable way. Given this commonality we may think of them as two distinct principles of the same genus. Nozick might say that both principles specify a unifying relationship. I prefer a slightly different terminology and would say that both NAC and PO are principles of *harmony*. There are probably more principles of harmony than just these two. Some version of the 'appropriate response principle' hinted at above would be an obvious candidate, for example, and in chapter 7 I will rely on such a principle to explain the negative value that the achievement of evil goals have *qua vice*.\(^{354}\)

I think that the idea that many human values can be understood as forms of harmony between mind and world is an attractive one. Philosophers thinking about intrinsic value have often been tempted to give a prominent place to the notion of harmony. Here is A.C. Ewing, for example:

> If we are to say there is only one good, the most promising candidate seems to me to be harmony. When we are in harmony on the feeling side with ourselves and our environment we have happiness; when we are in harmony on the intellectual side with reality, we have truth and wisdom; when in harmony with other men, social virtue and love.\(^{355}\)

\(^{354}\)For an in depth exploration of such a principle cf. Hurka (2001b).

\(^{355}\)Ewing (1953), 73.
He hastens to caution that

the claims of harmony to be the sole good are hard to reconcile with the fact that
one of the things we must account as most eminently good is a heroic struggle
against difficulties and with the fact that a worse man is often more in harmony
with society than a better.\textsuperscript{356}

While it is not clear that these particular examples would be quite as recalcitrant to a view that
made harmony – suitably understood – the sole good, my project here is not quite as ambitious
as that. And so I am happy to accept Ewing's claim that “it is at least doubtful whether we can
produce a tidy list of things good-in-themselves.”\textsuperscript{357} The point of this section, rather, was to show
how the positive orientation principle and the non-accidental correspondence principle might fit
into a broader axiological view. The view I suggested is centred around the notion of harmony
between mind and world, a genus of which there are different species. Our principles elucidate
two of them. Further questions regarding this notion of harmony, such as what other species of
harmony there are, or whether everything that is intrinsically valuable can be captured by this
notion will have to be left for another day.

5. Conclusion

Starting from Nozick's experience machine, I have argued that the value of achievements can be
understood via the idea that it makes our lives intrinsically more valuable, if we are 'in touch'
with reality. I suggested that there are at least two ways in which we can understand this notion
of being in touch or in harmony with reality. The first one, formally expressed by NAC, occurs

\textsuperscript{356}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{357}Ibid.
when the world non-accidentally corresponds to the way we represent it. The second, formally expressed by PO, occurs when we are positively oriented towards the world. I have shown that each of these principles yields the result that achievements are intrinsically valuable, and that the dimensions that determine the magnitude of achievements are partial measures of the value of achievements thus understood. Finally, I suggested that the two principles might fit into a broader axiological view. Taken together with a plausible third principle based on the notion of appropriateness, non-accidental correspondence and positive orientation make up an ideal of being attuned to, at home in, or in harmony with the world. Such harmony between mind and world is intrinsically valuable; and one way to establish it for oneself is to achieve one's goals.

In this chapter I have focused on presenting my own positive view on the value of achievements. I have thus largely ignored different proposals or objections. In the next two chapters, I will turn to what I perceive to be the two main challenges to the view presented here. First, the received view about explaining the intrinsic value of achievements is not via the notion of harmony but via the notion of human perfection; second, many people think that while some achievements are intrinsically valuable not all are. I will argue that both of these ideas are mistaken.
Chapter 6: Redemption and Perfection

1. Introduction

In the last chapter I argued that we can explain the value of achievements by reflecting on the way in which achieving our goals establishes valuable connections between ourselves and the (rest of the) world. In this chapter, I will argue against two alternative views about the value of achievements. The first is the idea that the value of achievements lies primarily in the redemption of sacrifices. The second is axiological perfectionism, i.e. the view that it is valuable when we use or develop central human capacities.

2. Achievements and Redemption

In 'Welfare, Achievement, and Self-Sacrifice', Douglas Portmore argues for the following axiological principle.

*The Sacrifice Principle*: The greater the amount of self-sacrifice that goes into achieving a goal, the more its achievement contributes to one's welfare.\(^{358}\)

His reason for accepting the sacrifice principle is that it is implied by a general view about the redemption of sacrifices that he calls

*The Not-for-Naught View*: The redemption of one's self-sacrifices in itself contributes to one's welfare – the closer that one's self-sacrifices come to being

\(^{358}\)Portmore (2007), 4. As is clear from the formulation of this principle, Portmore discusses the prudential (rather than the ethical) value of achievements. But for the purposes of this chapter this slight difference in focus is immaterial.
fully redeemed, the greater the contribution their redemption makes to one's welfare.\textsuperscript{359}

The not-for-naught view provides an explanation of the value of achievements that competes with the explanation in terms of harmony that I have presented in the last chapter. Or at least it does so, if the sacrifice principle is taken to be about the value of achievements \textit{qua} achievement. But whether this is so is not quite clear. To see this consider the following principle.

\textit{The Pleasure Principle:} The greater the amount of pleasure that is gained from achieving a goal, the more does its achievement contribute to one's welfare.

Now, I take the pleasure principle to be true. But this has nothing to do with the value of an event \textit{qua} achievement. The pleasure principle simply reflects the fact that pleasure is valuable. And if the achievement of a goal realizes a lot of pleasure, it is valuable in virtue of that fact. Similarly, if we accept the not-for-naught view, we might say that achievements that redeem sacrifices are valuable in virtue of that fact, but that has nothing to do with their value \textit{qua} achievement. As a matter of fact, I take this to be the most plausible way of thinking about the sacrifice principle. The value that Portmore assigns to redemption violates both conditions of VqA. Sacrifices can be redeemed in ways that have nothing to do with achievement (through God's grace say); and, more importantly, some achievements do not redeem sacrifices. This becomes particularly clear when we contrast self-sacrifice with effort.

The reason why one might take Portmore to intend the sacrifice principle as a principle about value \textit{qua} achievement is that he presents it as an alternative to the efforts principle.

\textsuperscript{359}Ibid., 13.
The Efforts Principle: The greater the amount of productive effort that goes into achieving a goal, the more its achievement contributes to one's welfare.\footnote{Ibid., 4.}

He attributes the efforts principle to Simon Keller who is clearly concerned with value qua achievement.\footnote{Cf. Keller (2004).} Portmore argues that the sacrifice principle is more plausible than the efforts principle as a rendering of the idea that the value of an achievement is a function of how much the agent has invested in it. In support of this claim he argues that investment and effort can come apart. To show this, he imagines the following case.

*Olympians*: Fred and Greg both put the same amount of effort into achieving their goals of winning Olympic medals. Both spend the same amount of time away from home training at the Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, New York. Both exert themselves just as much in their workouts. But suppose that whereas Fred is a loner who is perfectly content being away from home, Greg is a husband and a father who hates being away from his family. And suppose that whereas Fred enjoys training more than anything, Greg dislikes the training and trains only in the hopes of winning a medal.\footnote{Portmore (2007), 20.}

Portmore claims that in this scenario Greg has invested more in his training than Fred. But as the two of them have expended equal effort, investment cannot be a matter of effort. The difference in investment, according to Portmore, is explained by the fact that Greg has sacrificed more than Fred.

The first thing to note about *Olympians* is that it is tempting to think that Greg actually did put more effort in than Fred. Going back to the apparent paradox of effortless effort discussed in chapter 4, it is likely that Greg, but not Fred, has to fight off the temptation to quit,
which is itself an effortful activity. So Portmore needs to have an example in which this is somehow offset by some extra effort that Fred puts in. But now it is not so clear anymore that Greg has invested more; we need to know more details to decide that question. But suppose a case could be constructed in which Greg invests more despite putting in equal or less effort. Would this fact have an impact on the value of their respective achievements (should they succeed)? Consider a third athlete, Pierre, who is just like Fred but who, having shopped at a more expensive store, paid double the price for the identical training gear as Fred. Just like Greg, Pierre has invested more in his pursuit of the medal than Fred, but it seems that his achievement would not be more valuable than Fred's. Or at least that is the most natural way of thinking about the case. But it matters how we fill out the details. Suppose that Fred, despite being financially just as well off as Pierre, was not willing to spend a single dollar more on his training gear than he actually did. Had he not found the cheaper store, he would have quit. In that case it seems to me that his achievement is not as valuable as Pierre's, because he was less committed to his goal than Pierre. But this does not make his medal a lesser achievement and so the extra value that Pierre gets from his medal is not value qua achievement. Parallel considerations apply to Greg. Maybe he displays more conative commitment than Fred; maybe that means that his winning a medal is more valuable overall; but his success is no more of an achievement than Fred's, and thus has no more value qua achievement. This reinforces my earlier claim that we best understand the sacrifice principle as being about a value of redemption that can be realized through achievements but is conceptually independent from value qua achievement.

There is one further feature of Portmore's view that supports this line of thinking. Portmore claims that the redemption of a sacrifice is never so valuable as to outweigh the initial badness of the sacrifice. The value of redemption is always merely a mitigating factor.\(^{363}\) This

\(^{363}\) Cf. Ibid., 16-7.
might seem to imply that a self-sacrifice is always a bad idea and can never be worth it. That is not the case, however, as there might be other factors that make up for the badness of the sacrifice (for example the value of the realized goal itself). What Portmore's view does imply, however, is that the achievement of a goal itself is never worth the investment made in it. And that claim is squarely at odds with the achievement intuition. People who have the achievement intuition think it rational to (sometimes) sacrifice happiness for achievement. But for Portmore it would never be rational to pursue achievement at the cost of other values. He could, of course, embrace that implication and deny the achievement intuition. But in that case he would be in a poor position to offer advice on how best to conceptualize and explain the value of achievements such as that “achievementists [those who believe in the value of achievement] should adopt the Sacrifice Principle instead of the Efforts Principle”.364

I conclude that we do best to treat Portmore's paper as a discussion of the value of redemption that is independent of the value that events have in virtue of being achievements. The value of redemption (if it is a genuine value – a question on which I have not taken a stance), just like other values such as the value of pleasure, is sometimes realized by events that are achievements. But this should not lead us to conclude that redemption is a factor in, or an explanation of, the value of events qua achievement.

3. Achievements and Perfectionism

Insofar as philosophers have taken the trouble to defend the notion that achievements are intrinsically valuable at all, they have usually done so within a perfectionist framework. Just like harmonism, perfectionism is supposed to provide a kind of principled explanation why the

364 Ibid., 21.
objective list of human values contains the entries that it does. As Thomas Hurka says about his own perfectionist account: “[w]hile acknowledging the plurality of human goods, it gives a unified account of value.”

Having presented my own way of thinking about the value of achievements in the last chapter, I now turn to a short discussion of perfectionism and explain why I do not think that it is a viable alternative. I begin with a brief sketch of axiological perfectionism in general (section 3.1). Next, I sketch two ways in which perfectionism may be thought to support the achievement intuition (sections 3.2 and 3.3), before turning to a general critique of the view (section 4). The most important reference point for recent thinking about axiological perfectionism is the updated version of Aristotle that can be found in Hurka's *Perfectionism*. I will use Hurka's view as presented there as my main model for perfectionism; but it is worth noting that, in later work, he has begun to seem much less committed to the explicitly perfectionist aspects of this view.

3.1 Axiological Perfectionism

In its most general form, axiological perfectionism (not to be confused with political perfectionism) is the view that it is intrinsically valuable for some individual x of type Y to posses to the fullest extent those properties that are central to being a Y. This, of course, is reminiscent of Aristotle's *function argument*. Applied to human goods the view says that a good

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367 Cf. also Attfield (1981); Bradford (2013).
368 Cf. Hurka (2001b) where he uses the term 'perfectionist good' interchangeably with 'objective good'. Also cf. Hurka (2006) and (2011) where he discusses knowledge and achievement without any reference to perfectionism.
life for a human being is simply a truly human life. This is often expressed as the thought that a good human life consists in the excellent exercise or full development of those capacities that define human nature. In other words, all perfectionists accept the following axiological principle.

*The Perfection Principle*: States of affairs of the form \([x, \text{excellently exercising those capacities that are central to human nature}, t]\) where \(x\) is a human being, are intrinsically valuable.

In fact, acceptance of the perfection principle makes one a perfectionist in a somewhat minimal sense. Many perfectionists would contend that the perfection principle is not just a true axiological principle, but that it expresses the whole truth about intrinsic value (at least as far as value can be found in human lives). However, this stronger claim is not necessary for my current purposes and it invites a set of criticisms that would lead us too far afield. So, in this chapter, I take perfectionism simply to be the acceptance of the perfection principle. It is worth noting, however, that one problem with the stronger perfectionist claim is that it seems hard to square with the value of pleasure. And if perfectionism cannot account for the value of pleasure, this undermines its claim to be a comprehensive principle underlying the most important items on the list of objective goods.

The perfection principle is the first and central component of any perfectionist account. In order for such an account to generate concrete claims about what events are good, however, the perfection principle needs to be supplemented by (2) an account of which capacities are central

\[370\] I will drop the full development talk from here on out – excellent exercise seems to be at the heart of the view of most axiological perfectionists.


\[372\] For a discussion of perfectionism's inability to account for the value of 'cheap thrills' cf. Arneson (1999).
to human nature, and (3) a specification of what it means to excellently exercise these capacities.\(^{373}\) Both of these are no trivial tasks. And disagreement about how to specify (2) and (3) explains why perfectionists can arrive at very different judgements about the good life.

I formulated the perfection principle in terms of central capacities of human nature. This wording was meant to be neutral between different ways of generating an account of (2). Even prior to the question which capacities should be on the list, there is the question which criterion to use to settle that question (at which point terminology can easily prejudge the matter). One might think, for example, that we should be interested in the capacities that are essential to humans, the ones that are distinctive to humans,\(^{374}\) or the ones that are fundamental to human nature in that they are “special and important to humans and central to human activity.”\(^{375}\) The criterion is going to make a big difference as to what list of capacities we will end up with. But even if a criterion could be agreed upon, there might be further disagreement about which capacities meet it. Once a perfectionist has adopted a criterion for and generated a list of central human capacities, she has to give an account of (3). That is to say she has to explain, for each capacity on her list, what it means to excellently exercise the capacity. This may be done piecemeal, i.e. by providing a customized account for each capacity. Alternatively one could provide a general account of excellent exercise that applies to more than one (or even all) of the central capacities.

A fully worked out perfectionist position, then, has three parts: (1) the perfection principle, (2) an account of central capacities of human nature, and (3) an account of how these

\(^{373}\)Cf. Dorsey (2010), 62.

\(^{374}\)Cf. Hurka (1993), chapter 2.

\(^{375}\)Bradford (2013), 216.
capacities are excellently exercised. Whether a perfectionist view renders achievements intrinsically valuable depends on the way that (2) and (3) are spelled out.

Achievements have been explicitly interpreted as the excellent exercise of two distinct capacities, each of which may be plausibly thought of as central to human nature. According to Hurka achievements constitute the excellent exercise of practical rationality; according to Bradford they constitute the perfection of the will. I will use the general framework of perfectionism just developed to briefly sketch each of these proposals.

3.2 Practical Rationality

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* – the locus classicus for axiological perfectionism – Aristotle argues that rationality is what sets humans apart, and that therefore the good human life consists in exercising rationality well. Using the criterion of Kripkean essence Hurka, like most perfectionists, agrees that rationality, in both its theoretical and practical guise, belongs on the list of central human capacities. However, he is not convinced by Aristotle's account of what it means to excellently exercise rationality. Aristotle thinks that the height of practical rationality consists in living a political life in accordance with virtue and that of theoretical rationality in the contemplation of eternal truths. While he thinks that the truly excellent exercise of practical rationality requires success, the criterion that he puts most emphasis on is that he who exercises reason well will pursue worthwhile goals. Thus, in Aristotle's perfectionism achievements are

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376 Part of the great merit of Hurka's (1993) is that he carries out these tasks in sequence and great detail.
valuable only insofar as they are a component of virtue. Hurka, on the other hand, thinks that achievements, rather than virtuous activities, are what constitutes the excellent use of practical rationality.

These different views about the excellent exercise of practical rationality rest on a different understanding of its nature. While Aristotle has a holistic view of practical rationality according to which only the pursuit of ends that are worthwhile is rational, Hurka rejects this notion as illegitimately sneaking in conventional morality into the account of human nature.

In any sense of “rational” in which it is plausible that humans are essentially rational, it is not plausible that conventionally moral humans are always more rational than immoral ones. Here rationality connotes deliberation and the effective pursuit of ends, which can be found no less in a successful burglar than in a philanthropist. And if there is a sense in which conventionally moral humans are more rational than immoral ones (which I doubt), the rationality it defines is not essential to humans.  

Hurka goes on to provide a formal framework that is meant to capture the excellent exercise of both practical and theoretical rationality. This framework is familiar from part II. It is centred around the notions of number and quality of valuable mental states (broad content). The more and the higher quality of these mental states there are in a life, the more excellently rationality is being exercised. Quality, in turn, is defined in purely formal terms such as complexity and extent, rather than in substantive ones such as virtuousness. In considering the account of number, Hurka argues (though somewhat tentatively) that the mental states that should be

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381 Cf. Ibid., chapter 9.
counted are those of our beliefs and goals that 'deserve to be successful' (this is Hurka's way of referring to a non-accidentality condition), and are indeed successful (true/reached). 

According to Hurka, then, the degree to which rationality is exercised is a function of the number of goals and beliefs that are, and deserve to be, successful (i.e. reached and true respectively). That is a position quite similar to my non-accidental correspondence principle (NAC) from chapter 5. Hurka's 'deserved success' is akin to my 'non-accidental correspondence', and thus his version of perfectionism supports the twin claims, supported by NAC, that knowledge and achievements are intrinsically valuable. Thus, if we accept Hurka's thin notion of practical rationality, rather than Aristotle's normatively rich one, as the one that is central to human nature, the non-accidental correspondence principle may be thought to be an implication of perfectionism. Insofar as the perfection principle is plausible this would provide further support for NAC and thus to the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable.

Whether this further support is indeed available, however, depends on three conditions. First, perfectionism itself needs to be viable; second Hurka's picture of practical rationality needs to be more plausible than Aristotle's; and third, the excellent exercise of rationality (in this thin version) needs to actually translate into something like NAC. I will argue against the viability of perfectionism below. I think that Hurka is probably right that we should not incorporate moral values into our notion of practical rationality. I have my doubts, however, about the path from this notion of practical rationality to NAC. In particular, it seems to me that how excellently practical rationality is being exercised does not depend on whether the agent is successful. Suppose that you come up with some kind of clever plan to achieve one of your goals. The plan is very good but it depends on your very reliable friend John to call you as soon as your other

\[382\] Cf. Ibid., chapter 8.
friend Jimbo arrives at their shared office. Now in one scenario everything works out well and you achieve your goal. In an alternative scenario, however, John is fatally hit by a truck on his way to work; you never receive the phone call and your plan fails. Now, according to NAC there is no value in the second scenario, because there is no correspondence. But it is hard to see how perfectionism could account for this. Should we really say that you exercised your rationality less excellently, if John is hit by a truck than when he does not suffer such a misfortune?383

Hurka briefly considers this objection.384 In response, he suggests that we may think of humans as “essentially situated”, meaning that the kinds of relations with the world that determine the success or failure of our projects are a central part of human nature and thus should be taken into account by perfectionism.385 I remain sceptical. Even if we think of humans as essentially situated, it is hard to see how we could 'exercise' that part of our nature. For what it is worth, Hurka does not insist on the success condition. Instead, he says that “we have a moral choice between two ideals: of external connection and, opposing it, of personal self-sufficiency.”386 He presents this as a choice between two forms of perfectionism. I think it would be more plausible to think of it as a choice between perfectionism on the hand, and some form of harmonism (as developed in chapter 5) on the other. Only the latter can confidently account for a success condition.

383 The example I give here concerns competent failure. Examples of justified false belief would bring out the same worry.
385 Cf. Ibid., 110.
386 Ibid., 110.
3.3 The Will

Rationality is the most prominent but not the only faculty that figures into perfectionist accounts. It is sometimes claimed that another item that belongs on a perfectionist list of central human capacities is our will. Gwen Bradford, for example, outlines an epistemic guide for identifying the central human capacities that involves the two criteria of being (a) fundamental to human life and (b) intuitively worth exercising. She thinks that the will meets these criteria.

Indeed, it seems that we can't even engage in activity of any kind without exerting the will. [The will] is so fundamental that it underwrites our abilities to deploy all our other capacities. Thus the will clearly fulfills the criterion of fundamentality...

Further, the will passes the value criterion. It clearly seems that it is worth having and developing. Thus it is my contention that the will should be included in an account of the relevant capacities for perfectionism.

This is certainly a suggestion worth exploring and it does not lack historical precedent. The will as a central feature of human existence makes an appearance in both Nietzsche and Kant and, using the scheme developed above, one could develop perfectionist accounts inspired by these thinkers. A Kantian perfectionism would characterize the excellent exercise of the will as choice in accordance with the moral law. A Nietzschesian perfectionism, by contrast, would see the highest form of exercising the will as imposing one's choices on as much of the history of the world as possible. In the Kantian version the excellent exercise of the will has no conceptual ties with achievement, for achievements do not have to involve choice in accordance with the

388 Bradford (2013), 221.
389 These sketches of 'Kantian' and 'Nietzschesian' perfectionism are not meant as interpretations of the actual views of Kant and Nietzsche. That being said, the inspiration for the accounts can be found in Kant (1785) and Nietzsche (1968), book III respectively.
moral law. Moreover, the Kantian conception of the good will has no place for the success condition that is a central part of the concept of achievement. Exercising the will (making the right choice) has its value independently of success and failure. Such a perfectionism, much like Aristotle's (though for different reasons), would value virtue not achievement.

If we go with Nietzsche, on the other hand, the excellent exercise of the will is very closely connected to achievement. As Keller puts it, in achieving his goals an agent “imposes his will upon the world.” The more he does so, the more he achieves and, according to the Nietzschean view, the more excellently does he exercise his will. A broadly Nietzschean perfectionism, then, may offer support for the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable: to achieve one's goals is to impose one's will on the world; to impose one's will on the world is to excellently exercise the will; the will is one of the central human capacities; and thus, assuming the truth of the perfection principle, to achieve one's goals is intrinsically valuable.

This raises the question, however, what exactly is the capacity that is being exercised here. In a Kantian perfectionism it would be the capacity for choice itself. In a Nietzschean perfectionism it would have to be some kind of capacity for the implementation of choice, but Nietzsche himself has little to say about that (anything is good as long as it is successful). One way of thinking about such a capacity for implementation would lead us back to practical rationality, but Bradford has a different suggestion. Her conception of the nature of the will as a faculty of implementation of choice focuses on perseverance and effort.

We experience exerting our will when we struggle to get out of our cozy bed in the morning, when we try to lift heavy grocery bags out of the trunk of the car, resist...

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391 For a reading of Nietzsche that is more in line with Bradford's account by interpreting the will to power as a will to overcome resistance cf. Reginster (2006), 126-33.
temptation to lose focus listening to a boring lecture, or push ourselves to try to understand a difficult text.\textsuperscript{392}

She goes on to claim that engaging in activities that are difficult (in the sense of requiring a lot of effort), rather than being rational, virtuous, praiseworthy, etc., is what constitutes the excellent exercise of the will. From this, in turn, she concludes that perfectionism supports the view that achievements are intrinsically valuable.\textsuperscript{393}

It may be worth noting that a perfectionist might not have to choose between a Kantian and a Nietzschean version of perfectionism. Perfectionists can be (and typically are) pluralists. There is probably more than one central human capacity and exercising any one of them would be deemed valuable by the perfection principle. It is quite plausible that the capacity to choose and the capacity to exert effort in goal directed behaviour are two distinct capacities;\textsuperscript{394} and both might be central to human nature. If so, perfectionists concerned with the will might value both virtue (excellent choice) and achievement (excellent implementation).

However, once we abandon the sole focus on success that we arguably find in Nietzsche and turn to Bradford's notion of the will as the capacity to exert effort, it becomes yet again unclear how the success condition is being accounted for by the perfection principle. If the excellent exercise of the will consists in perseverance and the exertion of effort, it seems that all we need to know to assess the level of excellence is how hard the agent tried. If two people try equally hard but one of them never achieves any goals simply because of brute bad luck, it is hard to see, on the current picture, why we should say that the other one exercises his will more

\textsuperscript{392}Bradford (2013), 219.

\textsuperscript{393}Cf. Ibid., 221-2.

excellently. Again, the spirit of perfectionism seems to be that the goodness of a life should be independent from such external misfortunes.

4. Problems with Perfectionism

As the brief discussions in the last two sections indicate, whether perfectionism actually supports the achievement intuition is anything but uncontroversial. I will not pursue this question any further, however, for I think that perfectionism itself is a flawed theory. Thus, even if perfectionism did support the achievement intuition, this would not be the kind of support I would want to lean on. The problems for perfectionism I will lay out in this section are well known. In the current context, it is nevertheless worth rehashing them once more. For the most prominent recent defences of the achievement intuition have leaned on perfectionism and, as will become clear in chapter 7, some proposals for restricting the achievement intuition are best understood as motivated by a perfectionist understanding of the value of achievements.

4.1 The Determination of Human Nature

To give an account of what exactly the list of perfectionist capacities should look like is presumably the most difficult task for perfectionism. As I pointed out in section 3.1, it is anything but obvious what criterion to use. The general idea of perfectionism requires that the capacities must in some way or other be central to human nature. But that in itself provides little guidance. Should we say (as Plato does in Republic 1) that what is central to human nature are those features that are unique to humans? This seems problematic, not least, because it would
make our conception of human nature dependent on what other species are like.\textsuperscript{395} We might try a conception based on essence (in Kripke's sense), but that threatens to exclude many capacities we would want to see on the list as it seems clear that there are (and most certainly could be) humans that lack, for example, rationality.\textsuperscript{396} In responding to this worry, we might switch to a more permissive understanding of what is central by replacing essence with fundamentality, understood as nearly universal capacities the use of which is nearly inevitable.\textsuperscript{397} However, this approach (as well as the other two approaches) is likely to deliver a list that includes many capacities which do not seem to be particularly good candidates (take the capacity to fart).

The way that perfectionists tend to deal with this problem is to pick one of the above mentioned metaphysical criteria (or combine two of them) to generate a provisional list of capacities. Then, in a second step, the list is whittled down by ruling out those capacities the exercise of which is not intuitively valuable for its own sake.\textsuperscript{398} This second step, however, can only be an epistemic crutch in the absence of a fully developed metaphysical account. For, as Bradford aptly notes:

Perfectionism is the view of what capacities it is intrinsically valuable to develop,  
so it would beg the question to define them as those that are good to develop.\textsuperscript{399}

\textsuperscript{395}Cf. Hurka (1993), 11.  
\textsuperscript{396}A slightly different tack on essential properties is proposed by Robin Attfield: “Let the 'essential' capacities of an x be capacities in the absence of which from most members of a species that species would not be the species of x's, and let 'x' range over terms for living organisms.” Attfield (1981), 42. This might get around the worry about rationality not making the list, but the problem with this notion seems to be that it is unclear how membership in a species is to be determined (or how the good of members of a species that lack the essential properties is to be determined).  
A perfectionist who uses the intuitive criterion must hope that there is some unknown metaphysical criterion x that restricts the list of capacities in roughly the way that our intuitive judgements do. If we were to find x, we might be surprised by the resulting list – some capacities we expected to be on the list might not be and vice versa. However, as Dale Dorsey points out, the surprises had better not be too significant. Imagine, for example, that x would rule out all forms of rational capacities and instead include the capacities to move while sleeping and to throw up when consuming alcohol. In that case we would presumably conclude that x was not the criterion we had been looking for after all. Or if we were still convinced that x was indeed the missing piece in our account of human nature, we would give up on the perfection principle. Whatever initial plausibility that principle might have, if it were to generate the result that moving in our sleep and throwing up after consuming alcohol rank as important intrinsic human goods, the perfection principle would not be part of reflective equilibrium. I will return to this point shortly.

That perfectionists must assume the existence of criterion x is a liability for at least two reasons. First, it is hard to see how one could make progress towards finding it. And there does not seem to be a good excuse available for why this should be so hard. Second, absent criterion x perfectionism cannot actually claim to offer a unifying explanation of goods. As long as perfectionists generate the list of central capacities by relying on value judgements, these value judgements can scarcely be hailed as results of the theory itself. And thus it cannot be claimed that perfectionism's plausibility is enhanced through the intuitive results that are generated from

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400 Cf. Dorsey (2010), 68.

401 This is something we can say without an actual account of centrality on the table. This is a contrast to the last point: without an actual suggestion about criterion x, we cannot determine whether it would be plausible enough to overrule our intuitions about the items on the list of central capacities.

the perfection principle. Thus, as long as criterion x is just a promissory note, perfectionism cannot claim any intuitive plausibility above and beyond the intuitive clout of the perfection principle itself.\footnote{This argument closely follows Dorsey (2010).}

4.2 The Intuitive Force of the Perfection Principle

In my discussion of perfectionism so far, I have granted that the perfection principle is intuitively plausible. The discussion in the last section shows that this assumption is crucial. If perfectionism provided a convincing way of systematizing a large set of our considered judgements about human goods, we might come to accept the perfection principle on that ground, independently of whether or not we find it intuitively appealing all by itself. As things currently stand, however, perfectionists rely on our considered axiological judgements in giving content to their theory. Proceeding this way may be legitimate if the perfection principle is intuitively compelling. If the perfection principle cannot stand on its own merits, however, the situation is different. In that case perfectionists are simply concocting a tailor made principle that is guaranteed to deliver the results they want and then dress it up as an explanatory principle.

Is the perfection principle intuitively attractive? Here is Hurka on that question.

\begin{quote}
I believe the ideal does have intrinsic appeal: The goal of developing human nature, or exercising essential human powers, is deeply attractive. This is reflected in its widespread acceptance. The ideal is implicit in non-philosophical talk of living a “fully human” or “truly human” life and is endorsed by diverse philosophers.\footnote{Hurka (1993), 32.}
\end{quote}
Among the historical greats that Hurka identifies as perfectionists are Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibniz, Nietzsche, T.H. Green, Marx, and F.H. Bradley.\textsuperscript{405}

Dorsey, on the other hand, denies that the perfection principle itself is intuitively attractive. He suggests that the perfection principle derives whatever plausibility it has solely from the plausibility of the particular judgements it may be thought to entail. In support of his intuitive reaction to the principle itself he offers the suggestion that the perfection principle does not have any staying power in the face of contradicting considerations. This is a stronger version of the claim, made above, that the perfection principle would not be part of reflective equilibrium, if it had wildly implausible consequences. Dorsey thinks that it would not even be part of reflective equilibrium if it had just mildly implausible consequences:

Imagine that we come to believe that the relevant essence yields some trivial property. For instance, let's imagine that we come to believe that a disposition to develop hypothermia under cold conditions is essential to humanity. What pressure would there be to accept that property as good-making? I contend: none whatsoever. ... In order for an appeal to essence [i.e. the perfection principle] to play a role in a reflective equilibrium, it must have at least some resistance to recalcitrant beliefs. But an appeal to essence seems to have no such resistance.\textsuperscript{406}

Rejecting this argument requires perfectionists to be open to bite some bullets. Bradford, for example, declares herself willing to accept counterintuitive implications, if the account of human nature that generates them is “sufficiently theoretically compelling.”\textsuperscript{407} Such bullet biting is, of course, a legitimate strategy but it would surely be better if perfectionists could counter Dorsey's argument by putting some pressure on those who deny the perfection principle.

\textsuperscript{405} Cf. Ibid., 32 and 141.

\textsuperscript{406} Dorsey (2010), 67.

\textsuperscript{407} Bradford (2013), 223 n.10.
One possible way of doing so would be to provide upstream support for the perfection principle by showing that it follows from some other plausible principle. A natural candidate for such an upstream principle might be

*The General Perfection Principle*: States of affairs of the form \([x, \text{ excellently exercising those capacities that are central to } x\text{'s nature, } t]\) are intrinsically valuable.

The perfection principle is concerned with humans only. The general perfection principle, by contrast, claims that it is valuable for any individual to fulfil its nature. It is easy to see that the perfection principle follows from the general perfection principle. But is the latter a plausible principle?

Hurka suggests that perfectionists should probably accept the general perfection principle and notes that doing so would deepen the explanatory power of the (human) perfection principle. As noted above, the general perfection principle is also roughly equivalent to Aristotle's claim that the good of a thing is to fulfil its function. But we need to be careful here. If we understand the general perfection principle as an expression of Aristotle's general claim about functions, the principle has truly unacceptable consequences. It just seems indisputable that for many things that have functions the fulfilment of those functions is not intrinsically valuable (think of artifacts). However, the general perfection principle is formulated not in terms of fulfilment of function but in terms of exercising capacities. That helps to reign in the principle, restricting its application to beings that can plausibly be said to actively exercise capacities. This rules out lawnmowers and machine guns. However, the notion of 'exercise' in the general perfection principle must not be too narrow. Otherwise the general perfection principle threatens to collapse into the (human) perfection principle. Maybe an appropriately wide notion of

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'exercise' restricts the application of the general perfection principle to all living things, or maybe all conscious beings.\textsuperscript{410}

But even with this restriction in place, I do not think that the general perfection principle is at all plausible. First, the worries that Dorsey raised about the perfection principle are even more problematic for the general perfection principle. For, unlike in the case of the perfection principle, possible counterexamples are not limited to cases that are somewhat plausible as possible results of an account of human nature. What if we find out, then, that the \textit{Yrtegus} -- a species of immortal conscious beings -- have but one central capacity: to suffer. It is not that the Yrtegus want to suffer, or take pride in their suffering; it just happens to be their only central capacity. How much theoretical pull would there be to accept the suffering of the Yrtegus as something intrinsically valuable? I do not think there would be any (and someone like Dorsey, who does not think that the perfection principle can convince us of counter intuitive claims about the human good, would certainly be unmoved).

But even apart from considerations about its staying power in the face of counterintuitive implications the general perfection principle just seems to lack any intuitive plausibility. To be sure, there is a sense in which things are 'good specimen' of their kind, if they exercise their essential capacities, but this is very different from saying that such exercising has \textit{ethical} value. As Wayne Sumner puts the point:

\begin{quote}
What is unclear to me is why we should think we have a moral reason to make things better examples of their kind.\textsuperscript{411}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{410} Of course, we might then think that the general perfection principle is but a special case of the even more general 'function principle'.

\textsuperscript{411} Sumner (1996), 211.
I take it then, that the general perfection principle cannot be used to prop up the perfection principle. If anything, it does the opposite. I think the general perfection principle is so blatantly implausible that its association with the perfection principle may throw further doubt upon the latter. If it is clearly implausible to think that perfection is not ethically valuable in general, why would we think that human perfection is?

I think that the answer to this last question has to do with the fact that we tend to think highly of the capacities that come with being human. In other words, the (human) perfection principle seems plausible because we think that human nature is a wonderful thing. That is why living a 'truly human life' is an attractive ideal. Now, given that we are humans, it may be understandable that we hold human nature in high regard. But such self-adoration is suspect as a ground for an axiological principle.

I conclude that we have good reason to doubt that the perfection principle can carry the load it needs to, if perfectionism is to get off the ground. Let me close, however, with a somewhat conciliatory remark. The perfection principle posits a close link between our nature and the things that are valuable. One possibility for holding on to that link is to reverse the perfection principle. Instead of saying that what things are good (for us) is determined by our nature, we might think that we can learn something important about our nature from the things that are good in our lives. This move would also allow us to give a compelling interpretation of 'excellent exercise'. We could simply say that a capacity is excellently exercised if it is used in a way that is intrinsically valuable. If we accept the principles of harmonism, for example, we could say that using a capacity to endorse the world, or to establish non-accidental correspondence, would qualify as an excellent exercise of that capacity. Within the perfectionist framework, by contrast, such a move would be question-begging.
Abraham Maslow expresses the perfectionist creed as follows (although his version of perfectionism is individualized):

> Observe that if [the true nature of human beings can be determined this] promise[s] a scientific ethics, a natural value system, a court of ultimate appeal for the determination of good and bad, right and wrong. ... The thing to do seems to be to find out what you are really like inside, deep down, as a member of the human species and as a particular individual.\(^4\)

What I am proposing, by contrast, is something along the following lines:

*The Reverse Perfectionist Creed*: what we are as human beings (and maybe individuals?) is a matter of what capacities we have that can be used in intrinsically valuable ways. An important part of our identity is given by the ways in which our lives are made valuable.

I suggest that this is the way to go, if we want to hold on to the claim that there is a link between nature and value. Doing it the other way around, as perfectionism proposes, is simply implausible.

### 5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered two views about the value of achievements. These views are potential rivals to my own view that we should think about the value of achievements in terms of harmony between mind and world. First, I discussed Portmore's view that the value of an achievement is a function of the self-sacrifice that goes into the achievement of the goal. I argued that this view cannot be made plausible as a view about the value of achievements *qua*...
achievement. Second, I took on axiological perfectionism. I sketched Hurka's and Bradford's perfectionist accounts of the value of achievements and suggested that perfectionism has trouble to account for the success condition that is a vital part of achievements. Moreover, even if this problem could be conquered, it would not result in a plausible explanation of the value of achievements for perfectionism itself is not a viable doctrine.
Chapter 7: Restrictions and Defeat

1. Introduction

Let me begin by yet again stating the obvious: not all events that are achievements are on balance good. We already encountered the examples of Anders Breivik's successful killing spree and the murderous campaigns of Genghis Khan as events that are achievements but clearly not intrinsically valuable. The achievement of horrific goals such as these provides the most obvious motivation for rejecting what, following Simon Keller, I call

*The Unrestricted View*: Achievements are always intrinsically valuable. More precisely, they are always intrinsically valuable as achievements; overall, they may be intrinsically worthless or even have negative value.\(^{413}\)

Of course, the unrestricted view has the resources to declare such evil achievements bad overall, but some people will think that this is not enough. In such cases, they will say, it is not just that the value of achievements qua achievement is *outweighed* by other features of the event. Instead, the fact that the goal was evil, eradicates any value the event might otherwise have had in virtue of being an achievement.

Those who think that this is the right way to think about evil achievements might adopt a version of

*The Restricted View*: Achievements can be intrinsically valuable. However, not all achievements are. Achievements are intrinsically valuable iff they meet certain additional conditions.\(^{414}\)


\(^{414}\)Cf. Ibid. Keller discusses these views as views about achievements' contribution to well-being.
The additional condition prompted by the worry about evil achievements might be that the goal itself has to be intrinsically valuable, or that the goal must not have negative intrinsic value. However, while such a clause against evil achievements is the most obvious restriction one might want to place on the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable, it is not the only one. In addition to the value restriction, I discuss three further possible restricting conditions in this chapter: that the achievement needs to be significant; that the achievement needs to be endorsed by the agent; that the goal needs to be held authentically. I argue that the unrestricted view has sufficient resources to deflate the case for all of them except the last one. First, however, a few clarifications are in order about the notion of a restriction as such.

2. Balance, Defeat, Muting

Whenever an achievement has a feature that militates against its being valuable, there are two ways to think about that fact. On the one hand, we may simply say that the event has negative value in virtue of the feature in question and this negative value needs to be weighed or balanced against the positive value the event has qua achievement. The value qua achievement may be outweighed in which case the event is bad overall. As Roderik Chisholm puts it:

> when goodness is balanced off, then a whole that is not good has a part that is good,
> and, outside of it, a part that is worse than the whole.
>
> When goodness is thus balanced off, we may be consoled at least by its presence in the larger whole.\(^{415}\)

\[^{415}\]Chisholm (1968-9), 26. We need not worry here about whether Chisholm's notion of parts and wholes is adequate.
Chisholm goes on to contrast this notion of balancing off with the notion of defeat. When goodness is defeated, he explains, the presence of the part (or aspect) that is good makes the event worse. The way that he puts this point suggests that the part (or aspect), despite now making a negative contribution to the value of the whole, nevertheless retains its positive value.416 Alternatively, we may think that the part (or aspect) itself has negative value in the presence of some other feature.417 Deciding between these two ways of thinking about what happens when value is defeated would quickly lead us deep into discussions about the metaphysics of intrinsic value that I would like to steer clear of. Luckily, the interesting question for us is simply whether the fact that an event is an achievement always makes a positive contribution to its overall value. And for that question the difference between these ways of thinking about defeat is immaterial. In what follows, I will sometimes speak less carefully of the value of a part (or aspect) changing. What I mean by that is simply that the contribution this part makes to the overall value of the event is changing.

According to Chisholm, a part (or aspect) of an event can make different contributions to the event's overall value depending on what other parts are present. His notion of defeat is a special case of that phenomenon where the usually positive value of a part makes a negative contribution to the overall value of the event. But there could be other cases in which the value is merely diminished; or where it is enhanced. Some of these scenarios might be more plausible than others and some are interesting enough to deserve their own terms. For example, we might think that the value of some part or aspect is 'flipped' by the co-presence of some other part, meaning that it now makes a negative contribution that is equal in absolute value to the positive

417 Dancy argues that this is the only way to make sense of this notion of defeat. Cf. Dancy (2004), 176-84.
contribution it would have made otherwise. We may also think that the value of some part is 'muted' in some scenarios, meaning that its contribution to the overall value is reduced to zero.

The four versions of the restricted view I will discuss are most plausible, if we understand the features they are built around as playing different roles. The significance restriction is best understood as the claim that the absence of significance *mutes* the value of achievements. The same can be said about the endorsement restriction. The absence of authenticity, by contrast, most plausibly plays a *diminishing* role. The fact that an achievement is of an evil goal, finally, might be thought to *defeat* or *flip* its value.

3. Significance

The first worry that someone might have about the value of achievements is that some of the things that satisfy the CRG account are just too insignificant and petty to be bearers of value. Thus Gwen Bradford draws a distinction between achievements generally, of which she gives an account that is somewhat similar to the CRG account, and Achievements with a capital A which, in addition to being CRGs, involve a certain threshold of difficulty and are valuable (at least partly) in virtue of that fact.\textsuperscript{418} In the same vein Thomas Hurka states

\begin{quote}
But what exactly is achievement? It clearly involves realizing a goal, but not every such realization counts as an achievement; for example, tying one’s shoelace does not unless one has some disability.\textsuperscript{419}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{418}Cf. Bradford (2010), 6, 10, 130; (2013), 205.

\textsuperscript{419}Hurka (2006), 221.
Similarly, James Griffin, after stating that achievements are valuable only if they are the kind of thing that can give “weight or point” to a life, claims that “[s]ome values are just too small-scale to give one's life weight or point.” Finally, there is Joseph Raz's insistence that what is valuable is not just any achievement but rather the achievement of our comprehensive goals, i.e. those that are of pronounced importance to us and serve as organizing principles for the shaping of our lives.

I think that the significance requirement is best treated as pertaining to the question how much value a given achievement has, rather than to the question whether a given achievement has value at all. And I think that, with the exception of Griffin, all of the authors cited above would agree. They all give hints at one point or another that this is indeed the way their claims are intended. Griffin's case is somewhat special, for one may think that small-scale achievements do in fact fail to give one's life weight or point. But then we may wonder why this should not also be a matter of degree. In the grand scheme of things, after all, it would seem that all human achievements are rather insignificant. Once we think of some of them as giving our life weight or point, why should we not say that they all do to varying degrees?

If we compare two otherwise similar lives and one of them involves more small-scale achievements, it still seems to me that this fact alone makes this life a better one. You may think of two people who both have taken to playing mini golf as a way of killing time. If one of them is more successful than the other, his life is a tiny little bit better in virtue of that fact. Now, any example involving insignificant achievements like that is unlikely to evoke strong intuitions either way and so we cannot build a case around it. But I take the burden of proof to lie with

420Griffin (2008), 114.
Griffin here. The default position seems to be that an insignificant achievement has an insignificant amount of value. And I see no reason to think otherwise.

As I argued in chapter 1 and the prologue to part II, every CRG is an achievement. The difference between minor CRGs like tying a shoelace and textbook examples of achievement like climbing Mount Everest is one of degree not of kind. The same, I think, is true for the value of achievements. Every CRG is valuable, but some are so minor that their value is negligible and easily overlooked. It is not true that only significant achievements are valuable; what is true is that only significant achievements are valuable to a significant degree.

4. Endorsement

A more prominent version of the restricted view insists that achievements are intrinsically valuable only when the achiever endorses his achievement or reaps some other psychological gain from it. Wayne Sumner, for example, lists achievements as belonging to “a set of standard human goods” membership in which requires of each item that it be “plausible to say that everyone cares about it to some extent for its own sake, thus that its presence in a life makes that life to some extent more satisfying or fulfilling.” On Sumner's view, then, achievements are valuable only when and insofar the achiever takes some satisfaction in them or feels fulfilled by them.

423 For views that make suggestions along this line either about achievements or about any 'objective' value cf., e.g., Frankena (1973); Dworkin (1995); Sumner (1996); Adams (1999), chapter 3; Feldman (2004) 120-3; Moore (1966), 124-5.


425 Ibid., 181.
There are a number of different ways in which such an endorsement restriction could work. Sumner's view is that the value of achievements is determined by the degree that they contribute to a person's cognitive and affective life-satisfaction. This view, rather than being a restriction on the claim that achievements are intrinsically valuable as such, comes very close to a flat-out denial of it. The view does allow that achievements can be intrinsically valuable under the condition that they are being endorsed by the achiever. But the amount of value that an achievement has, on this view, is solely a function of the form and strength of the endorsement (rather than of the magnitude of the achievement). The view gives the same status to anything else. As long as (life-) satisfaction is derived from an event, the event is valuable to the degree that this is the case. Thus, achievements do not have any real axiological standing on that view. They just happen to be the kind of thing most people care about. This view, then, is not one that claims that value qua achievements can be defeated; it is one according to which such value does not exist. Taking on views like that is not something I can do here.

A different way of bringing endorsement to bear on the value of achievement would be the claim that some kind of endorsement is required to enable value qua achievement. According to such a view, achievements would have no value unless they are being endorsed; but if they are endorsed, their value qua achievement is determined, at least partly, by how much of an achievement they are, rather than solely by how much they are endorsed. This is the suggestion that the absence of endorsement mutes value qua achievement. This view is not without plausibility. Here is Ronald Dworkin.

It seems preposterous that it could be in someone's interests, even in the critical sense, to lead a life he despises and thinks unworthy. … my life cannot be better for me in virtue of some feature or component I think has no value.\footnote{Dworkin (1995), 263-4.}
However, insofar as the endorsement required is a cognitive judgement that something has value, as Dworkin's formulation may seem to imply, this suggestion is way out of line. Consider

*Axioms of Logic*: Professor Stern has come to hold the view that the only thing that is valuable in a human life is the contemplation of axioms of logic. He spends most of his days in his office trying to focus on those. He is aware, however, that in order to be allowed to keep his office he needs to continue teaching his undergraduate classes in political philosophy. He happens to be a fantastic teacher and, what is more, he enjoys teaching quite a bit. Once he leaves the classroom, however, he reproaches himself for enjoying such a worthless waste of time. Part of what makes it hard for him to focus on his axioms is that he keeps agonizing about his “twisted” values.

It seems to me that professor Stern's political philosophy classes are a source of value in his life. That he himself does not think so is irrelevant – he is wrong. Richard Arneson puts the point thus:

The objection to the endorsement constraint is that people's reasons for declining to endorse some putative good they are seeking or that is falling in their lap can be weak, confused, or even nonexistent.\(^{427}\)

However, I am quite sympathetic to the idea that making a judgement that something is valuable is not the only way of endorsing it. It seems quite plausible that the enjoyment that professor Stern gets from his teachings is a form of endorsement itself. But we can easily imagine a case in which even such 'emotional endorsement' is absent. The passage from Arneson I just cited continues as follows.

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\(^{427}\)Arneson (1999), 136.
Suppose Samantha writes a brilliant poem but denies that this achievement has any value or in any way enhances her life. Her ground for this dismissal is a shallow and silly aesthetic theory which she has thoughtlessly embraced. In these circumstances, her failure to endorse her achievement does not negate its value for her. No doubt her utility would be higher, other things being equal, if she were to endorse it, because a subjective sense of accomplishment is itself a not inconsiderable good, especially when it is well grounded on genuine accomplishment. But this point is fully compatible with rejection of the endorsement constraint. Note also that often other things are not equal. Samantha might be so disposed that becoming the sort of person who would endorse her achievements according to a sensible scale of merit would also involve becoming the sort of person who is not likely to achieve much. In such a case we might prefer for Samantha's own good that she not develop her capacity for self endorsement but instead develop and exercise her capacity for significant achievement.428

Even if we imagine, as Arneson seems to, that Samantha is not only judging her achievement to be worthless but also not enjoying it (she lacks a subjective sense of accomplishment), I think that Arneson is right. Samantha's achievement remains valuable.

Moreover, it is no accident that Arneson in his search for a counterexample to the endorsement restriction comes up with a case involving achievement even though achievements are not his primary concern. Achievements are a particularly good candidate for deflating the intuitive plausibility of an endorsement restriction because they already incorporate the central concern that motivates such a restriction in the first place. What accounts for the plausibility of an endorsement restriction is, I submit, the thought that a life cannot be improved by values that are imposed, as it were, from the outside. But achievements are already firmly grounded in the agent's own attitudes. The achievement of our goals is not a value that is imposed on us from the

428Ibid.
outside; it is a value that is shaped by our own choices and concerns. A different way of putting this point is that achievements trivially satisfy a version of the endorsement restriction. We may think of the kind of positive orientation towards an event that is realized through its being effortfully pursued as a goal as a form of endorsement. This will not satisfy someone like Sumner, who thinks that achievements can only be valuable if they contribute to one's (affective) sense of well-being, or someone who thinks that the kind of cognitive endorsement discussed above is necessary to enable the value of achievements. But I think that Arneson's example shows that such requirements are of limited plausibility. The plausible idea underlying these notions is that value that occurs within a person's life needs to be somehow anchored in that person's own attitudes. Achievements are so anchored.\footnote{Dworkin comes close to saying so himself when he seems to treat choice as a form of endorsement. Cf. Dworkin (1995), 272.}

A worry remains though. Even if choice and pursuit generally satisfy the need for a grounding of value in the agent's own concerns, we might think that this cannot be true of forced choice and pursuit under duress. As Dworkin puts it: “[i]n any case, endorsement must be genuine, and it is not genuine when someone is hypnotized or brainwashed or frightened into conversion.”\footnote{Ibid., 266.} This worry suggests a different kind of restriction; one that is centred around the notion of authenticity. I turn to that suggestion next.

5. Authenticity

Are achievements valuable only if the agent exhibits a certain degree of authenticity in pursuing the goal? The idea is analogous to the familiar worry about adapted preferences that is often...
raised in the context of desire-satisfaction theories of well-being.\textsuperscript{431} Brainwashing cases provide the easiest way to illustrate the problem. Imagine, for example, someone who has been brainwashed into adopting the goal of converting people to a new religion; she accomplishes that goal. Do we really want to say that this person's success is a valuable achievement? The intuitive reaction seems to be to deny this.\textsuperscript{432}

However, in a case like that the intuitive reaction is clearly overdetermined. First, as described, the case involves a seemingly bad goal (people being converted to what appears to be a manipulative cult). Second, absent special reasons we are liable to think that the brainwashing itself is probably of negative value (loss of valuable autonomy; possibly malicious intent on part of the brainwasher). Moreover, there is evidence that achieving inauthentic goals generates less subjective happiness than achieving authentic ones. Thus, most likely our brainwashing victim is not going to reap the usual psychological benefits from her achievement.\textsuperscript{433} We need to abstract from all of these factors.

Imagine, then, that while I am an avid runner, we both know that you hate running. But I am also a master brainwasher. One day, out of a desire to deepen our friendship I propose to use a brainwashing technique to make you adopt the goal of running a marathon with me – a goal which I have had for a long a time. Even though you think running marathons is a silly waste of time, you also have an interest in deepening our friendship and so you agree. The plan works out as does our training regime and we both finish a marathon. Does it seem intuitive to deny that

\textsuperscript{431}Cf., e.g., Sen (1987), 45-6.

\textsuperscript{432}Note that, just like in the case of endorsement, lack of authenticity does not seem to impinge on the status of this person's success as an achievement. This is a difference to the worry about significance and it renders these worries more genuine challenges to the unrestricted view. If a CRG is too insignificant, we might doubt that it is even an achievement (though this would be mistaken), which would take it out of the realm the unrestricted view is supposed to cover. By contrast, if a significant goal is achieved but the achievement is not endorsed, or the achieved goal was pursued inauthentically, the worry is that though there is achievement, there is no value.

\textsuperscript{433}Sheldon/Elliot (1999), 484.
your achievement is valuable? I think the answer is no. I do have a sense, however, that my achievement might be a little more valuable than yours. If that is right, it begins to look as if lack of authenticity is diminishing the value of an achievement instead of muting it. In the case of your marathon the value of your achievement intuitively appears to be diminished only by a little bit. This makes sense; for your authenticity is not undermined all that badly. You agreed to the brainwashing after all.

Brainwashing cases are tricky. Note that in the case above you agreed to be brainwashed into running a marathon, because you wanted to deepen our friendship – not because you thought it would be a good thing to be the kind of person that runs marathons. If the latter had been your reason, the sense that your authenticity was undermined by the brainwashing might have disappeared entirely. In that case we might have said that the brainwashing simply liberated your will by bringing your first-order desires in line with your second-order desires.\footnote{Cf. Frankfurt (1982).} By brainwashing you, I helped you to pursue your \textit{more} authentic goals. But note that, depending on how we think about brainwashing, we might say something similar about cases of involuntary brainwashing, and even cases where your second-order desires were changed also. For we might think that extreme cases of brainwashing create a new person. And this person might pursue her goals quite authentically. Of course, there is always the thought that somewhere 'underneath' this new person the person's old self is still there waiting to be 'liberated'. But this might just be a fiction.

While brainwashing cases are a handy way of generating the initial worry, we can get a better grasp on the plausibility of the authenticity restriction by thinking of cases where people achieve a goal that they adopt and pursue under duress. Think of those movies in which an evil
mastermind forces a talented young hacker or engineer to help set up some device that is needed for their evil plans. While held at gunpoint, Young Genius is writing the most elegant and effective code for hacking into the central computers of GoodWorld Co-op. Does his achievement have value? My intuitive reaction is a more pronounced version of the reaction I registered about the marathon case above: the achievement does have value, but it has less value – a lot less value in this case – than it would have had, if Young Genius had not been under duress.

The result that diminished authenticity leads to diminished value of the achievement is consistent with the explanation of the value of achievement in terms of harmony. Part of what makes achievements valuable, according to harmonism, is that they realize a positive orientation of the agent towards the world. This positive orientation is constituted by the conative commitment the agent makes to his goal. To the degree that an agent is actually not making that choice himself, he displays diminished conative commitment. Thus, the harmonist positive orientation principle delivers the intuitive result that the value of his achievement is diminished.435

6. Value

We have already encountered Griffin's criterion that achievements need to give a life weight or point in order to be intrinsically valuable. In section 3, I rejected the notion that only significant achievements can have intrinsic value. But Griffin also suggests that achievements are valuable

435Note that this gives us a further reason to think that PO does not describe value qua achievement. For diminished authenticity does not diminish the magnitude of an achievement and thus the value that is described by PO seems, again, in violation of condition (b) of VqA.
only if what is achieved is itself intrinsically good.\textsuperscript{436} While this suggestion is more plausible, Griffin's version of a value restriction is too demanding. The obvious problem with it is that it seems to deny value to achievements of neutral outcomes. This would mean, for example, that almost all athletic achievements are valueless as the goals that athletes pursue are usually trivial. A more plausible version of a value-restriction would claim that achievements are valuable unless the goal that is being achieved is of negative intrinsic value. This is the worry about evil achievements.

As I said above, I think that the worry about evil achievements is best construed as the intuition that the value of achievements is defeated or flipped by the intrinsic badness of the goal. That is to say that when an evil goal is achieved, the fact that it obtains as the result of someone's competent pursuit contributes negative intrinsic value to the overall situation. Thus, going back to the case of Anders Breivik, saying that the death and suffering of the teenagers (and the resulting suffering of their friends and families) vastly outweighs the value of Breivik's achievement will not do. For people will say that it would have been better if the teenagers had died, say, in a tsunami. The fact that their deaths constitute someone's achievement, far from (however slightly) mitigating their badness, makes the situation worse. It is this intuition that somehow needs to be reconciled with the unrestricted view.

Consider, then, the following pair of cases from Keller.

\textit{Bad Guy:} Roger is a horrible person with a heinous goal. Perhaps he wants to torture a certain number of kittens, or destroy those who oppose his tyrannical regime, or whatever. After some hard work, he achieves his goal. ... he achieves the standards he sets for himself. He imposes his will upon the world.\textsuperscript{437}

\textsuperscript{436}Cf. Griffin (1986), 65; (2008), 114.

\textsuperscript{437}Keller (2004), 31.
Inept Bad Guy: Barry is another horrible person with a heinous goal – the same goal, in fact, as Roger. Unlike Roger, Barry fails in his attempts to achieve his heinous goal. Along the way, though, Barry carries out some further, gratuitous, evil acts, acts that make him just as detestable a person as he would have been if he had achieved his heinous goal – just as detestable, indeed, as Roger.\(^{438}\)

Now, Keller claims that Bad Guy describes a life that is going better for Roger than Barry's life is going in Inept Bad Guy. And he thinks that this is due to the fact that Roger achieves his goals. “Roger is detestable, but Barry is both detestable and a failure.”\(^{439}\) I am not sure how strong an intuitive response this case will evoke. But I think what is clear is that the intuition that the achievement makes things worse is at the very least much weaker in this pair of cases than it is when comparing Breivik's murders with a tsunami. If that is right, it opens up the possibility that what we are reacting to in the latter case is not Breivik's achievement but rather his viciousness.\(^{440}\)

According to Thomas Hurka, vice and virtue can be analyzed using the axiological principle of recursion, according to which having pro-attitudes (con-attitudes) towards intrinsic goods (evils) is itself good and having con-attitudes (pro-attitudes) towards intrinsic goods (evils) is itself intrinsically bad. In chapter 5, I hinted that something like the principle of recursion would fit in nicely with the general outlook of harmonism: one way of being in harmony with the world is to respond to it in appropriate ways. Vice, according to this analysis,

\(^{438}\)Ibid., 31-2.

\(^{439}\)Ibid., 32.

\(^{440}\)It is worth drawing attention here to the fact that Keller is putting things in terms of prudential rather than ethical value. For someone could accept the claim that an evil achievement makes things better for the wicked agent but deny that this contributes positive value to the overall situation. In that case the value of well-being would be defeated by the fact that it was the well-being of a wicked person. Personally, I find the claim that well-being is indefeasibly valuable hard to resist (though considerations of appropriate distribution of well-being might outweigh a gain in well-being for the wicked). But I suspect that those who are comfortable with the defeat of the ethical value of achievements will have fewer qualms about the defeat of well-being also.
occurs when an agent has an inappropriate attitude towards a given event. To use Hurka's terms, to be vicious is to hate the good or to love the bad. 'Loving' and 'hating' are meant to cover a wide range of pro- and con-attitudes respectively. Importantly for our current purposes, one form of 'loving the bad' is the pursuit of intrinsically bad events.  

And, if Hurka is to be believed, such instances of vice are of negative intrinsic value.

This provides the resources for the defender of the unrestricted view to say that evil achievements always make things worse in one way additional to the badness of the goal itself. They are necessarily instances of vice. For if the agent did not viciously pursue the evil goal, they would not be credited with an achievement. However, many defenders of the restricted view will not be impressed. They may grant that the unrestricted view has an explanation for why evil achievements are necessarily bad in one way. But this, they will point out, at most allows the unrestricted view to pull even with their own favoured view. The restricted view can account for the same facts – and does so without needing extra resources. What we need, then, are arguments that favour one of these pictures over the other. While I do not think that anything decisive can be said here, I take the following considerations to favour the unrestricted view's contention that the value of achievements is outweighed rather than defeated.

First, note that, if the unrestricted view was true, we should find very few examples of evil achievements where the positive value of the achievement can outweigh the negative value of the goal. This is, because in order for the overall value of the situation to come out positive,

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441 Cf. Hurka (2001b), 16.

442 The question about the status of evil achievements (along with most other questions about achievements) has not received a lot of philosophical attention. For an exception cf. Bradford (2012). The parallel question about the status of vicious pleasures, however, has been widely debated. Here, too, there are those who think that the value qua pleasure of vicious pleasure is outweighed by its negative value qua vice, while others think that (if there is such a thing as) value qua pleasure (it) is defeated by the presence of vice. I think it is reasonable to think that the truth about vicious pleasures and the truth about evil achievements go hand in hand. Thus, any argument in favour of an outweighing or defeating account of vicious pleasure would also be support for a corresponding view about evil achievements. For some arguments against a defeating account of vicious pleasures cf. Hurka (2001b), chapter 5.
the achievement would have to outweigh not just the badness of the goal but also the badness of its vicious pursuit. According to the restricted view, however, it is not even a conceptual possibility that the value of an achievement could outweigh or even mitigate the badness of the goal and its vicious pursuit. But that seems overly moralistic when it comes to small-scale evils and great achievements. Take for example an elaborate art heist. Pulling it off may be no mean achievement, and although the goal is (somewhat) bad, it still seems that some (grudging) admiration is in order, which is an indication that there is something of value here.

Second, consider the following instance of an impressive achievement with an evil but not horrendous goal.

Equality of Height: Senator Kook is convinced that justice requires that all people appear to be equally tall when in public. To see that justice is done, he proposes a law that requires people to wear shoes with plateaus that correct for individual differences in height. Being not taken seriously at first, he achieves his goal with great political skill and effort. In addition to restricting freedom of choice, his law also causes everyone shorter than 5 foot 6 a short and mild discomfort while they are adjusting to their new footwear.

To me this case reinforces the notion that achievements do not make things worse when the evil achieved is not very significant. We may regret the outcome, but, again, it seems that Kook's achievement has some positive value that merits admiration. But there is something else here. Note that Senator Kook is acting out of an honest conviction about what justice requires. Now, imagine a variation of the case in which the reason he introduces the law is to get back at his ex-

444 The example is taken from Bradford (2012).
wife and her family all, of who are exceedingly short. It seems to me that the overall state of affairs is worse in this second scenario.

But why should the achievement of something bad made be worse by the agent's realization that it is a bad goal? I think that the best way of answering this question is by pointing to the additional viciousness of the pursuit in this scenario. If pursuing something bad is intrinsically bad, it is very plausible to say, as Hurka does, that pursuing something bad, while knowing that it is bad, is even worse.\textsuperscript{445} Compare the difference between the variations of \textit{Equality of Height} with the difference between \textit{Bad Guy} and \textit{Inept Bad Guy}. I take it that, in the former pair, increasing viciousness clearly makes a difference for the worse. In the latter pair, by contrast, even if you do not follow Keller in thinking that achievement makes a difference for the better, I find it hard to think that it could make a difference for the worse. I take that as some confirmation that our negative intuitive evaluations of evil achievements are mainly a reaction to the vice involved.

These arguments are unlikely to sway those who have their mind set on a defeating view. But pointing to the viciousness of evil achievements as an explanation of the fact that it is worse overall when a bad event is achieved (rather than coming about in another way) leaves us in a position where the outweighing view cannot be dismissed by pointing to obvious counterintuitive implications. The arguments in the last couple of paragraphs were designed to show that maybe it is even at a slight advantage in that regard. In that situation we might look to some more theoretical considerations to decide between the views.

It seems to me that the defeat view is easily motivated within a perfectionist framework. If the value of achievements is grounded in the fact that they constitute the excellent exercise of

\textsuperscript{445}Hurka (2001b), 177-80.
our central capacities, we can see how it might be built into the notion of 'excellent exercise' that we do not use our capacities to reach evil goals. If that was the correct way to think about the value of achievements, the defeating view would follow swiftly. For then a restriction concerning evil goals would be built into the very principle from which we derive the value of achievements in the first place. Alas, perfectionism is not the right way to think about the value of achievements – as I have argued in chapter 6. And within a harmonist framework the defeat view appears less natural. Evil achievements have positive value according to two principles of harmonism; they have negative value according to another. While there is nothing incoherent about saying that some harmonist values are conditional on others (or on the absence of negative values) it is hard to see how this move could be motivated from within the theory itself. And as the intuitive arguments in favour of a defeat view fall well short of being decisive, it seems to me that a good harmonist should go with the simpler version of the theory that does not make such conditional claims.

Before moving on, let us briefly consider whether the dialectical situation is different if, instead of contrasting the unrestricted view with a view that claims that the value of achievements is defeated, we contrast it with a view that claims that the value was merely diminished by an evil goal.446 I think that it is not. While I think that there is some intuitive appeal to this suggestion, I would be inclined to explain that appeal with reference to the same facts about the viciousness or virtue of the pursuit of the goal that I discussed above. If the recursive analysis of virtue and vice does indeed pick out states of intrinsic value, it is true that the better (worse) my goal, the better (worse) in one way my achievement: the better (worse) the goal, the more virtuous (vicious) and thus (dis)valuable my pursuit of it. But this is value qua virtue (vice), not qua achievement.

446 For the suggestion that the value of the goal is a factor in how valuable an achievement is cf. Hurka (2006).
6.1 Rationality

Joseph Raz and T. M. Scanlon both discuss achievements in the context of well-being and endorse versions of the restricted view about the value of achievements. Both of these authors claim that the achievement of goals is valuable only if those goals are 'rational'. However, the most plausible version of this suggestion collapses into the view – just discussed – that goals have to be intrinsically valuable.

Here is Scanlon:

[I]f something is one of a person's aims, then (provided it is rational) success in achieving it becomes one of the things that make that person's life better. ⁴⁴⁷

Now, one way of interpreting the requirement that a goal (or aim) has to be rational is that in holding it the agent does not violate some basic formal requirements of rationality. Most prominently, we may think that an agent is not rational in holding a goal the pursuit of which is self defeating or in conflict with her other goals. But it is hard to see why such a requirement should apply. To be sure, to achieve a goal that is incompatible with one's other goals involves a lost opportunity to pursue these other goals. If these other goals are more important, it is a bad decision to pursue the first goal, even if it can be reached. However, this does not mean that achieving the goal has no value. It just is not worth the opportunity cost. Maybe there are also reasons to think that it is intrinsically bad to hold incompatible goals. But even if this was true, it would not provide reasons to think that the achievement of any of these goals would lack the value otherwise associated with achievements.

⁴⁴⁷Scanlon (1998), 119.
In any case, what Raz and Scanlon have in mind is something else. In their conception, rationality involves responding to good reasons. As Raz tells us, to hold a goal is always to hold it for a reason; and when these underlying reasons are bad, the goal is not held rationally and achieving it is not valuable. Now, given that both Scanlon and Raz are committed to a picture in which what is to count as a good reason is not up to the agent, their rationality requirement is equivalent to a value requirement: on their conception it is irrational to have evil goals. Whatever the merits of this latter claim, it collapses their suggested rationality restriction into a version of the value restriction discussed in section 6.

7. Conclusion

According to restricted views about the value of achievements, events are valuable in virtue of their status as achievements only in the presence (or absence) of other factors. In this chapter, I have considered four such possible restrictions. First, that an achievement has to be significant in order to be valuable. Second, that an achievement cannot be valuable unless it is endorsed by the achiever. Third, that the value of an achievement depends partly on whether the goal was adopted and pursued authentically. And finally, that if the achieved goal has negative value, the achievement itself has negative value also. I declared my sympathies for the authenticity restriction and explained how such a restriction fits into the harmonist framework I developed in chapter 5. I argued that the other three suggested restrictions should be rejected.

Conclusion

I began with the question whether common sense is right that achievements are intrinsically valuable. I concluded that the answer is yes.

How valuable are achievements? This question cannot be answered in the abstract. The best one can say is that they are among the great human values on equal footing with goods such as knowledge, happiness, and moral virtue. In order to decide how particular achievements measure up against other values and against each other, it should be useful to understand what achievements are, why we should think that they are valuable, and which factors influence their value. Investigating these questions was the task of this dissertation. Deciding which concrete achievements are best to pursue, which time would be best to pursue them, and how much they are worth is a task for the practical wisdom of everyday life. I hope that the former can aid the latter. Still, I have followed Sidgwick, rather than Aristotle, in that my main objective has been “not Practice but Knowledge.”

Sidgwick (1907), viii.
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