



**2014 EDIT**

**(To Do: Are the figures OK?)**

### **Chapter 3**

**Czicksenmihalyi:**

**All that happiness stuff hadn't come out yet, but I endorse it now.**

### **Choosing Ends**

'Reason' has a perfectly clear and precise meaning. It signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends.

Bertrand Russell (1954, 8)

#### 1. THREE KINDS OF ENDS

Rational choice, on a means-end conception, involves seeking effective means to one's ends. From this basic idea, the social sciences have developed an instrumental model of rationality. The instrumental model goes beyond a means-end conception by inferring from it not only that rational choice involves seeking effective means to one's ends, but also that rational choice involves nothing beyond this. Ends must be taken as given, as outside the purview of rational choice. All chains of justification eventually come to an end in something unjustified.

Or so the story goes. This chapter, though, shows that it is possible to have a chain of means and ends whose final link is rationally justified. One might assume that justifying final ends requires a conception of justification foreign to rational choice theory. This chapter shows that it does not. Admittedly, defenders and critics alike seem to have agreed that, "the theory of rational choice disclaims all concern with the ends of action."<sup>1</sup> But such quietism about ends is not necessary. A means-end conception of

rationality can be consistent with our intuition that we can be rational in a more reflective sense, calling into question ends we happen to have, revising them when they seem unfit.

One could define ends as items we *ought* to pursue, but I define ends descriptively, as items we do pursue, which leaves open whether it is possible to have ends we not only pursue but which were rational to adopt as items to pursue. This chapter looks beyond a purely instrumental model to something more reflective, a model in which agents choose and criticize ends as well as means.

There is, of course, a problem. The instrumentalist model is standard equipment in the social sciences, in part because it is useful, but also in part because it is hard to imagine an alternative. Evaluating a proposed means to a given end seems straightforward. We simply ask whether it serves the given end. But when we talk about being reflectively rational, we are talking about evaluating ends as such. Now, we evidently can and do judge some ends as not worth pursuing, but how?

My answer draws on distinctions between four kinds of ends, three of which are well-known among philosophers. Suppose I wake one morning wanting to go for a two-mile run.

1. Perhaps I have this goal as an end in itself; I want to run two miles just for the sake of being out there running. In this case, the goal of running two miles is a *final* end.

2. Or perhaps I want to run for the sake of some other goal. I run because I want to be healthy. In this case, running two miles is an *instrumental* end, instrumental to the further end of being healthy.

3. Or suppose I want to run two miles because I want some aerobic exercise. In this case, running two miles is not exactly a mere means to the further end of getting some exercise. Rather, running two miles constitutes getting some exercise. So, in this third case we can speak of going for a run as a *constitutive* end.<sup>2</sup>

A variety of subsidiary criteria often help us to assess the relative merits of alternative constitutive ends. For instance, if my further goal is to get some aerobic exercise, and it occurs to me that I could ride my stationary bicycle rather than run two miles, I could ask myself which is easier on my knees, which will use less time, whether the bicycle's noise will bother the neighbors at that hour, and so on. If subsidiary criteria do not tell the difference between alternative constitutive ends, then the best I can do is to pick a form of exercise and get on with it.

The three categories are not mutually exclusive. An end like running two miles could be both final and instrumental, pursued for its own sake as well as for the sake of further ends. Nevertheless, distinguishing among these three kinds of ends is useful. For one thing, the distinction makes it easy to see how we can rationally choose some of our ends. In particular, we can choose instrumental and constitutive ends as means to further ends, and so such ends can be rational in the sense that choosing to pursue them can serve further ends. By the same token, we criticize such choices by asking whether pursuing the chosen end truly helps to secure the further end, or whether pursuing it truly constitutes pursuing the further end.

The final end that terminates a chain of justification, though, cannot be justified in the way we justify the links leading up to it. Final ends as such are neither constituents of nor instrumental to further ends. They are pursued for their own sake. Thus, the justification of final ends will be a different story, a story that cannot be told within the confines of an instrumentalist model.

## 2. A FOURTH KIND OF END

What sort of story? Suppose that, for Kate, becoming a surgeon is an end. Perhaps it is an end because Kate thinks becoming a surgeon will be prestigious, in which case becoming a surgeon is an instrumental end. Kate becomes a surgeon in order to do something else, namely, to secure prestige. But maybe, for Kate, becoming a surgeon is an end in itself. How could a career in medicine come to be a final end?

Maybe it happened like this. When Kate was a teenager, she had no idea what she wanted to do with her life, but she knew she wanted to do something. She wanted goals to pursue. In particular, she wanted to settle on a career and thus on the goal or set of goals that a career represents. At some point, she concluded that going to medical school and becoming a surgeon would give her the career she wanted. So she went to school to pursue a career in medicine. She may have other reasons to pursue this goal as well, but whatever else she is doing, one of the things she is doing is pursuing it as an end in itself, much as I might run just for the sake of being out running.

The interesting point is that Kate's story introduces a fourth kind of end, an end of acquiring settled ends, an end of choosing a career in particular. The goal of choosing a career is what I shall call a *maieutic* end—an end achieved through a process of *coming to have* ends. People sometimes describe Socrates as having taught by the maieutic method or the method of midwifery. The idea is that students already have great stores of knowledge in inchoate form, so the teacher's job is to help students give birth to this latent knowledge. I use the term 'maieutic' to suggest that we give birth to our final ends in the process of achieving maieutic ends.<sup>3</sup> In this case, Kate achieves a maieutic end by coming to have particular career goals. As we said, she settles on a career by deciding to pursue a career in medicine. Thus, just as final ends are the further ends for the sake of which we pursue instrumental and constitutive ends, maieutic ends are the further ends for the sake of which we choose final ends.

There may appear to be an inconsistency in the way the terms are defined. I said we could choose a final end as a way of achieving a maieutic end. On the contrary, one might respond, if Kate chooses a career in medicine as a way of achieving a maieutic end, she must be pursuing that career not as a final end but rather as an instrumental end. This would be a natural response. It may even seem indisputable. However, it misses the distinction between *pursuing* a final end (which by definition we do for its own sake) and *choosing* a final end (which we might do for any number of reasons). Admittedly, by definition, final ends are pursued for their own sake, not for the sake of maieutic ends. Yet, even if Kate pursues an end purely for its own sake, it can still be true that there was, in Kate's past, a process by which she acquired that end. It can also be true that going through the process (of acquiring the new goal) served ends she had at the time. The supposition that the choice process is a means to an existing end leaves open whether the *outcome* of the process, the chosen end, will be pursued as a means to the same end. The new end may well be something Kate subsequently pursues for its own sake. The distinction between reasons for choosing and reasons for pursuing thus allows us to speak coherently of choosing what will become a final end for the sake of further ends.

One might object that when we choose an instrumental or a constitutive end, we necessarily pursue it for the same reason we originally chose it, namely, the further end to which we chose it as a means. Analogously, the objection continues, when we choose a final

end we thereby take it to be good in itself. Consequently, our grounds for choosing X specifically as a final end must necessarily be the same as our grounds for pursuing X specifically as a final end—its being good in itself.<sup>4</sup>

This objection is more complicated than it looks. The alleged relation of identity between reasons for choosing and reasons for pursuing an end is by no means analytic. Even if it is true by definition that an instrumental end is both chosen and pursued as a means to a further end, it does not follow that the further end for which we chose it is identical to the further end for which we pursue it. It may be a safe assumption that they will be identical, but it is nevertheless an assumption, resting on further assumptions about human psychology. It is an empirical issue whether people tend to pursue ends for the same reasons they originally chose those ends as ends.

Similarly, even though it is true by definition that final ends are pursued for their own sake, it remains an open question whether further purposes were served by the process of coming to have final ends. For example, I may write because I simply love writing, but that supposition leaves open a possibility that other purposes were served by the process of coming to simply love writing. Developing that kind of devotion may have enabled me to get a job at a research-oriented university in the first place. I may even have been aware that good things happen to people who love to write when I began doing the things that led me to develop my taste for writing. My point is: these are empirical matters. Some might insist that my reasons for choosing to pursue an end simply cannot—cannot possibly—differ from my subsequent reasons for pursuing that end. If that is true at all, though, it is a truth grounded in human psychology rather than in analysis of terms. Let us look more closely, then, at the psychological assumptions underlying this objection to the distinction between reasons for choosing and reasons for pursuing final ends.

My own understanding is that, empirically speaking, an act of adopting something as an end often changes our attitude toward it. If so, then it is a mistake to assume that our future grounds for pursuing X will be like our present grounds for adopting X as an end. My student may feel ambivalent about each of the subjects in which she might major, but if she anticipates coming to view the study of philosophy as good in itself, then her anticipation of this new attitude can be grounds for choosing to study philosophy in the first place. Similarly, part of the point of choosing a career is that we want—and *do not yet*

*have*—the mind-set that goes with pursuing a particular career in a wholehearted way. We might choose an end in part because of reasons we expect to develop for pursuing that end.

Observe, then, how the relation between maieutic and final ends differs from the relation between final and constitutive ends. An end of getting some aerobic exercise is schematic; we cannot do what it tells us to do until we choose a specific way of getting exercise, such as a two-mile jog.<sup>5</sup> Choosing specifics is a necessary preface to achieving the end. This is not how it works, though, when the further end is a maieutic end. Choosing specifics is not a preface to achieving a maieutic end. On the contrary, a maieutic end just is a goal of settling on a specific end. In settling on a goal and thereby meeting the maieutic end's demand, one is achieving a maieutic end, not merely choosing a way of pursuing it.

For example, my attempt to jog two miles constitutes my attempt to get some exercise, but Kate's attempt to become a surgeon does not constitute her attempt to choose a career goal. On the contrary, when Kate goes to medical school in an attempt to become a surgeon, she is not just attempting to choose a career goal. At that point, she has already chosen a career goal, namely, to be a surgeon. In the jogging case, I pursue goal A as a way of pursuing goal B. In the second case, Kate *chooses* goal A as a way of *achieving* goal B. Note that in the jogging case, A is the constitutive end, while in the other case, B is the maieutic end. Therefore, even if the relation between A and B were the same in both cases (which it is not), constitutive ends and maieutic ends would still be different, for the two kinds of ends are found at opposite ends of the relation.

We also can see how the relation between maieutic and final ends differs from the relation between final and instrumental ends. When one end is pursued purely for the sake of another end, then the rationale for its pursuit depends on its ongoing relation as a means to the further end. For example, if pursuing a career in medicine is merely a means of securing prestige, and Kate one day loses her desire for prestige, then she also loses her grounds for becoming a surgeon. The rationale for her career depends on the persistence of the further end of securing prestige. In the other scenario, though, the rationale for her career does not depend on the persistence of the teenage end of settling on a career. On the contrary, her evolving set of career goals *replaces* the teenage end with something quite different. As long as Kate is settled in her career as a surgeon, she has attained the goal (of settling on a career) that she had as a teenager, thus eliminating the earlier goal as an item to pursue. For Kate,

the maieutic end of settling on a career reemerges (as an item to pursue) only if Kate at some point rejects her career as a surgeon and begins to long for something new.

A more sophisticated worry is that a maieutic end is never really eliminated and that the new end it spawns is subsequently pursued, implicitly if not explicitly, as a means to the maieutic end. When Kate settles on a career, her subsequent pursuits might be motivated by the same concerns that drove her as a teenager to settle on a career. My response is that of course this will be true in some cases; some people, after settling on a career, subsequently pursue their careers as instrumental ends (instrumental to the further end of making money) or constitutive ends (constitutive of the further end of keeping busy). In other words, maieutic ends can give birth not only to final ends but to other kinds of ends as well.<sup>6</sup> But such cases are beside the point. If our task were to explain how instrumental or constitutive ends could be rationally chosen, then those would be the relevant cases (and one could not rebut that argument by arguing that maieutic ends also can give birth to final ends). Our actual objective, though, is to explain how final ends can be rationally chosen. Accordingly, we need to focus on cases where ends chosen are then pursued as ends in themselves. We need to concentrate on the role maieutic ends play in giving birth to final ends, for it is in that role that maieutic ends are relevant to the puzzle of how final ends can be rationally chosen.

But, a critic might persist, how can we be sure maieutic ends *ever* give birth to final ends? One could argue that, if her desire for a career leads Kate to choose a career, then that same desire will be the further end for the sake of which she pursues her career. If she chooses a career as a mere means to the further end, she pursues the career for the same reason.

In response, we need not deny that there can be a *value* that Kate attaches to having a career that persists through her choice and pursuit of a particular career. To say Kate eliminates “settling on a career” as an end, i.e., as an item to pursue, is not to say she ceases to value having a career. We need to distinguish between being valuable and being an item to pursue. For example, my car is valuable to me. If I leave it parked on a hill and the parking brake fails, that is the moment when it also becomes an item to pursue. The car is valuable both before and after I secure it, but it ceases to be an item to pursue after I secure it. Similarly, if Kate already has a career, then having a career may be valuable to her, but it is not an item to pursue; it is an item she has secured. In fact, it is not clear that having a career was ever an item to pursue. Before settling on a career, Kate pursued the goal of settling on a

career. After settling on a career, Kate pursues her particular career, period; she does not pursue “having a career.” And if her career is ever in jeopardy, then *securing* her career may well appear or re-appear on her to-do list. So, Kate continues to value having a career even as she pursues one, but this is no reason to doubt that she now has goals, acquired in the course of settling on her particular career, that she pursues for their own sake.

Maieutic ends are not the only kind of end that can be eliminated as an item to pursue, but their elimination has a unique upshot. In the means-end relation between instrumental and final end, eliminating the further end renders the means pointless, robbing the means of normative significance. In contrast, in the means-end relation between final and maieutic end, eliminating the further end is an essential part of the process by which final ends acquire their characteristic normative significance.

Maieutic ends are not merely a theoretical postulate. They are real. The drive to find a career or a life partner can be powerful, even painful, and such drives are drives to settle on a particular career or particular person. Recall what it was like to choose a major subject in college or to choose a career. One way or another, we had to choose something, and, for some of us, not having done so yet was an occasion for real anxiety. Some of us had hardly any idea of what we wanted, but it felt better to settle on some end or other than to let that part of our lives remain a vacuum. Of course, there were institutional and parental pressures as well, and some feel only those, but many also felt palpable pressure from within.

None of this denies that some people are simply gripped by particular final ends.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps such ends are not acquired by choice. If not, then questions about how they could be rationally chosen are moot. But that does not mean all questions are moot, for we can still ask whether further ends are served by the process of coming to have a final end. Regardless of whether ends are deliberately selected from a set of alternatives, my model has something to say. It addresses the question of whether an end’s acquisition serves further ends.

That, then, is my theory about how an end, pursued as a genuinely final end, could nevertheless have been rationally chosen. There are ends—maieutic ends—to which a final end could be chosen as a means. In passing, note that although the four ends are distinct conceptually, they are not mutually exclusive. An end could be final, pursued for its own sake, and at the same time instrumental, pursued as a means to some further end. Moreover, Section 4 presents three formal models of reflective rationality, the first of which models a

maieutic end as also a final end while the third models a maieutic end as also an instrumental end. Falling under one description does not preclude falling under others as well.

The next section explains how unchosen ends might serve as parts of a framework for judging a choice of ends. Section 4 then considers whether explaining the rational choice of one final end presupposes further and still unexplained final ends. Either way, we have seen how final ends could be rationally chosen, but are “loose ends” inevitable?

### 3. THE ROLE OF UNCHOSEN ENDS

Although some of our ends are chosen, some are not. For most of us, the goal of survival is a goal with which we simply find ourselves. Likewise, we want to be good at what we do, and this goal also seems to be unchosen, something we simply have. We want to be competent.<sup>8</sup> We do not need reasons to choose our unchosen ends, since we do not choose them. We simply have them. Even unchosen ends can be rejected, of course, but to rationally reject them, one needs a reason to reject them. Unchosen final ends, therefore, have a certain normative inertia, which means they can be part of a relatively stable frame of reference in terms of which we can evaluate ends we might acquire by choice. Not every pursuit, for instance, would be conducive to survival.

Harry Frankfurt goes a bit farther, holding that fixed ends are a *necessary* part of a normative frame of reference. The problem of choosing ends presupposes a frame of reference against which one assesses one’s options, and not all of this framework can be an endogenous product of choice. As Frankfurt puts it, “it is only if his volitional nature is in certain respects already fixed that a person can effectively consider what his final ends should be—what is to be important to him, or what to care about. He will not be in a position to inquire into the question of how he should live unless it is already the case that there are some things about which he cares” (1992, 17). Frankfurt has a point. We need a fairly stable frame of reference to get started in assessing prospective ends.

At the same time, the stable foundation need not, as Frankfurt himself notes, “be fixed unalterably” (1992, 18). Thus, although I accept Frankfurt’s point, three related complications bear mentioning. First, the stable foundation need not be permanently fixed. Indeed, it might be something that has to be left behind. Childhood is the foundation for

adulthood, but childhood is something we outgrow. Second, in the long run the foundation might not be fixed independently of choice. Rather, some parts of the foundation (character traits, in particular) might arise and change through a process of habituation driven by ongoing patterns of choice. Third, even when an end is acquired by choice, the process of settling on that end often is not a simple act of will. On the contrary, often we settle on something as an end partly by habituating ourselves toward aiming at it. For instance, we want to have someone to love. This is a maieutic end that we achieve when we come to love particular people and embrace spending time with them and making them happy as ends worth pursuing for their own sake. But coming to love and be devoted to a person obviously is not a simple act of will but rather a matter of growing into a commitment, step by step.

So, some items come to be pursued as final ends through a process of habituation. And although Kate's character is stable with respect to particular decisions, it is also part of her that, over the long run, is shaped by her choices. If all goes well, she grows into the career (and the husband) she chose, and the person she becomes will some day find that career (and that husband) intrinsically worthy of her ongoing commitment.

Of course, circumstances help determine whether a prospective end is appropriate. Indeed, circumstances determine whether a particular option even exists. A given activity counts as a prospective career, for example, only if there is a market for that kind of activity. (Does becoming a chess player count as settling on a career?) The nature of maieutic ends also depends on circumstances. For example, settling on a spouse can be a maieutic end only if a certain kind of social structure exists to render that end intelligible. To a large extent, culture dictates both the range of maieutic ends one could have and also the range of final ends whose choice would achieve a given maieutic end.

Another part of a framework for assessing prospective ends is supplied by an aspect of maieutic ends that we have yet to discuss. A maieutic end is an end of bringing ends into existence, of giving oneself ends to pursue. To have ends to pursue is to have something to live for. If we have a single overarching and maybe unchosen maieutic end, I would say it is the end of finding things to live for.<sup>9</sup> The various maieutic ends (settling on a major subject in college and then a career, defining ideals, choosing a spouse, finding ways of contributing to the community, and so on) are all species of a generic and overarching maieutic end of finding things to live for, ends to which one can devote oneself. In different words, the end

of finding something to live for is the end of acquiring ends in general, the end of having one's life be spent on something rather than nothing.

That does not mean we are always looking for things to live for. Sometimes our existing corpus of ends gives us plenty to do, leaving us with neither the need nor the opportunity to look for more. Sometimes feeding ourselves (or our children) is a serious challenge; it keeps our hands so full that taking time to ask what we are living for is out of the question. To have no time for ends beyond bare survival is to have no need for ends beyond bare survival. But when day-to-day survival becomes too easy to keep us busy, that is when we need something else to aim at, lest we find ourselves with plenty of time to ponder the fact that there is nothing for the sake of which we are surviving.

In effect, insofar as bare survival originally presents itself as a final end, we need to convert it into something else, a form of survival that has instrumental value as well. When we do this, we change survival from something we happen to seek as a matter of descriptive biological fact into something with normative weight—a goal we have reason to seek. In this way, we redeem survival as a goal. But to do this, we need to settle on further ends to which survival can serve as means.<sup>10</sup> The next section incorporates these ideas into a model of reflective rationality. After we have the model in front of us, Chapter 4 will have more to say about comparing prospective final ends.

#### 4. A NEW MODEL

Means-end conceptions of rationality posit instrumental ends. Sophisticated versions also posit constitutive ends. A means-end conception also posits final ends, which rationally justify instrumental and constitutive ends. Instrumental or static rationality involves seeking effective means to given ends. The essence of reflective rationality is that, although it involves means-end reasoning, it goes beyond instrumental rationality because it does not take ends as given. Reflectively rational choosers realize that their preference functions change over time. They realize further that some changes will serve their current ends better than others. To be reflectively rational is to manage one's changing preference function, to do what one can to become the sort of person one wants to become.<sup>11</sup>

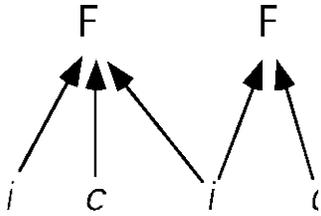


Figure 3.1. The Means-End Conception

In Figure 3.1, *F*, *c*, and *i* stand for final, constitutive, and instrumental ends. An arrow from *c* to *F* signifies that pursuing *c* is a means to *F*.

There will be as many chains of justification as there are final ends, and instrumental or constitutive ends pass as rational only if they are links within one or more chains, which is to say they serve as means to one or more final ends. The final ends that top the chains, though, are not justified within the instrumentalist model.

A model of reflective rationality adds the following elements to the means-end conception of rational choice. The point is to embellish the means-end conception rather than to supplant it, in the process showing how even final ends can be subject to rational choice. First, the model posits particular maieutic ends. Insofar as settling on final ends is our way of achieving maieutic ends, the choice is rational if it serves the purpose. Second, we pursue particular maieutic ends (like the end of choosing a career) as constitutive ends relative to the overarching maieutic end of finding something to live for. Getting a career is a way of getting something to live for (see fig. 3.2).

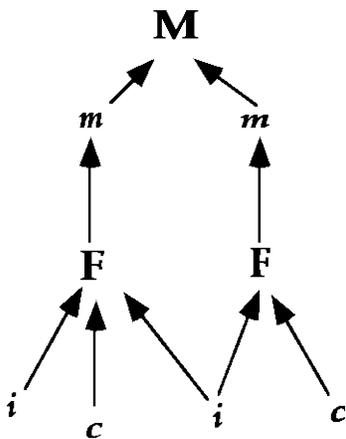


Figure 3.2. The Reflective Model, Taking the Overarching End as Given

In Figure 3.2, an arrow from *i* to F signifies that pursuing *i* is a means to F. An arrow from F to *m* signifies that choosing F is a means to a particular maieutic end *m*. An arrow from *m* to M signifies that pursuing *m* is a means to the overarching maieutic end M.

The model that emerges from this has several variations, of which we will look at three. In the first version, this is where we stop. We take the overarching maieutic end as a final end that is simply given. This first model is noteworthy in two ways. It explains how an end, pursued for its own sake, could be rationally chosen. Second, the model identifies and characterizes further ends to which the choice of final ends could be a means. The model takes at least one final end as given, though, and so from a theoretical standpoint is not entirely satisfying. It goes beyond the instrumentalist model by showing how even final ends could be rationally chosen, but shares with instrumentalist models the property of necessarily leaving us with loose ends—terminal ends not justifiable within the model.

Judging from the first model, then, it still seems reasonable to suppose that, as Bernard Williams writes, “there will have to be at least one reason for which no further reason is given and which holds itself up” (1985, p. 113).<sup>12</sup> The second model, however, goes further. Instead of taking the overarching maieutic end as given, we note that finding reasons to live improves our survival prospects. To whatever extent we care about survival, and to whatever extent finding things to live for strengthens our will to survive and thereby improves our survival prospects, we have a rationale for the overarching end. Finding things to live for is instrumental to the further end of survival. In the second model, we stop here. We take survival as a given final end. See Figure 3.3.

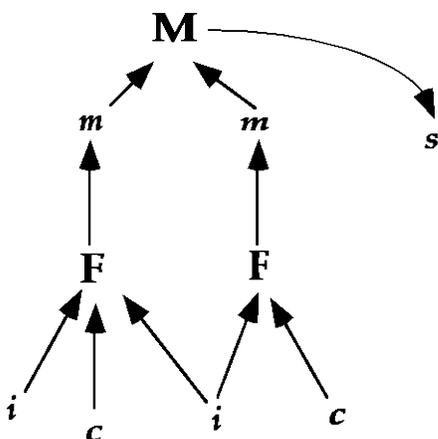


Figure 3.3. The Reflective Model, Taking Survival as Given

In Figure 3.3, an arrow from M to *s* signifies that pursuing the overarching end M is a means to the end of survival.

Should we take the end of survival as given? Since we are given the end of survival as a matter of biological fact, why not? One problem is that we would still be left with a theoretical loose end, an end accounted for in descriptive biological terms but not in normative terms. There is also a practical reason why we cannot take survival as given (as indicated by the twinge of existentialist anxiety that the reader feels upon being invited to take survival as a descriptive given). We cannot take survival as given because, as a matter of fact, our commitment to the biologically given end of survival is not an all-or-nothing matter. Our commitment is a matter of degree, variable even within persons. The point is not that some people do not have the end of survival. (Even if some people lack the end of survival, this need not affect its normative force for the rest of us.) The more crucial fact is that, even for those of us who have the end of survival, the strength of our will to survive can change. Further, the strength of our will to survive is in part a consequence of our choices.

Accordingly, the third model goes one more step. Survival is a final end with which we begin as a matter of biological fact, but it will be subverted as an end if we cannot find something that survival is *for*, i.e., if we cannot find reasons to live. With some ends, of course, a threat of subversion would not matter. For example, if Ulysses expects the Sirens to subvert his desire for broccoli, he shrugs his shoulders and plans to eat something else. But in contrast, if Ulysses expects the Sirens to subvert his desire to survive, he binds himself to the mast. He wants to survive his encounter with the Sirens no matter how he will feel about survival when the time comes.

This proves that broccoli and survival are different. Unlike a desire for broccoli, the biologically given desire for survival happens to have a certain intransigence. It resists its own extinction. It drives us to find things to live for, as proof against its own subversion.

As we find things to live for, the instinctive goal of survival with which we begin becomes something more than that. It becomes a means to final ends acquired in the process of achieving maieutic ends. And as new goals insert themselves into our corpus of ends, the goal of bare survival evolves into something else. There comes a time when bare survival is no longer what we are after. By acquiring the final ends that make life instrumentally

valuable, we convert bare survival from something we happen to pursue into something we have reason to pursue as a keystone part of an increasingly complex hierarchy of ends.<sup>13</sup>

This suggests a circular chain of reasoning (a nonvicious circle, since several and perhaps all of the links have empirical content). Constitutive and instrumental ends are justified as means to final ends. We pursue final ends for their own sake, and the *choice* of final ends is justified as a means of achieving particular maieutic ends. Particular maieutic ends are justified as constitutive means to the overarching maieutic end of finding something to live for. Finding something to live for is instrumentally justified to the extent that, given our psychology, achieving the overarching maieutic end (and thus producing reasons to live) helps us survive. And to close the circle, survival and the implied preservation of the ability to pursue goals has come to be instrumentally justified as a means to the pursuit of final ends. See Figure 3.4.

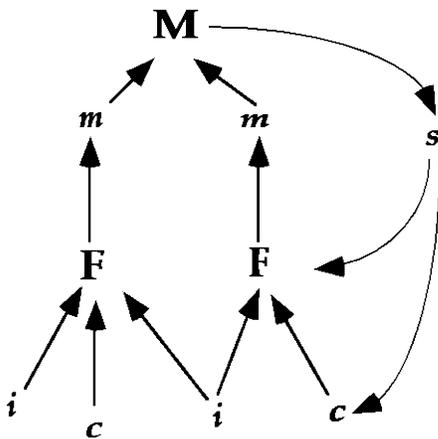


Figure 3.4. The Reflective Model, With No Loose Ends

In this model, survival is a means in the sense of being needed for the sake of other goals. To be an instrumental end, and thus an item to pursue, there must also be something one needs to do to secure it. So, as I use the terms, being an instrumental end entails being a means, but not vice-versa. Survival is not unique in this respect. For example, suppose Tom needs a car in order to attend a concert. If Tom already has a car, though, then having a car is not an item to pursue, thus not an end, thus not an instrumental end, even though it is a means of attending the concert.

We might think there is an easier way to close the circle. That is, we could eliminate maieutic ends from the picture and suppose more simply that survival is justified as a means to our final ends while our final ends are justified by the fact that acquiring those ends gives us reason to live and thereby improves our survival prospects. But how could acquiring final ends improve our survival prospects? Acquiring final ends could improve our survival prospects by giving us reasons to live, but that way of closing the circle presupposes what I called a maieutic end. Maieutic ends enter the picture even if the name I gave them does not.

Another way of closing the circle involves standard instrumental reasons for wanting some of our ends to be final ends. For example, we might be healthier if we eat broccoli as an end in itself—just for the taste—rather than for the sake of our health.<sup>14</sup> In this way, we can rationalize intermediate links in a chain of ends, and thus can rationalize ends that in a sense are final as well as instrumental. We would not be rationalizing the acquisition of a terminal end, though. By contrast, maieutic ends are achieved, not merely furthered, by the process of acquiring final ends. Their persistence is not presupposed. Maieutic ends can drop away while leaving intact the chosen end's rationale, which explains how *even the link that terminates a chain of ends* could have been rationally chosen. A circle of ends can close without maieutic ends, but when maieutic ends are part of the story, the closed circle can break open again, leaving a rationally chosen final end in the terminal position.

Does this mechanism drive the emergence of everyone's corpus of ends? It is hard to say. In any event, the models are not really meant to be descriptive in that sense. They are meant to show how someone, starting even from something as mundane as the survival instinct, could have reason to develop the complicated set of ends that beings like us actually have. The models are also meant to show how each element of an emerging corpus of ends can come to have its own normative force without any end's normative force being simply taken as given. Survival enters the second model as a biological given, but the third model depicts a process by which this biological given eventually becomes something more than that. The third model thus exhibits a striking completeness, since within it there are no loose ends. The chain of justification has a beginning, but need not come to an end. One might be tempted to ask for a justification of the chain as a whole, but to justify every link is to justify the whole chain. The chain metaphorically represents a series of choices wanting justification in rational choice terms, together with interrelationships that help them justify

each other. When one forges the chain in such a way that no link is without justification (that is, no choice is without justification, including basic existentialist choices such as to seek survival or to cultivate ends beyond survival), then no issue of rational choice remains to be represented by the metaphorical chain as a whole.

Even as astute a critic of foundationalism as Bernard Williams joins foundationalists in embracing what from a dynamic perspective is the foundationalist metaphor's least plausible implication, namely that starting points are what subsequently erected edifices must rest upon.<sup>15</sup> Don't be fooled by the metaphor. Our starting points can be more like launching pads than like architectural foundations. A launching pad serves its purpose by being left behind. Even if we inevitably begin by taking some ends as given, it remains open whether a corpus of ends will always include ends taken as given.

Further, survival is not the only descriptively given end capable of launching the normative rocket. If a primeval desire for survival does not drive a person to develop a corpus of ends, something else might. A desire for happiness also can drive us to find things to live for, since we find happiness in ends we pursue for their own sake. (If we did not independently care about achieving those ends, there would be nothing in the achievement to be happy about.) A primeval desire to avoid boredom might have similar consequences.<sup>16</sup> To launch the normative rocket, all we need is some given desire that gives us reasons to find things to live for. I like survival as an example of such a primeval desire because it is in fact biologically given and because it is fairly clear how bare survival could start as a biologically given final end only to drive the process by which survival itself evolves into a complicated instrumental end, thereby leaving us with no loose (i.e., simply given) ends.

Perhaps it is somewhat curious that organisms would have a survival instinct in the first place. The reason why they have it, presumably, is this. Organisms having no instincts other than an instinct to replicate would not be good at replicating and thus would have declining representation in successive generations. The goal of replicating, the ultimate biological given, is better served in organisms who combine or replace that goal with other goals: to survive, to have sex, to eat, and so forth. Obviously, not every organism is guaranteed to have more offspring in virtue of having a complex corpus of ends, but whether the rule has exceptions is not the issue. The issue is whether the probability of replication goes up or down as a corpus of ends becomes complex.

Sociobiological speculation aside, it remains the case that, having posited an initial goal of bare survival, we can see why this goal would fall away as a driving force in just the way launching pads need to fall away and be replaced by a commitment to survive *in a particular way*, as a being with a particular hierarchy of ends. In circumstances like ours, to have the thinner goal is to have reason to try to replace it with its thicker analog. (The reason is that the end of bare survival is too thin to sustain itself as a corpus of ends. Unless survival acquires instrumental value, our commitment to it will decay.) It would have been simpler to posit a thicker goal (of surviving in a humanly dignified way, for example, or of having a life filled with happiness) as a biologically given final end, but that would have made the model at once much less interesting and much more controversial.

One might find it odd to model final ends as ends we acquire by choice. Recall, then, that models of reflectively rational choice do not presume we acquire final ends only by conscious choice. We sometimes make choices unintentionally, habituating ourselves toward aiming at an end without realizing that we are doing so. Some of our ends seem simply to captivate us. Nor is anything necessarily wrong with acquiring ends unintentionally. When we find ourselves gripped by an end, we have no practical need to formulate a rationale for our ends. (There is a saying: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”) Nevertheless, there might be a rationale for one’s final ends whether or not one has reason to identify it. Final ends can give us something to live for regardless of whether we think of them as serving that purpose.

Thus, the three models have a normative force pertaining not only to ends one acquires by deliberate choice but also to ends by which one is simply gripped. They explain not just how we could come to have final ends but how we could come to have *rationally chosen* final ends, and such an explanation can have justificatory force even when it is not descriptively accurate.<sup>17</sup> For example, if Kate is simply gripped by the end of learning to play jazz guitar, then since she did not choose it at all, she cannot be said to have rationally chosen it either. Nevertheless, we can say her end is rational if the process of adopting it served an end she had at the time, and in particular if adopting the end gave her something to live for. And we can say this even when she neither chooses nor pursues the end with that further purpose in mind.

We have seen how final ends could be rationally chosen. In addition, the third model shows that it is not necessary for a chain of ends to terminate in an end that is simply given

rather than rationally chosen. Note that these models rely only on the ordinary and well understood means-end conception of rational choice. The choice of instrumental, constitutive, final, and maieutic ends are all explained as means to further ends. (By definition, the pursuit of final ends cannot be so explained, but the choice of final ends can be.) This shows that the means-end conception of rational choice has the resources to go beyond the instrumentalist model. I do not assume that means-end reasoning is the only kind of rationality there is. Rather, the point of the exercise is to show how even this narrowest of conceptions of rational choice has the resources to explain the rational choice of ends, and further, to do so without leaving loose ends.

Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112b11-12) said we deliberate not about ends but about ways and means.<sup>18</sup> But I believe we have maieutic ends. And if we deliberate about means to maieutic ends, then by that very fact we deliberate about ends. It is through means-end deliberation with respect to maieutic ends that final ends are brought within the purview of rational choice. To belabor the obvious, though, only choices can fall within the purview of rational choice. Therefore, the intent of this chapter's argument has been to show how rationality is conferred on final ends as choices, not as ends per se. Even when there is nothing to say about the rationality of ends as ends, it remains possible to rationally choose final ends in the sense that choosing them can serve further ends.

This chapter's argument does not presume that a person can have more than one genuine final end, but the next chapter argues that it is possible and typically rational to have a plurality of final ends. Chapter 4 also considers how we compare prospective ends. Are some ends better than others? When we have several options (e.g., several available career paths), is there a procedure for deciding which alternative is best? Also, when no prospective end emerges as best, is it nevertheless possible to make recognizably rational choices?

### ***Epilog 2014: So, Why Be Moral?***

I did of course write this essay as an end in itself. It seemed also to have an instrumental value in this book, contributing as it does to the conclusion that humanly rational choice is not a matter merely of rationally pursuing exogenously given ends. Humanly rational choice involves acknowledging the fact that our ends are themselves endogenous and evolving

products of our life choices. What we strive for is almost never to be equated with bare survival. Even what we would represent to ourselves in the developed world as a financial emergency is still the kind of situation where we aspire to survive in a particular way. We need to find things worth living for. We need to be able to see ourselves as persons worthy of our own esteem at a bare minimum. This sets the table for an argument for the rationality of being moral, not because being moral facilitates maximizing our bundles of material stuff, but because being moral facilitates being worthy of our own esteem.

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- <sup>1</sup> David Gauthier (1986, 26). Michael Resnik puts it dramatically: “Individual decision theory recognizes no distinction—either moral or rational—between the goals of killing oneself, being a sadist, making a million dollars, or being a missionary” (1987, 5).
- <sup>2</sup> The distinction between instrumental and constitutive ends is formalized by J. L. Ackrill (1980, 19). I am also borrowing from Scott MacDonald (1991).
- <sup>3</sup> I leave open whether, prior to our choosing them, we already have final ends in inchoate form. This sometimes does appear to be the case, though. There sometimes seems, for example, to be a grain of truth in describing a person as having been born for a particular pursuit.
- <sup>4</sup> I thank Scott MacDonald for suggesting this objection.
- <sup>5</sup> Constitutive ends can be either specific ways of pursuing a more formal further end (Putting on a suit can be constitutive of being well-dressed) or constituent parts of the further end (Putting on a tie can be a constituent of putting on a suit). See also Scott MacDonald’s discussion of ends as specifications (1991, 59).
- <sup>6</sup> I thank Lainie Ross for the observation.
- <sup>7</sup> The issue came up in discussions with Ruth Marcus and Michael Della Rocca.
- <sup>8</sup> It is not a conceptual truth that human beings desire to be competent, but nor is that desire merely a local phenomenon. Probably, it is conspicuously present in all societies. Robert White (1971) says exploratory and playful behavior in children and even young animals serves to develop competence in dealing with the environment and that a sense of competence is a vital aspect of self-esteem. Sarah Broadie says the joy human beings take in doing things well “is so natural that people set up all sorts of trivial ends in order to have the satisfaction of achieving them correctly” (1991, 92).
- <sup>9</sup> I speak interchangeably of having, finding, getting, or coming to have something to live for.
- <sup>10</sup> It seems that some people would rather die than live without goals they consider worth living for. Suicide often might be understood not as a repudiation of the unchosen end of survival but rather as the ultimate confirmation of the intolerability of failing to achieve the maieutic end of finding something to live for.
- <sup>11</sup> The topic of endogenous preference has become an industry since I wrote this. For the tip of the iceberg, see Bowles (1998) or Dietrich and List (2013).
- <sup>12</sup> Williams expresses skepticism about the “linear model” of reason-giving at issue in the cited passage, but his belief that it is impossible for rationales to go “all the way down” is unwavering.
- <sup>13</sup> For those with no desire to live in the first place, this argument does not get off the ground unless they have some other desire that can play a similar role in the model. But we are not concerned here with the likelihood that some people’s ends cannot be rationally justified in this way. Perhaps some ends cannot be rationally justified at all. Be that as it may, the objective is to show how a final end could be rationally chosen. We do not need to argue that *all* ends are rationally chosen.
- <sup>14</sup> I thank Sara Worley for this point.
- <sup>15</sup> See Williams (1985, 113-17).
- <sup>16</sup> I thank Harry Frankfurt for this suggestion. See also Frankfurt (1992, 12).
- <sup>17</sup> Alan Nelson (1986) discusses the relation between explanation and justification.
- <sup>18</sup> Aristotle believed we deliberate about constitutive as well as instrumental means, and some commentators (e.g., Terence Irwin in the notes to *Nicomachean Ethics*, 318) say that if we deliberate about a constitutive means to a final end, we thereby deliberate about the final end. Not necessarily. We may deliberate about whether to run two miles without deliberating about whether to get some exercise. We may deliberate

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about whether to wear a maroon tie without deliberating about whether to wear a suit. And so on. We do not get to a perspective from which to assess final ends merely by deliberating about constitutive means.