

*The Guise of the Good*

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According to the "The Guise of the Good Thesis" (henceforth GG), when we act intentionally, we always act under the guise of the good. That is, in  $\varphi$ -ing intentionally, we take  $\varphi$ -ing to be good.

Although I will use this formulation, there are many possible variations of the view, and many of its advocates extend the view to apply to any desire; that is, they take it that all desires present their objects as good ((Tenenbaum, 2007), (Stampe, 1987)) or that they are "experiences of value" (Oddie, 2005). In this entry, I outline various versions of the GG view and motivations for it, together with arguments that have been presented for and against this view.

*Background and Motivation*

In very broad terms, advocates of GG will typically defend the view in the course of understanding intentional agency as expressing, or being guided by, our rational or cognitive powers. Although the view is called "Guise of the Good", a similar thesis could be upheld in terms of reasons (Gregory, 2013) or fittingness, if, for instance, one were to be committed to the primacy of these normative notions. Versions of GG go back at least to Plato: in the Protagoras, for example, Plato seems to argue against the possibility of some form of *akrasia* on the basis of the impossibility of willingly

refraining from pursuing what he knows to be good.<sup>1</sup> Jessica Moss argues that Aristotle was committed to a wide ranging version of GG; namely, that “all motivation involves an appearance of the desired object as good” (Moss, 2010, p. 3). GG has been quite popular in the history of philosophy: indeed, Kant describes a version of GG with respect to desire and motivation as an “old formula of the schools.”<sup>2</sup> Kant himself takes this “old formula of the schools” to be “indubitably certain,” at least insofar as we will “under the guidance of reason” (Kant, 1997, p. 52). Uriah Kriegel argues that GG plays a central role in Brentano’s theory of intentionality (Kriegel, n.d., Chapter 3). Despite their radically different views, G. E. M. Anscombe and Donald Davidson, arguably the two “parents” of contemporary action theory, both seem to have endorsed some version of GG. According to Anscombe, “the question ‘What do you want that for?’ arises until we reach the *desirability characterization*, about which ‘what do you want that for?’ does not arise” (Anscombe, 2000, p. 74, emphasis mine). Davidson takes intentions, including intentions in action, to be “all-out” evaluative judgments or judgments of desirability (Davidson, 1980b, 1980c). Of course, GG has also had well-known critics: both Hobbes and Hume seem to have rejected the doctrine. According to Hobbes, rather than representing the object of desire as good, “whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire” is what “he for this part calleth good”(Hobbes, 1994, Book I, Chapter 6). According to Hume, “A passion is an original existence, or, if you will, modification of existence, and contains not any representative quality.” (Hume, 1978, p. 415) In contemporary philosophy, Michael Stocker and David Velleman have advanced prominent challenges to GG (Stocker, 1979; Velleman, 1992), and more recently, Kieran Setiya has presented novel arguments against the position (Setiya, 2007, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> (Plato, 1991). The dialogue seems also to imply that one pursues only what one regards as good.

<sup>2</sup> Kant describes the “old formula of the schools” as “*Nibil appetimus, nisi sub ratione boni; nihil aversamus, nisi sub ratione mali* (we only desire under the guise of the good; we only avoid under the guise of the bad). (Kant, 1997, p. 51)

Often, GG is defended as preserving some intuitive claims about the nature of desire and intentional action; more specifically, the view seems to capture how explanations of intentional action make the action intelligible, or display it in a reasonable light. Anscombe famously argued that intentional action is characterized by a special sense of the question “Why?”; a proper answer to this question provides a desirability characterization; that is, a characterization of the end of the agent that shows that the agent’s pursuit is an intelligible. It seems plausible that a pursuit is made intelligible by showing how the agent regarded the object of the pursuit as good, at least in a broad sense of ‘good’. If one is asked “why are you pumping water?” and they answer “so that the water can go a further mile South”, it would seem natural to regard this explanation as incomplete and ask “But why do you want the water to go South?”. On the other hand, if the answer were “so that the water can reach the children, who’d otherwise have no access to clean water”, no further explanation is necessary. It seems that this difference can be accounted for by the fact that the latter explanation, but not the former, shows the good that the agent saw in the action, given that “providing children with clean water” is something that is readily intelligible as the pursuit of a good. GG puts restrictions on what the agent can pursue intentionally; that is, it holds that she can act intentionally only when she conceives her action to be good. In the absence of such restrictions, it seems that in principle anything could be an object of pursuit or desire for any particular agent. It is thus tempting to test the hypothesis by looking into cases in which an object of desire or pursuit does not seem to be the kind of thing that can be conceived as good, or in which it is somehow stipulated that the object of pursuit in no way connects to the evaluative judgments of the agent.<sup>3</sup> In Anscombe’s famous example, an agent who would answer such a “Why” question by mentioning a desire for a

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, one could think that there are different restrictions on the objects of desire and pursuit. But insofar as the examples below are cases in which we think that there are something awry because the objects of pursuit are not, and perhaps could not, be conceived as good, they are effective examples against such views as well.

saucer of mud would fail to make her action intelligible. Although it is possible to argue that in such an example the agent is intelligible because the complement of “desire” is a noun, rather than an infinitival or a proposition, the same cannot be said of other examples. For instance, Anscombe considers someone who “hunted out all the green books in his house and spread them out carefully on the roof.” If in answer to this version of the question “Why?”, the agent simply said “for no particular reason” or “I just thought I would”, we would find his answer “unintelligible” (Anscombe, 2000, p. 26). Warren Quinn gives the example of someone who has a disposition to turn on radios, wherever he encounters them. The agent in question is not interested in listening to music, or in anything else connected to having the radio on. Quinn argues that actions of someone moved by such brute dispositions cannot be rationalized at all (and thus arguably it would not count as an intentional action at all (Quinn, 1993)).

However, these examples point out to a more general consideration in favour of GG; namely, the idea that what is special about intentional action, rather than any other action that might have originated within a rational agent, is that intentional action is guided by the agent’s understanding that the action, or the intended object, was worth pursuing (or, in more modest versions of the view, that there was something in the action or object that was worth pursuing). As Joseph Raz puts it: “From its earliest origins, whatever version of the Guise of the Good was viewed with favor was the keystone keeping in place and bridging the theory of value, the theory of normativity and rationality and the understanding of intentional action” (Raz, 2010). One way to make this motivation more concrete is to draw an analogy between the role of ‘good’ in practical rationality and intentional agency, and the role of ‘true’ in theoretical rationality and epistemic attitudes or epistemic agency (Tenenbaum, 2006a, 2008). It is widely accepted that in believing a

certain proposition, the subject somehow holds or takes the content of the proposition to be true.<sup>4</sup> Moore's paradox ("it's raining outside, but I don't believe it"), for instance, supposedly illustrates the fact that there is a tension between asserting the truth of a proposition and failing to believe the proposition. Relatedly, truth is taken to be a constitutive standard of correctness for belief, so that an ideal "theoretical agent" only believes what is true (or all her beliefs are instances of knowledge), and an ideally rational believer forms and revises beliefs in accordance with the norms of evidence. On this picture, truth is the formal object of belief (any content that we believe is taken to be true)<sup>5</sup> as well as the formal aim of belief (any belief is correct only if it is true). Of course, each element of this picture of belief can be disputed, but it gives advocates of GG a general model of how to understand the relation between action and the good in terms of the relation between belief and truth (more on this later). In the good case, a subject employs her rational and cognitive faculties to form a belief that **p** in response to the fact that **p**; in other words, she believes **p** because **p** is the case (is true) and her cognitive faculties provide her with access to the fact that **p**. The bad case is explained as a failed or impeded exercise of these capacities; an explanation of a belief that falls short of knowledge would explain why the agent takes it to be the case that **p** even though **p** is not the case or the fact **p** is not appropriately connected to this exercise of the subject's cognitive faculties.

A parallel view about GG argues that in intending to *A* or acting with the intention of *A*-ing, an agent takes *A*-ing to be good, or believes that *A*-ing is good. Similarly, on some versions of GG, GG takes the formal object and the formal aim of intentional agency to be the good; in *A*-ing

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<sup>4</sup> The first sentence of Eric Schwitzgebel's Stanford Encyclopedia entry on "belief" is: "Contemporary analytic philosophers of mind generally use the term "belief" to refer to the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true." (Schwitzgebel, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Or taken to be a representation of the world as it is.

intentionally or intending to  $\mathcal{A}$ , an agent takes  $\mathcal{A}$  to be good and the internal standard of success in action (and intention) is that the agent does (and intends) what is in fact good. In the good case, intentional agency is explained simply as the exercise of one's (practical) cognitive and rational faculties employed in the pursuit of the good. And the bad case will be similarly a case in which the exercise of these faculties was somehow defective. This version of GG promises also to vindicate the way in which intentional explanations show an agent's actions to be "intelligible" (Anscombe, 2000) or the way in which intentional explanations show how "from the agent's point of view there was, when he acted, something to be said for the action." (Davidson, 1980a, p. 9). But more generally, according to GG, explaining why the agent performed a certain action amounts to explaining the good that she saw in the action she undertook (or in its consequences).

Although this presentation of GG relies on the analogy with the role of truth in understanding belief and knowledge, the two pictures are independent. One could accept GG without committing oneself to the parallel picture about the nature of belief or knowledge. However, rejecting the equivalent picture in the theoretical realm would rob GG of an important motivation; namely, its ability to provide a unified understanding of practical and theoretical cognition and rationality in which theoretical and practical rationality are distinguished only by having different formal objects or aims.

It is worth mentioning some related motivations or arguments for GG. A more neo-Aristotelian approach to GG sees this thesis as essential for understanding how a general notion of the good that is constitutive of the teleological nature of all life forms can be extended to the realm of rational agency. On this picture, animals act in pursuit of ends that are naturally good for them in light of their form. A cat hunts mice because it is of the nature of cats to hunt mice; hunting mice is good for a cat insofar as in hunting mice the cat actualizes its form. When a cat hunts a mouse, it acts successfully in pursuing a goal insofar as it has this goal in virtue of its form. Human agents are

moved by a *self-conscious* representation of their good. If a capacity for action in the animate world in general is the capacity to pursue the animal's good, the rational, self-conscious, capacity of a rational agent to act is "a capacity to pursue what it takes to be good" (Boyle & Lavin, 2010, p. 187).

Another possible motivation flows from a commitment to value realism. On a certain interpretation, GG takes our conative faculties to provide access to an independent realm of value; on this picture, desires are experience of value (Oddie, 2005). Of course, there need not be a single, or even a very general, main reason to accept GG. Benjamin Wald, for instance, argues that we should accept GG because of its overall fruitfulness in various branches of practical philosophy (Wald, 2017).

### *The Nature of the Guise*

There are various versions of GG, but here I will focus on a very basic distinction between two versions of the "guise". On one version of GG, an agent acts intentionally only if she *believes* that her action is good. So, for instance, Raz presents the following as an immediate consequence of the defining theses of GG:

Intentional actions are actions taken in, and because of, a belief that there is some good in them. (Raz, 2010, p. 111)

On this view, roughly, our reasoning about what to do is reasoning that ends in the belief that a certain course of action is good, and intentional action is (typically)<sup>6</sup> action done in light of, and because of, this belief. We can call this version of GG the "Content Version", in light of the fact

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<sup>6</sup> Raz allows that some actions are not done under the guise of the good. See (Raz, 2010, 2016).

that the “guise” appears as the content of an attitude; namely, the belief that explains the action. On an alternative view, in having an intention (either a future-directed intention or an an intention an action), an agent takes the object of the intention to be good. If we extend this version of GG to desires, this view says that in desiring, the content of the desire appears to be good to the agent, while extending the Content view to desire yields a view in which desire is an appearance with an evaluative content or a belief that something is *pro tanto* or *prima facie* good. We can call this version the “Attitude version”, given that the “guise” does not appear in the content of any of the agent’s attitudes, but it is part of the nature of the attitude itself that in having such an attitude we somehow take, or hold, its content to be good.<sup>7</sup>

The most obvious advantage of the Content version is that it does not need to rely on the notion of “taking” or “holding” that is essential for the Attitude version. After all, what is taking *X* to be good if not a belief that *X* is good? However, even the Content version is committed to a similar “taking” relation if we accept the view mentioned above that to believe that *p* is to take *p* to be true. The “taking” relation is already needed in order to understand the relation between belief and the truth; the Attitude version simply postulates that the same relation holds between intending to *A*, or *A*-ing intentionally, taking *A* to be good. In fact, on the Attitude version, there is a much clearer parallel between the realms of theoretical and practical rationality: the role of ‘good’ in practical reasoning and action is exactly the same as the role of ‘true’ in theoretical reasoning and belief. How exactly the parallel is spelled out will depend on the specific theory;<sup>8</sup> here, I can only outline some of these parallels. For instance, good and true may play similar roles in distinguishing various kinds of ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’ attitudes. We have, on the one hand, unendorsed, or

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<sup>7</sup> For versions of this view, see (Kriegel, n.d.; Schafer, 2013; Tenenbaum, n.d., 2008, 2012; Wald, 2017). (Velleman 1992) makes a similar distinction, but the paper ultimately rejects GG.

<sup>8</sup> For one example, see (Tenenbaum, 2007)

*prima-facie* attitudes towards the good and the true, such as, respectively, desire and perceptual appearances, and on the other hand, endorsed, or *all-out* ones, such as intentions, or intentional actions, and belief. The different formal objects may also play similar roles determining what counts as valid inference (good-preserving in the case of practical reasoning; truth-preserving in the case of theoretical reasoning). Finally, they may also play similar roles in determining the fundamental case of success in belief and action; in other words, what counts as theoretical and practical knowledge (non-accidental true belief in the case of theoretical reasoning; non-accidental good action in the case of practical reasoning).

The Content version also seems to require richer conceptual capacities from those who can engage in intentional action. Only those who have evaluative beliefs can act intentionally, and for every intention and intentional act there must be a corresponding (albeit implicit) belief with the relevant content. This is particularly problematic if we want to extend GG to desire, since it would imply that small children and animals do not have desires, or at least not the same kinds of desires we have. Of course, one might restrict GG to intention and intentional action, but not extending GG to desires leaves GG incapable of explaining the ‘rational force’ of desires;<sup>9</sup> that is, it puts GG in a difficult position for accounting for the role of desires in practical reasoning. A more promising route would be to argue that the evaluative content of the relevant desires is non-conceptual, and thus capable of figuring in the content of children’s and animals’ mental states.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Content versions of GG will arguably face more difficulties in explaining apparent cases in which the agent seems to act contrary to their evaluative beliefs, such as cases of *akrasia* and *perversion* (more on these issues below). Finally, on the Content version, practical reasoning turns out to be an instance of theoretical reasoning, albeit theoretical reasoning whose conclusion is about

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<sup>9</sup> See (Schafer, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> See (Hawkins, 2008).

the good.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the Attitude version, practical reasoning is a genuinely different form of reasoning: it is a form of reasoning, whose soundness or validity cannot be understood in terms of truth-conduciveness or truth-preservation. Of course, this difference does not seem to favour either view on its own. However, philosophers have recently argued that a proper understanding of intentional action requires that reasoning reaches all the way to the actual actions of an agent; the action itself must be the conclusion of practical reasoning or the direct expression of our rational powers.<sup>12</sup> If this is correct, this would be a further reason to accept the Attitude version of GG, given that, in the Content version, practical reasoning ends at the formation of the relevant belief.

### *Common Objections and Replies*

In the last few decades, GG has been the subject of a large number of criticisms and objections. In his seminal paper in the topic, Michael Stocker says:

It is hardly unfair, if unfair at all to suggest that the philosophical view is overwhelmingly that the good and only the good attracts. (Stocker, 1979, pp. 739–40)

Stocker would have been pleased to learn that this state of the discipline that he so clearly lamented has been radically changed: we now have no shortage of philosophers who either explicitly reject GG or who provide accounts of human agency that are incompatible with GG. Opponents of GG often argue against the view by proposing putative counterexamples to it (Stocker, 1979; Velleman, 1992). We'll briefly examine three central types of purported counterexamples to GG; namely, cases of perversion, cases of *akrasia*, and cases of “arational” actions.

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<sup>11</sup> Anscombe argues that in such a view there is nothing that there should be called a ‘practical syllogism’: just as we see no reason to think that ‘mince-pie syllogisms’, syllogisms whose subject-matter are mince-pies express a different form of reasoning, we have no reason to think, on this view, that the practical syllogism is a special form of syllogism. (Anscombe, 2000, p. 58)

<sup>12</sup> On this point, see (Lavin, 2013; Tenenbaum, 2006b).

### Purported Counterexamples: Akrasia

Perhaps the most common counterexample raised against GG are cases of weakness of will or *akrasia*.<sup>13</sup> To make this challenge clear, it is worth taking a step back and looking at a very basic objection to GG. According to this objection, GG must get the structure of motivation wrong, since we may want or be motivated to do things that we don't believe to be good in any way. So, for instance, Gary Watson gives the example of "a squash player who, while suffering an ignominious defeat, desires to smash his opponent in the face with the racquet" (Watson, 1975, p. 210). An agent might have this motivation and yet not find it to be good in any way to behave in this manner. A common response to this objection is to say that in such cases, the want corresponds to a *prima-facie* evaluative judgment, or a perception or appearance of value;<sup>14</sup> this is certainly compatible with the agent believing that the object of the desire has no value. We can compare such cases with perceptual illusions in the theoretical realm. Sticks might look bent under water, cars might look small from a distance, and the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion appear to be of different sizes.<sup>15</sup> These things continue to *appear* this way, even when we know that the stick is straight, that the cars are large, or that the lines are of the same size. Similarly, we can continue to desire to smash the racket on our opponent (smashing the opponent with the racket *appears* good), even when we know there is no value in doing so. In other words, the relation between desire and intention, or intentional action, is like the relation between perceptual (and other) appearances and belief: desire is

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Holton takes weakness of will and *akrasia* to be different phenomena. What Holton describes as weakness of will does not present a particular problem for GG; the issues that we discuss below fall under the heading of what Holton calls "*akrasia*" (Holton, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> For understanding desires in terms of *prima-facie* evaluations, or appearances or experiences of the good, see (Davidson, 1980b, 1980c; Oddie, 2005; Stampe, 1987; Tenenbaum, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> (Austin, 1962) has famously argued that the stick under water does not really look bent. I'll ignore such complications, and, at any rate, a similar claim would be rather implausible regarding the Müller-Lyer illusion.

an unendorsed, or *prima-facie*, attitude towards the good whose existence is compatible with the absence of any instance of an endorsed, or *all-out*, attitude with the same content.

But this move does not necessarily respond to the challenge presented by cases of *akrasia*. Weak-willed agents do not simply desire that which they regard as worthless or less valuable than an alternative. Weak-willed agents *pursue*, or at least form intentions to pursue, actions that they consider to be worse than alternatives open to them. Their “endorsed”, *all-out* attitudes seem to favour the action that they regard to be bad (or at the least worse). But if the agent acts intentionally under the guise of the good, wouldn’t she always prefer a better option over a worse option? The weak-willed agent seems to choose, say, to watch a full season of her favourite series instead of studying for her exam, while simultaneously believing that watching the series is the worse option. Some philosophers sympathetic to GG think that all that GG requires is that an agent act in the pursuit of *some good* (but not necessarily the better option),<sup>16</sup> but akratic agents might engage in actions that they do not think are good in any way; Watson’s squash player might succumb to temptation and attack his opponent. Davidson himself took *akrasia* to be a serious challenge to the claim that intentions in action are evaluative judgments. In a seminal paper (Davidson, 1980b),<sup>17</sup> Davidson distinguishes between “all-things-considered” evaluative judgments and “all-out” evaluative judgments. An all-things-considered judgment is an evaluative judgment that takes into account all the relevant considerations. So in our example, the akratic agent forms the judgment “given all the relevant considerations, it is best to study”. However, this is not an unconditional judgment of what it is best to do *simpliciter*, so it is compatible with the other judgment that on Davidson’s view the akratic agent makes; namely, an “all-out” unconditioned judgment. In our example, the agent also makes the following, compatible, judgment: “it is best to watch TV”. Of

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<sup>16</sup> See (Clark, 2010). For a criticism of this more moderate version of GG, see (Tenenbaum, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> For further development of this account of *akrasia*, see (Tenenbaum, 1999).

course, our unconditional evaluative judgments should take into account all the relevant considerations, so the agent in question is guilty of irrationality. This is, however, a welcome consequence: *akrasia* is a form of irrationality.

Some philosophers find this move unpersuasive; they argue that the akratic agent often acts against their “all-out” judgment of what is best ((Bratman, 1979; Pears, 1982; Tappolet, 2003) or that there is no non-perspectival comparative judgment that the agent makes in favour of the akratic action (McDowell, 2010). But it is not clear that the advocate of GG need to accept that the agent makes an all-out comparative judgment. One can insist that the relevant judgment is a judgment about what is *good simpliciter* and thus argue that the akratic agent moves from a defeated or undermined appearance or *prima-facie* judgment to the conclusion that something is good *simpliciter*, much in the same way as a subject could irrationally move from defeated or undermined evidence to an irrational belief (Tenenbaum, n.d.). At least if one accepts the Attitude version of GG, this stance is compatible with the agent still *believing* that it is best to study. After all, the evaluative judgment in question, the way in which the weak-willed agent regards watching the show to be good, is not a belief.

### **Purported Counterexamples: Perversion**

Cases of perverse action (Stocker, 1979, 2008; Sussman, 2009; Velleman, 1992), and cases that fall under Hursthouse’s category of “arational actions” (Hursthouse, 1991) also seem to present difficulties for GG. Perverse actions are actions that are done exactly because they are bad, rather than being good. Satan is supposed to be an illustration of an agent who performs actions because they are bad. Anscombe, however, argues that we can make sense of the good pursued by Satan:

“the good of its being bad ... might be condemnation of good as impotent, slavish, and inglorious. Then the good of making evil my good is my intact liberty in the unsubmitiveness of my will” (Anscombe, 2000, p. 75).

Moreover, it is not clear that Satan pursues what is bad *simpliciter*, rather than what is *morally* bad or some other specific form of badness. After all, Satan does not seem to find anything attractive in foul tasting food, badly played music, or being engaged in boring activities, even though all these things are also bad. If a perverse agent is attracted by *badness as such*, why wouldn't she be attracted (at least to some extent) to all instances of badness?<sup>18</sup>

Irrational actions are supposed to express an emotion—a jealous lover might, for instance, smash the picture of his beloved, but the lover might not see anything good in a broken picture of the beloved. However, even though the agent need not see the outcome of the action as good (the broken picture), it is not clear why one needs to deny that he might see the action itself (the breaking of the glass) as good (Boyle & Lavin, 2010; Tenenbaum, 2007).<sup>19</sup> In sum, purported counterexamples might lead the GG advocate to refine and qualify the view, but, given its central theoretical motivations, it is unlikely to present insurmountable problems for the view.<sup>20</sup>

### **Theoretical Difficulties: Alternative Constitutive Aims**

Most of the authors who raise such counterexamples also try to argue more systematically that a proper understanding of intentional agency does not require GG. These strategies are mostly of two kinds: either they dispense altogether with the idea that there is a formal aim or object that is constitutive of intentional agency (Setiya, 2007), or they propose a different constitutive aim, such as self-understanding or intelligibility (Velleman, 1996).<sup>21</sup> Whether or not proposals of the latter kind

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<sup>18</sup> (Tenenbaum, n.d.). For other responses to this objection, see (Raz, 2016; Tenenbaum, n.d.).

<sup>19</sup> But some advocates of GG think that there are exceptions to the view. The exceptions are typically cases in which the agent has less than full control over her action. See (Raz, 1999, pp. 36–44, 2010)

<sup>20</sup> This point is also made by opponents of GG. See (Setiya, 2010, p. 83)

<sup>21</sup> For further developments of this idea, see the articles collected in (Velleman, 2006) and (Velleman, 2009).

succeed depends on whether the constitutive aim of action is a genuine alternative, and superior, to the one provided by GG.<sup>22</sup>

Although I can't examine in detail here alternative proposals for constitutive aims of action, it is worth mentioning one advantage that GG has over other proposals. The constitutive aim of action needs to do double duty. First, a constitutive aim of action is supposed to be an aim that one necessarily pursues whenever one pursues any other end. So if Velleman is right, whenever I, say, go to mall to buy shoes, I am also pursuing the end of self-understanding or intelligibility. But the constitutive aim is also supposed to provide a normative standard for the action: when I fail to realize the constitutive aim, my action falls short in some important way. But, assuming I can act intentionally and yet fail to realize the end of self-understanding to some degree, why shouldn't I perform an action that provides me with less self-understanding but more of some other end of mine (such as, for instance, personal enrichment). Why shouldn't I sacrifice a bit of self-understanding for a lot of money?

### **Theoretical Difficulties: Superfluity**

(Setiya, 2010)<sup>23</sup> argues that GG imposes a superfluous constraint on the nature of intentional action. Let us assume for a moment Anscombe's view that an intentional action is one in which I know not only that I am *A*-ing, but also why I am *A*-ing—that is, I know my reason for *A*-ing. But the relevant reason here is an explanatory reason: I must know the reason that *explains* my action, not the reason that justifies my action. But even the GG advocate needs to accept that sometimes

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<sup>22</sup> For criticisms of Velleman's proposal for a constitutive aim of action, see (Katsafanas, 2013, Chapter 3). Katsafanas proposes different constitutive aims for intentional action; namely, will to power and agential activity. If the "schmagency" objection to Velleman's view works, it would also speak against the idea that there is an interesting notion of intentional action such that it is true that acting intentionally requires us to have a substantive aim such as self-knowledge. See (Enoch, 2006). For a response to the schmagency objection, see (Ferrero, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> (Setiya, 2007) provides a different argument against GG, namely, that GG cannot explain certain necessary truths about intentional action. I discuss this argument in (Tenenbaum, 2012).

agents act in ways that are not in fact good. After all, the claim is that agents must *represent* their action as good, or believe that their action is good: everyone knows that agents act for bad reasons and thereby pursue actions that are not in fact good. But since being an explanatory reason for an action does not require that the reason is a good reason, neither should knowledge of the reason require that the agent believes that the reason is a good one. Thus, it seems perfectly possible that an agent could know that she is A-ing and that she knows that her reason for A-ing is that A-ing will bring about outcome O, and know that “bringing about outcome O” is a bad reason and thus that O is in no way good. Such an agent fulfills all the conditions of intentional agency even though she’s not acting under the guise of the good.

But this argument seems to move from the third-person perspective to the first-person perspective in a possibly illicit way. The fact that someone can rightly explain my action by referring to a reason she knows to be bad does not mean that I can decide on a reason that I know to be a bad reason to act or pursue an action that I do not regard as good. A comparison with Moore’s paradox is relevant here: although it is coherent for someone to ascribe a false judgment to me, or to see that I make a judgment based on poor evidence, it is far from clear that I can, at least under normal circumstances, judge that  $p$  when I regard  $p$  to be false, or judge that  $p$  on grounds that I myself take to be inadequate.

### *Conclusion*

Critics of GG focused first mostly on purported counterexamples. But the discussion above hopefully shows that more sophisticated versions of GG can accommodate the phenomena that are supposed to create difficulties for the view. I hope to have also shown that it is far from clear that alternatives can replicate, or dispense with, the theoretical advantages of GG. Although GG has

faced a number of criticisms recently, it remains a compelling view of desire and intentional action, a view that can be an important part of a unified account of our rational powers of action and knowledge.

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