Reasons and Ideals*

Kimberley Brownlee
(kimberley.brownlee@manchester.ac.uk)

ABSTRACT: This paper contributes to the debate on whether we can have reason to do what we are unable to do. I take as my starting point two papers recently published in *Philosophical Studies*, by Bart Streumer and Ulrike Heuer, which defend the two dominant opposing positions on this issue. Briefly, whereas Streumer argues that we cannot have reason to do what we are unable to do, Heuer argues that we can have reason to do what we are unable to do when we can get closer to success but cannot have reason *to try* to do what we are unable to do when we cannot get closer to success. In this paper, I reject both positions as they are presented, on the grounds that neither can accommodate an important category of reasons, which are the reasons to realise and to try to realise dimensions of value that lie at the boundary of what is realisable, specifically, genuinely valuable ideals. I defend a third view that we can have reason to do and to try to do what we are unable to do even when we cannot, in Heuer's sense, get closer to success. Moreover, I argue that we can have reason to realise and to try to realise genuinely valuable ideals *for their own sake* and not simply for the sake of achieving mundane, realisable ends.

Can we have reason to realise and to try to realise genuinely valuable ideals?[1] This question relates to a broader and more well-discussed question: Can we have reason to do what we are unable to do? In papers recently published in *Philosophical Studies*, Bart Streumer and Ulrike Heuer defend the two dominant opposing positions on the latter question. Streumer argues that we cannot have reason to do what we are unable to do because, first, if we could, then we would have 'crazy reasons' to travel back in time to avert wars, for example, or to jump 30,000 feet in the air to save people from falling planes.[2] Second, if there were reasons to do what we cannot do, we would have to take those reasons into account in our deliberations about how to act with the consequence that our practical reasoning deliberations often would have pointless results (Streumer, 2007). Responding to Streumer, Heuer argues that we can have reason to do what we are unable do just in case we can get closer to success. Only the presence of reasons to do what we cannot do can explain the presence of derivative reasons, for example, to learn to do what we cannot do, or to apologise for not doing what circumstances render us unable to do, such as keep a promise. But, Heuer continues, we cannot have derivative reason *to try* to do what we cannot do or to take the means sufficient to do what we cannot do because, since we cannot succeed, any effort will be insufficient, and thus there is no such reason to make that effort. Impossibility affects both instrumental reasons and reasons to try, she argues, but not the non-derivative reasons for success (Heuer, 2008).

In this paper, I reject both Streumer's and Heuer's positions on the grounds that neither can accommodate an important category of reasons, which are the reasons to realise and to try to realise

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1 In this discussion, *reasons* are facts that speak in favour of action.

2 Streumer offers another related argument that there cannot be a reason for inanimate objects such as a table or a chair to perform an action because it is impossible for such objects to perform actions. According to Streumer, 'When it is impossible for a person to perform an action, this person is in the same position with regard to this action that a table or a chair is in with regard to all actions. Therefore, just as there cannot be a reason for a table or a chair to perform an action, there cannot be a reason for this person to perform this action.' Streumer (2007). In reply, tables and chairs not only lack reasoning abilities, but also lack the capacity, in principle, to have reasoning abilities. As entities that are incapable of being sensitive to reasons, they cannot be subject to reasons.

dimensions of value that lie at the boundary of what is real and realisable, namely, genuinely valuable ideals. Such ideals are conceptions of genuine perfection or models of genuine excellence around which we can shape our lives and our commitments. Accounting for the place of such ideals within practical reason requires the tools of a view like Heuer's that does not limit what we have reason to do to what we are able to do. But it also requires less rigid and less demanding conceptions of both *trying* and *success* than those employed by Heuer and others.

After briefly outlining forceful elements of Heuer's response to Streumer, I criticise Heuer's positive account of how impossibility affects reasons on the grounds that her account as she presents it cannot accommodate reasons to realise and to try to realise dimensions of value that (1) take the form of continua with no determinate endpoint, (2) are promoted constitutively rather than through independent means, and/or (3) lie at the boundary of what is realisable. I bolster my position by arguing that we have reason to realise and to try to realise genuinely valuable ideals *for their own sake* and not simply for the sake of achieving mundane, realisable ends.

1. Reasons

In her paper 'Reasons and Impossibility', Heuer plausibly challenges the view that we cannot have reason to do what we are unable to do. She notes that, if the impossibility of doing a thing would eliminate the reason to do it, then the derivative reasons related to our doing it presumably also would be eliminated. But, Heuer observes, in many cases the derivative reasons are not eliminated, which implies that there is also non-derivative reason for doing the thing even though we cannot do it (2008).

Heuer considers two contexts in which there are derivative reasons related to doing what we cannot do. One context is self-disablement (where a person renders herself unable to do what she otherwise had reason to do), the other is learning. Both contexts constitute 'shallow' impossibilities, that is, impossibilities that can be overcome or avoided in future situations. (These can be contrasted with what Derek Parfit has called deep impossibilities. ‘An imagined case is deeply impossible if it requires a major change in the laws of nature, including the laws of human nature.’ (1984, 388)) Concerning self-disablement, Heuer observes that, if we cannot have reason to do what we are unable to do, then we could simply bring it about that a reason which applies to us now ceases to apply to us when we make it impossible for us to act on that reason. That there is something we can be held to account for when we disable ourselves implies that we have reason to do the very thing we disable ourselves from doing. The reason not to disable ourselves is a success-related derivative reason; it derives from the reason to do what we disable ourselves from doing.[3]

Concerning the context of learning, Heuer observes that it sometimes comes about, or sometimes we can bring it about, that we can do what was hitherto impossible by removing certain obstacles and disabilities. But, she says, if we adopt Streumer's view that we cannot have reason to do what we are unable to do, then it seems that there is no reason to remove such obstacles. Heuer states:

> If there was no reason to play the piano for someone who can’t play it already, there would presumably be no reason to learn to play it either. Reasons for learning something require that there is a reason for doing what (as yet) one cannot do. The reasons for learning to ϕ are derivative reasons: they derive from the reason to do whatever it is [of value] that one learns to do (2008).

There are two possible difficulties with Heuer's analysis of the nature and value of learning. First,

3 I will not rehearse the exchange back and forth between Streumer and Heuer on this issue. I will simply note that it is counterintuitive to say, as Streumer does, that we can be held to account for not acting on reasons that do not apply (i.e. no longer apply) to us. We can be held to account at a later stage for not acting on reasons at the time those reasons did apply to us, but not for not acting on reasons at a time those reasons did not apply to us. C.f. Streumer, Bart (2009) 'Reasons, impossibility and efficient steps: reply to Heuer' in *Philosophical Studies*.

she has set up the example in a tendentious way that Streumer need not accept. The case is not 'I cannot play, therefore I have no reason to learn to play.' Rather the case is 'I cannot play, therefore I have no reason (on Streumer's view) to sit down and play the piano. But, I can learn to play, and therefore *ceteris paribus* I have reason to learn to play.' Putting the case in the way that Heuer does is analogous to saying: 'I cannot make dinner in the car, therefore I have no reason to drive home to make dinner.' Heuer might reject this analogy on the grounds that learning is a special kind of activity unlike merely changing our circumstances. Learning, so conceived, involves acquiring an ability that is valuable *because* the exercising of that ability is valuable: the reasons for learning to do something are derivative of the reason to do whatever it is of value that we learn to do.

But, this feeds into a second objection, which is that, on this interpretation, the value of learning is represented mistakenly in purely instrumental, fixed-end terms as a process to undergo until (suddenly) we can do the thing that we were until that point only learning to do. First, this misconceives of the nature and scope of the activity of learning: even masters of a discipline continue to learn. Second, it gives an impoverished account of the value of learning since it disregards the value that learning has independent of achieving the ability in question.[4] But, Heuer's view may be interpreted more charitably as saying that, insofar as the value of learning derives from the value of ultimately doing what we learnt to do, the value of learning is to be understood in instrumental, fixed-end terms. Where this proviso does not apply, Heuer need not take an instrumental view about reasons to learn.[5] The difficulty with this more charitable reading is that it weakens Heuer's challenge to Streumer, as it allows him to resist the counterintuitive claim that there are no reasons to learn to do what we cannot do. Although Streumer must hold that there are no *derivative* reasons to learn to do what we cannot do, he can endorse reasons to learn based on the independent, non-derivative value of learning. In consequence, Heuer's particular objection has force only in banal cases, such as learning to tie our shoelaces, where the value of learning is largely, if not entirely, derivative of doing what we learn to do.

Let us turn to Heuer's two positive theses about how impossibility affects practical reasons, the first of which concerns reasons to succeed. On Heuer's view, we have a reason to φ even if we cannot φ just in case there is a reason to φ and we can take efficient steps that get us closer to φ-ing. (This is the efficient steps condition for reasons to succeed.) We take an efficient step toward φ-ing, Heuer says, first, if our action is done with the *intention* to φ, and second, if that action is a necessary part of a (completable) sufficient plan that, if completed, achieves the intended result.[6] Trying, she says, is an example of taking efficient steps. For Heuer, trying is not simply engaging in appropriately oriented endeavour or effort (as I characterise it). Instead, it has its own internal success condition. For our efforts even to count as *trying* to φ on Heuer's view, it must be that they actually get us closer to φ-ing.[7]

4 Although he does not put his view in philosophically rigorous terms, basketball coach John Wooden (who coached the UCLA basketball team to an unbeaten record of ten NCAA championships in 12 years) maintains that practising and learning have great value independent of success in the game. Indeed, on his view, it is the learning and not the games played which has non-derivative value. Wooden defines success as 'Peace of mind attained only through self-satisfaction and knowing you made the effort to do the best of which you are capable' (Wooden, 2001). He observes that you can lose in a game even when you outscore the other team and you can succeed in a game and be outscored. What matters is that you be able to hold your head up afterward. If you play honourably and to the best of your ability, then the results will be as they should be. He says that he hoped that if people saw a player after the game, they couldn't tell by the player's actions what the score was. He wanted the score of the game to be simply the by-product of these other things.

5 I thank an anonymous referee for outlining this more charitable interpretation.

6 Streumer observes correctly that Heuer does not state, but implicitly relies upon, a requirement that the plan in question be completable in principle. C.f. Streumer, Bart (2009) 'Reasons, impossibility and efficient steps: reply to Heuer' in *Philosophical Studies*.

7 Thus, in response to Streumer, Heuer says the 'craziness' in the idea that there could be reasons to travel back in time, for example, is explained not by the fact that such an action is impossible, but by the fact that there is nothing that the agent could do in such a case that would even count as trying. I agree with Heuer on this general point, but do not draw the limits of an agent's reasons to succeed at the place where *that* agent cannot do anything that counts

Heuer's second thesis concerns reasons *to try* to succeed. She claims that having a reason to φ is not sufficient for having a reason to try to φ. To have a reason to try to φ, it must be the case that trying, or taking other efficient steps, would be *sufficient* to succeed. (This is the sufficiency condition for reasons to try.) John Gardner, for one, offers a broader account of reasons to succeed than Heuer does, as I note below, but appears to agree with Heuer's sufficiency condition for reasons to try. Drawing upon what Antony Kenny calls the 'logic of satisfactoriness' – that we have reason to do what is sufficient to achieve what we have reason to achieve – Gardner argues that we have derivative reason to try to φ just in case trying (ultimately) will yield success.[8] I examine this further in Section 4.

Heuer's theses are problematic not only for an account of the value of realising and endeavouring to realise genuinely valuable ideals, which I discuss below, but also for more mundane cases of inability to realise value. Here are three reasons why her efficient steps condition is problematic. First, consider Gardner's example of Drowning Man.[9] I stand on a cliff above the sea and see a man drowning in the water below. Although there is nothing I can do to bring myself closer to saving the man, since I have no cellphone, no one to call out to, and no way down, I have reason to save the man since there is value in such an act and the act is possible, in principle. It is a shallow impossibility – the obstacles to my inability may lift (for example, a helicopter may appear) – though, at present, those obstacles render me unable to get closer to saving the man. By linking reasons to φ with whether any effort gets me closer to φ-ing, Heuer is committed to saying that I have no reason to save the man (at the moment) because nothing I do right now would constitute a necessary part of a completable plan which, if carried out, would be sufficient to save the man. In short, Heuer limits the scope of reasons to φ to the capacity of the particular agent, confronting the case in a particular moment, to 'get closer'. She does not allow that the lines might be drawn more broadly at the limit of what is possible in principle for reasoning agents.

One way for Heuer to deflect this objection, though I doubt she would endorse it, would be to take a broad view of what it takes to 'get closer' to success. If preparing my mind for a possible rescue is a necessary part of a sufficient plan in which a helicopter appears *deus ex machina* then my ability to prepare my mind would satisfy her efficient steps condition and make it the case that I have a reason to save the man.[10] That so little might make the difference between having a reason to do something of great value and not having a reason to do it seems an unhappy solution.

Second, Heuer builds intentions into her already weighty definition of 'trying' and into her definition of 'efficient steps' in general. This is insensitive to the fact that sometimes directly endeavouring to do something can be self-defeating. As Gardner notes, intentionally endeavouring to be spontaneous or funny or happy often is unlikely to be successful. Not endeavouring to be funny sometimes is more likely to make us funny. Put more generally, endeavouring to comply with a reason (act *for* that reason) can make it less likely that we will conform to that reason (act in

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as trying. I think the limit, while difficult to locate, relates to what *any* agent could do that could meaningfully count as trying (where trying is understood as relevantly meaningful endeavour, but not necessarily as getting closer). C.f. Raz, (2005) 'The Myth of Instrumental Rationality' in *The Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 4. Raz states 'It is not the case that I have reason to attend the symposium that was recorded by Plato in the dialogue of that name, nor is it the case that I have reason to travel outside the solar system, but I have reason to go to the concert conducted by Abbado tonight even though I cannot, for it is sold out. I do not know how to distinguish in the abstract between reason-negating and other impossibilities. Perhaps it is just a matter of the likelihood that the impossibility will lift, or that it is temporary.'

8 Kenny, A. J. (1966), 'Practical Inference' in *Analysis*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 71. Cited from Gardner, John (2004), 'The Wrongdoing that Gets Results' in *Philosophical Perspectives* Vol. 18, No. 1 (*Ethics*), 55. Joseph Raz puts a similar, though slightly more modest, point in terms of facilitative actions. He states 'We have reason to adopt and pursue a plan only if, and for as long as, it is feasible and affords reasonable chances of successfully facilitating realization of the action it is designed to facilitate.' Raz (2005), 6.

9 Gardner, John (2004), 'The Wrongdoing that Gets Results' in *Philosophical Perspectives,* Vol. 18, No. 1 (*Ethics*), 53-88.

10 I thank Omar Mirza for noting this possible response for Heuer.

accordance with that reason).[11] Not focusing on compliance sometimes can yield greater conformity with reason. It may be that Heuer means to build a kind of second-order intentionality into her definitions, whereby our larger objective might be to be funny but our self-acknowledged, direct objective is not, but she does not discuss this.

Third, Heuer seems to say that, although we can have reason to do what we are unable to do when we can get closer (or take other efficient steps), we cannot have reason to do things that together amount to doing what we are unable to do when we cannot do those things. For example, I can have reason to bake bread even when I am unable to bake bread, but, on Heuer's view, I cannot have reason to do the various things that comprise baking bread when I am unable to bake bread. The difficulty, which the case of ideals will make clear, is that often we cannot divorce the activities that are constitutive of φ-ing or that together comprise φ-ing from the act of φ-ing.[12]

Before fleshing out the difficulties that face Heuer's account in relation to the cultivation and realisation of genuinely valuable ideals, let me briefly outline some core features of ideals.

2. Ideals

A substantive ideal is a conception of perfection or a model of excellence around which we can orient our thoughts and actions and through which we can seek to effect substantial changes in practices and perspectives. As models of excellence, ideals can guide us in the development and enrichment of various aspects of our lives including our character, motivations and intentions, actions, goals, commitments, reflections, and relationships.[13] Some ideals are largely personal in nature, such as athletic excellence, musical virtuosity, and civic virtue. Others are largely public, such as global prosperity, social justice, and peace. Various key features of ideals have been identified by CAJ Coady, Nicholas Rescher, Dorothy Emmet, and others as the features that collectively distinguish paradigmatic examples of ideals from ordinary goals and values. These features, as itemised by Coady, are comprehensiveness, admirability, constitutiveness, and unrealisability. With certain refinements and qualifications outlined below, I endorse this list of key features.

First, ideals are more comprehensive and general than most goals are. Ideals, unlike ordinary goals, can form the core focus of a meaningful life. The ideal of musical virtuosity, for example, is more comprehensive and general in nature than the goal of attending an opera once a month. The ideal of global prosperity is more comprehensive and general than the well-off person's goal of giving money occasionally to a charity.

Second, ideals typically garner esteem from the persons who cultivate them, something that a goal need not do. Coady states that ‘an ideal is estimable for those who pursue or acknowledge it in that they must rank it highly as a good.’ (2008, 51-2). Note, however, that the fact that a professed ideal is viewed as estimable or admirable by those who cultivate it does not mean that it is genuinely estimable or admirable. The ideal of racial purification seemed admirable to the Nazis, but they were mistaken about its admirability. If a person's ideal has genuine value, then there is reason to admire both it and any success that person has in realising it. There is also reason to facilitate the person's cultivation of that ideal. By contrast, if a person's professed ideal has no genuine value, that is, it is really a 'false' ideal (or only formally an ideal), then there is reason not to admire either it or that person's efforts to realise it and not to facilitate its cultivation. Consequently,

11 C.f. Gardner, John (2002), ‘Reasons for Teamwork’ in *Legal Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 495.

12 As an aside, Heuer's view seems to have difficulty accommodating cases where a person's actions are on their own insufficient and unnecessary to do a certain thing, but which can prompt or contribute to others' actions in ways that might be sufficient to do that thing. Consider the case of Catching the Bus. My running for the bus might be a necessary part of a sufficient plan in which the bus driver notices me running, but it is only once I start to run that it becomes either the case or not the case that my running was indeed necessary for the driver to notice me.

13 For an overview of substantive ideals and deliberative ideals, see Rosati, Connie (1998). 'Ideals' in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward Craig (ed.), London: Routledge, http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/L038SECT1

when two persons disagree over the admirability of some professed ideal, at least one of those persons is mistaken.[14] This does not mean, however, that that person is necessarily mistaken about what she herself has good reason to do. We may admire the musical virtuoso without having any weighty reason to regard her genuinely valuable ideal as an ideal we ought to cultivate ourselves. And, our own commitment to genuinely valuable ideals may be incompatible with a commitment to other equally admirable ideals. This incompatibility need not diminish our regard for alternative ideals because, as P. F. Strawson puts it, the steadiest adherence to a single ideal picture of life may coexist with the strongest desire that other incompatible ideals should have their steady adherents too (1974, 28).[15]

Third, ideals are more pervasive or even constitutive than ordinary goals are. Someone who is possessed of an ideal, Coady suggests, 'acts now in the light of that ideal and does not merely do certain ideal-neutral things that will bring about the ideal in some remote future…the ideal comes to exist to a greater or lesser degree in the agent as the agent seeks to live it.' (2008, 57). In other words, the core behaviour undertaken to cultivate an ideal is to varying degrees constitutive of that ideal itself and not merely independent, instrumentally useful means for pursuing it. I see this as analogous to T. H. Irwin's characterisation of Aristotle's conception of virtue, which relies upon a distinction between two senses in which conduct may be said to 'promote' a given end (1998). Often, Irwin observes, the action we take to achieve some end is external and purely instrumental to that end. Buying food 'promotes' the end of eating dinner. There is a contingent connection between the chosen means of buying food and the end of eating dinner, and any number of means, such as going to a restaurant or begging at someone's door, might serve equally well to promote the end of eating dinner. Other times, however, the action we take (or the intentions, beliefs, and attitudes we adopt) is a component of our end, that is, performing that action *partly* constitutes achieving the end. Eating the main course 'promotes' eating dinner. Although Aristotle does not draw the above distinction clearly in his writing, he regards the exercise of the virtues as 'promoting' the good of man in this second sense.[16] Exercising the virtues is not a contingent, preparatory, or purely instrumental part of coming to live a good life. It is constitutive of such a life. I maintain that this non-contingent, constitutive connection holds between all ideals (valuable or not) and the core conduct that the truly committed person undertakes to honour and to realise them.[17] The activities that the committed person takes to cultivate her ideal will become increasingly constitutive of that ideal as she comes to embody the ideal to a greater or lesser degree.

Fourth, ideals often are in different ways and for different reasons unrealisable. Some thinkers take a strong view of the unrealisability of ideals. Nicholas Rescher, for one, says that an ideal is,

> …a very model or paradigm that answers to the purposes at issue in a way that is flawless and incapable of being improved upon: 'the true friend,' 'the flawless performer,' 'the

14 In some cases, both persons might be mistaken. For example, both would be mistaken in a case where one person believes mistakenly that the element under consideration is a genuinely valuable ideal and the other person believes it is an ideal in the formal sense that the Nazi's ideal is a formal ideal and not a genuinely valuable ideal, but in actual fact the element under consideration is merely a moderately valuable goal, and not an ideal at all. I thank Jon Quong for noting this point.

15 That said, not all ideals are optional. For example, some ideals recommend themselves to all while at the same time are particularly salient to specific ways of life. Coady observes that, '…the ideal of truth, for instance, has an objective claim to the attention of all, [but] it may have a special role in the lives of intellectuals, just as the ideal of justice must concern everyone, but have a special significance for judges.' (2008, 70.)

16 Aristotle's position, as summarised by Alastair MacIntyre, is that the good of man is constituted by a complete human life lived at its best, to which the exercise of the virtues is a central part. MacIntyre, A. (1981), *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 139-140.

17 Some actions taken in promotion of an ideal will be purely instrumental and could be substituted by other actions to no lesser effect. For example, the efforts of a philanthropist to further the career of a rising musical star are instrumental to the cultivation of the ideal of virtuosity.

consummate physician.' Such ideals, of course, are 'too good to be true.' (1987, 117)

Although some ideals take this Rescherian form, other generally acknowledged ideals do not, which suggests that we can distinguish amongst the degrees and types of unrealisability in various ideals. Concerning types of unrealisability, to the extent that the ideal of the good parent, say, is unrealisable, its unrealisability can be represented in at least two ways. One way is in terms of its never-endingness. Being a good parent yesterday, today, tomorrow and each day afterward is an unrealisable challenge in virtue of its ongoingness; it is simply unsustainable. A second way is in terms of its limitless progressiveness. One could always be a better parent than one is being or has been. Concerning strengths of unrealisability, first, something may be a plausible ideal for one person but not for another person when, for the latter person, that thing is neither unrealisable nor unrealised. It would be appropriate to represent my present musical ideal in terms of playing the cello as well as Yo Yo Ma does, but obviously this is not an appropriate description of a musical ideal for Yo Yo Ma.[18] Second, something may be an ideal for one person or for all persons at a given time, but prove subsequently to be realisable. For example, despite the odds, I might come to play the cello as well as Yo Yo Ma does. Or, we might succeed as a global community in eradicating poverty. Third, something may be an ideal for one person (or for all persons) and persist in remaining out of reach even though it is possible, in principle, to realise that ideal. For example, Coady observes that the philosopher's own ideal of truth, in all likelihood, will forever elude her even though, in principle, it is possible that she could always make only true assertions and sound arguments.[19] Despite their differences in degree and type of unrealisability, ideals as a class can be distinguished from deep impossibilities such as living forever, travelling back in time, and so on. This is because, unlike deep impossibilities which to some extent defy imagination, or at the very least defy the imaginative contemplation of what actions to take to endeavour with appropriate focus to realise them, ideals originate in the use of imagination 'to contemplate value possibilities that transcend the restrictive confines of the real.' (1987, 83). With this sketch of the nature of ideals in hand, let us consider their role in practical reason.

3. Reasons and Ideals

Ideals play several distinct, but overlapping roles within practical reason. One such role is a regulative role. Genuinely valuable ideals can regulate moral reasoning by serving as 'guideposts' (to use Rescher's phrase) in our deliberations about how to act and how best to actualise genuine values. They set standards for practical reason. Entertaining such ideals, Emmet says, even though, on her view, they are wholly unrealisable, gives orientation to our practices and prevents us from settling for surrogates (1994, 2-3). In a similar vein, Rescher defends adopting and pursuing wholly unrealisable ideals on the grounds, first, that an ideal is a component element of a holistically unified, wider goal structure that incorporates other appropriate, achievable desiderata (and this validates the unrealisable ideal as something whose pursuit yields associated side benefits apart from those directly at issue in the ideal itself). Second, adopting and pursing an ideal can maximise actual achievement in circumstances where the adoption of more 'realistic' cognate goals would otherwise be less productive. Rescher states, 'The useful work of an ideal is to serve as a goad to effort by preventing us from resting complacently satisfied with the unhappy compromises demanded by the harsh realities of a difficult world.' (1987, 83).

Constrained by space, I simply note these views to demonstrate that a case can be made for

18 Representing my musical ideal in terms of playing as well as Yo Yo Ma gives an overly concrete characterisation to my ideal. It is understandable that I represent my ideals imperfectly in this too-concrete way, as this reflects the limits of my present imaginative abilities relative to the musical greatness to which I aspire. As I progress as a musician, my conception of true musical virtuosity will become richer and more refined.

19 Although Coady says that 'the unrealisability of this ideal of total truth does not stand in the way of striving to achieve it', nevertheless he suspects that those ideals that are unrealisable are misconceived as ends to be aimed at in this way. Coady (2008).

the regulative value of ideals within practical reasoning on the grounds that ideals further the practical possibilities for both the cultivation of value in general and the achievement of more specific, modest, and fully realisable goods which we might otherwise believe to be beyond us. Aiming wholeheartedly for the stars so that we may hit the ceiling often can be helpful and sometimes can be necessary because, as Rescher and Coady both note, it seems to be a psychological fact about people that they can reach remarkably high levels of performance by aiming at a perfection or advanced state that they know or believe to be beyond them (Coady, 2008, 59).

A second, more central, role for ideals in practical reasoning is sketched out briefly above in terms of the cultivation and realisation of their constitutive elements. To be genuinely committed to any ideal means, first, that we honour that ideal, in the sense that we act in ways that are in keeping with the spirit of that ideal. Second, it means that we actively cultivate that ideal even though we do not, and perhaps never will, fully actualise it. When we are wholeheartedly committed to an ideal, we cannot but try to realise it (however inadequate our efforts may be). A violinist's wholehearted cultivation of the ideal of virtuosity, for example, requires from her, amongst other things, her continual development of her expertise, her contribution to the advancement of her field, and her genius in performance, all of which are components or fragments of the ideal of virtuosity. Similarly, widespread collective cultivation of the ideal of human prosperity requires, amongst other things, general understanding of complex issues, strong collective and individual commitment to the protection and preservation of key human interests, allocation of sufficient resources, and so on, all of which are components or fragments of the public ideal of eliminating poverty. That these activities are constitutive of each of these respective ideals gives the violinist and the global community derivative reason to cultivate their chosen ideals; their conduct realises constitutive aspects of what they have reason to achieve, even though, in the case of the violinist at least, she will never realise fully her ideal.

A third role for ideals within practical reason is as objects of expressive value. By adopting a genuinely valuable ideal, such as goodness, courage, or authenticity, we can express our commitment to goodness, courage, authenticity irrespective of how well we come to embody that ideal. Fourth and finally, it is plausible that being deeply committed to genuinely valuable ideals is necessary for, and even constitutive of, personal autonomy. The speculative suggestion here is that, without a deep commitment to the cultivation and embodiment of genuinely valuable ideals, attempted deliberations about how to act will lack a meaningful framework by which to recognise certain actions and objectives as valuable or as appropriate for realising what is valuable. If this is correct, then ideals not only regulate our deliberations about how to act, but also are fundamentally necessary to our ability to undertake those deliberations. They are central to practical reason as a practice.

4. Critique of Heuer's Account

At first glance, Heuer's position seems amenable to reasons to realise ideals because she holds that we need not be able to succeed in order to have reason to succeed; it's enough that we be able to 'get closer', which many persons who cultivate genuinely valuable ideals seem to do. However, as noted in the discussion of mundane cases like Drowning Man, Heuer's efficient steps condition for reasons to succeed is too strong. It builds in a partial-success condition (that any effort actually gets us closer) which rules out reasons to succeed when there is value in our object and our object is possible in principle, but our present efforts will not bring us closer to realising it (which is paradigmatically the case for ideals). More specifically, the notion of 'getting closer' is an unhappy one to apply to the cultivation of ideals since this notion has an ineliminably instrumental, fixed-end gloss: we take a step along a road to success which has a fixed endpoint with reference to which we can say that we have 'got closer'. As my account shows, this does not accurately represent what goes on in the cultivation of ideals. The violist does not 'get closer' to her ideal of virtuosity because,

although she can realise fragments of the ideal, there is no fixed end-point to virtuosity, and her cultivation of virtuosity is constitutive, not instrumental. Consequently, Heuer's view cannot accommodate reasons to realise genuinely valuable ideals. A broader criterion for reasons to succeed is necessary to accommodate reasons to realise ideals.

Concerning reasons to try, Heuer's account, and I believe Gardner's as well, cannot accommodate derivative reasons to try to realise ideals because, for Heuer and Gardner, to have such a reason to try, one must satisfy the sufficiency condition: we have derivative reason to try to φ just in case trying will *ultimately* be sufficient for success. But, the notion of *success* invoked in such a condition is necessarily a fixed-end notion that cannot accommodate dimensions of value that take the form of never-ending continua. Since, by definition, no amount of endeavour could be sufficient to realise fully such continua – no amount of endeavour could bring the violinist to realise fully a genuine ideal of virtuosity – there can be, for Heuer and Gardner, no reason to try to realise such a genuinely valuable ideal.

Now, this objection may seem to hold only in the context of trying to realise ideals for their own sake since Heuer and Gardner apparently can accommodate reasons to try to realise ideals that derive from reasons to achieve mundane ends. In those cases, the thing we have reason to do is achieve the mundane end and the thing we have reason to try to do as a means to realising that mundane end is achieve an ideal. Although our efforts to realise the ideal itself in all likelihood will fail, making the attempt satisfies the sufficiency condition when the attempt is sufficient to realise the mundane end, and that is what gives us derivative reason (on Heuer's view) to try to realise the ideal. But, this response trades on an ambiguity in the notion of *trying*. While it may seem that we are *trying* here to realise the ideal, in fact we are orienting our attention toward the ideal to further our efforts to achieve the mundane end, and hence what we are actually *trying* to do is achieve the mundane end. (To see this, note that when describing reasons to φ and reasons to try to φ we must plug the same thing in for φ.) Therefore, the objection stands that Heuer's sufficiency condition is too strong to accommodate reasons to try to realise ideals.

In conclusion, Heuer's account cannot accommodate reasons to realise and to endeavour to realise dimensions of value that have certain features that are exemplified in, but not unique to, genuinely valuable ideals. Specifically, Heuer cannot accommodate reasons to realise and to endeavour to realise dimensions of value (1) that have no determinate endpoint, (2) whose promotion is constitutive in a way not captured by the standard means/end distinction, and (3) that lie at the boundary of what is practically possible.

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