

International Phenomenological Society

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Author(s): Luc Bovens

Source: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 821-840

Published by: [International Phenomenological Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2108334>

Accessed: 23/07/2013 18:28

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The Intentional Acquisition of Mental States*

LUC BOVENS

University of Colorado at Boulder

Phyllidula is scrawny but amorous,
Thus have the Gods awarded her,
That in pleasure she receives more
[than she can give;
If she does not count this blessed
Let her change her religion.

(Ezra Pound)

For various reasons a person may wish to have mental states other than the ones she actually has. Let us consider a few examples. I may wish to have more of a taste for dry wines, since my wine-connoisseur friends serve only dry wines at their parties. Or, I may wish to believe that my spouse is not having an affair, though all the evidence suggests that she is. Or, suppose I strongly disapprove of racially mixed marriages. When an old friend asks me to be her best man in a racially mixed wedding, I may wish that my moral stand on this issue were different.

The mental states that I wish for may be desires—as in the case of the dry wines—or beliefs—as in the case of my unfaithful spouse—or moral judgments—as in the case of the racially mixed wedding. It is not uncommon for someone to try to realize these wishes. Such attempts typically involve a project rather than a simple act of will: they can only be achieved in some roundabout way. A common strategy is to act *as if* one already had the projected mental state. To complete such a project successfully is to acquire the mental state in question intentionally through *as if* actions. There is a curious

* This research was in part supported by the Edelstein Center for the History and Philosophy of Science at the Hebrew University. I am grateful for helpful suggestions or comments on earlier drafts of this paper from Erik Anderson, Carol Cleland, Kevin Falvey, Andrew Mason, Claudia Mills, Michael Otsuka, Christopher Shields, Ellen Wagner, Ruth Weintraub, Margaret Wilson and two anonymous referees of this journal. I have also benefitted from presentations at an APA session of the Society for Realism/Anti-Realism Discussion, at the Mountain-Plains Conference, at Ben-Gurion University and at Tel Aviv University.

asymmetry between the intentional acquisition of beliefs in this manner (IA^b) and the intentional acquisition of desires in this manner (IA^d) (section I). The intentional acquisition of moral judgments through *as if* actions (IA^m) can be clustered together with IA^b in the face of this asymmetry (section II). I discuss some earlier reflections on the phenomenon of *wanting to believe* by W. James, H. H. Price, D. Davidson and B. Williams (section III). I then venture an explanation of the asymmetry between IA^b and IA^m on the one hand and IA^d on the other hand (section IV) and consider how this explanation fares with respect to some special cases and related phenomena (section V).

I

IA^b differs from IA^d in that, with certain qualifications, the former phenomenon—unlike the latter—raises certain qualms. Suppose that I am suspicious that my spouse is having an affair and I very much want to believe that she is not. To dispel my suspicions I plan a romantic outing to celebrate our wedding anniversary, asking myself rhetorically how I could after all be doing so while she is having an affair. Or, consider the following real-life example. Apparently it is not uncommon for people who know that they are carrying the HIV-virus to donate blood.¹ A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that they try to dispel the belief for themselves that they are carrying the HIV-virus by choosing to act *as if* they are not carrying the HIV-virus: ‘How could I be carrying the HIV-virus while being a blood donor?’ I start from the intuition that there is something unreasonable about such belief acquisitions and will try to provide an explanation of this intuition. I invite those who do not share this intuition to read my account as an argument to the effect that typical cases of IA^b indeed ought to be met with qualms.

IA^b is distinct from two related phenomena that do *not* raise qualms. First, IA^b involves a desire to acquire a mental state that has a particular propositional content, e.g. *that my spouse is not having an affair*. This is different from wanting to acquire *a belief about my spouse*, viz. whether she is having an affair or not. Second, on IA^b, my desire to acquire the mental state in question motivates me to engage in *as if* actions. This is different from a case in which I want to acquire the belief that my spouse is not having an affair in order to put my suspicions to rest and this desire motivates me *to check out things*—e.g. by paying close attention to her daily routine.

I also wish to distinguish IA^b from two related phenomena that meet with no fewer qualms than IA^b. First, there is the case in which I try to realize my desire to acquire a particular belief by subjecting myself to some brainwashing technique—e.g. I may ask a hypnotist to install the belief that my spouse is faithful (conjoined with a set of supporting beliefs) through post-hypnotic suggestion. Second, I may try to acquire the projected belief by *selectively*

¹ *New York Times*, July 8, 1991.

checking things out, e.g. by paying attention only to information that will most likely support the belief that my spouse is not having an affair. I will return to these related phenomena and show how my account of IA^b can also explain why the latter pair does and the former pair does not call for qualms.

IA^d differs from IA^b in that it does not in and of itself raise any qualms. To make this claim plausible, let us at first consider the attempt to acquire morally correct desires. It is a commonplace in Aristotelian ethics that an action cannot qualify as a virtuous action unless the agent performs it with a sense of joy. Suppose a poker-player who enjoys the game because of the possibilities for cheating involved, comes to realize that cheating is morally reprehensible. She decides to start a new life on this score, yet does not find fair-play poker terribly exciting. In her quest for virtue she is committed to becoming the kind of person who enjoys fair play. She decides to stick to fair play and to play *as if* she already enjoyed it, aiming to develop precisely such liking for it.² This story can be recast with alternatives that are entirely morally neutral. The casino may change its official card-game from poker to blackjack. Our poker-player may initially dislike blackjack, yet decide to stick with it—i.e. to play blackjack as if she already enjoyed it—aiming to develop precisely such an appreciation. Such projects of ‘character planning’³ do not raise any qualms in and of themselves. On the contrary, we may commend the former player in her quest for virtue as well as the latter player for being adaptable.

IA^b typically meets with qualms, while there seems to be nothing objectionable about IA^d in and of itself. Nonetheless, for both phenomena, there is an ample set of *Cross-Over* cases in which qualms (a) vanish for the intentional acquisition of *Beliefs* (COB’s) and (b) rise for the intentional acquisition of *Desires* due to special features of the cases in question (COD’s).

(COB¹) If there is good reason to believe that the truth of a proposition *p* is itself subject to a person believing *p*, then qualms about intentional belief acquisition may disappear. For instance, if there is good reason to believe that my ability to jump the creek is itself a function of my belief that I can jump the creek, then it seems to be quite reasonable for me to try to acquire the belief that I can jump the creek.

(COB²) Suppose that my son is reported as missing in combat and I know that I can only go on living in a meaningful way if I adopt the belief that he

² Notice that there is a clear difference between the intentional acquisition of morally correct desires and the intentional acquisition of moral judgments (IA^m). An example of a projected mental state on the former phenomenon is the desire structure on which I loath cheating and love fair play in card games. An example of a projected mental state on the latter phenomenon is the moral judgment that cheating is morally reprehensible. I will return to IA^m in the next section.

³ Cf. Elster, J. (1980) *Sour Grapes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 20–26.

is still alive. If such were the case, would it not be a most rational strategy to adopt the belief in question intentionally? Certainly, but this does not remove qualms about the belief acquisition in question. An action which is open to qualms may well be part of a rational strategy. For instance, suppose I know that making an utterance which invites ‘knocking on wood’ makes me feel highly uncomfortable unless I actually do knock on wood, knowing full well that I am hereby performing a superstitious act. Would it not be the most rational strategy, say, in a situation that is independently stressful, to knock on wood after I make such an utterance? Certainly, but this would not take away any qualms about the particular action of knocking on wood.

(COB³) If a proposition is such that the evidence for it *in principle* underdetermines a choice between it and its negation, it is less clear that qualms are in place about the intentional acquisition of the belief in a proposition of this kind. A voluntaristic conception of faith rests on the premises that religious beliefs are in principle underdetermined by our evidence for them and that there is nothing objectionable about their intentional acquisition—the more so since the consequences of holding such beliefs may be weighty.⁴ I wish to remain agnostic about the acceptability of intentional belief acquisition of this kind.⁵

(COD¹) Engaging in a project to acquire a character that cherishes certain desires may lead to an impasse. Such are desires which ‘involve a kind of self-forgetfulness or outward focus of the personality’.⁶ The obstacle in carrying through a project of becoming a self-forgetful or outwardly focused character is that engaging in character planning is itself a highly self-focused project. As such it may well reinforce rather than overcome the self-focused attitude from which it stems.

(COD²) IA^d is subject to the standard demands on rational action. If the state of affairs that the agent is aiming for—viz. holding a particular set of preferences—is not in her best interest and one could reasonably expect the agent to recognize this to be the case, then this project will raise qualms for this reason. An example that fits this category is a small-town middle-aged person with no realistic prospects beyond small-town jobs trying to acquire a preference structure that is fitting to a Hollywood lifestyle.

(COD³) There is the charge that IA^d lacks authenticity. In response, I wish to suggest that ‘lack of authenticity’ is predicated of a life style in which a *cluster of desires* is intentionally adopted in reference to some identity to which one *uncritically aspires*—rather than of some particular instance of

⁴ Cf. James, W. (1957) “The Will to Believe,” in *Essays on Pragmatism*, ed. by A. Castell (New York: Hafner), pp. 88–109.

⁵ And I certainly wish to remain agnostic about the former premise of voluntarism—i.e. that religious beliefs are underdetermined by our evidence for them.

⁶ Seabright, P. (1988) “The Pursuit of Happiness: Paradoxical Motivation and the Subversion of Character in Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady*,” in *Ethics*, 98, p. 320.

IA^d.⁷ An inauthentic life style requires instances of IA^d, yet the converse does not hold true: there are plenty of instances of IA^d which do not deserve the charge of inauthenticity.

(COD⁴) We tend to use the expression 'sour grapes' with a sense of disapproval. This expression is ambiguous. Let us define 'preference' as a desire for some *particular* state of affairs. 'Sour grapes' may refer to a case in which a person, upon realizing that her preference cannot be satisfied, sets out to deceive herself that she does not have such preference in order to avoid frustration. Yet it may also refer to a case in which a person, upon realizing that her preference cannot be satisfied, sets out to change her preference in order to avoid frustration. In the former case our qualms come about since 'sour grapes' denotes a (straight) case of IA^b. In the latter case, I wish to distinguish sour grapes from character planning in that, on sour grapes, a person adjusts her preference so as not to prefer the no longer feasible option, yet she does not change any of the more general desires—i.e. desires for *types* of states of affairs—that underlay her original preference. Character planning is the more complex project of adjusting some preference as well as the more general desires that underlie the preference.⁸ Our qualms about sour grapes can then be explained in that a person holds a newly acquired preference which does not fit in with the set of more general desires that is relevant to the preference at hand, since these desires remained unchanged and so do still support the original preference. Hence, what makes us frown upon the fox in Aesop's fable is not his change of preference (from 'wanting to eat the grapes' to 'not wanting to eat the grapes') in and of itself, but rather, that his newly acquired

⁷ What is wrong with a lack of authenticity in its stronger form is (a) that a substantial chunk of one's conative self is modeled after some aspired identity *and* (b) that this aspired identity is uncritically accepted. I am less certain about cases in which only one of these conditions is fulfilled. First, I am tempted to generalize that sculpting one's identity in reference to some *critically* accepted ideal meets with fewer qualms—i.e. charges of inauthenticity—in North America than in Europe. The search for an identity is much more a North American than a European feature of life. Notice that it is the pursuit of an identity—projected in a reflective and critical manner—within a European setting by the American Isabel Archer which contributes to her demise in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (cf. f. 6). Second, critical acceptance does seem to be less of a requirement to avoid the charge of inauthenticity when isolated desires are at stake. For instance, consider some isolated desire for fashion items: I am hesitant to say that uncritically trying to enjoy the pastel colors of this year's spring collection deserves the charge of inauthenticity.

⁸ Notice that if sculpting a *substantial* chunk of one's conative self is sufficient for inauthenticity (cf. f.7), then there is a subtle tension between sour grapes, character planning and inauthenticity. As the character planner avoids the Scylla of sour grapes by adjusting not only her preferences but also the reasons underlying these preferences she may steer towards the Charybdis of inauthenticity by affecting a substantial chunk of her conative self. For different projects of preference adjustments, the waters between Scylla and Charybdis may be more or less narrow.

preference does not fit with his steadfast passion for juicy summer fruits in general.⁹

In conclusion, I have argued that IA^b typically meets with qualms while there is nothing objectionable about IA^d in and of itself. Nonetheless, for both phenomena, there is an ample set of cross-over cases in which qualms vanish for beliefs and rise for desires due to special features of the phenomena in question. I will be able to cast some more light on these cross-over cases after I have presented an account of the asymmetry between straight cases of IA^b and IA^d.

II

But let us first turn to the intentional acquisition of moral judgments through *as if* actions (IA^m). Ultra-conscientious consumers run into the difficulty that the range of ‘politically correct’ products leaves them little to choose from. *The Wall Street Journal* writes about Todd Putnam, the founder of the *National Boycott News*: ‘It’s a shame Todd Putnam can’t walk on water. He sorely needs a new pair of shoes, but he can’t wear leather—that would be cruel to animals. He won’t touch Nike sneakers—the company has been accused of exploiting the black community. Rubber and plastic are out, because they don’t recycle well. And he has even had to stop buying his Chinese-made all-cotton shoes because of the Tiananmen Square Massacre’.¹⁰ How is Todd to resolve this moral quandary?

Compare this to a non-moral quandary in purchasing shoes. Suppose that I have a strong desire to buy designer products as well as to tax my budget minimally by clothing expenses. With this set of desires, the market may have as little in store for me as for Todd. How am I to resolve this non-moral quandary? There is a strategy that is respectable for both of us, viz. we may pick that pair of shoes which is most compatible with our set of moral judgments or set of desires. What is more interesting is that there exists a strategy which is entirely respectable for me to pursue yet not for Todd. After iterated quandaries of this kind I may consider modifying my set of desires—i.e., I may try to adjust either my desire for designer products or my desire for low-budget clothing. It would not be a respectable option for Todd to modify his set of moral judgments in response to iterated moral quandaries of this kind—i.e., to try to adjust, say, his views on the political correctness of supporting the Chinese market or on the moral significance of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. I am not questioning the empirical plausibility of this strategy. Both Todd and I may find each other buying cheap Chinese cotton shoes.

⁹ In (1992) “Sour Grapes and Character Planning,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 84, pp. 57–78, I argue against Elster’s autonomy-based account of the distinction between the phenomenon of sour grapes and the phenomenon of character planning and present an extensive defense of the account I have sketched in this paragraph.

¹⁰ April 24, 1991, front page.

By acting *as if* I had no interest in designer shoes I may try to extinguish my desire for designer shoes. By acting *as if* he had no scruples in supporting the Chinese market Todd may try to extinguish his scruples to this effect. Both of us may or may not succeed in this project. Yet the difference between Todd and me is that his project—unlike mine—raises qualms which appear to be very similar in kind to our qualms about IA^b.¹¹

There is an appeal to intuitions at this juncture and, as such appeals go, some will undoubtedly remain unconvinced. Let me try to solidify these intuitions by means of two examples. Friedrich Nietzsche's contempt for a slave morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals* turns on qualms about the intentional construction of moral values. When the slaves—i.e. the weak—realize that they do not possess any genuine aristocratic values, they set out to redefining what constitutes value in order to secure worth and respect for themselves. Nietzsche expresses his contempt for this project in graphic language: 'This workshop where *ideals are manufactured*—it seems to me it stinks of so many lies.'¹²

In Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Joe and Kate Keller's son is a fighter pilot who is reported as missing in action during World War II. Joe Keller was running a company at the time in which he knowingly sold defective airplane parts to the military causing the death of various pilots. To evade the presumed responsibility for the possible death of their son, Kate and Joe bring different strategies to bear. Kate engages in intentional belief construction: after many years she refuses to believe that her son has died and she cherishes this belief by acting as if he is still alive—e.g. by keeping his shoes polished for the day of his return. Joe engages in intentional moral-judgment construction: he adopts the moral judgment that his foremost responsibility was to provide for his family by keeping his company in business. When questioned about their respective belief and moral judgment Kate and Joe are short of (justificatory) reasons and resort to a very similar non-response. Kate's line runs: 'Because he *has to be* [alive].'¹³ Joe's line runs: '[That I did it for my family] [*has*] got to excuse it.'¹⁴ That is, they both choose to resort to this non-response rather than to point to their desire to evade responsibility. This common resistance to a first-person recognition of IA^b and IA^m suggests that both phenomena indeed call for very similar qualms.

¹¹ In respect for Todd Putnam, I should mention his own solution to this quandary. Todd goes for a new pair of Chinese shoes arguing that his old pair was so offensive that 'his socially responsible behavior was becoming borderline anti-social'.

¹² Nietzsche, F. (1967) *On the Genealogy of Morals—Ecce Homo*, translated by W. Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage Books), p. 47. [emphasis in original]

¹³ Miller, A. (1957) "All My Sons," in *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: Viking Press), p. 78 [emphasis added].

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120 [emphasis added].

III

Why is it that IA^b and IA^m typically raise qualms while IA^d does not? Let us consult the relevant philosophical literature. Price, Williams and Davidson each make one or more suggestions as to why qualms are in place for projects of *wanting to believe* (WtB-projects). Such projects include attempts to acquire beliefs intentionally through *as if* actions (IA^b proper), but also through simple acts of will, through persistently focusing on the projected belief or through subjecting oneself to hypnosis. At least four more or less developed accounts of these qualms can be identified. Let us examine each in turn.

(a) Donald Davidson¹⁵ points to the following common feature in *akrasia* and WtB-projects. In *akrasia*, the desire that provides a reason for the *akratic* action overrides a principle that one do what one holds to be best all things considered. This desire *causes* the principle to be silenced *without giving a reason* against the principle. In WtB-projects, a desire to believe *causes* the belief *without giving any reason* for the belief. Davidson very carefully says that this characterization of the phenomena ‘points the way to one kind of explanation of irrationality’.¹⁶ But in the final paragraphs he acknowledges a crucial difficulty, *viz.* that estimable projects of self-improvement through character planning (involving IA^d) equally require that second-order desires cause first-order desires without giving any reason for them. Though Davidson seems to be less pessimistic, I take this to be a decisive objection against his tentative account of the irrationality of IA^b. Since mental causation in the absence of a reason-giving relation is a feature that is present in both IA^b and IA^d, it cannot explain why there are qualms to be had about the former and not about the latter.

(b) Bernard Williams¹⁷ suggests that qualms about WtB-projects arise because changing one belief forces one to change a range of interrelated beliefs and ‘there is no end to the amount you have to pull down’: such a project will tend ‘in the end to involve total destruction of the world of reality, to lead to paranoia’.¹⁸ There is an analogue to this problem in the case of desires. In my discussion of sour grapes (COD⁴), I argued that qualms do not arise about IA^d, *only if* we are careful that a preference adjustment respects the consistency of our desire structure. Similarly, I agree that qualms may arise about IA^b due to the lack of internal consistency of the resulting belief structure. But the difference between qualms about IA^b and IA^d is that even if we make the necessary adjustments to respect the internal consistency of the resulting structure of mental states, qualms remain in place for the former and

¹⁵ “Paradoxes of Irrationality,” in R. Wollheim & J. Hopkins (eds.) *Philosophical Essays on Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 298–305.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁷ “Deciding to Believe,” in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 136–51.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

not for the latter. I take Williams to respond at this junction that a consistent adjustment in one's belief structure through IA^b would affect our complete set of beliefs. Two responses are in place. First, why would a contained adjustment in a belief-structure be any less plausible than a contained adjustment in a desire-structure under the constraint of consistency? Is there any reason to believe that a belief structure is more integrated than a desire structure? I do not see any reason to this effect. Second, Williams correctly claims that the impossibility of *directly* believing at will is not a contingent limitation on the will—in contrast with, say, the impossibility of blushing at will.¹⁹ Similarly, qualms about believing at will in a roundabout way—as in IA^b—do not rest on contingent features either. But, even if human belief structures are as a matter of fact fully integrated, it is not a conceptual impossibility that one have a set of beliefs in which a change in a contained subset S affects each and only each element of S. Hence, qualms about IA^b cannot be properly accounted for by its alleged resulting in a complete disintegration of our belief structure.

(c) William James argues for the rationality of voluntarily adopting religious beliefs notwithstanding insufficient justificatory reasons, since a persistent scepticism about religious beliefs stands in the way of attaining 'a certain vital good.'²⁰ H. H. Price²¹ turns this economic argument around for ordinary beliefs and argues that WtB-projects are to be discouraged on prudential grounds. Such projects may yield a short-term peace of mind but are generally not to our long-term advantage. I find this appeal to prudence unsatisfying as an explanation of our qualms about IA^b for two reasons. First, the explanation does not extend to IA^m. Consider the case of Phyllidula in the epigraph. Stretching the interpretation somewhat, I take the (conditional) counsel to Phyllidula to 'change her religion' to be a recommendation that she change her moral judgment that one ought not to take more pleasure than one is able to give. What is paradoxical about this recommendation is that it is indeed sound prudential advice—i.e. it would lead to Phyllidula's long-term advantage—yet it meets with standard qualms about IA^m. Second, there are certainly isolated cases²² in which the intentionally acquired beliefs are of a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 105.

²¹ Price, H. H. (1954) "Belief and Will," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Supplement), 28, pp. 1–26 and *Belief* (London: Allen & Unwin), p. 238.

²² One might respond that, just like moral rules and not particular choices are justified on grounds of expected collective utility (*pace* Rawls, J. (1955) "Two Concepts of Rules," *Philosophical Review*, 64, pp. 3–32), prudential rules and not particular choices are justified on grounds of expected individual utility. Hence it is sufficient to establish a prudential rule against IA^b: even if a particular case of IA^b would maximize individual utility, qualms remain in place because the project violates a prudential rule against IA^b. I reject this response for the following reason. Even if Rawls' conception of moral rules is defensible, it is very dubious that it can be extended to prudential rules. Though moral rules may indeed have weight against act-utilitarian assessments, prudential rules

nature that it is unlikely for them to cause the believer to make suboptimal decisions. In such cases, qualms about IA^b remain in place, yet there is no reason why it would not be to a person's long-term advantage to engage in such a project.²³

(d) Both Price and Williams also suggest that our qualms come about because WtB -projects are not geared towards the truth of the projected beliefs. This suggestion can readily be developed into an account of qualms about IA^b and IA^m and the absence of qualms about IA^d , if it be assumed that for beliefs and moral judgments—unlike for desires—there is a truth of the matter. Two comments are in place. First, this response is fine as far as it goes. But we can and should do better. Compare the following scenario. Suppose that I am asked to give an account of our qualms about a common strategy in gambling. I show that the strategy does not maximize expected payoff. This is fine as far as it goes. Yet, what one might ask in addition is how the strategy could become so widely used. What sort of reasoning are the players following and where precisely in the reasoning lies the mistake? Similarly, I want to know what makes the route of *as if* actions (rather than, say, direct decisions) in trying to acquire projected beliefs tempting. What pattern of reasoning underlies such projects and where does the reasoning take a wrong turn? Second, the account is restricted to cognitive mental states. It would be very costly to let an account of our qualms about IA^m be contingent on cognitivist assumptions for moral judgments. Similarly, cognitivism is an open question for certain classes of beliefs for which IA^b is no less subject to qualms. Consider, say, projectivist accounts of causal beliefs. Again, it would be very costly to have an account of our qualms about IA^b for causal beliefs rest on a rejection of projectivism.

In the following section, I will present an account that is not contingent on cognitivist (or non-cognitivist) assumptions. For simplicity, I will let 'beliefs' stand for cognitive mental states. For moral judgments, I will not assume that cognitivism holds (nor will I assume that non-cognitivism holds). If certain beliefs (say, causal beliefs) are indeed not amenable to a cognitivist reading, then an account of our qualms about their intentional ac-

can be no more than rules of thumb: there is no reason why a careful assessment of the expected individual utility of a particular choice should not override conflicting advice from some prudential rule.

²³ (COB^2)-cases are special cases in which IA^b is indeed to a person's long-term advantage. Hence, is our condoning of (COB^2)-cases not a reason to believe that our qualms about ordinary cases of IA^b indeed come about because they are not to a person's long-term advantage? I do not think so. First, not all cases in which IA^b is to a person's long-term advantage are to be condoned: (COB^2)-cases require in addition that there is an extreme necessity at stake. Second, in (COB^2)-cases, being irrational is part of a rational strategy. But the first-order irrationality remains—unlike what one would expect if long-term advantage be the correct criterion for assessing the rationality of instances of IA^b .

quisition matches my account of our qualms about IA^m. If moral judgments are amenable to a cognitivist reading, then an account of our qualms about their intentional acquisition also matches my account of our qualms about IA^b.

IV

I will first present a sketch of my account before turning to a systematic defense. What is troublesome about instances of IA^b, say, about the case in which a man organizes a romantic outing to dispel his belief that his spouse is having an affair? There are facts about a man which typically count as evidence—i.e. as a justificatory reason—for the belief that his spouse is not having an affair. One such fact is that he is organizing a romantic outing. This evidential relation is subject to various disclaimers. It would be a disclaimer that he had organized the romantic outing in order to believe that his spouse was not having an affair. Hence, the person who engages in IA^b must suppress the latter disclaimer from the set of available evidence. Our qualms can thus be understood as a special instance of qualms about beliefs that do not meet Carnap's *requirement of total evidence*.²⁴ This requirement stipulates that beliefs must be grounded in the complete set of evidence that is available to the believer. IA^b does not meet this requirement since the projected belief is grounded in a proper subset of the evidence—viz. the complete set of evidence minus the disclaimer—that is available to the believer.

I venture that a parallel explanation can be constructed for our qualms about (IA^m). Let us similarly define 'an item of information X is evidence for a moral judgment m' as *X provides a justificatory reason for m*.²⁵ A parallel explanation would run as follows: actions in accordance with a moral judgment may provide evidence for the moral judgment in question. Yet, if these actions in accordance with the moral judgment are embedded in an intentional scheme to effect the acquisition of this moral judgment, then they no longer provide evidence for the moral judgment in question. Hence, qualms about IA^m come about because, in acquiring the moral judgment, the agent did not

²⁴ Cf. Hempel C. G. (1965) *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Free Press), pp. 63–67, and p. 379; and Davidson, D. (1980) *Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon), p. 41.

²⁵ I intend to defend an account which is neutral with respect to the debate between moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism. My account is not neutral on metaethical issues in so far that it is committed to the stand that rational adjudication has a legitimate role in ethics. If someone were to deny this stand then it is upon her to provide a better explanation of the fact that IA^m commonly meets with qualms that does not make any reference to the rational acceptability of moral judgments. In the absence of such an account, I suggest that, since the possibility of rational adjudication in ethics plays a role in what I take to be the best explanation of qualms about IA^m, we have good reason on the principle of inference to the best explanation to accept the metaethical stand in question.

take into account the disclaimer that her actions in accordance with the moral judgment were embedded in an intentional scheme: her newly acquired moral judgment is not grounded in the complete set of available evidence, but rather in the subset that excludes this disclaimer.

Why is it the case that IA^d is not subject to similar qualms? A parallel account is blocked for IA^d from the first step on, since action in accordance with some desire may induce this desire, but it does not provide a justificatory reason for it. For instance, my drinking of dry wines may induce a desire for dry wines but it does not provide me with a justificatory reason for this desire. Since action in accordance with some desire does not provide a justificatory reason for this desire and since disclaimers disclaim justificatory reasons for mental states, the fact that the action is intended to effect the desire in question cannot function as a disclaimer. Hence, IA^d does not call for qualms since its success is not contingent on the bracketing of a disclaimer from the complete set of available justificatory reasons for the projected desire.

Let us now turn to a systematic defense of this account. For brevity, let 'reason' hereafter stand for *justificatory reason*. I will (a) make it plausible that actions in accordance with some belief or moral judgment may provide a reason for the belief or moral judgment both from a third-person and a first-person perspective; (b) provide an explanation of this phenomenon; (c) discuss the role of disclaimers; (d) determine the reason-giving force of actions in accordance with a belief or moral judgment in the absence of disclaimers; (e) show how both IA^b and IA^m violate the requirement of total evidence and (f) lay out the contrasting dynamics of IA^d.

(a) My account of IA^b and IA^m can hold up only if, in the absence of disclaimers, action in accordance with some belief *p* indeed provides a reason for *p* and action in accordance with some moral judgment *m* indeed provides a reason for *m*. Furthermore, this reason-giving relation must hold on a first-person perspective—i.e. with the agent and the believer being one and the same person. Let us first present two cases in which the believer and the agent are *not* one and the same person. My botanist camping-companion's acting in accordance with the belief that the mushrooms in her basket are not poisoned—e.g. by eating them—may give me a reason (though not necessarily a sufficient reason) to believe that they are not poisoned. Or, in case I had some reason to believe that they were poisoned, it may give me a reason to reexamine the matter. Similarly, Jonathan's acting in accordance with the belief that his wife Susan is not having an affair—e.g. by organizing a romantic outing at their wedding anniversary—may give me a reason to believe that she is not having an affair, or, in case I had some reason to believe that she is having an affair, it may give me a reason to doubt whether she is. Now turn to a case of moral-judgment acquisition in which the judge and the agent(s)

are *not* one and the same person. Suppose I were asked to consider whether some voting procedure is a fair procedure for appointing new faculty in my department. May I not take the fact that the procedure is widely used in other departments at my institution—i.e. that it is a common practice to act in accordance with the moral judgment that this is a fair voting procedure—to be a reason (though not necessarily sufficient reason) to judge that it is indeed a fair procedure? Or, if I have initial misgivings about this procedure, may its widespread use not be a reason for me to ask myself whether my misgivings are indeed justified? Turning to a real-life example, empirical research shows that a major force in the change of attitude from a pro-life to a pro-choice position is for people to learn that friends and acquaintances have opted for abortions at some point in their lives. In our own terminology, this phenomenon can be explained as follows: the fact that friends and acquaintances act in accordance with the moral judgment that abortion is permissible—viz. through opting for abortions—provides some people with a reason to call into question whether their moral judgment as to the impermissibility of abortion is indeed warranted.

Let us now consider whether this reason-giving relation holds on a first-person perspective. Being completely absorbed in fine-tuning a paper, I may find it difficult to pass judgment on its quality. Yet it is in witnessing my hesitation to send it off for publication (rather than on introspecting upon some sentiment of insecurity) that I may come to believe that there is still room for improvement. A similar observation can be made for moral judgments. Suppose I find myself in some moral quandary and, with time running out, I finally decide to plunk for a particular course of action. If my subsequent actions show pride or peace of mind—i.e. are in accordance with the moral judgment that I chose to do what was right in the face of this quandary—then, in witnessing these actions, I may come to judge that I did indeed choose to do what was right.

Here is an instructive real-life case in which the action that provides a reason for a moral judgment is the very action of which the moral judgment asserts the permissibility. I was once told by a woman in post-abortion counseling that her therapist responded to her lamentations of self-blame by rhetorically asking her whether she thought of herself as being a selfish person in general. What the therapist is doing in this case is inviting the patient to take her own choice for an abortion to be a reason for the moral permissibility of abortion. He does so by pointing out that she has no reason to think of herself as having the moral vice it would take to have an abortion on the assumption that the moral judgment underlying her self-blame—say, that abortion is the murder of an innocent child—were accurate.

(b) Why is it the case that action in accordance with some belief or moral judgment may provide a reason for this belief or moral judgment? The best

explanation for someone's acting in accordance with a particular belief or moral judgment may include a reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment and hence, on the principle of inference to the best explanation, the action in question would provide a reason for the belief or moral judgment in question. This may come about because the best explanation for someone's acting in accordance with the belief or moral judgment is that she holds the belief or moral judgment and the best explanation for her holding the belief includes reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment. However, it may also come about through some alternate route. The management of a firm may act in accordance with the belief that some policy maximizes production yet not actually hold this belief: what explains their actions is the truth of the belief that the policy maximizes production together with the fact that firms who did not adopt this policy did not survive competition. Similarly, the committee members may act in accordance with the moral judgment that some voting procedure is a fair procedure yet not hold the moral judgment in question: what explains their actions is the rational acceptability of the moral judgment that the voting procedure is a fair procedure together with the fact that their mandates are highly precarious and contingent on the fairness of their voting practices, since those who are affected by their decisions would not tolerate the slightest procedural injustice. If the best explanation for some action in accordance with some belief or moral judgment includes a reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment (whatever form this reference may take), then clearly the action would provide a reason for the belief or moral judgment in question.

(c) Let us now turn to the role of disclaimers. In the presence of a disclaimer, action in accordance with some belief or moral judgment gives us no reason (or at least less of a reason) for the belief in question. What disclaimers have in common is that they all discredit or (at least to some extent discredit) the explanation of agency in accordance with some belief or moral judgment that includes reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment. If Jonathan is hopelessly naive then his action in accordance with the belief that Susan is having an affair gives us no reason for the belief in question. The best explanation for his organizing a romantic outing does not include reference to it being the case that Susan is faithful as ever. Jonathan would be organizing a romantic outing whether Susan were having an affair or not, since her ways altogether escape him. Similarly, if my home institution has a bad reputation for its hiring practices then a voting procedure cannot gain any moral credibility from its wide acceptance. The best explanation for its wide acceptance does not make reference to the fairness of the procedure since a concern for fairness would be of little import to the adoption of the voting procedure. The disclaimer that is of special con-

cern to our inquiry is that an action that is embedded in an intentional scheme to effect a change in belief or moral judgment cannot provide a reason for the mental states in question since the action is fully explained by the agent's desire to acquire the belief or moral judgment (and *not* by the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment.)

Disclaimers play a crucial role in discounting action in accordance with some belief or moral judgment as evidence for the belief or moral judgment. For instance, in the case of abortion, it is instructive that a defense of the pro-life position typically includes an explanation of the widespread practice of abortion which precludes reference to the rational acceptability of a moral judgment as to the permissibility of abortion. Such explanations may range from occult allusions to demonic plots at the eve of doomsday to more secular speculations about the escalation of egoism in our culture at large.

(d) In the absence of a disclaimer, action in accordance with a belief or moral judgment provides *some* reason for the belief or moral judgment, yet it may not provide *sufficient* reason. But, one might ask, if the best explanation for action in accordance with some belief or moral judgment involves the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment, then why is it that such an action merely provides some reason—rather than sufficient reason—for the belief or moral judgment? Notice that the best explanation of some phenomenon may involve reference to the truth of some belief while there exist independent reasons that support some incompatible belief. For instance, at some point in the history of astronomy, the best explanation for the perturbations in Mercury may have been the existence of Vulcan—i.e. an unobserved planet located between Mercury and the sun—since there were no inklings yet of the better explanation that had to await the rise of general relativity theory. Nonetheless, the lack of observation reports of Vulcan may have cast severe doubts on this hypothesis. Under these conditions, there was some reason for the belief that Vulcan exists, yet there was not sufficient reason. Hence, that the truth of some belief plays a role in the best explanation of some phenomenon provides a reason for the belief in question, but it may not provide sufficient reason: there may be some independent reasons against the belief in question too. Similarly, though the best explanation of some action in accordance with a belief or moral judgment may involve reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment, this does not warrant sufficient reason for the belief or moral judgment since there may be independent reasons for some incompatible belief or moral judgment. For instance, though I cannot explain how a perceptive Jonathan could be taking Susan out for a romantic outing on the premises that she is having an affair, I do nonetheless have independent grounds to hold that she is indeed having an affair. Or, though I cannot explain why some voting procedure is so widely used in a respectable institu-

tion on the premises that it is a strongly biased procedure, I do nonetheless have independent grounds to hold that it is indeed a strongly biased procedure. Hence, I have some reason to believe that Susan is not having an affair (how else would it be possible that a perceptive Jonathan be taking her out for a romantic outing?) I have some reason to judge that the voting procedure is a fair procedure (how else would it be possible that it is so widely used in a respectable institution?) Yet in neither case do I have sufficient reason for the belief or moral judgment.

(e) Beliefs and moral judgments ought to be grounded in reason-giving items. Yet reason-giving items are subject to disclaimers. Actions that are in accordance with some belief or moral judgment provide a reason for the belief or moral judgment unless there is some disclaimer present, i.e. unless some item of information discredits an explanation of the action that makes reference to the truth of the belief or the rational acceptability of the moral judgment. That the action is embedded in an intentional scheme to bring about the projected belief or moral judgment is precisely such a disclaimer. The success of IA^b and IA^m is contingent on bracketing this disclaimer from the evidence that pertains to the projected belief or moral judgment. The belief or moral judgment that is thus acquired is grounded in a genuine subset of the complete set of available reasons—viz. the subset that includes my actions in accordance with the belief or moral judgment and excludes the disclaimer that these actions are embedded in an intentional scheme to acquire the projected belief or moral judgment. The requirement of total evidence stipulates that beliefs must be grounded in the complete set of pertinent reasons that are available to the believer. Similarly, moral judgments must be grounded in the complete set of pertinent reasons that are available to the judge. Hence, what accounts for our qualms is that IA^b and IA^m yield beliefs and moral judgments that do not satisfy the respective requirements of total evidence.²⁶

(f) Qualms about IA^d do not arise since action in accordance with some desire does not provide for a reason for the desire in question and hence there are no disclaimers to be bracketed. But then how can IA^d be successful in the first place? A change of desire may come about through some psychological

²⁶ One could raise the following objection to the requirement of total evidence. What it is reasonable to require is not that a belief is grounded in the complete set of evidence but rather in a subset that (a) contains some random selection of evidence and (b) whose size is commensurate with the prominence of the belief within one's life. This appeal to *satisficing* is well taken as an objection to the requirement of total evidence. A similar argument could be made for moral judgments. However, these objections are of no avail in erasing our qualms about IA^b or IA^m . The projected beliefs or moral judgments in IA^b and IA^m (a) are contingent on a subset of evidence that is not randomly selected but that is selected to support the projected belief or moral judgment and (b) typically concern matters which have great prominence in our lives (cf. *All My Sons*) and deserve that the complete set of evidence be attended to. Hence, a departure from the requirement of total evidence in cases of IA^b or IA^m cannot be justified by an appeal to *satisficing*.

mechanism that causes—but does not provide a reason for—the change in question. For instance, one such mechanism is that the presentation of a desired object in conjunction with some loathed object may extinguish the desire for the former object.²⁷ Knowledge of this mechanism is what makes us take off the headphones playing Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in the dentist’s chair. The copresence of a loathed and a desired object causes a change in desire yet it does not provide me with a reason for the change in my desire. The psychological mechanism that is of interest to us is that the repeated presentation of some object may kindle a desire for the object in question.²⁸ It is this mechanism which is at work when it is said that one needs to grow up with certain types of food to acquire an appreciation for them. Again, the repeated presentation of some object is what may cause the development of a desire in me yet it does not provide me with a reason for the newly developed desire. IA^d is the embedding of the latter psychological mechanism in an intentional scheme to effect the acquisition of some desire. The agent chooses for the repeated confrontation with some object—i.e. acts as if she already had a desire for the object in question—with the aim of bringing about precisely this desire. Qualms about IA^d do not arise since action in accordance with the projected desire does not function as a reason for the projected desire. Hence there is no room for the objection that was leveled against IA^b and IA^m: since no reason-giving relation holds between the action and the projected desire, there is no disclaimer on any such relation to be excluded from a complete set of pertinent reasons for the projected desire.

V

Let us now consider whether my account is of any help in explaining our qualms (or absence of qualms) about the related phenomena and cross-over cases that I presented in section I. First, there are no qualms to be had about my ‘checking things out’ either (a) because I want to acquire a belief about my spouse (whether she is having an affair or not) or (b) because I want to put my suspicions to rest by acquiring the belief that she is not having an affair. Indeed, in both cases there is no reason to think that the belief that I will come to acquire will not be grounded in the complete set of evidence that is available to me. Second, there are qualms to be had about the scenarios in which (a) I either subject myself to hypnosis or (b) selectively check things out because I want to acquire the belief that my spouse is not having an af-

²⁷ Classical or Pavlovian conditioning is the behavioristic version of this psychological mechanism. The limitations of this mechanism are dramatically displayed in the ill-fated rehabilitation program based on classical conditioning in Stanley Kubrick’s movie *A Clockwork Orange* after Anthony Burgess’ novel by the same name.

²⁸ The seminal work in social psychology of this mechanism is Zajonc, R. B. (1968) “The attitudinal effects of mere exposure,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, Monograph supplement, pp. 1–27.

fair. Both scenarios fall short of the requirement of total evidence. In case (a), the projected belief will not be grounded in any evidence. (Or, in case the hypnotist provides me not only with the projected belief but also with some supporting beliefs through post-hypnotic suggestion, then the set containing the projected belief and the supporting beliefs will not be grounded in any evidence.) In case (b), the belief will be grounded in a subset of the available evidence that is carefully stacked with items that support the projected belief.

Let us now turn to the cross-over cases. We need to distinguish between two scenarios of COB¹. Either it is the case that, if I come to believe that I can jump the creek, there is indeed a good chance that I will be able to jump the creek. Or, it is the case that, if I come to believe that I can jump the creek, my jumping the creek becomes merely somewhat less improbable. On the former scenario, provided that there is good reason to believe *now* that I will indeed come to believe that I can jump the creek *by the time of my jumping the creek* (i.e. that IA^b will be successful), I do indeed have good reason to believe *now* that I will be able to jump the creek. My present belief that I will be able to jump the creek is grounded in the complete set of evidence which includes my future belief that I can jump the creek. Hence, this first scenario of COB¹ passes the requirement of total evidence. On the latter scenario of COB¹ it is not the case that the complete set of evidence—including my future belief that I can jump the creek—can ground my present belief that I will be able to jump the creek. It can only ground the belief that it is slightly less improbable that I will be able to jump the creek than if I were not to have the future belief that I can jump the creek. Hence, on the second scenario, trying to acquire the belief that I can jump the creek would meet with qualms. Nonetheless, the argument that I made earlier with respect to (COB²) can be repeated here. Just like it may be part of a rational strategy to knock on wood in a stressful situation, it is equally part of a rational strategy to try to acquire the belief that my son is still alive if that is the only way I can go on living in a meaningful fashion or to try to acquire the belief that I can jump the creek if this increases my chances—however slim—to jump the creek. But this does not take away that there are qualms to be had about the action of knocking on wood as such as well as about the belief acquisitions as such in (COB²) or in the latter scenario of (COB¹).

I did not take a definite stand on (COB³). (COB³) addresses the reasonableness of IA^b for propositions which are such that neither they nor their negations can be grounded in the available set of evidence. Hence, (COB³) does not pass the requirement of total evidence since IA^b aims at a belief that is not grounded in the complete set of available evidence. However, the requirement of total evidence can be weakened such that (COB³) does pass through. Let 'B' stand for the property that a proposition p has if and only if it is reasonable to believe that p. Let 'C' stand for the property that a proposition p

has if and only if p is grounded in the complete set of evidence. (COB³) passes the following weaker requirement on reasonable beliefs:

1. $(Bp \rightarrow \sim C\sim p)$

while it does not pass the stronger²⁹ original requirement:

2. $(Bp \rightarrow Cp)$

Hence, if one accepts (1) rather than (2) as a necessary condition on reasonable belief acquisition, then (COB³) does pass through. Whether one accepts (1) (rather than (2)) hinges precisely on whether one rejects that agnosticism is the only proper response to a proposition for which the set of available evidence can neither ground it nor its negation.

Let us now turn to the cross-over cases of IA^d. In (COD¹) I point to an internal limitation of the dynamics of IA^d. Acting in accordance with some desire in order to acquire the desire is a self-focused project. Hence, there is a serious difficulty in engaging in such a project in order to acquire outwardly focused desires, since how could actions that are contained in a self-focused project have a genuine outward focus? But surely, one might object, I could go join Mother Theresa to overcome my self-focused attitude. I believe that such a project can succeed only if I can make some binding commitment to engage in a project of doing outwardly focused actions. Once I have made this (self-focused) binding commitment each individual action does not require a self-focused motivation. However, I am much more sceptical that the project can succeed if I need to motivate every single outwardly focused action as being a step on the route of my self-focused project.

(COD²), (COD³) and (COD⁴) all raise qualms because of the nature of the projected desires. What is disconcerting in (COD²) is that these desires cannot be realized, in (COD³) that they lack authenticity and in (COD⁴) that they do not respect the internal coherence of the desire structure. It is worth taking a closer look at (COD⁴). Preferences—i.e. desires for particular states of affairs—are grounded in some set of desires for types of states of affairs. Just like beliefs and moral judgments must be grounded in the set of evidence, preferences must be grounded in the set of pertinent desires for types of states of affairs. Let us suppose that I have a preference for a particular job due to my desire for the type of job that offers challenging career prospects and opportunities for overtime work. I then hear that the job in question is no longer available and engage in IA^d to restore my preference for my present job

²⁹ (2) entails (1) on the reasonable assumption that no proposition is such that it as well as its negation are grounded in the complete set of evidence—i.e. $\sim(Cp \ \& \ C\sim p)$ —while (1) does not entail (2) unless we assume that $(Cp \vee C\sim p)$ —which is precisely the assumption that does not hold for the propositions under considerations.

which lacks these attractive features. This project raises qualms unless I set out at the same time to try to become the kind of person who genuinely values the type of job that allows for leisure time and in which there is no career pressure. What this cross-over case of IA^d has in common with straight cases of IA^b and IA^m is that they all violate the requirement that the projected mental states be grounded in the complete set of pertinent reasons for this mental state. However, IA^b and IA^m violate this requirement by bracketing a disclaimer on the reason-giving relation between *as if* actions and the projected mental state, whereas (COD⁴) violates this requirement by adjusting a preference while not adjusting the reason-giving items that ground this preference.