

Intention as Faith

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1. Introduction

What, if anything, has faith to do with intention?¹ By ‘faith’ I have in mind the attitude described by William James:

Suppose...that I am climbing in the Alps, and have had the ill-luck to work myself into a position from which the only escape is by a terrible leap. Being without similar experience, I have no evidence of my ability to perform it successfully; but hope and confidence in myself make me sure I shall not miss my aim, and nerve my feet to execute what without those subjective emotions would perhaps have been impossible. But suppose that, on the contrary, the emotions of fear and mistrust preponderate; or suppose that...I feel it would be sinful to act upon an assumption unverified by previous experience,—why, then I shall hesitate so long that at last, exhausted and trembling, and launching myself in a moment of despair, I miss my foothold and roll into the abyss....*There are then cases where faith creates its own verification.* Believe, and you shall be right, for you shall save yourself; doubt, and you shall again be right, for you shall perish.²

The climber has ‘no evidence’ about his ability to leap across the chasm: his faith goes beyond evidence.³ The desire to leap across enables the climber to believe he will leap across: his faith is wishful. Belief that he will leap across enables him to leap across: his faith is self-fulfilling. When it comes to faith, the ‘no evidence’ issue is usually at the fore; but I shall mostly ignore it here, and focus on faith as a wishful and self-fulfilling attitude.

Skirting alpine melodrama, and making a modest start: if faith is a kind of belief, we can begin with the wider question of what belief has to do with intention. Some

¹ I am grateful for comments from the audience at the RIP conference on *Action and Agency*, and from Richard Holton, Lloyd Humberstone, Matthew Nudds, Mike Ridge, David Velleman, Denis Walsh and Timothy Williamson. I’m aware I have not always profited by their generous responses as well as I should.

² William James, ‘The Sentiment of Rationality’, in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Norwood, Mass: Plimpton Press, 1896), 96-7.

³ ‘Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is still theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance’ (*The Will to Believe*, 90.)

philosophers give belief a modest role: perhaps intending to do something implies believing it at least *possible* you will do it; perhaps it implies believing you *will* do it; perhaps it implies *not* believing you *won't* do it; perhaps it implies believing you *intend* to do it. But among the propositional attitudes it is desire rather than belief that is usually thought closest to intention, and a popular view has it that intending just *is* a sort of *desiring*. After all, desire and intention apparently share a 'direction of fit', however one attempts to characterize this intuitive idea. When Elizabeth Anscombe famously contrasted the detective's list from the spied-upon shopper's list, she was contrasting belief, which aims to fit the world, from an attitude that aims rather for the world to fit itself: intention, or desire? The shopper lists what he wants and intends to get. Why not put the two together and say that intending is a sort of desiring? The shopper intends to buy butter when he most strongly desires to buy butter, and desires not to deliberate further about buying it.⁴

An opposing hypothesis says intending just *is* a sort of *believing*. This is the doxastic account of intention, sometimes called 'cognitivism about practical reason'.⁵ An elegant account along these lines is given by David Velleman, who says intentions are future-directed beliefs about what one will do—they are 'self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment and that represent themselves as such'⁶.

⁴See e.g. Michael Ridge, 'Humean Intentions', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998), 157-178 (this description massively oversimplifies his proposed view). Anscombe's example is in *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), p. 56.

⁵ See e.g. Michael Bratman, 'Cognitivism about Practical Reason', 250-1, in *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶David Velleman, *Practical Reflection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 109; also available on-line at Velleman's website. Intention is belief-like in its direction of fit (representing its content as true) and in its aim for truth (being regulated by mechanisms which revise it in the face of counter-evidence); these features justify the label 'belief', according to Velleman, but the label is not what matters. Extensive

The shopper intends to buy butter when he has made up his mind that *he will buy butter*:
'making up what we will do is, in fact, our way of making up our minds to do it.'

Intention

represents as true that we are going to do something;... it aims therein to represent something that really is true; and...it causes the truth of what it represents.⁷

The leaper's faith likewise represents as true that he is going to do something; it aims therein to represent something that really is true; and it causes the truth of what it represents. James' courageous leaper seems worlds away from Anscombe's shopper, but if the doxastic proposal is right there may be a connection between the leaper's faith and the shopper's intention; and I shall be interested in what the comparison can tell us about the proposal's merits. My conclusion will be a critical one—which is churlish, given that as a newcomer to this topic, I have nothing better to offer in its place; but there it is.

Both the leaper and shopper possess, on this account, a self-fulfilling expectation that is motivated by a desire for its fulfillment. Desire comes in as the spring of belief, rather than directly as the spring of action. The leaper and the shopper alike possess a belief that is both wishful, and self-fulfilling. This means that, on the face of it, intention and faith are alike in possessing certain 'misdirections' of fit, as we might provisionally dub them. On neat rules about direction of fit, belief is supposed to fit the world, and the world is supposed to fit desire; but in wishful thought, belief comes to fit desire, instead of the world; and in self-fulfilling thought, the world comes to fit belief, instead of desire.

references to views ascribing a more modest role to belief in intention, such as those of Gilbert Harman, Paul Grice, and Robert Audi, are cited at p. 113 note 8.

⁷ Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 26. I do not attend here to the development of his view since the original presentation; in particular I shall skate over the distinction between a drive for self-knowledge as a desire, and as a regulative aim.

These misdirections of fit are at once the source of the doxastic account's considerable virtues, and also of its ultimate failure, or so I shall suggest. They make intention a sort of faith; and, even if they did not, they would make intention as bad as faith—as difficult to achieve, and as dubious, epistemologically speaking. They deserve some brief preliminary comment.

2. Misdirections of fit: wishful and self-fulfilling belief

Taking wishful thinking first, it is worth distinguishing two forms. (i) I may believe that p because *I desire that p be true*. I desire to leap across the chasm, so I believe I will leap across the chasm. I desire that my cancer will be cured, and so I believe that my cancer will be cured. I desire that God exists, so I believe that God exists. (ii) I may believe that p because *I desire that I believe that p* . Wishing to avoid risk of damnation, and wagering as Pascal wagered, I desire to *believe* that God exists; so I believe that God exists. These two forms may also be combined, as when—(i + ii) I believe that p because *I desire that p be true, and I believe that believing p will make p true*. I desire to leap across the chasm, and believe that believing I shall leap across will enable me to leap across; so I believe I shall leap across. I desire that my cancer will be cured, and believe that believing my cancer will be cured will help cure it; so I believe my cancer will be cured. If (i) presents naive wishful thinking, (i + ii) presents sophisticated wishful thinking, assisted by faith in the efficacy of belief itself.⁸

⁸Paralleling this phenomenon of *desire-driven belief*, one might identify *belief-driven desire* of these two corresponding varieties: (a) I desire that p because *I believe that p is true*. What would be envisaged here is a stoical matching of desire to what the world is believed to offer. I believe I am destined to be a housewife, so being a housewife is what I desire. (b) I desire that p because *I believe that I desire that p* . I am told, by credible authority, that all Australians love to watch cricket. Believing I am Australian, I believe I will love

Wishful thinking presents a puzzle, since it is widely thought by philosophers that you cannot, just like that, believe something because you want to believe it, or because it would be useful to believe it. *Acting* like a theist is something you might, all of a sudden, come to do, offered suitable incentives (the knife of the Inquisitor at your throat).

Believing God exists is not something you might, all of a sudden, come to do, whatever the incentives. The reasons for this have been linked to belief's proper direction of fit. As Bernard Williams says,

it is not a contingent fact that I cannot bring it about, just like that, that I believe something...Why is this? One reason is connected with the characteristic of beliefs that they aim at truth. If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover, I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness I could will to acquire a 'belief' irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that before the event I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality.⁹

Fear of hell provides Pascal, or his contemporary successor, with pragmatic reason for belief in God, but he cannot believe it, just like that. He may, of course, *do* something, just like that (go to church, say his prayers, announce his so-called 'decision for Christ' at the altar), actions which may lead to useful belief. Wishful thinking is thought to need assistance from a blindness or forgetfulness at odds with the 'full consciousness'

Williams mentioned. The associated principle is sometimes cast as a point about the ethics of belief, a normative constraint—we *ought not* to indulge in wishful belief. This is the target James had in mind when he complained of those who 'feel it would be *sinful* to

to watch cricket. As a result, I come to love to watch cricket. This contrast is discussed in joint work by Richard Holton and Langton, in progress.

⁹Bernard Williams, 'Deciding to Believe', in *Problems of the Self* (1973), 136-51; 148. Implications of this for feminist critique of reason are drawn in Langton, 'Beyond a Pragmatic Critique of Reason', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993), 364-84, where I argue that pragmatic critique of 'male' cognitive strategies—for example, that they serve men's interests and hurt those of women—fails adequately to explain them, or damn them. (Reprinted in Langton, *Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), forthcoming.)

act upon an assumption unverified by previous experience'. Williams casts the principle as a constitutive constraint on belief: we *cannot* wishfully believe, or at least, we cannot wishfully believe 'in full consciousness'. If faith is wishful belief, and wishful belief impossible, little wonder faith is listed by St. Paul as a special gift, along with the power to work miracles.¹⁰ It would be peculiar, though, if we had to place intention on the same list.

We turn from wishful to self-fulfilling beliefs, that 'class of truths of whose reality belief is a factor as well as a confessor', to borrow James' phrase. With this misdirection of fit, the world accommodates itself to fit belief, instead of belief accommodating itself to fit the world. Among self-fulfilling beliefs are some wishful beliefs, including the cases which occupied James. My desire-driven belief that I am able to leap across the chasm may enable me to leap across the chasm. My desire-driven belief that my cancer will be cured may cure my cancer. Belief may be self-fulfilling independently of the workings of desire: my belief in my chasm-leaping ability, my belief in a happy cancer prognosis, may stem from misleading evidence rather than desire, and, if I am lucky, be equally self-fulfilling. For the leaper and the cancer patient, the world that accommodates itself to fit belief is the immediate psychological or physiological world of the believer; but belief's self-fulfillment may stretch further afield. Here is James again:

Do you like me or not?...Whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation. The previous faith on my part in your liking's existence is in such cases what makes your liking come.

¹⁰1 Corinthians 12: 9-10. Thanks to my mother, Valda Langton, for reminder of the reference.

How many women's hearts are vanquished by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they must love him! he will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot. The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence; and so it is in innumerable cases of other sorts.

Who gains promotions, boons, appointments, but the man in whose life they are seen to play the part of live hypotheses, who...takes risks for them in advance? His faith acts on the powers above him as a claim, and creates its own verification.¹¹

A whole train of passengers...will be looted by a few highwaymen, simply because the latter can count on one another, while each passenger fears that if he makes a movement of resistance, he will be shot before any one else backs him up. If we believed that the whole car-full would rise at once with us, we should each severally rise, and train-robbing would never even be attempted. There are then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.

Less sanguine examples from the social domain might include a teacher's belief that a child will be stupid, which helps to make the child stupid; and a domineering man's belief that a woman will be submissive, which helps to make her submissive. These latter cases illustrate the way belief's self-fulfilment might have a moral and political dimension—might even be, as I have elsewhere argued, a central feature of objectification, though that is not my topic here.¹² Still further afield is the far-fetched hypothesis countenanced by James, that belief in God may be self-fulfilling:

[W]ill our faith in the unseen world...verify itself? Who knows? ...I confess that I do not see why the very existence of an invisible world may not in part depend on the personal response which any one of us may make to the religious appeal. God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this.¹³

¹¹James, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Will to Believe*, 23-4.

¹² See e.g. Langton, 'Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification', in *Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. Jennifer Hornsby and Miranda Fricker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹³ James, *The Will to Believe*, 61.

(This, if taken seriously, makes James' theism an instance of (i + ii), above.) These various examples are all, I take it, causally self-fulfilling. Non-causally self-fulfilling beliefs might include the classic Cartesian examples: 'I am thinking' and such; we shall, for present purposes, be ignoring those.

Now self-fulfilment is thought to have implications for the aforementioned puzzle about wishful thinking. While philosophers may wonder about the possibility, or rationality, of believing something 'just like that', given pragmatic incentives, their worries are groundless when it comes to wishful belief that is also self-fulfilling belief—so James argues. Wishful belief is no miracle, and it is no sin:

we may logically, legitimately, and inexpugnably believe what we desire [when] the belief creates its verification. The thought becomes literally father to the fact, as the wish was father to the thought.¹⁴

He castigates those who question the rationality of self-fulfilling faith:

*[W]here faith in a fact can help create the fact, that would be an insane logic which should say that faith running ahead of scientific evidence is the 'lowest kind of immorality' into which a thinking being can fall.*¹⁵

In the context of intention rather than faith, Velleman argues likewise that wishful belief is not only possible but rational, when self-fulfilling. He says in response to Williams:

If a person thinks of his beliefs as self-fulfilling, then he will see that aligning them with his wishes won't entail taking them out of alignment with the truth, for the simple reason that the truth will take care of aligning itself with them. He can therefore think of himself both as believing what he likes and as believing only what's true, because what's true depends on what he believes... Because self-

¹⁴ James, *The Will to Believe*, 103. Self-verifying belief is not quite the same as self-fulfilling belief—belief that produces evidence for itself might not be belief that fulfils itself—but the talk of 'fact' shows that what James has in mind here is belief that is self-verifying because it is self-fulfilling. Mind you, such a contrast will be relevant to his example of theism, given the contrast between theistic belief supplying subsequent evidence for itself, and making itself true (the latter being a considerably stranger doctrine than the former).

¹⁵ James, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Will to Believe*, 25.

fulfilling beliefs cause their own truth, instead of being caused by it, they remain reliably connected to the truth even if they are determined by what the subject wants to believe, and so they afford an opportunity for deliberate wishful thinking.¹⁶

Note that if it is supposed to be a matter of what the believer can ‘think of himself’, this argument should apply, not to beliefs that *are* self-fulfilling, but to beliefs that are *believed to be* self-fulfilling. Here we merely record the latter worry for later attention.

This talk of truth and the direction of causation brings us to a central feature of the doxastic account, which, if it works, achieves something far more ambitious than just an answer to the puzzle about how one can believe what one wants to believe. Intention, recall,

(i) represents as true that we are going to do something;... (ii) it aims therein to represent something that really is true; and...(iii) it causes the truth of what it represents.¹⁷

Velleman here draws apart three features each of which have been taken by other philosophers to characterize the intuitive notion of direction of fit: whether a state represents something as true; whether it aims at truth; and whether it is caused by or causes the truth of what it represents.¹⁸ Intention, as he describes it, involves no *misdirections* of fit; it does have an unusual combination of direction of fit-like features, which is what allows it to be both wishful, and truth-aiming. Our chief interest is in the second and third features.¹⁹ The second he calls a ‘constitutive aim’, the aim to represent

¹⁶ Velleman, *Practical Reflection*, 129

¹⁷ Velleman, *Practical Reason*, 26; roman numerals added.

¹⁸ For a survey of a range of attempts to identify what ‘direction of fit’ consists in, together with an original alternative proposal, see Lloyd Humberstone, “Direction of Fit”, *Mind* 101 (1992), 59-83; a paper to which I owe a great deal.

¹⁹ For Velleman only the first of the three listed features deserves the name ‘direction of fit’, which he uses in a narrow sense for the distinction between representing something *as* true and representing something as *to be made* true. This feature distinguishes beliefs *and* imaginings, together, from desires.

something as true only if it is true.²⁰ The third he calls ‘direction of guidance’, and it concerns the direction of causation: whether the state *causes*, or *is caused by* the truth of what it represents—or, to supply a Kantian label he does not use, whether the state in question is ‘spontaneous’ or ‘receptive’.

Intention thus has two features which earn it the name of belief: it represents a proposition as true, and it aims at the truth. The third feature supplies a ‘direction of guidance’ which is not belief-like: it is practical, and more traditionally associated with desire rather than belief. Velleman concedes there is a temptation confine practicality to desire: to suppose that if a mental state is cognitive, representing how things are, it must be caused by how they are, or (borrowing the Kantian label) it must be receptive; to assume correspondingly that if the mental state causes what it represents, it must be representing how things *are to be*, and therefore it must be spontaneous, conative rather than cognitive; and to conclude belief cannot be practical. This temptation, he says, must be resisted:

when I make a choice, a question is resolved in the world by being resolved in my mind. That I am going to do something is made true by my representing it as true. So choice has the same direction of fit as belief but the same direction of guidance as desire: it is a case of practical cognition.²¹

While Humeans allege that a state cannot have two directions of fit, Velleman’s distinctions make space for a state which does, effectively, have two directions of fit; or better (putting the point in his terms), intention has a ‘constitutive aim’ that is

²⁰This distinguishes beliefs from imaginings, as well as from desires. When you imagine something, you represent something as true without aiming to represent something that really is true; when you believe something you aim to represent it as true only if it really is true.

²¹ *Practical Reason*, p. 25.

cognitive—it aims at truth—and a ‘direction of guidance’ that is conative—it causes its truth. That is how intention can be ‘practical cognition’.

We return now to the question of what faith might have to do with intention, given a doxastic account of intention.

3. Is intention a sort of faith?

Faith, as I am understanding it, is not merely predictive belief. Distinguishing intention and merely predictive belief is easy. The difference between merely predictive belief and intention lies in the direction of guidance. Merely predictive belief will be like an intention in representing as true that I am going to do something, and in aiming therein to represent something that really is true; but merely predictive belief, unlike an intention, does not cause the truth of what it represents. A merely predictive belief is receptive, not spontaneous. (Note that, contrary to what Velleman’s dichotomy suggests, merely predictive belief is not receptive in virtue of being caused by the truth *of what it represents*, since what it represents is in the future; it is presumably receptive in virtue of being caused by the truth of propositions about the present or past that are evidence for the future.) Intention diverges from predictive belief about what one will do in being spontaneous—uncaused by what it represents—and by being self-fulfilling—causing the truth of what it represents. Intention is a wishful, spontaneous, self-fulfilling belief about what one will do.

When it comes to faith, distinguishing faith from intention is less easy. Faith so far matches intention, point for point: faith shares intention’s belief-like features—the leaper represents as true that he is able to leap the chasm, and he aims to represent it as

true only if it is true. Moreover, faith shares intention's direction of guidance, for it causes its truth: the leaper's faith enables him to leap the chasm. This might tempt us to think that what James has described simply *is* the climber's intention to leap across the chasm. If Velleman were right, that would seem an appropriate conclusion.

That would be a surprising outcome: for James is surely describing something quite different to the mere intention to leap across. He is describing a process of wishful confidence building, that is lucky in its outcome. To be sure, the leaper also *intends* to leap across, on anybody's story, and the presence of this intention—however understood—complicates the example. But the intention is not the same thing as this wishful, and fortunate, confidence building manoeuvre. To bring that out, consider the difference between this climber and the experienced climber who simply leaps across, without psychic drama, when he intends to do so. In both cases we have intention: each climber has, on Velleman's hypothesis, a motivated belief whose content is 'I shall leap across', and it is a belief that fulfils itself; but the James example supplies something extra, in addition to the intention. The experienced climber has intention; the inexperienced climber has intention *and faith*. The faith is surely not the same thing as the intention. This gives us some preliminary reasons for doubting the doxastic account of intention, at least as so far described.

In the example just considered, there is intention without faith. There can equally be faith without intention. The faith which James describes that wins friends, wins love, and wins promotions, may work without thereby being an intention to win friends, win love, and win promotion. (Indeed, it will work better if it is no part of an intentional strategy.) My wishful, self-fulfilling belief that you will be friendly is not *ipso facto* my

intention that you will be friendly, still less (to take James' far-fetched example) is my wishful, self-fulfilling belief that God exists is my intention that God exists.

Intuitively then, faith and intention are not the same. How are they to be distinguished, given the doxastic account of intention? Well, there are some more resources to draw upon.

In the first place, intention is supposed to be a wishful, self-fulfilling belief about *my own future action*: so your friendliness, my employer's rewarding actions, and God's existence do not obviously qualify. (But they might—perhaps the scope of one's own action reaches further than one thought, and in any case how else am I to identify what is my action if not via the notion of my intention?) Leaving aside this complex issue, it leaves untouched the basic hunch that the climber's faith in his future leap is indeed a belief about his future action; but it is not identical with his intention to act.

In the second place, intention is supposed to be a wishful, self-fulfilling belief that *consciously represents itself as self-fulfilling*. Intentions, recall, are 'self-fulfilling expectations that are motivated by a desire for their fulfillment and *that represent themselves as such*'. This constraint distinguishes intention from the faith of the naive wishful thinker—the leaper whose faith enables him to leap across, though he does not know it. But consider now a sophisticated leaper, who has read his William James and *knows* that faith will enable him to leap. The sophisticate has a wishful, self-fulfilling belief that does indeed consciously represent itself as self-fulfilling. But nonetheless that belief is, surely, not his intention.

In the third place, intention, unlike faith, is supposed to be a belief that fulfils itself via a mechanism involving an *aim for self-knowledge*. Here we come to the most

daring part of Velleman's proposal, and a feature which promises at last to distinguish intention from faith. How does faith fulfil itself? We do not know, and it would presumably take a team of psychologists (or theologians) to tell us. How does intention fulfil itself—why is it that when I intend something, I act on that intention, making true the belief that I will do it? My belief that I *will* do something comes true because *I want to know what I am doing*, or (better) because I *aim to know what I am doing*. On this view, self-knowledge is a constitutive aim of action, and this is what drives intention's direction of guidance. The shopper's belief that he will buy butter makes him put the butter in his basket because, roughly, he wants (or aims for) his belief to be true.

This want or aim is, Velleman concedes, not usually our end in view, consciously represented in our practical reasoning. The shopper may place butter in his basket without sparing a thought to the question of whether that is what he believed he would do, and without sparing a thought to the question of whether he wants to do what he believes he will do. The push towards self-knowledge is a sub-agential aim, comparable to the aim of avoiding pain in our movements about the world, likewise an aim which regulates behaviour without (usually) being an end. When the shopper places butter in his basket, what happens is this: he antecedently believes he is going to place butter in his basket, and his belief aims to be true; given his aim to know what he is doing, action makes his belief true. On Velleman's account, intention is not only a species of self-fulfilling belief, but a species of self-fulfilling belief that (when successful) counts as *knowledge*, and the achievement of this knowledge is—wittingly or otherwise—the aim of our intended actions.

What are we to make of this special mechanism? It does present a promising means of distinguishing faith from intention, on the doxastic account: for when my faith is self-fulfilling it is not mediated by an aim to know what I am doing. At least, I don't *think* it is mediated that way. But then it is news to me that my intention's self-fulfillment is mediated by an aim to know what I am doing. Perhaps a psychologist, or a philosopher, could convince me that the aim for self-knowledge is, in many cases, what drives faith as well. That would be an interesting surprise, but no more of an interesting surprise than the revelation that an aim for self-knowledge is what drives intention. Suppose a psychologist *were* to deliver us the news, after careful research, that the climber's faith was so mediated: he leapt across because he wanted his belief about himself to be self-knowledge. Would we then think of the climber's faith as his intention? Surely not—though I have no theory to back up this basic intuition. Supplying this extra ingredient does not yet add up to intention: faith mediated by a drive for self-knowledge is still just faith. But the doxastic account must call this faith intention. It must, effectively, concede that intention is a sort of faith.

4. Is intention as bad as faith?

The doxastic account effectively makes intention a sort of faith; it lacks resources adequately to distinguish intention from faith, or so I have argued. Suppose my argument is mistaken. It may nonetheless be that intention resembles faith closely enough that the pitfalls of faith are also the pitfalls of intention—that there are problems posed both by wishfulness, and by self-fulfilment.

What problems? After all, if wishfulness is supposed to be the problem, isn't self-fulfilment supposed to be the solution? That was certainly the idea. Faith is no miracle, and no sin, according to James: being self-fulfilling allows and entitles faith to be wishful, and still aim at truth. Intention, likewise, is no miracle, and no sin, for the same reason: being self-fulfilling allows and entitles intention to be wishful, and still aim at truth. Self-fulfilment is the key to the possibility, and epistemological laudability, of these attitudes—so James and Velleman argue, and we have been taking their word for it. But it is time to look at that idea more critically.

Let us consider whether faith can indeed be adopted directly, 'in full consciousness', when self-fulfilling. Pascal's wishful belief is *not* adopted directly, 'just like that', but cultivated gradually out of new habits and behaviour, assisted, presumably, by forgetfulness and inattention to earlier strategic thinking—but then Pascal did not suppose faith in God was self-fulfilling. Imagine instead a wishful theist who thought as James apparently thought, that God's very *existence* is a result of belief. Never mind that the point of Pascal's wager disappears (no threat of hell after all, if I don't believe in an avenging God!). Would the believer, in these circumstances, be able to believe in God, 'just like that'? The answer should be yes, if self-fulfilling beliefs 'cause their own truth, instead of being caused by it', as Velleman says, and therefore 'afford an opportunity for deliberate wishful thinking'. Ah, you say, but Velleman is here speaking of *truly* self-fulfilling belief: he is not speaking of belief that is merely *believed* self-fulfilling, on the basis of—not to put too fine a point on it—lunatic theology.

Well, let's see. Merely *being* self-fulfilling is never going to be enough to make wishful belief possible, 'in full consciousness'. To an agent ignorant of their potential

self-fulfilment, such beliefs will come no more easily than any others. The argument against Williams implies, though this is not made explicit, that what matters is *believed* self-fulfilment, not self-fulfilment—and here we return to the worry recorded earlier. It is *believed* self-fulfilment, not self-fulfilment, that makes deliberate wishful thinking possible, if anything does:

If a person *thinks of his beliefs as self-fulfilling*, then he will see that aligning them with his wishes won't entail taking them out of alignment with the truth, for the simple reason that the truth will take care of aligning itself with them. He can therefore *think of himself* both as believing what he likes and as believing only what's true, because what's true depends on what he believes. (emphasis added).

Being self-fulfilling won't achieve this; being *thought* self-fulfilling just might. So if Velleman is right, the lunatic theist should indeed be able to wishfully believe in God *just like that*, 'in full consciousness', without recourse to Pascal's method of religious habit and inattention. Since he thinks of his belief in God as self-fulfilling, he ought to see that aligning them with his wishes won't entail taking them out of alignment with the truth.

Can he believe in God, just like that? Surely not. The lunatic theist would be no better equipped than Pascal in the task of working up belief. I conclude that, contrary to the implicit views of James and Velleman, being *believed* self-fulfilling is not enough to make wishful belief possible, 'in full consciousness'. Faith would still, in these circumstances, be more or less a miracle. So too, I suggest, would intention, and for the same reason. The constitutive constraint on belief identified by Williams is not adequately met either by self-fulfilment, or by believed self-fulfilment.²² Wishfulness creates a problem which self-fulfilment, believed or actual, does not adequately solve.

²² So much for possibility: what of rationality? Here it may depend whether one has an internalist or externalist understanding of what makes belief rational. If his religious belief is not *in fact* 'reliably connected to the truth', it is, though possible, irrational, by externalist standards. But if instead what matters is internal to the mind, the belief may be not only possible but rational. To be sure, it rests on a false belief

What of the normative constraint on belief? For James, it is no epistemological sin to wishfully believe, when belief is self-fulfilling: belief, though wishful, can still aim at truth, and can even count as knowledge.²³ The same goes for intention, on the doxastic account: belief can, though wishful, still aim at truth, and count as *knowledge*. How else could it be a drive for self-knowledge which makes one fulfil one's intention? When successful, intention is a true belief about one's future action, and non-accidentally true: it is reliably connected with the truth, because it is self-fulfilling. So it is knowledge.

Now faith has a number of features which may undermine its claim to be knowledge, including its wishful origins, but I wish to consider the possibility that *self-fulfillingness* may undermine faith's claim to knowledge. What applies to faith will then extend, I think, to intention, doxastically understood. Knowledge is thought to require appropriate direction of fit—not merely truth, justification, and non-accidentality. For those who think non-accidentality will do the job, Lloyd Humberstone supplies the following story as counterexample:

Consider the case of a subject, S, whose beliefs about the future are monitored by a supernatural being who, taking (for whatever reason) a special interest in minimizing falsity amongst S's beliefs, intervenes in the course of history so as to make these future-oriented beliefs of S true. Note that we do not suppose that S has the slightest inkling that this is going on. It does not seem correct to say that S, who believes, for example, that Islam will be the state religion of a United Europe by the year 2100, knows this to be the case, even though it is not at all accidental that S's belief here is true. The trouble is that the non-accidentality pertains to a matching of the world to S's mental state rather than in the converse direction that befits a thetic attitude.²⁴

that belief in God is self-fulfilling (which in turn may have an irrational source): but the wishful belief-forming process is itself a rational one, since it can be regarded as aiming at the truth.

²³ James, 'The Will to Believe', 12. He thought that when we have faith, we know, but we do not know that we know.

²⁴ Humberstone, 'Direction of Fit', 62.

The beliefs of this believer are not wishful, nor is he aware of his epistemological good fortune: yet, saliently, his beliefs are reliably self-fulfilling, reliably rendered true by his divine guardian. This agent presents a vivid example of faith in a fact helping to create a fact, in James' terms; his beliefs have, in Velleman's terms, a practical direction of guidance, since they cause the truth of what they represent, albeit by a rather unusual mechanism. He believes that Islam will be the religion of a United Europe by the year 2100, his belief is no accident—but it is not knowledge, or so Humberstone assumes, and I for present purposes agree. Why does it fail, as knowledge? Because of its anomalous direction of fit, its anomalous direction of guidance: his belief has not come to fit the world, but the world, rather, has come to fit his belief. Having a reliable connection to the truth is just not good enough.

Suppose we alter the example to make it, roughly, faith. The agent, out of religious devotion, *wishfully* believes that Islam will be the religion of a United Europe. That, I presume, would not improve its epistemological standing: so faith, even though self-fulfilling, would not be knowledge. Suppose we further alter the example to make it, roughly, intention, doxastically understood. We add Velleman's conditions: the agent is *aware* of his epistemic good fortune, and can *represent* his beliefs as self-fulfilling; we narrow down the scope of his beliefs to the domain of his own future action, so instead of thinking about Europe in a hundred years, he thinks, predictively, about his own doings, in a day's time. I presume these conditions do not, saliently, improve the beliefs'

epistemological standing, though this may take more argument. So intention, even though self-fulfilling, would not be knowledge either.²⁵

Summing up then, it seems that faith, even if self-fulfilling, or believed to be self-fulfilling, can probably not be achieved ‘just like that’ — so neither can intention, doxastically understood. Construed as ‘deliberate wishful thinking’, intention would be as impossible as faith. Moreover, faith, even if self-fulfilling, is not knowledge — so neither is intention, doxastically understood. We concluded before that the doxastic account makes intention a sort of faith. We conclude here that, in any case, it makes intention as bad as faith. James hoped for a faith achievable without miracle, and without epistemological sin. Velleman hopes the same, effectively, for intention. I fear such hopes are forlorn.

²⁵ This is not supposed to be a merely terminological point about how the label ‘knowledge’ is to be used. Observe too that even if one were to allow intention to count as knowledge of what one will do, it would be a knowledge so deeply entwined with error it is not obvious that it deserves the name (intellectualist rhetoric notwithstanding). When I intend to buy butter, I believe I will buy butter, and my belief makes me buy butter—given my background aim of *knowing what I am doing*. That is, in some sense, why I do it. But if asked, I will surely deny that is why I do it. If Velleman is right, my answer shows that I am profoundly in error. Velleman does not pretend that this is what we—consciously, explicitly—think we are up to when we act on our intentions. He allows that the background aim for self-knowledge is regulative, comparable to the background aim of avoiding pain when moving about, something that guides what we do without presenting itself as an explicit goal. He allows that we may be ignorant of our actions’ constitutive aim. But ignorance understates the point. Ignorance is not mistake. If asked, ‘in moving about like that, were you aiming to avoid hurting yourself?’, a reflective response might well be ‘yes, perhaps so—I hadn’t realized’. If asked, ‘in putting the butter in the basket, were you aiming to know what you are doing?’ a reflective response is likely to be a simple no. The account implies that here we have mistake, and not just ignorance. The aim ascribed to us is not simply sub-agential, unconscious: it is actually at odds with what we believe we believe we are up to. So whenever I intend to do something, I am making a cognitive mistake. This, if nothing else, is a strange outcome for so vividly rationalistic an account of intention.