THE PHILOSOPHICAL FORUM
Volume XXXII, No. 1, Spring 2001

WISDOM AND THE AXIOM OF FUTILITY

MARVIN KOHL

One of the most valuable contributions, if not the landmark, of ancient Greco-Roman philosophy is the idea that we are generally free to improve our lives and can do so, essentially, by cognitive means. It is the belief that we are free to understand the nature of the universe and, within the limits of our intelligence and power, can better fashion and control our own lives. This kind of understanding, when capacious, is called wisdom.

In this paper I intend to do two things. The first is to provide an outline of a more viable theory of wisdom, a theory that, in part, is derived from the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, and in part, from work in psychology. Recent work in psychology emphasizes wisdom's pragmatic and emancipatory features and tends to view the competency of wise persons to necessarily include heuristic and problem-solving skills.[1] From this perspective, wisdom is more than the acquisition of important information. It also involves a high degree of skill at evaluating information and solving problems. In other words, modern psychology has become increasingly interested in what some call crystallized intelligence, in a kind of high multidimensional intelligence, an understanding of how to live well and the capacity to apply this knowledge to the challenges of real life.

In order to distinguish my own formulation from those that significantly differ, I shall call it a non-classical, self-regulatory deliberative theory of wisdom, or, more simply, a self-regulatory theory.[2] It is non-classical in the sense that, although it is largely indebted to the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, it incorporates neither a notion of divine wisdom, nor a teleological belief in perfectionism, nor the Stoic belief that the universe is, as a whole, guided by a rational and benevolent divine providence. It is self-regulatory in that it assumes that people hold several distinct kinds of self-guides, that is, values against which people compare themselves and direct their lives. It is deliberative because it stresses the importance of knowledge and intelligence and, as such, implicitly

rejects the attitude of passive resignation and/or anti-intellectualism, an attitude that marks some forms of Taoism.

The second thing I shall do is analyze Lawrence C. Becker's useful formulation. According to Becker, the Axiom of Futility is a self-imposed constraint that an individual may or may not place upon his behavior, and is one of the Axioms of Normative Logic. "Agents," he writes, "are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something that is logically, theoretically, or practically impossible."[3] His fuller claim is that the Axiom of Futility is normatively trump. More exactly the claim is that the Axiom of Futility, or the precept that we ought not to try to do things that are known to be impossible, overrides all other normative principles or statements.[4]

The question before us is, how adequate is Becker's formulation? How can a life directed by wisdom protect us against the natural human inclination to strive for what is unattainable? To what extent does such a life command that we accept our limitations and stop wasting time and energy by pursuing futile goals? By way of providing an answer, I suggest that it is better to use another formulation to guide human behavior. I call this formulation the Principle of Futility. The Principle of Futility maintains that agents are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something known to be futile unless they also know that the endeavor in question has point and worth, specifically that of significantly enhancing their subjective well-being without directly injuring the agent or innocent others. Little will be said here about the rationality of desiring or wanting to do things which are impossible to do.[5] I also will have little to say about the dangers of pretending to know what one does not.[6] Nor will we be able to address the challenging question as to the *extent* of the practical value of the Axiom of Futility. It is obvious, I hope, that wisdom has its own limits, that in some of the most important of life situations it is impossible to know what one can and cannot do, and that to pretend otherwise is a negative illusion. Fascinating as these topics are, they must be reserved for other occasions.

I also wish to avoid, as Becker does, the quagmire of the "'can not' implies 'ought not'" controversy. In other words, whatever be the difficulties involved in Becker's defense of what he calls the axioms of Stoic normative logic, they do not involve the inordinate difficulty of stipulating the meanings of 'can', 'ought', and 'implies' in order to justify the acceptance or rejection of the inference at hand. This is not to deny Henderson's contention that these dictums often express "a bluff, no-nonsense wisdom" or that a relatively non-arbitrary successful explication of the various senses of 'implies', 'ought', and 'can' may be useful.[7] It is only to suggest that the "'ought' implies 'can'" approach has shown itself to be thorny, if not intractably difficult and, therefore, that Becker's approach may be a better one.

I THE GRECO-ROMAN HERITAGE

The general topic of the relation of wisdom to ethics is certainly not new. As a matter of fact, "the ideal of a rational ethics can be traced back to the Hellenic idea of *deliberate* wisdom concerning the management of life."[8] Socrates' search for wisdom is legendary, Plato regarded wisdom as the crowning virtue which should guide men to the good life, and Aristotle accepted this view with significant modifications. Perhaps no school of philosophy in the ancient world placed greater emphasis on the importance of understanding and accepting the limits of human power than did the Stoics. For the Stoics maintain that in addition to knowing what is worth doing, wisdom, in some very fundamental way, consists in knowing what we can and cannot do, knowing what is and what is not in our power, and not attempting to do what we cannot do. The essence of this idea is expressed by Epictetus when he writes:

> You can be unconquerable if you enter into no combat in which it is not in your own power to conquer. When, therefore, you see anyone eminent in honors, or power, or in high esteem on any account, take heed not to be bewildered by appearances and to pronounce him happy; for *if the essence of good consists in things within our power,* there will be no room for envy or emulation. But, for your part, do not desire to be a general, or a senator, or a consul, but to be free; and *the only way to this is a disregard of things which lie not within our own power.*[9]

Becker's formulation expresses a similar idea. Epictetus and Becker agree that knowing one's limits is generally a necessary condition in order to avoid living poorly and that this condition, in some vitally important way, is overriding. However, for Epictetus these principles are explicitly grounded in a theory of wisdom; for Becker they are not. This suggests two different approaches to a Stoic philosophy of life. In the first, the Stoic philosopher takes as his or her starting point a theory of wisdom, with the peculiarities and difficulties such an approach generates.[10] In the second, one begins with axioms that guide the inquiry. We shall follow the former path. Like Epictetus, we assume that a theory of wisdom logically precedes a theory of morality because it necessarily sets limits on what ends, goals, and actions ought to be pursued. Like Epictetus and the Stoics in general, we believe that self-feeling can be significantly controlled, not only by generally prohibiting the attempt to do the impossible but by establishing psychological self-guides that help minimize unnecessary failure and unhappiness. This, in part, explains why a description of the nature of self-esteem and the two kinds of self-guides that are of particular importance in self-discrepancy theory is included in the discussion that follows.

II TOWARDS A SELF-REGULATORY THEORY OF WISDOM

I suggest: first, that wisdom is a deep understanding of how to live well, an understanding that is a necessary but not a sufficient condition; second, that full wisdom is worthy of being loved or at least rationally pursued because it combines excellence in theoretical matters and excellence in actual living. In other words, wisdom is "terrific" because, at its best, it combines a capacious understanding of things and problem-solving skills with a life of excellence, with a life that is truly worth living. It merits our esteem and emotional commitment because, if anything is supremely lovable, it is knowledge of our true interest; it is knowledge about, and an understanding of, what is best to be done in the important circumstances of human life, in order to arrive at our main end-in-view, well-being and happiness.[11]

Another way of saying this is to suggest that wisdom is the "science" of understanding how to live well. Substantively, it involves a theory of well-being which combines external and internal requisites and, except for the importance of self-esteem, gives priority to the former. As used here, the term self-esteem "refers to individuals' *overall* evaluation or appraisal of themselves, whether they approve or disapprove of themselves, like or dislike themselves."[12] Self-esteem is not a stable personality trait like extroversion and introversion. Rather it is in part a consequence of self-regulatory process and, as such, provides up-to-date summary information about an individual's relative psychological well-being.

According to self-regulation theory, the nature of self-esteem varies depending upon what kind of self is functioning as the reference point of the evaluation, depending upon what reference point for evaluating any particular kind of actual self one uses, and depending upon whether or not there is a conflict between self-guides.[13] Of the many sources of low self-esteem, two are central to the present discussion. That is to say, human beings compare their behavior to at least two different kinds of expectancies which typically have become internalized standards (or selves) whose point is to guide self-regulation. These selves are the ideal self and the ought self. "The ideal self is the kind of person an individual would really *like* to be. The ideal self is a positive point of reference made up of qualities, hopes, and positive wishes for the self. Ideals might be viewed as incentives. Living up to an ideal means attaining a value that is intrinsically desirable. Self-discrepancy theory holds that the discrepancies between the perceived actual self and the ideal self lead to the experience of dysphoria and dejection."[14] The ought self is different. The ought self is the kind of person an individual believes he or she has the *duty* or *obligation* to be. "Ought selves are defined by a sense of duty, responsibility, or obligation. An ought self is a self that one feels compelled to be rather than intrinsically desires to be. The ought self is a positive value in the sense that people wish to conform to it. However,

the ought self seems derived in part from punishment. That is, living up to an ought self means being a particular kind of person so as to avoid an aversive experience such as self-disapproval or the disapproval of others. Oughts thus seem intrinsically to have a dual-motive quality. . . . They incorporate an attempt to avoid an undesired value by approaching a desired value."[15] While discrepancies between the perceived actual self and the ideal self lead to the experience of dysphoria, dejection, and unhappiness, discrepancies between the perceived actual self and the ought self lead to the experience of guilt.[16]

More generally: empirical research reveals that there is a significant correlation between low self-esteem and psychological disorders and a high correlation between high self-esteem and happiness. Some believe that this evidence warrants a stronger conclusion. For example, David G. Myers suggests that there is reliable and sufficient evidence indicating that there is a set of conditions that jointly constitute almost necessary conditions for a healthier and happier life, and that reasonably high self-esteem is one of these conditions.[17] It is not surprising, therefore, that thinkers in growing numbers consider self-esteem to be a great, if not a primary, good.[18] However, for present purposes it is only necessary to maintain that a wise person understands the urgency of avoiding unnecessary self-discrepancy and the other avoidable *causes* of low self-esteem.

Procedurally, wisdom requires knowledge about, or a capacious understanding of, relevant aspects of nature (universal factors), the important things in human life (species-bound factors), the important things in an individual's life (idiosyncratic factors), and knowledge about what can and cannot be done. Wisdom is a matter of degree. At its fullest it requires a high degree of such knowledge, but it does not require knowledge of all things. At its fullest it requires relevant knowledge about the nature of proximate and ultimate reality, how human beings are organized and behave, the idiosyncratic facts about oneself (including what may be the unique range of one's basic needs and psychologically vital interests), and an understanding of what can and cannot be done. The latter is often referred to as the Greek penchant for limits, their belief that in order to live well one must not only have a vast amount of information but understand, in a sense, what one does not know and the limits of self—what one morally and physically can and cannot do. The Axiom of Futility—the claim that we ought not to try to do things that are known to be impossible, which overrides all other normative principles—is just one part of the complex problem of understanding the nature of these limits.

III THE AXIOM OF FUTILITY

Some thinkers may immediately object to this line of thinking and say that to be failure-proof one must have an unconquerable faith in being able to do

anything one wants to do. Others may urge us to believe that invincible determination of purpose should be psychologically so fixed that we persevere until "either victory or death."[19] Still others, operating under the pretence of wisdom, may urge us to combine a false with a true statement. Here we are told that "you can have anything you want, but you can't have it all." These extreme libertarians of choice reject the precept that one ought not try to do things that are known to be impossible. They reject it because they believe that very few things are known to be impossible or, and more important, that very few things are, in fact, impossible. Like Nicholas Rescher,[20] they are also inclined to believe as a general life stance that optimal results are attainable only by trying for too much.

Advocates of a regulatory theory of personality and more moderate libertarians believe otherwise. They deny the truth of the proposition that "everything is possible" or even the proposition that "almost everything is possible." The fact is that some things cannot be done. And even if we introduce the distinction between what presently can be accomplished and what can be accomplished in the future, the fact remains that, given the limits imposed upon us by nature as well as the limits imposed by death, each living creature is faced with limits. Dumbo aside, no living elephant will be able to fly under its own power. We may be able to breed a species of elephant that can use its ears to fly, but this is beside the point. Much as people may like to believe that a person can change into a bat and vice versa, no living creature can transubstantiate. Moreover, it is highly improbable that they will ever be able to do so, that is, magically to change into another substance. So far we have been considering extreme beliefs. But there are other and more ordinary quests for the impossible. For example, it is quite common to want to be significantly taller than one can ever be. If I am 4'10" tall, then I cannot, even with the employment of surgery, be 6'10". Resolute determination simply has nothing to do with it. The point, and it is an old one, is that to aim at what cannot be done is not only to invite failure but to waste precious time and energy that could have been effective elsewhere. To aim at the futile with indefeasible resolution and the profound conviction that one must persevere to "either victory or death" is to invite the latter and is, therefore, even more seriously normatively flawed.

A word or two about the virtue of being fiercely determined. Admittedly, fierce determination and tenacity of purpose is a power that can produce amazing, if not optimal, results. But from this it does not follow that optimal results are attainable only and simply by trying for too much. What follows is that, when this kind of determination and tenacity is exercised within the constraints of the possible, it often leads to results otherwise not achievable. What follows is that, when determination of purpose is combined with wise constraints, the individual, other things being equal, can more fully achieve his or her full potential.

Becker's formulation of the Axiom of Futility makes this supervening behavioral directive clearer than Epictetus' formulation and, thereby, provides us with a more effective postulate of practical reason. As mentioned earlier, Becker differs with Epictetus. Initially, he provides no justifactory argument. Nor does he seem content to introduce it as a postulate of practical reason whose only warrant is that it is assumed to be true. According to Becker, the Axiom of Futility involves some sort of cognitive disposition. It is not triggered by experience in exactly the same manner as, say, bird singing is triggered. It is not, or does not seem to be, a simple instinct. Rather the claim is that it is a proposition or idea which, when "experienced," more likely than not generates what Becker calls a "categorical commitment." A commitment is some kind of intellectual and emotional bonding. Becker tells us that categorical commitments are "characterized by the unconditional way in which the agent experiences them, at least initially . . . [and they] are experienced as attachments, constraints, necessities, requirements, boundaries."[21] Becker also suggests that, when we initially or first experience it, we experience it as an unconditional constraint or requirement of practical reasoning. Evidently, the term "experience" is here meant to signify that part of the process whereby an agent recognizes and accepts it to be true in an overriding way.

What does the agent experience when he or she experiences this vitally important ideal or proposition? And why does the agent accept it as being true?

Following Epictetus, I have given reasons and a teleological explanation of why choice should not be exercised in a field of unlimited choice. If one rejects this kind of justification and also prefers to avoid Becker's approach, there is at least one other major strategy which can be employed. One may, for example, extend Becker's explanation and say that the Axiom of Futility is, or is something akin to, a synthetic a priori truth. Thus it may be said that, while the principle may be elicited by experience, its truth does not depend upon experience. Certainly it is synthetic in the sense that, if we make the distinction originally introduced by Kant and contrast analytic and synthetic propositions, we cannot rightly say it is analytic, that is, we cannot rightfully say that the concept of the subject is contained in the concept of the predicate. But by making this move we still do not get rid of the difficulty. For we still have not shown why the Axiom of Futility is not a derivative one. That is to say, we have not shown why the belief that "one ought not try to do things that are known to be impossible overrides all other normative statements of principles" is, in fact, or could not in principle be, derived from the belief that "happiness is better than misery." Expressed differently: One may suggest, as Bertrand Russell once did, that the proposition "happiness is better than misery"[22] is a synthetic a priori judgment. One may then plausibly argue that, given the relevant facts, the proposition that "we ought not try to do things that are known to be impossible" follows from the

former synthetic a priori judgment. In other words, the argument has changed in form. The claim would now be, not that the proposition is a categorical commitment but rather, that it is a "derivative synthetic a priori truth." It is difficult, I believe, to say whether this move is an improvement over a straightforward teleological explanation. It may have the merit of shifting the epistemic focus from the "futility" proposition to the seemingly more fundamental "happiness is better than misery" proposition. But if one is inclined to go in this direction, one still has the challenge of explaining how this or, for that matter, how any such a priori knowledge is possible.

Whatever be the better way to present or justify the axiom, it is clear that it is one of the central postulates of Becker's New Stoicism. A point mentioned but not discussed in detail earlier is that, for Becker, "agents are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something that is logically, theoretical, or practically impossible."[23] According to Becker:

> The Axiom of Futility represents the Stoic doctrine that we ought not to try to do things that are known to be impossible, written as a prohibition that dominates any normative proposition to the contrary. . . . The Axiom of Futility says only that when we know that a given undertaking is impossible, we are prohibited from undertaking it. This does not imply that we ought to refrain from other efforts to make it possible. Nor does it imply that we should refrain from exploring the possibilities when we are ignorant of them. . . .
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> If the facts as you know them are that something is (currently) impossible for you to do, but you have good reason to think you could make it possible, and good reason to try, then you ought (at some normative level n) to try. Nothing in or implied by the Axiom of Futility says otherwise. If you do not know whether a given undertaking is possible, but have good reason to think that you could find out, and good reason to try to find out, then you ought (at some normative level n) to run the investigation. All that Stoic doctrine insists upon is that we distinguish such coherent meta-endeavors from incoherent direct attempts to do the impossible, and that we bring closure to practical reasoning about the incoherent ones by recommending that they not be pursued.[24]

Believing that something can't be done is not sufficient. What is necessary is that we know that it can't be done. For the Axiom of Futility only says that when we know that given understanding is impossible, we are prohibited from undertaking it. Becker does not explain what he means by "know" in this context, but I think we may safely assume that, when faced with claims as to empirical knowledge, this kind of claim depends upon reliable evidence.

Equally important, we often know that something is impossible without trying to do it. Perhaps there are occasions, some vitally important ones, where we really have to try to do something before we know that we can or cannot do it. But from this it does not follow that one can never know that one cannot do something unless one tries to do it. Admittedly, this belief is widely held. But a myth widely held is nonetheless still a myth.

IV SOME PRELIMINARY OBJECTIONS

Following the spirit of Becker's admonition, let us grant that there are many things we cannot do that we ought not attempt to do. Let us also admit that many people would commit, or be willing to try committing, to Becker's formulation of the Axiom of Futility. Why, then, is there a "gut" uneasiness about the preemptive nature of Becker's formulation? The reason, I suspect, is that a likely truth seems to have been overlooked, viz., the existence of those less fortunate humans whose lives would be significantly improved by a self-regulatory theory of wisdom that allows for a specific kind of exception. For example, suppose we know that an action is futile. Suppose we also know that it has point and worth, specifically that of significantly enhancing the subjective well-being of the agent without injuring the agent or innocent others. Is this action a wise one?

This question will receive an affirmative answer and the underlying thesis further support from the study of the legitimacy of palliative illusions or delusions, to which we now proceed. I begin with one of James Thurber's fables. There are several reasons for using this as a point of departure. In the first place, one should distinguish between a life that is completely dominated by delusion (or its essential like) and a life that permits the pursuit of some futile actions because they have point and significant worth. Second, and related to the last point, it is also important to distinguish between someone who seeks to be invulnerable in some pugnacious and complete sense and someone who is strongly motivated by the desire to become significantly less vulnerable. There seems to be no easy way to make this distinction sharper. Nonetheless, it is vitally important to understand that a wise person does not strive for invulnerability at the price of becoming a narrow and relatively impoverished human being. In short, even if it were possible to do so, a wise person does not generally choose to be only, or nearly only, subjectively happy.[25] Third, the fable hits a mark that is more or less neglected in most of the literature. For Thurber suggests that futile actions are often wise and that objective life circumstances have little effect on well-being; what really counts is the way we feel about things. Finally, underlying the notion that we should escape from reality and pursue the futile is an implicit and challenging thesis, "Believe what makes you feel happy—whether it be true or not, whether it be delusion or not—and you will be happy!" According to this thesis, mental health and wisdom permit, if not command, the taking of the false as true or the unreal as real if the particular form of self-deception will, in fact, succeed in generating a dominant and significant sense of subjective well-being. I will call this the "happiness through deception" thesis.

In "The Moth and the Star," Thurber writes:

> A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother about this and she counselled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead. "Stars aren't the thing to hang around," she said; "lamps are the thing to hang around." "You don't get anywhere chasing stars." But the moth would not heed the words of either parent. Every evening at dusk when the star came out he would start flying toward it and every morning at dawn he would crawl back home worn out with his vain endeavor. One day his father said to him, "You haven't burned a wing in months, boy, and it looks to me as if you were never going to. All your brothers have been badly burned flying around street lamps and all your sisters have been terribly singed flying around house lamps. Come on, now, get out of here and get yourself scorched! A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!"
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> The moth left his father's house, but he would not fly around street lamps and he would not fly around house lamps. He went right on trying to reach the star, which was four and one-third light years, or twenty-five trillion miles, away. The moth thought it was just caught in the top branches of an elm. He never did reach the star, but he went right on trying, night after night, and when he was a very, very old moth he began to think that he really had reached the star and he went on saying so. This gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, and he lived to a great old age. His parents and his brothers and his sisters had all been burned to death when they were quite young.
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> **Moral: Who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here tomorrow.**[26]

Thurber's message is clear: Deception, especially self-deception, can bring as its reward a meaningful, happy, and long life. Having a meaningful life signifies having a minimally adequate sense of purpose and worth largely because one has important goals and believes that they are, or may be, attainable. As such the moth's life was meaningful, since he had a central purpose which he held to be profoundly significant. If being happy signifies, as Thurber suggests, being deeply and lastingly pleased with one's life, then the moth, indeed, was a very happy insect. Moreover, he lived longer than the other moths did and, according to Thurber, the longevity he achieved was a relatively high-quality one. The price of self-deception is, therefore, a small one to pay if it results in deep, lasting pleasure and living to a great old age.

So far I have been considering the more obvious benefits of the moth's life; but it may be considered in another aspect, which may be called in a special sense fundamentally psychological—that is, the moth's healthy sense of self-esteem. From Thurber's point of view the moth had a high, or at least no problem of low, self-esteem. The most salient reason for this is that he only had one life goal and he did not engage in other activities such as attempting to provide food, shelter, and other health protection, activities that might have led to frustration or failure, thereby lowering or damaging his self-esteem. In psychological terms, because his life was deliciously simple it could not generate any of the normal discrepancies of self.

This point becomes clearer if we shift to a narrower characterization of self-esteem, one that is consistent with our earlier and more general formulation. Suppose we talk about a narrow kind of "self-discrepancy self-esteem," one limited to the problems of the ideal self. Suppose we also say that it may be defined as "the net value of worth an individual places on his or her self, where the closer the perceived self is to the ideal self, the stronger and more positive are the individual's feelings of self-worth." In other words, suppose we say that self-esteem is the degree to which individuals actually like themselves, where its existence and extent is directly related to the conviction that their actual self is congruent with their ideal self. Notice that the results of our analysis do not change. The moth's belief that it is possible to reach the star and that with sufficient effort he will be successful bathes and nourishes his sense of self-worth. His conviction that he has finally reached the star is tantamount to the conviction that his actual self is perfectly congruent with his ideal self. The bottom line seems to be that people (or anthropomorphized insects) who like and accept themselves feel good, not only about themselves but about life in general. This, in part, explains why we enjoy the fable and tend to empathize with its moral.

Two objections may come to mind. The first has evidentialist roots. Evidentialists, at least extreme ones like W. K. Clifford, maintain that deception is always harmful and that "no cause justifies the suppression of truth." Thus Clifford writes: "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." He repeatedly reminds us that believing things that are not true—no matter how trivial the belief—causes harm.[27] Evidentialists of this kind tend to reject the "happiness through deception" thesis. They believe that the sole pursuit of affective happiness, the pursuit of just feeling good about life, inextricably disposes a person to love delusion. They would also remind us that a sense of well-being that is based upon comforting lies is the most fragile kind of life satisfaction. For this kind of life satisfaction can be, and typically is, shattered by truth. No one tells the moth that it is, in fact, impossible to do what he is trying to do. No one tells him, when in old age he claims to have reached the star, that this is a false belief.

There is still another practical reason for not fully deluding oneself. In order to live one must have sufficient food, shelter, and health care. Contrary to what Thurber suggests, unless these external goods are provided by someone, the fully deluded person is neither here today nor here tomorrow. But this objection may not be as telling as it appears to be. After all, it may be wiser for some to escape from reality if there are extenuating circumstances and if loved ones, friends, or society will provide for their basic needs.

A more plausible objection is one that follows Robert Nozick's line of reasoning.[28] Suppose we could live like the moth, suppose we could take a potent drug that once taken would forever take us "out of reality" and provide an enduring

feeling of happiness, or suppose we could be permanently attached to Nozick's experience machine and live in blissful delight for the rest of our days. Why not do so? Why shouldn't a rational or wise person not want to bestow this kind of happiness on him- or herself? Nozick's answer is that these forms of escape are objectionable because they completely cut us off from actuality. That what we want and should value, if we were rational, is an actual and significant connection with reality. The moth's life, use of the drug, and the experience machine should be rejected because they do not give us this connection. Another way of saying this is to say that objective values connected to reality, not subjective feelings, are the true ends of life. That a life so fundamentally disconnected from the real world is, in a sense, a form of suicide and a wasted life.

It follows that almost any rational person would reject the moth's life, the drug, and the experience machine as a model for the good life. I say "almost any rational person" because an argument raised by Stephen Nathanson should be considered. It is an argument that appeals to compassion and, as such, permits certain exceptions.[29] Since Nathanson's argument is limited to whether or not we should accept or reject Nozick's experience machine, I here take the liberty of broadening it.

Nathanson suggests that a person could choose the machine life or in some other situations the life of the deluded moth without being irrational. In other words, although reason allows choosing real over simulated or deluded living, it does not require this choice. According to Nathanson, one way to see this is by imagining the choice between the blissful life attached to the machine or pursuing a star twenty-five trillion miles away and an actual life of torture and deprivation. Even if one felt that a person was losing something of great importance by accepting the simulation or the delusion, it would certainly not be irrational to prefer it to an actual life of great pain and suffering. Hence we cannot categorically pronounce actual lives to be superior to life simulations or delusions.

What does *not* follow from this is that rationality requires an interest in truth and evidence only to the extent that they further our interests, where our interests are left almost completely open-ended. What *does* follow is that, when we are faced with a choice between an actual life of torture and deprivation and a relevant suspension of truth, a sense of humanity and compassion warrants the latter. Contrary to Nathanson, it is not any human interest that overrides considerations of truth. Rather it is that no philosophy is really humane, or avoids needless cruelty, unless it recognizes the inevitability of human suffering, defeat, death, and destruction and provides some anodyne through wisely cultivated resignation or some form of escape.[30]

So far this discussion has been limited to an analysis of a kind of life goal that is totally consuming in its nature and scope. But there is another category that is less encompassing. It has to do with what I will call "partial escapes." The

question is whether or not one should pursue activities such as, for example, voting for the Socialist ticket where it is known that it cannot win. The question here is whether or not the Axiom of Futility should be reformulated so as to allow for partial escapes that have significant worth.

As a high school senior, I remember reading with fascination Morris Cohen's *A Dreamer's Journey.*[31] Later, I read his review of John Dewey's *Essays in Experimental Logic* in *A Preface to Logic*. The latter added to my growing belief that there may be a necessary connection between being wise and having compassion for the suffering of others. "Does not wisdom," writes Cohen, "consist in apportioning time for work and time for play, time to live with others and time to live with one's self?"

> In politics the prime object of Professor Dewey's aversion, ideals divorced from actualities, would perhaps be best embodied in the impossible *a priori* program of the old Socialist Labor party, and I suppose the logical consequence of his views would be a practical program of reform that would progressively improve all the conditions of municipal, state, and national life. But though the latter course is my own preference as a citizen, I am not sure that it is always the wisest course. Whenever I think of this question the pale face of a socialist tailor that I once knew comes to mind. Possessed of remarkable intellectual and literary gifts, his life was wrecked by commonplace poverty and hard work. As I would recall how his deep-set eyes would lighten up and his whole figure be transformed as he explained that by voting the Socialist ticket he was dealing the death-blow to the capitalist system and laying the sure foundation of the beatific co-operative commonwealth, I wonder whether a practical reform party which might have helped to increase his wages or reduce the number of hours, could have so lifted his life out of the sodden dreariness through which so many have to bear their burden.[32]

The nature of the benefit for the tailor is difficult to describe. Cohen writes about the deep-set eyes of the tailor lighting up and his whole figure being transformed. There is often a certain ecstasy in wanting things you know you can't get. But the experience of the tailor involves more than mere exaltation and a feeling of rapturous delight. It is transforming. That is, it is an uplifting and positive kind of transport ecstasy. For want of a better label, I will call it an epiphany-like illusion.

I hesitate to say what exactly follows from this. But there is good reason to believe the following: *If we know an action or goal is futile and also know it has point and worth, specifically that of significantly enhancing the subjective well-being of the agent without directly injuring the agent or innocent others, then that action may be a wise one.* I call this "the Palliative Rule." It suggests that there is something incomplete about a philosophy of life that does not allow for positive illusions or delusions when they are not pathological or dangerous but palliative in nature. It also suggests that Becker's formulation has to be modified to read: The Axiom of Futility—that we ought not try to do things that are known to be impossible—overrides all normative principles, except the Palliative

Rule. Another way of saying this is to say that there are good reasons for substituting the Principle of Futility for the Axiom of Futility. *According to the Principle of Futility, agents are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something known to be impossible unless they also know that their endeavors have point and worth, specifically that of significantly enhancing their subjective well-being without directly injuring the agent or innocent others.*

The question of how many other kinds of illusions (or delusions) the palliative rule would allow to enter into the life of a wise person is a question of psychological analysis that cannot be explored here. Reasons have been given for the allowance of two. The first kind allows for complete escapes but only in the most dire of human circumstances. The second allows for partial escapes but, like the first, only in those situations where the Palliative Rule applies.

One possible criticism of the above analysis is this: We may be told that by so modifying the Axiom of Futility, by making it defeasible, we have weakened it to the point of making it psychologically less effective. That is, by allowing for loopholes we have eroded the force of the axiom. For if a person believes he or she can get away with loopholes, he or she will find so many that the rule becomes worthless. On the other hand, if he or she does not believe this, he or she can hold the line against pursuing futile actions.

My response to this criticism is that it contains a kernel of truth. George Ainslie, in his seminal paper on the nature of conflict in the multiple self, suggests that of the several precommiting devices that an individual may employ in order to protect long-term interests from being dominated by competing short-term interests, the making of private side rules seems to be most effective.[33] He describes the common need for indefeasible rules, such as an alcoholic's need to define the line between forbidden and permissible drinks. Anslie then concludes that: "The availability of boundaries which cannot be moved just a little bit is very important to the long-term interest. Activities like smoking and drinking have such a line in an obvious place, that is, between any indulgence and no indulgence; but people who eat too much or spend too much money cannot completely give up these activities, and so must find some way to make a single diet, or budget, stand out from all the others to which they are apt to retreat under pressure."[34] Given this perspective, it seems obvious that by making the Axiom of Futility defeasible, it has been made psychologically less effective. It may be less obvious but, nonetheless significant, to note that this does not mean that the new principle is necessarily ineffective. Being less effective is not synonymous with being ineffective. The important question is, how effective does the prohibition have to be? Admittedly, in extreme situations like excessive drinking or eating the adherence to indefeasible rules may be necessary to protect our long-term health interests. But in these situations the motive for drinking or eating is so powerful as to take on at least the force of a craving. We have said that there

is a natural inclination to pursue the impossible. But a natural inclination is not the same as a craving or compulsion.[35] I think we also might want to add other caveats. We might, for example, want to distinguish between what an individual ought not do and what an individual ought not make a habit of doing. In other words, it does not seem convincing to say that a tailor voting every four years for the Socialist ticket is comparable to being a drunkard or glutton. The consequences also seem to differ. The drunkard is a threat to himself as well as to others; unless he is playing the role of a spoiler, the tailor's vote is probably not.

Although an intuitive case has been made for the Principle of Futility being a constraint for the wise, it still may not be sufficiently clear why it is better than Becker's formulation. Granting that it is *wise* to have a behavioral constraint like Becker's Axiom of Futility, why is it *wiser* to adopt the Principle of Futility?

We are as yet far from being able to provide a complete answer to this question and even further from demonstrating, in any strict sense, that it is wiser to allow elements of compassion to enter into a theory of wisdom, especially at this rudimentary level. Having said this, we may proceed to explicate what hitherto has been only alluded to. What seems to be required is a combination of several arguments. The first involves an appeal to the normative relevancy of needs. The claim is not that every *de facto* need creates an obligation. Rather it is that a need makes itself imperative to the extent to which it coheres with, and is embedded in, the notion of what constitutes the ends of life. Often there is a need for relief from the great burdens of life. Often its satisfaction does not involve injury to others and benefits its recipient. Because of this, allowing for its satisfaction seems to be the humane and compassionate thing to do.

Wisdom, it has been maintained, is knowledge about, and an understanding of, what is best to be done in the important circumstances of life, in order to arrive at our main end-in-view, well-being and happiness. The goal is not to strive for an unattainable kind of perfect wisdom. Rather it is to become as wise as one can in order to increase the probability of coming as close as possible to living the "richest" life. In other words, the goal of a wise person is not to focus upon what is merely a good life, but to focus upon what is the best of possible actual lives. The goal is to arrive at some rich combination of objective and subjective well-being. An individual life that has achieved reasonable success at satisfying basic needs and other vital interests is a very good one. But a life in which one also appreciates that success and, thereby, feels good about one's life is a better one. Arguably, a life that combines objective success with subjective appreciation is better than a life that does not. But feeling good need not be directly correlated with objective success. It can, and often does, stand alone as a good in its own right. Another premise may be necessary. If there is an ultimate interest *and* value in feeling good, this interest carries over, perhaps even entails, an immediate interest in the same value. More to the point: If the having

of a long-range interest in feeling good about one's life creates a special claim on us, then the immediacy of the need for relief from the burdens of life often creates a similar claim.

But this discussion of the relevancy of needs and long-range interests may obscure the more fundamental intuition and argument. The intuition is that allowing for the Palliative Rule *is* the humane and compassionate, the decent, thing to do. The argument is that the Palliative Rule is authorized, if not mandated, by the duty of charity and beneficence. We are not required to do good to every single person since that is impossible; but each one of us is bound generally to share with those who are considerably less fortunate than ourselves and to do good in some particular cases; for charity binds us to relieve at least the fortuitous distress or suffering of others when we can do so without great inconvenience.

V SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The core of our self-regulation theory is constituted by commitment to the following beliefs and propositions: Wisdom is a deep understanding of how to live well. At its best, it combines a capacious understanding of things and problem-solving skills with a life of excellence, with a life that is truly worth living. It merits our esteem and emotional commitment because, if anything is supremely lovable, it is knowledge of our true interest; it is knowledge about, and an understanding of, what is best to be done in the important circumstances of human life, in order to arrive at our main end-in-view, well-being and happiness. In order to live well one has to not only have a vast amount of information about important things but has to understand, in a sense, what one does not know and the limits of self—what one morally can and physically cannot do. The Axiom of Futility—Becker's claim that we ought not to try to do things that are known to be impossible, which overrides all other normative principles—is just one part of the complex understanding of the nature of these limits. Unlike Becker, we do not claim that the principle of futility is an axiom. Our justification is teleological or instrumental in nature. One part of it involves the recognition of different possible selves and the nature of the conflicts that may exist within a multiple self. When, for example, we "choose" ideal or ought selves that are impossible to achieve, we tend to invite unnecessary failure and suffering. Another part of this justification involves a discussion of the nature of self-esteem and a recognition of the sinister role that low self-esteem tends to play. Not every frustration or failure results in a significant loss or lowering of self-esteem. But many do. The habituation of failure, especially the feeling that one has "the reverse Midas Touch," often leads to despair, the horrible feeling that life is empty and vain. Therefore a wise person is strongly disposed to avoid the causes of low self-esteem. Our analysis of James Thurber's fable suggests

that, while complete escapes are sometimes justified, a wise person generally does not strive for invulnerability at the price of becoming a narrow and relatively impoverished human being. Our analysis of the Morris Cohen story suggests that epiphany-like illusions are often wise. The general argument advanced in the last section of this paper may leave much to be desired. But it does explain why one might be rationally disposed to substitute the Principle of Futility for the Axiom of Futility. The Principle of Futility reads that agents are required not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something known to be impossible unless they know that the endeavor in question has point and worth, specifically that of significantly enhancing their subjective well-being without directly injuring the agent or innocent others.

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
State University of New York, College at Fredonia

NOTES

I wish to thank Jonathan Adler, Lawrence C. Becker, Raymond Belliotti, Stefan Baumrin, William James Earle, Stephen Nathanson, and Peter Simpson for their comments. I am especially indebted to Robert Hoffman.

1. S. G. Holliday and M. J. Chandler, *Wisdom: Explorations in Adult Competence* (Basil: Kager, 1986), 86. For an interesting survey of Eastern and Western traditions of wisdom and a description of the results of an empirical investigation of how wisdom is perceived, see Vivian P. Clayton and James E. Birren, "The Development of Wisdom across the Life Span: A Reexamination of an Ancient Topic," in *Life-Span Development and Behavior*, ed. Paul B. Bates and Orville G. Brim, Jr. (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 103–35.
2. The *locus classicus* of recent self-regulation theory is Charles S. Carver and Michael F. Scheier, *On the Self-Regulation of Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Self-discrepancy theory is a logical part of regulation theory. Although it is not a homogeneous body, self-discrepancy theory is particularly intriguing because it provides a conceptual basis and motivational explanation for differentiating dysphoria and anxiety from feelings of fear by positing respectively different selves such as the ideal self, the ought self, and the feared self. For example, research by Higgins and his colleagues has confirmed that people whose lives are dominated by different selves are motivated and act differently and, therefore, tend to live different lives. See E. Tory Higgins, "Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect," *Psychological Review* 94 (1987): 319–40, and E. Tory Higgins, C. J. R. Roney, E. Crowe, and C. Hymes, "Ideal Versus Ought Predilections for Approach and Avoidance: Distinct Self-Regulatory Systems," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66 (1994): 276–86. For a fascinating study that suggests that fear and feared selves have an overall preemptive role, see Charles S. Carver, John W. Lawrence, and Michael F. Scheier, "Self-Discrepancies and Affects: Incorporating the Role of Feared Selves," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25 (1999): 783–92. Although their positions differ in some respects, I have drawn heavily from the writings of Higgins and Carver for my explanation of the salient features of self-esteem.
3. Lawrence C. Becker, *A New Stoicism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 42.

4 *Ibid.*, 44. It is tempting to say that what is involved here are two different principles. The first is that we ought not to try to do things that are known to be impossible; the second is that the former principle overrides all other normative principles and statements. Of course we can combine the two and call the complex proposition the "Preemptive Principle." Although this move adds an element of clarity, it may be redundant in that, when Becker uses "ought not" in this formulation, it appears to signify the strongest kind of preemptive "ought not." Attempting to do the impossible is a case in point. Attempting to do something that one knows to be impossible is *both* inadvisable *and* prohibited by the very logic of what it means to be an agent. Hence we ought not try to do things that are known to be impossible *and* we are required by the very logic of what it means to be an agent not to make direct attempts to do (or be) something that is logically, theoretically, or practically impossible. Once this is understood we can use, hopefully without error, the phrase "Axiom of Futility" and the cognates "precept," "principle," "proposition," etc., interchangeably.

It also may be helpful to note here the similarities between Becker's formulation and Carver and Scheier's claim that knowing when to disengage is a normal part of self-regulation and that "when a goal is truly unattainable, you should let it go." [Carver and Scheier, *On the Self-Regulation of Behavior*, 228]. For a useful discussion of the complex theoretical and practical psychological problems of disengagement, see Carver and Scheier, *On the Self-Regulation of Behavior*, especially chapters 10, 11, 12, 13; Charles S. Carver and Michael F. Scheier, *Perspectives on Personality*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 471–72, 483–85, 489–90; and Charles S. Carver and Michael F. Scheier, "Three Human Strengths," in *A Psychology of Human Strengths: Perspectives on an Emerging Field*, ed. L. G. Aspinwall and U. M. Staudinger (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, forthcoming).

5 Suffice it here to say that, if the Preemptive Principle holds, it seems to follow that one should not *desire* or *want* something known to be impossible. Nicholas Rescher, in *Ethical Idealism: An Inquiry into the Nature and Function of Ideals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), argues otherwise. He claims, first, that there is always something unrealistic and unachievable about ideals; second, that unattainable ideals, chimerical though they seem, are important because of their capacity to turn thought and action in beneficial directions. Thus he writes: "To be sure, an ideal is not a goal we can expect to attain. But it serves to set a direction in which we can strive. Ideals are irrealities, but they are irrealities that condition the nature of the real through their influence on human thought and action" (133). One difficulty with this analysis is that it appears to rest upon ambiguous usage. Rescher uses the terms "sometimes unrealistic" and "irreality." Presumably they are juxtaposed to "unrealistic" and "unreality." I have no objection to holding ideals that are *unrealities in the sense that the goal in question cannot presently or in the near future be achieved*. But if the ideal is known to be impossible in the sense of never being attainable, and it has no other ameliorating point, then why is it rational to pursue it? In other words, there seems to be an ambiguity between pursuing futile actions and pursuing completely infeasible ideals, as well as an ambiguity between an ideal being completely infeasible, being feasible in some limited way, and being fully feasible.

Of course, Rescher does say that "no one is insisting that we are obligated (practically or prudently) to *achieve* unattainable goals but only that their adoption and cultivation can make good practical sense" (25). But this does not make his argument any more convincing, since he insists that we should not lower our sights when faced with unattainability. For example, suppose someone proposes an unattainable altruism, say an altruism that directs us to enhance and contribute to the welfare of each and every human being. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant that this is impossible to do. Should we not lower our sights? Not according to Rescher. He seems to believe that the pursuit of this end will, nonetheless, produce some altruistic benefit and that it is better to aim at a greater than a lesser target. The latter move adds another premise, a premise about how high one should aim. "To attain the limits of the possibilities in our powers and

potentialities," writes Rescher, "we *must* aim beyond them" (128, emphasis added). The notion that optimal results are only attained by trying for too much may be widely believed, but it is far from self-evident.

6 One of the oldest, and perhaps the best, expressions of the stance that ought to be taken is Lao Tzu's statement. Lao Tzu writes:

> 'To know when one does not know is best.
> To think one knows when ones does not know is a dire disease.
> Only he who recognizes this disease as a disease
> Can cure himself of the disease.'
> The Sage's way of curing disease
> Also consists in making people recognize their diseases as diseases and thus
> ceasing to be diseased.

Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Weiderfeld, 1958), chapter 71, 231.

7 G. P. Henderson, "'Ought' Implies 'Can'," *Philosophy* XLI: 156 (1966): 101–12.

8 Morris R. Cohen, *Reason and Nature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), 439.

9 Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, XIX, trans. Thomas W. Higginson (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 23. The emphasis is my own.

10 Perhaps the greatest challenge to Epictetus' approach is the problem of whether or not ordinary people, or for that matter anyone, can become a Stoic sage. Bizarre as it appears to be, the challenge is whether or not such a theory is self-refuting, that is, whether or not most individuals in trying to become wise are, in fact, attempting to do what we know cannot be done. By aiming lower than most of the ancients did, by being content to conceive of wisdom, not as a nearly perfect kind of understanding, but as a kind of *high* multidimensional intelligence, I hope to avoid this rather serious objection.

11 I owe the structure of the latter formulation to Benjamin Franklin. See *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2, ed. L. W. Larabee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 138. Saying that the main end-in-view is well-being *and* happiness is, in part, a way of distinguishing between what is often called "objective and subjective well-being." It is a simpler, hopefully more elegant, way of saying that there is a kind of good life that involves the combination of external and internal requisites, the combination of certain objective conditions (such as having food, shelter, health, etc.) with subjective conditions (such as having a sense of well-being or feeling good about one's life), and that such a life is generally better than a life in which one has achieved reasonable objective success but fails to appreciate that success. Saying that wisdom, in part, means rationally managing or organizing our activities so as to achieve a maximum of attainable ends or goods of life is not tantamount to saying that we should be unduly absorbed in ends or purposes. For when we are so absorbed and only (or essentially) live in the future, we fail to taste much of what life is about, namely, the precious present.

12 E. Tory Higgins, "The 'Self-Digest': Self-Knowledge Serving Self-Regulatory Functions," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71 (1996): 1073–74. Although I am also indebted to Higgins for the notion that self-esteem is more like a thermometer than a stable personality trait, I do not share his general skepticism about the value of this concept.

13 *Ibid.* Higgins provides us with one of the most perceptive analyses of the concept of self-esteem. Among other things, he maintains that the nature of self-esteem is far more complex than heretofore has been suggested in the literature. My limited explanation, especially my focus upon the ideal self and the ought self, is not meant to deny this. Nor is it to suggest the self-feelings in this world depend *entirely* on what we back ourselves to be and do, as some interpretations of Stoicism suggest. Rather it is to more closely align this discussion with a discussion of the Axiom of

Futility and suggest that, when we "choose" ideal or ought selves that are impossible to achieve, then other things being equal, we invite unnecessary failure and suffering.

14 Carver, Lawrence, and Scheier, "Self-Discrepancies and Affects," 783.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Self-discrepancy theory is at least as old as Stoicism. But William James seems to have strongly influenced its introduction to modern psychology and philosophy. According to James, the Axiom of Self-Esteem is founded on the notion that "with no attempt there can be no failure; with no failure no humiliation, no sense of self-worthlessness," and that this proposition represents the Stoic doctrine that self-feeling of worth is determined by the ratio of our actual success to our pretensions, where success is the numerator and pretensions the denominator. Thus,

$$\text{Self-Esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}.$$

James observes that "such a fraction may be increased as well by diminishing the denominator as by increasing the numerator." That "to give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified; and where disappointment is incessant and the struggle unending, this is what men will always do." [William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 296–97.] Although James goes on to criticize the Stoics for advocating too narrow and unsympathetic a kind of ideal personality, he seems to unabashedly share their belief that "our self-feeling is in our power."

17 For a summary of the research literature on self-esteem, see David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), especially 108–13.

18 Probably the most influential philosophical advocate of the idea that self-esteem is a primary good is John Rawls. Although Rawls holds the terms self-esteem and self-respect to be interchangeable, he prefers to use the latter. His explanation of why it is clear that self-respect is a primary good is especially illuminating: "Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have values for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity become empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism. Therefore parties in the original position would wish to avoid at *almost any cost* the social conditions that undermine self-respect." [Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), section 67, 440.]

19 Quoted from Sir Thomas Buxton by Mack Douglas, *How to Make a Habit of Succeeding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1966), 20. Buxton suggests that *if something can be done*, then invincible determination is a large part of the secret of success. But in the discussion that follows Douglas tends to neglect this constraint. Giving up is considered an anathema and its opposite, perseverance, is exalted. While this may be a misuse of the Buxton quotation, it is consistent with popular success literature, a literature that typically venerates the ability to persevere.

20 Rescher, *Ethical Idealism*.

21 Becker, *A New Stoicism*, 16.

22 Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 76.

23 Becker, *A New Stoicism*, 42.

24 *Ibid.*, 44–46.

25 I say that a wise person would not *generally* choose to be only, or nearly only, subjectively happy because there are situations where an individual's life may be so blighted by the infirmities of existence so as to warrant such a choice.

26 James Thurber, "The Moth and the Star," *Fables for Our Time* (New York: Harper/Blue Ribbon Books, 1943), 19.

27 W. K. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, 1879.

28 Nozick's ingenious "experience machine" argument is developed in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 42–44. A related argument that affective happiness is not the

only thing that matters is to be found in the chapter on "Happiness" in his *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 99–117.

29 Stephen Nathanson, *The Ideal of Rationality* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1985), 141.

30 This statement is an extension of the one made by Morris Cohen and, as we shortly will see, may more fully express the spirit of the point he is making against John Dewey's naturalism. See Morris R. Cohen, "Dewey's Anthropocentric Naturalist Difficulties," *Studies in Philosophy and Science* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949), 169.

31 *A Dreamer's Journey: The Autobiography of Morris Raphael Cohen* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949).

32 Morris R. Cohen, *A Preface to Logic* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944), 202.

33 George Ainslie, "Beyond Microeconomics: Conflict among Interests in a Multiple Self as a Determinant of Value," in *The Multiple Self*, ed. Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 146.

34 *Ibid.*, 149.

35 Saying this does not preclude the possibility of a natural inclination becoming a craving or compulsion. If or when it does, then it seems advisable to convince a conflicting self of the prudence of having an absolute or non-defeasible rule.