

Martin's theory of hope

Handout
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Counterexamples to the orthodox definition

- Cancer Research, Shawshank Redemption, and Lottery Ticket. In each, two people have equally strong desires for the same outcome and assign an equal probability to it, but one of them is hopeful and the other is not hopeful at all. Martin fends off objections to the effect that either the desires aren't really equally strong or the players don't really assign the same probabilities.

Existing analyses

- **Bovens** appeals to the devoting of mental energy—checking, visualizing and such. AM: Those things can indeed be important elements of hope, but they're just parts of the desire itself, and so provide no genuinely competing analysis of hope.
- **Meirav** appeals to relevant external factors and the subject's attitude toward one or more of those, the hopeful person seeing such a factor as good. AM: (1) Counterexample cases in which one hopes for something one believes will depend entirely on arbitrary factors; (2) the external factor just puts the problem off (Andy and Red could both believe in a good one). But the takeaway point: the difference is in "the justificatory attitude one adopts." [Does she mean that seeing an external factor as good is itself *justificatory*?]
- **Pettit** posits "cognitive resolve": being disposed to act at least in some way as if the hoped-for outcome is going to occur. AM: (1) The hopeful person still has a back-up plan which she fully expects to need and implement; (2) the hopeful person's rationale for the acting-as-if is not to pretend that the odds are other than they are, but just to affirm that the real odds are good enough to *permit* acting in that way. Takeaway: The hopeful person "stand[s] ready to *justify* dedicating certain kinds of attention and thought to the outcome." [Here again I think the reference to justification, especially as italicized, is Martin's own, not in Pettit, though doubtless Pettit is thinking that the "resolve" is a practical way of being able to bear the crushing truth.]¹

What kinds of attention and thought?

- That is the topic of the rest of Ch. 1. There are two kinds: thoughts, and feelings. Under the heading of thoughts, Martin focuses on "fantasizing." A fantasy in her defined sense has a narrative structure, and it has "an egoistic function." The latter means just that

¹ So far as I've found, only one of the four of them, Bovens, quotes "Hope is the Thing With Feathers." I suppose Adrienne thought it would be too big a cliché.

fantasizing includes “imagining some of one’s [own] desires satisfied” (p. 26). N.b. (p. 28), Martin grants that fantasizing is not strictly necessary for hoping.

- In her terminology, “desire” (= “attraction”) and “aversion” contrast; desire is always positive. In the fourth version of the racing accident example (p. 28), the subject has and manifests each of the two. Martin doesn’t explicitly say, but I think she counts this as a case of hope, though perhaps a sullied one.
- She goes on to address the difference between hope and expectation, which she thinks normally contrast. The difference, she says, is in the subject’s affective dispositions. It shows in the subject’s reaction to the materializing or not of the outcome. A disappointed expectation brings at least a mild type of “anger,” since expectation “brings with it a sense of quasi-entitlement” (p. 31), while disappointed hope brings only “discomfort or discouragement.” Parallel remarks apply to fulfillment: fulfillment of a hope brings greater satisfaction than does that of an expectation. So “[t]o hope is, in part, to stand ready to justify feeling anticipation (but not entitlement) when imagining...” (p. 32). [Here again the notion of justifying is injected by Martin, not part of the work of Miceli & Castelfranchi she has been discussing. She pauses to comment that the relevant feelings are reason-responsive and so the sorts of feelings that *can* be justified.]

Mental states and their characteristic rational norms

- “Rational” refers again to reason-responsiveness. Martin distinguishes “theoretical” from “practical” norms (p. 37). The former identify considerations of “truth-approximation” that bear on a mental state’s “correctness” = “successfulness” = non-“defectiveness.” Practical norms identify considerations of “rational-ends-promotion.” Such considerations are what Martin is calling reasons. There are two constraints on rational norms / reasons.
- *NGRDR* (pp. 38-41) says that it must be possible barring “confounding factors” for the subject to “revise” the mental state in question as a *direct* result of deliberating about the reasons attaching to it. Martin says this is “almost tautologous.” Her example is that of pain: A pain can’t *itself* be a rationally defective mental state, because the sufferer can’t make it go away just by deliberating about why s/he shouldn’t be suffering it. As we know, Martin is going to say the same thing about desires (“attractions”) themselves.
- *DCR* (pp. 41-44) says that, crudely, a reason must have motivating force. More specifically, it must be able to dispose the subject to “revise,” *through her recognition of it as having normative authority*. [Phew.] Granted, there are borderline cases, and she says there need not be actual, much less conscious, deliberation.

The licensing stance

- (pp. 44-52). This is an attitude towards the given assigned probability, that treats the probability as “enabling” a reason. It’s a practical attitude, but is not intrinsically motivating, though the reason will be. It is arrived at by practical deliberation. This is

not like the “transparent” deliberation that produced the probability assessment in the first place; in the latter case, all we were *psychologically* capable of was attending to the evidence bearing on truth-approximation. In considering Pascal’s Wager (p. 47) I simply cannot *directly* come to believe in God by assessing the evidence. I would have to resort to other, additional means to induce that belief. (You’ll recall that Pascal himself made that point.)

- When we put the point about the “transparency” of belief-formation to evidence together with *DCR* (p. 48), it follows that the only considerations that qualify as reasons for “revising” a belief are evidential or at least truth-approximative. That’s the way the rational norm characteristic of the mental state *belief* works. [I found these last two pages very tough going. If you have trouble wielding the notion of “transparency” (fn 19), I don’t blame you. And now, why, exactly, did Pascal not give us a *reason*—of a different kind, of course—for believing in God if we can manage it? I think that may come down to the way Martin is choosing to use the word, but I’m not at all sure.]
- In any case we can choose to see the assigned probability in the licensing way, or not, and that is a practical decision. See the italicized deliberative reasoning on p. 49. We cannot change the assigned probability for practical reasons, but we can “shift our perspective” on it. Martin alludes to aspect-perception, which is IMPORTANT for our own later purposes and we shall discuss in a few weeks. What’s important for her present purposes is that it’s under voluntary control and can be done for reasons. And (p. 50) it is governed by no theoretical norms; anything can (theoretically-)rationally be “seen as” anything, in the literal visual sense of “see.”

Treating something as a practical reason

- The licensing stance is an attitude one may take toward a fixed assigned probability. It is “[in light of that probability] giving oneself permission to treat one’s *desire* for the hoped-for outcome, and the outcome’s desirable features, as reasons” (p. 52). The other attitude that makes up Martin’s “incorporation element” is toward the desire/attraction, and consists of going ahead and so treating it. [Is the relation that close? I hope I’m not misreading.]
- As noted earlier, Martin opines that desires just in themselves are *not reasons* for action. But her examples on p. 53 do not show that; all they show is that so far as a desire is a reason, it can easily be outweighed. [Now, even though I love any attack on the Humean picture, I’d have thought any desire was *a reason*. But Martin’s view is that a desire has to have reasonhood contingently conferred on it. I happily agree with what she goes on to say in the first sentence of the next para., but it is compatible with desires’ being *eo ipso* reasons. However, maybe all I should be thinking is that every desire *can readily be made* a reason. We shall, I hope, see.]

The two-element view vs. monisms

- Any desire can of course motivate—just not rationally unless it has been made a reason. So, Martin maintains, we need to acknowledge both subrational and rational motivations/“resources.” Her opponents, then, will be one-element or monist theories of motivation, wholly antirationalist ones and wholly rationalist ones.
- Hume is the antirationalist poster child. His offense (p. 55) is in not allowing for normative authority, which requires taking an endorsing attitude towards one’s desire. Martin admits that he has some resources—e.g., higher-order desires—but she reasonably complains that those are just more desires and add no justificatory element.² [I think a real Humean should forthrightly call further justification a chimaera, but so much the worse for real Humeans in my view.]
- Contemporary rationalists include Scanlon and Parfit (pp. 56-57). Scanlon thinks of desire as itself being the apparent perception of reasons; “there is no possibility of asking oneself whether one’s [subrational] motivation provides any justification,” and that is precisely Martin’s objection to the view. [But here she must assume not only her claim that mere desires are not themselves reasons but also that there are desires that do not even *furnish* reasons by being veridical perceptions of them.]
- Behavior directly caused by a subrational mere desire is not action. But, Martin concedes (p. 59), we do expect people to control their impulses, and we hold them responsible when they behave badly. Why do we, if the behavior was not under rational control? Martin answers only that “to demand justification for failures of self-control...is demanding justification for a rational activity or its absence.” [???—A failure of self-control is a rational activity or its absence? I don’t get this at all.]
- Contrast: Belief, we saw by mobilizing *DCR*, is by its nature governed by a theoretical norm. Not so desire/attraction. By *NGRDR*, it is not governed by any norm at all, any more than is pain. Of course, as soon as the subject deliberately chooses to treat it as a reason, it acquires both “normative authority” and accountability; it is within what Sellars called “the space of reasons” and is open to justification and to criticism.³

The incorporation

Martin describes her paradigm case of hope on p. 62. Whatever we think of her slighting views on desires, we should evaluate her family-resemblance analysis on its own terms.

² She deprecates Humeans’ claim that belief-desire explanations “rationalize” action, but she mischaracterizes what at least some of them mean by it: that a b.-d. explanation exhibits why the action seemed a good idea from the agent’s point of view. As noted in class, however, that formula needs more careful scrutiny.

³ My reference to Sellars is not accidental. Though Martin nowhere mentions him, her Kantian discussion is shot through with Sellarsian themes. She does mention Darwall.

