

21. GEWIRTH AND THE VOLUNTARY AGENT'S ESTEEM OF PURPOSE

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses Alan Gewirth's claim that the agent of a voluntary action necessarily values his purpose. It holds that not only is Gewirth wrong in making the claim but that his mistake is of serious importance for his moral theory. The criticism proceeds through an examination of the five arguments advanced by Gewirth, explicitly and implicitly, in support of the proposition that any agent necessarily esteems his goal. A key point in the criticism is that an agent of voluntary action might have his goal capriciously and for that reason might not appreciate the goal. The paper concludes by specifying how Gewirth's inadequate defense of his claim undercuts certain principles of his moral theory, including the Principle of Generic Consistency.

I

Alan Gewirth contends that the agent of any voluntary action prizes his purpose by logical necessity. Far from being superficial or middling in importance for Gewirth's moral theory, this claim is fundamental. According to the theory a moral action is an interpersonal voluntary action.¹ Voluntary action has two generic features, the agent's acting unforcedly and wittingly and his acting for "some end or purpose that constitutes his reason for acting".² The former trait Gewirth calls alternatively "voluntariness" and "freedom" whereas the latter he dubs alternately "purposiveness" and "intentionality".³ The purpose for which an agent acts might be occurrent or dispositional; that is, it might be explicitly held or habitual, the result of long-standing goal-directed behavior where the goal has ceased to occupy the center of attention.⁴ In having a purpose, an agent necessarily desires it; and in wanting the purpose, he conceptually has a favorable interest in it and thereby values, with respect to relevant criteria, the purpose by logical necessity.⁵ The agent's valuation of his goal means that he implicitly judges it to be good. The term "good" has "the common illocutionary force of expressing a favorable, positive evaluation of the objects of purposes to which it is attributed".⁶ Hence, to want an objective is logically to be committed to saying, in view of criteria, that the objective is good. The criteria by which an agent of voluntary action implicitly judges his objectives to be good "need not be moral or even hedonic; they run the full range of the purposes for which the agent acts, from the momentarily gratifying and the narrowly prudential to more extensive and long-range social goals".⁷ Because an agent does judge his end to be worthy, he necessarily regards as good and asserts a right to its fulfillment, the

voluntariness and purposiveness of his action, and his well-being, which consists partly of his freedom and partly of certain goods involved in his purposiveness.⁸ Moreover, he implicitly judges as good these matters insofar as they are generic to all voluntary actions, including those of all other agents, and recognizes that all agents have rights to these matters insofar as they are generic to all voluntary actions.⁹ Implicit in this normative structure of action, according to Gewirth's theory, is the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC), which for the theory is the supreme principle of morality.¹⁰ In sum, Gewirth's claim about the agent's esteem of purpose is basic for his theory in that it undergirds what Gewirth takes to be the normative structure of voluntary action and the supreme principle of morality. If, consequently, one shows that Gewirth is wrong in holding that any agent necessarily esteems his end, one will be able to show also that the foundation of his moral theory and all that rests upon the foundation are faulty.

In general Gewirth's critics do not deny that he is correct in maintaining that the purpose of any action is prized necessarily by its agent.¹¹ I, however, believe that he is wrong. My case against Gewirth is that the arguments advanced by him, explicitly and implicitly, in support of his position are flawed. A key point of the case is that an agent of voluntary action might have his objective capriciously and thus, if he does value it, he does not do so by logical necessity. After criticizing the arguments, I will specify the significance that Gewirth's inadequate defense of the proposition has for his moral theory.

II

Gewirth explicitly furnishes three arguments in defense of the proposition that any agent necessarily esteems his goal, and he suggests two others. Yet, whether his arguments are forthrightly stated or simply indicated, they contain difficulties.

One of the explicit defenses centers around the connection between purposes and wants, or desires. According to Gewirth agents want, or desire, to do what it is their purpose to do. Wanting, he explains, is ambiguous. "In the inclinational sense, to want to do *X* is to take pleasure in doing *X* or to like doing *X*; but in the intentional sense, to want to do *X* is simply to intend to do *X*, to regard one's doing *X* as having some point or purpose even if one doesn't like doing it".¹² Agents, however, may desire what it is their purpose to do in either the inclinational or intentional sense. Whether inclinational or merely intentional an agent's desire to attain his goal consists in a pro-attitude toward the latter. His wanting to realize the end means that he turns his attention to the purpose of his action as against other possible objects of attention, that he tends to move himself toward the attainment of his goal rather than other possible objects, and that he has a favorable interest in, or favorable mind-set toward, attaining his goal. This favoring need not be vehement or inclinational, but it does comprise an intending to attain the objective "such that interference with its attainment would cause at least momentary annoyance or dissatisfaction".¹³ After giving this account of what he means by the connection between purpose and wants, Gewirth contends that the connection is important for the agent's valuation of his aim: "For from this connection stems the fact that the agent necessarily regards his purpose as good and hence makes an implicit value judgment about them; . . .".¹⁴ The

putative fact of the agent's viewing his goal as worthy stems from his having an objective in that the agent desires to attain the goal and, therefore, values the goal. The realization of any purpose, it will be remembered, is the object of a want, which desire entails a favorable interest in and, thus, a valuation of the purpose's fulfillment. By virtue of this valuation the agent of concern looks upon the fulfillment as good. In holding that an agent's judgment of his aim as good is entailed by his appreciation of the objective, Gewirth does not mean that goodness is identifiable with a positive interest; but he does insist that such interest is highly important in judging something to be good: "the primary, although by no means the only, basis of judging something to be good is precisely its connection with one's pro-attitude or positive interest or desire whereby one regards the object as worthy of pursuit".¹⁵ At any rate, because all agents necessarily desire to achieve the objectives of their actions, they necessarily have positive interests in and, at least implicitly, prize the objectives of their actions. In sum, an agent esteems his purpose because he desires to realize it.

This argument certainly looks promising; at least, by its own terms it does demonstrate that the agent's desire to do what it is his purpose to do entails that the agent values his purpose. The question, then, is whether or not the argument should be accepted on its own terms. More specifically, the question is whether or not Gewirth's conception of desire by an agent of voluntary action should be accepted. Gewirth, as we have seen, itemizes several conceptual criteria of wanting by a voluntary agent: attention, tendency, and favorable interest. It seems quite in keeping with normal discourse, which Gewirth professes to use as a source of conceptual meaning,¹⁶ to take attention and tendency as conceptual criteria of desire; for it surely would be odd to say that Johnson wants *X* but never gives any heed to *X* or never directs any of his or her efforts toward attaining *X*. It is highly doubtful, nevertheless, that having a favorable mind-set toward the object of one's desire is, according to ordinary language, a conceptual criterion of desire.

For one thing, it is wrong to maintain, as Gewirth does, that the negative feeling engendered by interference with an agent's intention to achieve a given goal necessarily signifies that the agent approves the goal. Gewirth apparently presumes that the only possible cause of the negative feeling that such an interference might have is the agent's being detained from reaching something in which he is positively interested. It is undoubted that this possible cause of negative feeling is a part of common discourse. A person deterred from obtaining a goal that he approves is often said to be unhappy with, disappointed by, or angered by the deterrence. This, however, is not the only possible cause of annoyance or dissatisfaction brought on by interference with an agent's intention to reach a given end. An agent acting with regards to an end may be described, Gewirth had indicated, as moving himself toward the end. Thus, he may be spoken of as "set" or "keyed" to attain the end or as "bent" upon or "headed" toward its attainment. And when any agent's movement toward an end is interrupted, he may be referred to, without any reference, implicit or explicit, to his failure to reach something he approves, as feeling disturbed because of the interference. None of this is to say that a frustrated agent has two negative feelings: one caused by the interruption, and only the interruption, of his motion and the other caused by his being deterred from gaining something that he favors. It is to allow, rather, that the agent's negative feeling, even

if unitary, might have a complex cause consisting of both of the causal factors just described. In any event, if one is to infer from a frustrated agent's feeling that the agent is positively interested in his end, one must establish that such a feeling is always caused, at least in part, by the agent's deterrence from obtaining something that he prizes. Until this point is made, one faces the possibility that the feeling might have been engendered by nothing else than the interruption of the agent's movement. This point has not been established by Gewirth, and that it can be by anyone is dubious. As I shall argue shortly, ordinary speech permits us to talk about a capricious purpose and, thus, a purpose not valued by its subject. And the only way that one can explain a disturbance felt by a frustrated agent with a capricious purpose is to say that the feeling was caused by the interruption of the agent's movement.

Another reason why favorable interest should not be construed as a conceptual criterion of desire is that in common speech a person may give a description of any desire of voluntary agent *A* without referring to any favorable mind-set and still may identify the desire as a desire. To describe *A* as wanting *X* is to say *inter alia* that *A* does not now have *X*; that *A* pays heed to *X*; that *A* directs some effort toward obtaining *X*; and that *A*, given the opportunity and an absence of overriding conflicts, will obtain *X*. But it is not to say that *A* necessarily favors *X*. *A*, of course, might favor *X*; even so, *A* does not have to be referred to as having a positive interest in *X* in order to be described as desiring *X*. To be sure, one would have to say that *A* favors *X* if one intends to state that *A* has an approving desire of *X*; but in describing an approving desire, one is not describing any desire by any voluntary agent, which clearly is the sort that Gewirth had in mind. It is recognized that philosophers have not always followed ordinary language when relating desire to positive interest. Some have defined desire at least partly in the terms of favoring while others have conceived positive interest at least partly in the terms of desire. By making approval a conceptual criterion of desire, Gewirth takes the former approach. But a conceptual criterion of desire departing from normal talk need not be justified. The departure might be misleading and confusing, especially if it is not done explicitly. Moreover, the departure might be arbitrary, especially if it is made without there being an inadequacy with the standard idea of desire. Gewirth neither declares that his view of desire differs from the normal one or states that the normal one is lacking in some way. It is tempting to conclude, then, that his notion of desire, in the respect that it makes positive interest a criterion of desire, is misleading, confusing, and arbitrary.

One might object, however, that this criticism of Gewirth has begged the question. It has presented the ordinary conception of desire as not including a favorable interest and has used that analysis to overturn Gewirth's; but far from defending its analysis, it merely has assumed that the analysis is correct. Hence, it has begged the very question at issue. Maybe Gewirth's conception of desire is consistent with the standard one and mine is the one that is misleading, confusing, and arbitrary. To meet this objection, I will explain that in normal discourse one may talk about a desire that does not include any favorable interest on the part of its subject. Such a desire might be a caprice, or a desire formed or had capriciously. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the primary meaning of "caprice" is: "A sudden change or turn of the mind without apparent or adequate motive; a desire or opin-

ion arbitrarily or fantastically formed; a freak, whim, mere fancy". Also according to the same work the meaning of "capriciously" is: "in a capricious manner; according to caprice; arbitrarily". While desires formed fantastically are pertinent to some contexts, the ones relevant to the problem at hand are those had arbitrarily. A desire is not held arbitrarily when its subject has a reason for wanting its object whereas it is held arbitrarily when its subject does not have a reason for wanting its object. Thus, if A does not now have X, pay heed to X, makes an effort to obtain X, will obtain X when it is feasible to do so, but has no reason for obtaining it, he desires X arbitrarily, or capriciously. We all, or at least most of us, have encountered persons, in ourselves or others, who seem to want something without reason. A person suspected of having a capricious desire is typically, but not exclusively, one whose concerned desire *inter alia* appears suddenly, endures briefly, and runs counter to his established life. The husband who never before has been interested in extramarital sex but who all of a sudden and for a short time wants to engage in it is one who well might be considered as possibly having a desire without reason. The same may be said of the successful career woman who suddenly and briefly desires to give up her career and become devoted totally to being a housewife and mother. Even though we might not ever be convinced that given possibly capricious desires are without reason, we, as the OED testifies, find nothing silly in thinking that they might be capricious. One thing that necessarily counts as a reason for a subject's having a desire is having a positive interest in its object. Even if a subject sincerely denies that he has a reason for desiring an object, he has a reason for desiring it if he approves of the object; for he may justify his desire by appealing to the approval. So, because it makes sense in standard speech to refer to capricious, or arbitrary, desires and because approval of a desired object means that the desire is not held arbitrarily, it follows that a positive interest is not a conceptual criterion of desire in normal language. If it were, it would be characteristic of each and every desire; thus, there could never be a capricious desire. Consequently, Gewirth's analysis of desire, which does not allow for a capricious desire, is opposed to ordinary discourse.

Dictionaries, of course, are fallible. Hence, rather than taking them as the indisputable authority on the normal conception of desire, one should ask whether or not desire by a subject who has no reason for having it really makes sense. Suppose that Betty says she wants a saucer of mud but, upon demand, can furnish, directly or indirectly, no reason for wanting it, not even "Just to have it".¹⁷ Would not we think that Betty has misspoken herself or, what comes to the same thing, that she does not really desire the saucer of mud? As G.E.M. Anscombe has remarked, "To say, 'I merely want this' without any characterization is to deprive the word of sense; . . .".¹⁸ What may count as a subject's furnishing a reason for desiring X is his stating in some way that he approves X in some respect. Because, therefore, normal discourse conceives desire as involving a reason for the desire, the contention that the notion of an arbitrary desire makes sense is patently wrong, dictionaries notwithstanding. Accordingly, one cannot describe a desire by a voluntary agent fully unless one refers to a reason by the agent for the desire, e.g., a favorable mind-set toward the desire's object.

Even though this argument might be greatly appealing, it rests upon a serious confusion. It confuses the sense of desire with the sensibility of desire; in other words, it mistakes the meaning of desire for

the rationality of desire. It is one thing to have a desire; it is quite another to have a reason for the desire. Betty may not be sensible in wanting a saucer of mud; but if she does not have a saucer of mud, gives attention to such, directs some energy toward obtaining one, and obtains it when she feasibly can, she certainly desires a saucer of mud. If her attitude is not to be called "desire", what is it to be called? Certainly not "wish" or "hope". Yet, it might be objected that an important matter has been ignored. What is specifically in question is desire by a voluntary agent, who acts wittingly as well as unforcedly. To be able to know what he is doing, does not such an agent have to have a reason for wanting something? The answer is, "No". According to the received notion of knowledgeable action, an agent has to know who he is, what he is doing, whatever purpose he has, what other persons are being affected by his action, and the immediate outcome of his doing; but he does not need to know why he desires to fulfill the purpose that he has.¹⁹

Gewirth's second explicit argument in defense of the proposition that the voluntary agent necessarily values his goal concerns the other generic characteristic of voluntary action, viz., noncoerciveness. To say that an action is unforced is to say, positively, that the given agent controls the action by an unforced choice. It is to say, negatively, that the action is not caused by a) direct compulsion, physical or psychological, by someone or something external to the agent, b) something internal to the person, such as a reflex or disease, that decisively contributes in some way beyond the control of the agent to the occurrence of the action, or c) indirect compulsion whereby the person's choice to emit the action is forced by someone else's coercion.²⁰ In appealing to the noncoerciveness of voluntary action to support the claim that any agent necessarily esteems his purpose, Gewirth avers that the only element that can unforcedly motivate any agent to perform his action is his respecting his purpose.

He regards this goal as worth aiming at or pursuing; for if he did not so regard it he would not unforcedly choose to move from quiescence or nonaction to action with a view of achieving the goal. This conception of worth constitutes a valuing on the part of the agent; he regards the object of his action as having at least sufficient value to merit his acting to attain it, according to whatever criteria are involved in his action.²¹

The reason why the agent's esteem of his purpose may be seen as a motivating force is that it may be used to explain why the agent goes from quiescence to action, and the reason why it may be taken as moving the agent unforcedly is that the agent is the source of the esteem and, insofar, is in control of it. Any other motivating factor, Gewirth manifestly implies, would be coercive in that it would fall under either a), b) or c) above and, thus, would be beyond the control of the agent.

Much of this argument's burden rests upon Gewirth's claim that any motivator other than the agent's valuing his purpose would be compulsive and, thus, would render his behavior involuntary. If Gewirth did not make this claim, he would have to allow that there might be another motivating factor of the agent that is not coercive and, thus, could not state that if an agent did not regard his purpose as worthy, "he would not unforcedly choose to move from quiescence of nonaction to action

with a view to achieving the goal". Unfortunately, Gewirth fails to justify the claim; he does not explain, directly or indirectly, why any other motivator would be compulsive. If he had considered how to support the claim, he might have discovered that it cannot be supported well and, therefore, that his argument suffers from a weak foundation.

Let us recur to the point that an action's purpose might include a capricious desire. Upon being asked what is the goal of his action, agent *A* may respond, "To attain *X*". Upon being asked next why he is trying to attain *X*, *A* may respond, "Because I desire to attain *X*". And upon being asked then why he wants to attain *X*, he may respond: "The matter is absolutely unexplainable; I suddenly and simply happen to want to attain *X*". That the desire accompanying a goal is capricious does not prevent the latter from being motivational; in fact, the desire itself, despite its being without motivation, is what moves the agent to action. When an agent says that he is trying to obtain *X* because he wants to, he declares a motive of his action. In effect, he asserts that his not having *X*, his attending to *X*, his being inclined to obtain *X*, and whatever other elements of his desire to obtain *X* there might be constitute a motive of his action. If he states that he desires to achieve the goal because of *R*, he presents *R* as an approximate motive of his action and treats his desire as the immediate motive. If, however, he states that he simply wants to achieve his goal, or, alternatively, that there is no reason for his wanting to attain the goal, he specifies that there is no motivator of his action more distant than his desire and that his desire is the only force moving him.

It is admitted that a capricious purpose might be coercive. The purpose's attendant desire, albeit uncaused, might be so strong that it forces the agent to try to fulfill the purpose. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that a capricious purpose need not be compulsive. The desire involved in the objective might be moderate or weak enough that it does not force the agent to try to fulfill the objective. While the agent might be attentive to the object of the desire and might try to gain it, he need not be oblivious to all other matters and fixed in his tendency. Thus, he might shift the focus of his attention and the direction of his tendency. He might change desire because upon meeting with a conflict he might become so strongly desirous of another object that he ceases to attend to the object of his original desire or *inter alia* because he, somewhat like St. Paul on the road to Damascus, suddenly comes to assess the capricious desire and to find it unworthy of fulfillment. While the former possibility might mean that the agent is coerced by his new desire, it certainly does not mean that his former and capricious desire coerced him. And while the latter possibility means that the agent esteems the object of whatever new want he now has, it surely does not mean that he prized the object of his former and capricious want.

The third argument explicitly set forth by Gewirth concerns the endeavor and intention associated with voluntary action. By concept a voluntary agent acts intentionally, i.e., in view of the end of his action, and tries to achieve that end. If he did not act intentionally, he would not be knowledgeable of the end; and if he were not trying to obtain it, he could not possibly be acting in an unforced way. Given these traits, Gewirth maintains that one may infer that the agent of voluntary action values his purpose:

Now, every agent regards his purposes as good according to whatever criteria (not necessarily moral ones) are involved in his acting to fulfill them. This is shown, for example, by the endeavor or at least intention with which each agent approaches the achieving of his purposes.²²

This argument is reflected in a passage employed by Gewirth in his presentation of an argument with a different point, viz., an argument that defends his dialectical method:

If we see someone running very hard in order to catch a bus, we can safely infer, without stopping him and asking him, that he thinks it is worth his effort to try to catch the bus, just as if we see someone reading a book with avid interest we don't have to see whether he is moving his lips in order to attribute to him such a judgment as, 'It is worth my attention reading this book,' according to whatever criterion of worth is involved in his purpose of reading.²³

Because Gewirth does not explain why one may infer from an agent's endeavor or intention that the agent prizes his goal, he leaves it to others to supply the explanation. One may make the inference because the endeavor and the intention each entails the agent's esteem of his goal. No agent logically can try to fulfill a purpose unless he values it, and no agent logically can intend to achieve an objective unless he esteems it. No other explanation comes to mind. At any rate, if this one is true, it gives Gewirth's argument a firm base and thereby enhances its probative force. Whether or not it is true remains to be seen.

It is readily admitted that an agent's endeavor or intention does show that he probably regards his goal as worthy of pursuit; it also is readily conceded that upon observing an agent acting toward an end, one might infer safely that the agent probably prizes the end. It is denied, however, that the agent's endeavor or intention shows that he by *conceptual necessity*, which is the sort that Gewirth has in mind, views his goal as worthy of attainment and that observing an agent in pursuit of an aim warrants one to infer that the agent necessarily esteems his aim. In order to show that an agent conceptually has to value his purpose, the agent's endeavor or intention must entail by its concept that the agent has to prize his goal; otherwise, the endeavor or intention can show nothing more than that the agent probably esteems the goal. However, neither the concept of endeavor by an agent nor that of intention by an agent implies that an agent must look upon his objective as worthwhile.

While Gewirth states what he means by intention, viz., an agent's acting in view of the end of his action,²⁴ he does not clarify what he means by endeavor; but he presumably intends what it is normally understood to be. According to ordinary use an agent's endeavor is nothing separate from his action; it is, rather, an aspect of his action, to wit, the agent's expenditure of energy to attain his goal. Thus, when one says that Smith is or is not endeavoring, attempting, or trying to gain X, one normally means that Smith is or is not expending energy to gain X. If it were the case that a voluntary agent exerts himself to achieve his aim only if he thinks the aim worth achieving, it would follow that his endeavor does necessarily signify his valuing the aim. There is, however, another possible explanation as to why an agent

strives to achieve his aim. He might desire his aim arbitrarily, or capriciously, and thus without appreciating it; and if he does desire it capriciously, he is moved by a capricious desire and, insofar, not by an valuation of it to try to fulfill it. A similar point pertains to an agent's intention. Without question an agent might intend to achieve an objective because he esteems it, but he also might intend to achieve it for some other reason. He might act in view of the goal because he desires it capriciously. In sum, because an agent's endeavor and his intention to fulfill his purpose may each be for reasons of caprice, neither signifies that he logically must appreciate his purpose. People do learn from experience that those who try or intend to obtain goals usually, if not always, prize them; and from learning this, people may infer safely that a person striving or intending to attain a purpose probably does esteem it. They may not safely infer from any experience, however, that an agent logically has to esteem his objective.

The first argument suggested by Gewirth emphasizes the rationality of the voluntary agent. As far as Gewirth is concerned, any agent of voluntary action who "initiates or controls his behavior through his unforced, informed choice with a view to achieving various purposes",²⁵ is "rational in that he is aware of and can give expression to the generic features that conceptual analysis shows to pertain necessarily to his actions, including the logical implications of these features".²⁶ Hence, he adheres to the canons of deduction and induction.²⁷ Because Gewirth views a voluntary agent as following the rules of deduction and induction, he indicates that the agent acts only if he has some reason for acting and, insofar, intimates that the only kind of purpose that a voluntary agent can have is one for which he can have a reason, which is to say, a rational purpose. In fact, Gewirth does use the expression, "rational desires",²⁸ and in using it hints that the desires and purposes characteristic of a voluntary agent are rational in that they are liable to being backed by reasons by the agent with the purposes and desires. Given the fact that a desire is rational only if it can be explained by reference to a favorable interest, it is safe to hold that a purpose is rational only if it too can be explained by reference to its being valued by its agent. Being rational, therefore, a voluntary agent must value his purpose. It follows that capricious purposes and desires, if there be such, are logically foreign to the agents of voluntary action.

Gewirth is correct, I believe, in maintaining that voluntary agents necessarily are rational. He is further correct, I believe, in holding that they necessarily are rational in that they grasp the logical implications of the generic features of their respective actions and follow the rules of deduction and induction. If, however, Gewirth does intend that a voluntary agent also must value his purpose in order to be rational, he, I believe, is mistaken. The reason why is that at least from the standpoint of common understanding it is self-contradictory to say that being favorably impressed with his purpose is a necessary characteristic of the voluntary agent. As already explained, such an agent need not approve his purpose; he might have it capriciously in that he arbitrarily desires to attain the end of his action. Because having a favorable mind-set toward his purpose is not a distinguishing mark of the voluntary agent, it logically cannot be a condition of his necessarily being rational. To be sure, a voluntary agent who approves his goal is rational in that respect: he can cite his approval of the goal as a reason for pursuing it. This does not mean, however, that he has to favor his objective in order to be rational. Any volunteer agent, whether he favors his purpose

or not, is rational in that he grasps the logical implications of his action's generic features and adheres to the rules of deduction and induction. Thus, the voluntary agent with a capricious purpose is rational in that he can see, while following the canons of deduction and induction, that by virtue of his not preferring the purpose he lacks a reason for fulfilling it. In other words, the voluntary agent with a capricious goal is rational in that he can understand that he is not rational in seeking the goal. The reason why he logically can be rational in the former but not in the latter respect is that each represents a different sense of rationality. The former concerns rationality in the sense of comprehending logical implications and following rules of inference while the latter concerns having reasons for action. Hence, for ordinary understanding voluntary agents are necessarily rational in the former but not the latter sense whereas for Gewirth they are necessarily rational in both senses.

The other argument intimated by Gewirth is methodological. According to Gewirth the method he employs in establishing his moral theory is the dialectically necessary method, which "begins from statements or judgments that are necessarily attributable to every agent because they derive from the generic features that constitute the necessary structures of action".²⁹ The statements and judgments deriving from these features are those that "emerge successfully from the conceptual analysis of action and of the agent's necessary beliefs".³⁰ And to say that they emerge successfully from the analysis is to say that they are "definitely justified" or warrant "favorable consideration" by the analysis.³¹ Accordingly, it might be contended that the foregoing criticisms of Gewirth's defense of his claim that the agent necessarily esteems his goal have demanded strict justification and thereby have not allowed favorable consideration where it has been warranted. So, while the criticisms of the defense might have succeeded in demonstrating that the claim has not been definitely justified, they might not have succeeded in evincing that the claim does not merit favorable consideration. Indeed, one might be inclined to urge that Gewirth's defense has portrayed the claim as deserving such consideration. Only one counterexample to the claim has been furnished, to wit, that of capricious purpose; and it has been admitted tacitly that genuine instances of the counterexample might be nonexistent or at most negligible in number. Should not one, therefore, be willing to dismiss this counterexample as practically insignificant and, thus, to look favorably upon Gewirth's claim?

While this argument is relevant, it is not compelling. First, even if the counterexample of a capricious purpose is without practical significance, it is not without conceptual significance, which is the sort at stake in Gewirth's claim. He is contending that agents look upon their goals as worthy not because that is the way they tend to view them in the "real world" of action but because that is a part of what it means for them to be agents. Second, the single counterexample, however rarely found in actuality, is sufficient to question the truth of Gewirth's claim. Third, Gewirth does not even discuss the possibility of a capricious purpose, which prompts one to doubt that he entertained its possibility when he made the claim and, therefore, to wonder if he would have modified the claim had he considered its possibilities. These reasons, I submit, are adequate for not extending the claim favorable consideration.

III

In showing that Gewirth does not soundly support his claim that voluntary agents necessarily prize their goals, the preceding discussion has great significance for his moral theory. It implies that all the principles resting, directly and indirectly, upon the claim have a weak foundation.

As far as can be told, Gewirth places only one principle directly upon the claim. It holds that any voluntary agent necessarily values his action. That Gewirth puts this principle immediately upon the claim can be seen from the fact that he supports the former by appealing directly to the latter: the agent must appreciate his action because he performs it in order to attain something that he necessarily regards as good, viz., his goal.³² According to the analysis argued here, the agent does not necessarily view his aim as worthwhile and, thus, does not perform his action in order to obtain something that he necessarily esteems. Hence, he cannot properly be said to prize his action from necessity on the ground that he necessarily values his end. It is acknowledged that an agent does necessarily prize his action as a means for fulfilling his purpose, but this is not to say that he has to regard his purpose as valuable. It has been intimated that any voluntary action, whether its end is appreciated by its agent or not, is deliberative, which entails that its agent looks upon the action as preferable to alternative actions for attaining his end. It follows that the agent has to allow that the action is valuable for achieving his objective. In granting this, however, he need not make any concession about the worth of his objective. The standards employed in choosing an action might make sense only if they are used for choosing one meant to attain a valued end. Efficiency, for instance, might make sense as a standard only because it will enable the agent to gain as quickly as feasible an end that he values. Even so, the standards used might make sense in choosing an action meant to achieve a capricious goal. Being desired arbitrarily, a capricious objective does not have to be attained immediately or within the confines of prudence, morality, aesthetics, or any other normative area; but it is to be achieved during the duration of the involved desire. In choosing an action, therefore, an agent with a capricious objective might employ no standard other than effectiveness; that is, he might consider no aspect of an entertained action other than whether or not it is likely to realize his purpose. If he does entertain several actions that look equally effective, he can select among them arbitrarily, e.g., by a coin toss. In any event, if he chooses an action simply for its effectiveness, he values it as a means in that he prefers it to actions that are neither effective nor as effective as the chosen one in fulfilling his aim. He, of course, does not prefer it to actions that are as effective as the chosen one but are rejected arbitrarily.

Not all the other principles of Gewirth's moral theory rest even indirectly upon his claim that agents value their purpose by logical necessity. Thus, while the Principle of Proportionality, which is conceived by Gewirth as a procedural principle for applying the PGC, is presented by him as derivable from another claim, namely, that there are "degrees of approach to full-fledged agency", it is not presented by him to be even distantly derivable from the claim with which we are concerned primarily.³³ Of the principles that Gewirth does ground more or less approximately upon the latter, some are highly important for his moral theory. One of them is the PGC, which states: "Act in accord with the

generic rights of your recipients as well as yourself".³⁴ The others are those that link the PGC with the claim in a chain of inferences. The principle that any agent views all of his other actions as worthy follows from the principle that he appreciates his present action. After all, if he appreciates an action of his because he sees it as a means to something that he esteems, he must value any other action of his that he perceives as a means to something that he prizes.³⁵ Because the principle about the agent's esteem of all his other actions derives from the one about his valuation of his present action, it derives indirectly from Gewirth's claim. The principle that an agent deems as worthy the generic features of his given action follows from the one that he esteems his action and, thus, indirectly from the claim.³⁶ Because the principle that an agent values the generic features of all his other actions comes directly from the one that he prizes the generic features of his present action,³⁷ it comes indirectly from Gewirth's claim. The principle of generic rights, or that each and every voluntary agent has a right to the generic features of his actions, is supported even more indirectly by the claim; for this principle is upheld immediately by those concerning any agent's valuing the generic features of his actions, given and otherwise. And, of course, the PGC, which purports to follow from the principle of generic rights, rests still even more indirectly upon the claim.³⁸ Despite the fact that the support received from the claim by each of these principles is indirect and despite the fact that the indirectness of that support varies in degree from principle to principle, each of the principles rests upon the same flawed foundation. Each is as unsound as the other. For lack of a solid foundation, then, these principles do not stand.

ENDNOTES

¹ Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 129. Alan Gewirth, *Human Rights: Essays on Justification and Applications* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1.

² Gewirth, *Reasons and Morality*, 27. Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 28, 114.

³ Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54, 255.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-103.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, x, 25-26, 48. Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 4, 116-23, 134-35.

¹¹ Cf. Paul Allen III, "A Critique of Gewirth's 'Is-Ought' Derivation", *Ethics*, 92 (January, 1982): 224-25. Edward Regis, Jr., ed., *Gewirth's Ethical Rationalism: Critical Essays with a Reply by Alan Gewirth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

- 12 Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 39-40.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 44, 46-47, 172.
- 17 The idea of a saucer of mud as an object of desire comes from G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 70.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 19 Aristotle, *N. Ethics*, 1109b30-111a6. Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 31.
- 20 Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 31.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 49. This passage is repeated in Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 117. A short version appears in Gewirth, "Replies to My Critics", in Regis, *Gewirth's Ethical Rationalism*, 204.
- 22 Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 47.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 115.
- 24 Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 39.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 171. Cf. *Ibid.*, 44, 153, 174. Also, Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 122, 135.
- 26 Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 44.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 46, 153, 171.
- 28 Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 132-33.
- 29 Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 43-44.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 46-47.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 119-21.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 52-54.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 63-64.