

Overeating, Obesity, and Weakness of the Will

by

Jennifer Heidrun Sommers
B.A., University of Victoria, 2011

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Philosophy

© Jennifer Heidrun Sommers, 2015
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Overeating, Obesity, and Weakness of the Will

By

Jennifer Heidrun Sommers
B.A., University of Victoria, 2011

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Cindy Holder, Supervisor
(Department of Philosophy)

Dr. Scott Woodcock, Departmental Member
(Department of Philosophy)

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Cindy Holder, Supervisor
(Department of Philosophy)

Dr. Scott Woodcock, Departmental Member
(Department of Philosophy)

ABSTRACT

The philosophical literature on akrasia and/or weakness of the will tends to focus on individual actions, removed from their wider socio-political context. This is problematic because actions, when removed from their wider context, can seem absurd or irrational when they may, in fact, be completely rational or, at least, coherent. Much of akrasia's apparent mystery or absurdity is eliminated when people's behaviours are considered within their cultural and political context. I apply theories from the social and behavioural sciences to a particular behaviour in order to show where the philosophical literature on akrasia and/or weakness of the will is insightful and where it is lacking. The problem used as the basis for my analysis is obesity caused by overeating. On the whole, I conclude that our intuitions about agency are unreliable, that we may have good reasons to overeat and/or neglect our health, and that willpower is, to some degree, a matter of luck.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| TITLE PAGE..... | i |
| SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE..... | ii |
| ABSTRACT..... | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | iv |
| LIST OF TABLES..... | vi |
| PREFACE..... | vii |
| CHAPTER ONE: § 1: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| § 2: AKRASIA, VIRTUE, AND MORALITY..... | 4 |
| § 3: AKRASIA AND INTUITIONS ABOUT ACTION..... | 6 |
| § 4: AKRASIA AND FORMAL LOGIC..... | 8 |
| CHAPTER TWO: BOURDIEU'S HABITUS..... | 11 |
| § 2: HABITUS AND AKRASIA..... | 22 |
| CHAPTER THREE: AKRASIA AS RATIONAL BEHAVIOUR, INTRODUCTION..... | 26 |
| § 2: THE PHILOSOPHICAL CASE FOR AKRASIA AS RATIONAL ACTION..... | 27 |
| § 3: REASONS FOR BEING UNHEALTHY..... | 29 |
| § 4: CONCLUSION..... | 38 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: CONFOUNDING FACTORS..... | 40 |
| § 2: MEANING, POWER, AND AGENCY..... | 41 |
| § 3: FREEDOM, ADDICTION, AKRASIA, AND COMPULSION: WHEN AND HOW ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE?..... | 45 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND ITS ROLE IN BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION..... | 50 |

| | |
|---|----|
| § 1: WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS CHAPTER..... | 50 |
| § 2: INTRODUCTION..... | 50 |
| § 3: STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING THE HYPERBOLIC CURVE TO AN EXPONENTIAL CURVE..... | 55 |
| § 4: BELIEFS AND DIET..... | 59 |
| § 5: THE NICHOMACHEAN ETHICS AND PICOECONOMICS..... | 60 |
| § 6: BRIGHT LINES AND COMPULSIONS..... | 61 |
| § 7: CONCLUSIONS..... | 63 |
| WORKS CITED..... | 67 |

LIST OF TABLES

| <i>Table</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 Homosexuality and Agency..... | 41 |

Preface

I undertook this research project because I wanted to answer some questions which had been bothering me for a long time. I've gained a lot of weight in recent years. I understand what precipitated this change: I was getting older and slowing down, I no longer worked a physical job, and I had sustained a serious and debilitating back injury which affected my ability to move as well as my mental state. But, while I know why I gained the weight, I found that even once my health improved and my pain had subsided, I could not seem to take it off again. Prior to this change, I had sustained a healthy weight for years in spite of a great love of food and an inherited tendency to run to fat. I wanted to know why I could no longer abide by my resolution to stick to my diet. I had become the paradigmatic akratic: I knew that I ought to lose weight by sticking to a diet. I judged that, all things considered, this was the best thing to do. Yet I failed to act consistently on this judgment.

In addition to this, I had noticed that people's reactions to fat¹ people in North America often consist in a combination of moral panic and deep, visceral hatred. I found this mystifying. Nobody's perfect, and it made no sense to me that overweight and obese people should be judged so harshly. So I wanted to do two things: (1) I wanted to look deeply at the problem of akrasia and obesity and shed light on the factors which make it possible for people to act against their considered judgments that they ought to lose weight. And, (2) I wanted to understand the factors that cause people to morally judge overweight and obese people. I felt that there was a connection between these things—that weakness of will which was 'written on the body' so to speak, would garner harsh moral judgments.

I skirted this subject matter for years by writing about drug addiction. I was sympathetic with drug addicts because I knew what it was like to succumb to urges in spite of one's resolutions and in spite of social sanctions. But I didn't want to come right out and write about what really concerned me because it is considered shameful to be fat. It was as if writing about it explicitly would shine a spotlight on me. It was the academic equivalent of standing in front of a crowd and yelling “Hey, I'm fat!” It was embarrassing. But it's not as if my status as a fat person is some kind of secret. I don't have magic fat camouflage. So I decided to accept the embarrassment and write about what interests me.

In an effort to better understand weakness of will, I took several courses which covered the philosophical literature on akrasia. But I was often really bothered by the literature. I felt that it was deeply flawed because it relied too much on introspection and intuition and not enough on empirical data from other disciplines such as psychology, social science, neuroscience, and so on. Thus, this project was also motivated by a deep desire to respond to the philosophical literature on akrasia. In what follows, I will apply research from the sciences, particularly social science, to the literature on akrasia.

1 I don't consider the word "fat" a pejorative. Or, more specifically, I don't consider it any more or less disparaging than "overweight." In fact, "fat" is merely an inoffensive adjective to me, while "overweight" implies that something is wrong and needs to be changed. Though it is true that the two words have different "feels" or effects, the fact that people are uncomfortable with the word "fat" says something about how people feel about fat and nothing about the word. "Overweight" or "obese" are considered acceptable terms because they have medical overtones and people think science and medicine are morally neutral, correct conceptual frameworks. So I use the word, "fat," to describe myself. That being said, I will often use the terms "overweight" and "obese" throughout this thesis because they are less distracting, more technical terms that are correlated with specific BMIs.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce the topic of akrasia in two ways: Firstly, I will briefly discuss the problem of obesity caused by overeating and how it is an example of akratic behaviour. Secondly, I will discuss problems and concerns I have with some of the philosophical literature on akrasia. The problems I have with some of the philosophical literature on akrasia are: (1) It characterizes akrasia as a problem for action theory and not as a problem for morality. While, in one way this is true, I will present reasons for believing that this is problematic; (2) It relies too much on intuition and introspection. Many of our intuitions about agency are probably mistaken. We are not transparent to ourselves and conceptions of agency based upon introspection are not a sound basis for any theory of action; (3) The paradox of akrasia cannot be resolved through the use of formal logic, though a logical construction of the problem may help us to identify the problem's origins.

Akrasia, or weak-willed action, is “free, intentional action contrary to the agent's better judgment” (Stroud 11).² Donald Davidson's highly influential paper on the possibility of akratic action provides an even more precise definition:

In doing x an agent acts incontinently if and only if: (a) the agent does x intentionally; (b) the agent believes there is an alternative action y open to him; and (c) the agent judges that, all things considered, it would be better to do y than to do x . (72)

Akrasia has often been seen as a mystery or a paradox as is shown in Davidson's formulation of the problem:

P1-If an agent wants to do x more than he wants to do y and he believes himself free to do either x or y , then he will intentionally do x if he does either x or y intentionally...
 P2-If an agent judges that it would be better to do x than to do y , then he wants to do x more than he wants to do y ...
 P3-There are incontinent actions. (73)

In the above formulation, if P1 and P2 are true, then P3 should not be possible. In response to this, Davidson very elegantly and ingeniously demonstrates how incontinent action is possible by arguing that there is a logical distinction between “relational, or *pf.* [*prima facie*], judgement[s]” and “unconditional judgement[s]” (Davidson 86; Stroud 10-19). In acting akratically, the agent acts against her all-things-considered (relational) judgment, a judgment which does not entail a commitment to a particular course of action. Yet, the problem remains, for it still seems true to many of us that we can form an unconditional judgment that x is the best course of action and still intentionally fail to do x (Stroud 19-20).

What I wish to undertake in this thesis is an analysis of a puzzling instantiation of an akratic behaviour and in so doing shed light on what makes akrasia possible. Weakness of the will is at times discussed using trivial or highly personal and idiosyncratic examples which belie its gravity. But akrasia can do serious harm both socially and individually. The problem of obesity caused by overeating is, arguably, a

² A different characterization of weak-willed action was posed by Richard Holton in 1999. This conception of weakness of will does not require that the agent act against his better judgment; instead, the agent acts against his intentions, or, more precisely, his resolutions. I will discuss this conception of weak-willed action in chapter five.

problem caused by weakness of the will, and this problem affects about one third of the North American population (“Adult”; Navaneelan and Janz). The success of our efforts to solve this problem depends upon an accurate understanding of agency. If much of the philosophical literature on akrasia misrepresents human agency, then this literature is doing us a disservice. In this thesis I will use the problem of obesity caused by overeating to demonstrate the ways in which the philosophical discourse on akrasia is insightful in some ways while inadequate in others.

Frequent overeating is a paradigmatic example of akratic action. It consists in acting against your best judgment that you ought to eat moderate portions of healthy foods. It is not done out of ignorance, for the most part. Most, if not all, of us have easy access to information regarding what sorts of foods are healthy and how much we ought to eat. Most newspapers and magazines have sections concerning health, and celebrities such as Dr. Oz and the hosts of *The Doctors* are watched by millions (Bruni). This is not to say that these people always give the best advice, but routine facts such as 'eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables,' and so on are common knowledge.⁴ Yet “[m]ore than one third of U.S. Adults (34.9%) are obese” and the number of overweight and obese Canadians, while fewer, is still large.⁵ This is a matter of concern given that “heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer” are all obesity-related conditions (“Adult”).⁶ In addition to the increased mortality and chronic, debilitating conditions associated with obesity, there is a great social stigma associated with obesity.

4 A systematic review of health interventions aimed at improving the overall health and fitness of children found that knowledge, itself, did not contribute to success, while programs which emphasized “skills and competencies” were more successful (Baker et al. 16).

5 Health Canada reports:

In 2013, 18.8% of Canadians aged 18 and older, roughly 4.9 million adults, reported height and weight that classified them as obese. The rate of obesity among men increased to 20.1% in 2013 from 18.7% in 2012, but was the same as the rate between 2009 and 2011. Among women, the rate of obesity in 2013 (17.4%) was about the same as in 2012.

The rate of adults who reported height and weight that classified them as overweight in 2013 was 41.9% for men and 27.7% for women. The percentage of men who were overweight was about the same as 2012, but is an increase from 40.2% in 2011. The rate among women has been stable since 2003.

When those who were classified as obese were combined with those who were overweight, 62.0% (8.1 million) of men and 45.1% (5.8 million) of women had an increased health risk because of excess weight. The combined rate of overweight and obese women has remained stable since 2009. For men the rate in 2013 was a significant increase from 2012. (“Overweight”)

6 We already enter into a larger problem here. Calling these conditions “obesity-related” shows that the causal pathways are unclear. Petr Skrabanek observes that

homosexuality is a risk factor for AIDS. Yet, clearly it is not homosexuality which causes the disease... In general, the study of risk factors and their detection in individuals does not bring us nearer to an understanding of causal mechanisms. More often than not, risk factors obscure rather than illuminate the path towards a proper understanding of cause” (163).

So, it is possible that obesity is a sign of a problem and not the problem itself.

Overweight and obese people are mocked, derided, and abused verbally. People in the upper percentiles of BMI often dread leaving their homes for fear of being abused by others and experience deep feelings of shame.⁷ On the surface, it makes no sense that so many of us should act against our own best interests in this way and suffer so dearly for it. And this is the problem of *akrasia*—that we should act against our considered judgments, even when we know that the consequences will be dire, even when we adamantly agree that we oughtn't behave this way.

One argument that is sometimes made is that we live in what's called an 'obesogenic' environment and people are simply being tested beyond their limits: It's in our nature to want to eat fattening foods, for this facilitated our survival in the past. One might argue at this point that there is no mystery, really, in this case. These arguments describe the tendency to overeat as originating in non-cognitive impulses rooted in our evolutionary history. They tell us why we might *want* to overeat, but these arguments do not explain why some of us cannot control this behaviour. People are moved regularly by base or 'natural' urges. We may have urges to pursue sexual liaisons which we ought not to pursue; we may experience murderous rages from time to time. These are strong, overwhelming feelings, yet most people manage to refrain from acting on these urges. Thus it is reasonable to ask why many of us cannot resist the urge to overeat when we can resist other, nearly overwhelming, urges. This can be countered with the argument that, while the basic characteristics of these examples are analogous, the urges to act violently or to have illicit affairs are not tied to the means, opportunities, and reinforcing messages that accompany food and eating. Junk food is cheap, cheaper than healthy food, and it is everywhere. Moreover, there are ads which feature tantalizing images of delicious foods all around us. Yet, while many people in North America are overweight or obese, many are not. Evolutionary and environmental theories regarding why some of us tend to overeat unhealthy foods do not explain why many people *do not* manifest these tendencies. So the problem is more complex and nuanced than a case of adaptive traits gone awry. The reasons which move us to act against our best judgments are varied and surprising. But, even when we begin with these theories about evolutionary and environmental factors which may cause us to behave akratically, we move in the right direction. For a big part of the mystery is dissolved by looking at the behaviour in its context. Whenever one describes actions taken at the level of the individual without looking at the broader context—and by this I mean social, cultural, historical, and political—so much information is lost. It is akin to a radical reductive materialism which might describe and explain PTSD or acute grief in terms of their neural correlates. While accurate, in one sense, such explanations are clearly lacking on the whole because they lack meaningful content. A strictly neurophysiological description of an acute personal crisis or chronic psychiatric disorder does not include the emotions and behaviours which make those experiences matters of concern to us. And to make the analogy explicit, neurophysiological activity also happens in a context. Events occurring outside of the individual interact with his or her central nervous system and a knowledge of these events is necessary in order to make sense of the neurophysiological activity. Similarly, the individual agent's behaviours can only be thoroughly understood by looking at his or her historical, political, cultural, and social situation.

The discourse on *akrasia* in the 20th and 21st century has often characterized the subject as primarily a problem for action theory, for the problem consists in acting against one's better judgment, even if that judgment is to act against some moral rule. The content of the judgments to which our actions fail to conform when we act incontinently is irrelevant on this view (Broadie 230). The mystery lies in the intuition that our all-things-considered judgments ought to guide our actions. That is, our intuitions tell us that evaluative judgments possess some special, action-guiding quality. The idea that this might not

7 See "Obesity, Stigma and Public Health Planning" by MacLean et al. for a discussion of this phenomenon and its consequences.

be the case, that some type of “extreme externalism” holds in which “deliberation about what it would be best to do has no closer relation to practical reasoning than, say, deliberation about what it would be chic to do” is counterintuitive (Stroud 9-10; Bratman 158-159). Generally, a solution to the problem of understanding akrasia is thought to lie in between the radical internalism of R.M. Hare, who argues that “[j]ust as sincere assent to a statement involves *believing* that statement, sincere assent to an imperative addressed to ourselves involves doing the thing in question,” and the “extreme externalism” described by Michael Bratman which gives evaluative judgments no special conative status (Stroud 10).⁸ But, in the following two sections I will argue that 1) Akrasia, in its day-to-day sense is a problem of morality, and 2) Intuition and introspection can help us to identify problems and puzzles, but they cannot tell us much about agency, per se.

Akrasia, Virtue, and Morality

While it is certainly true that we can conceptually reduce akrasia to its most basic elements so that it is, strictly speaking, only a problem for action theory, akrasia, in its day-to-day sense, is a moral problem. People who are weak-willed may be judged morally because their actions, or lack thereof, may be self-destructive or harmful to others. That is, the kinds of akratic actions which truly concern us are actions related to serious matters of duty to ourselves and others. Consider this example: If you decide that, all things considered, you should have a strawberry ice cream but then order chocolate at the last moment, even though you still think you should have ordered strawberry, this is puzzling and a matter of concern. This example is, strictly speaking, a depiction of agency gone awry *sans* moral content. No one is harmed, no serious duties to oneself or others are violated. Yet, even though this example is trivial and is unrelated to any moral concern, you would probably be quite disturbed if you had decided

8 The internalism and externalism to which I refer here is generally called 'Motivational Internalism/Externalism'. A motivational internalist, on this view, believes that the sincere belief or judgment, that you ought to ϕ , is intrinsically motivating, whereas the motivational externalist claims that such beliefs are not intrinsically motivating. While discourse surrounding this kind of internalism/externalism is most strongly associated with arguments concerning whether it is possible to be a true amoralist—that is, someone who truly believes that he or she has a moral duty to ϕ , yet feels unmotivated to do so—the literature on akrasia is concerned with how it is possible to believe that one ought to ϕ , be free to ϕ , and yet fail to do so.

Another type of internalism/externalism is 'Reasons Internalism/Externalism' which is primarily associated with Bernard Williams' essay, “Internal and External Reasons.” On this view, the reasons internalist believes that you have a reason to ϕ only if ϕ ing is part of your 'subjective motivational set' which consists in your personal reasons, desires, inclinations, goals, commitments, and so on. The reasons externalist believes that there can be reasons for you to act which are not part of your subjective motivational set. A commonly used example to illustrate this is suicide: a person who wishes to end her life has a reason to commit suicide, but there are some people, such as Kant, who would say that such a person has duty to refrain from committing suicide. That is, someone like Kant would say that this person has a reason not to kill herself, even if this reason is not part of her subjective motivational set.

Both of these theories are more complex and nuanced than this brief summary allows, but it should suffice. Throughout this thesis, I will distinguish the two theories by calling them by their respective names: Motivational Internalism/Externalism and Reasons Internalism/Externalism. It is more likely, on the whole, that I will make reference to the Reasons Internalism/Externalism associated with Williams because it is more relevant to my work.

to get one type of ice cream and then ordered another kind, in spite of your decision. This characterization of akrasia is disturbing because it depicts an agent acting for what appears to be no reason at all. The agent is out of control, his actions guided by some unknown or unconscious factors. In short, it is weird because few, if any, people have this sort of experience. This is not the sort of problem that troubles us when we think seriously about weakness of the will. Most ordinary people, bracketing those who have had the hemispheres of their brains split or who have certain brain injuries, do not make trivial decisions about things such as ice cream and then act against those decisions for no reason. Akrasia, for most people, consists in acting against judgments about what we *ought* to do. Thus I might judge that I ought to do more volunteer work, but slack off instead, or I might judge that I ought to refrain from eating meat, but eat meat anyway, or I might judge that I ought to eat less and exercise so that I'll live longer for the sake of myself and my loved ones, but succumb to my urge to lie around eating chips. In such cases of akrasia, the factors which move us to act against our best judgments are not experienced as mysterious or arbitrary. We succumb to appetites and desires of which we are aware; we just don't understand why.⁹

If we use the three basic moral theories as a framework, akrasia is, in part, a moral problem because (a) From the perspective of virtue ethics, a virtuous character requires self-control. An important aspect of human virtue consists in the capacity to moderate our urges, to act upon them in the right ways at the right times (Aristotle NE 1109a 24-29).¹⁰ From the standpoint of virtue theory, the capacity to control ourselves is an integral part of a good human life. (b) From a Kantian perspective, while hypothetical imperatives are not moral, the capacity to act on reasons, regardless of one's desires, enables us to fulfill our duties to others and to ourselves. And (c): From a consequentialist or utilitarian perspective, the best outcome and greatest utility, arguably, comes from a society formed of persons who are capable of acting on their considered judgments. Thus an agent or an agent's actions can be judged as vicious or immoral, when that agent acts akratically. Even though it is certainly possible for akratic actions to consist in either failures to violate moral rules or actions which are neither moral nor immoral, this does not demonstrate that akrasia is not a moral problem. It is true that some incidences of akrasia may involve trivial matters without significant consequences. Or there may be times in which an agent fails to perform some immoral act, such as murder, even though he or she thinks it the best thing to do, all

⁹ There are times when what we perceive as akratic action may not be true akrasia. It may be the case that when we succumb to our desires that doing so is what we truly prefer or what is truly best for us. We may, on some level, know that it is not really best that we ϕ , but we tell ourselves that we ought to because it is considered the right thing to do, socially or culturally. In such cases, it may not really be true akrasia because we only think that we're acting against our best judgments. I will discuss this phenomenon in chapters two and three.

¹⁰ In making this claim, I concur with Aristotle who says:

We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that ensues on acts; for the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent, and he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward. For moral excellence is concerned with pleasure and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education. (NE 1104b 4-13)

things considered. But, both of these types of cases are anomalies. Normal akratic action involves acting against judgments or principles upon which we ought to act. Failing to act on our considered judgments is distressing because we experience ourselves as lacking in integrity when we fail to abide by our own judgments and these failures can have serious consequences for ourselves and for others.

Akrasia and Intuitions About Action

Much of the literature on weakness of the will appeals to our intuitions. Philosophers who claim that weakness of will, as defined by Davidson, is possible, are partially motivated by their personal experiences. They, like many people, have experienced themselves intentionally acting against their own all-things-considered judgments, while also believing that they could have done otherwise. Thus, some arguments against R.M. Hare's strong version of internalism or Davidson's weaker form of internalism have been founded on these intuitions.¹¹ The author's experience does not act as the sole justification for the claim that weakness of the will is possible in these arguments. However, the intuition acts as a starting point for the discussion, a way of identifying the problem. And this is a normal feature of philosophical discourse, particularly moral theory, as seen in Trolley Experiments, and political theory, as seen in Rawls' Reflective Equilibrium. A good moral or political theory must, to some degree, be compatible with our moral intuitions and our "sense of justice", respectively, and these intuitions can be used as a foundation for building such theories (Rawls 281). However, it is simply not possible to develop an accurate theory of action or true account of weakness of the will with this methodology. While we can certainly identify a problem or a question by beginning with an intuition that some phenomenon seems puzzling or paradoxical, if the problem concerns facts about the world, and extends beyond the boundaries of human moral and political concerns, then we are not equipped to deal with it alone. That is, theories concerning the right and the good are human constructs. They are certainly grounded in facts about the world; they don't come from nowhere. But the machinations of human agency are not up to us and can be better understood through careful scientific observation. Introspection and anecdotal evidence are starting points from which we can identify problems and questions. But we need to include other resources, data from other disciplines, if we want answers.¹²

¹¹ A similar argument, albeit concerning willing in the context of addiction, is R. Jay Wallace's claim that addicts "behave in ways that are at least minimally voluntary," by acting intentionally and with an awareness of the consequences of their actions ("Addiction" 621). Wallace claims that addiction is a voluntary phenomenon because it is goal-oriented (626). He assumes that if an agent experiences him or herself as having certain goals and acting upon those goals, that such an agent acts voluntarily. But this is to assume that the phenomenology of action can provide us with true information about human agency (626).

¹² I am in agreement with Philip Kitcher's argument in favour of a philosophical methodology which incorporates data from other disciplines. Kitcher's primary concern is that philosophy remains relevant and contributes meaningfully to people's lives. He advocates for a philosophical practice which identifies social and political "tensions and difficulties" and engages with these problems by intelligently drawing from the broad body of knowledge available from a variety of disciplines. That is, he views philosophers as individuals who can perhaps specialize in the meta-analysis of available knowledge in order to address the live concerns of both philosophers and non-philosophers. He states:

Philosophy, so understood, is a synthetic discipline, one that reflects on and responds to the state of inquiry, to the state of a variety of human social practices, and to the felt needs of individual people to make sense of the world and their place in it. Philosophers are people whose broad engagement with the condition of their age enables them to facilitate individual reflection and social conversation. (254)

We cannot rely upon introspection and intuition when we talk about agency because our intuitions may be misleading. For example, people, on the whole, are intuitively dualists.¹³ This intuition of ourselves as minds or souls driving our bodies like homunculi in Cartesian theaters may result in a belief that we have more control over our behaviours than we do. A belief in mind-body dualism in which only the mind is active and the body is inert, senseless matter creates an illusion of control.¹⁴ Daniel Wegner compares our belief in our own causal agency to a belief in magic. Magic shows may involve hidden complex machinery, trap doors, mirrors, pulleys, and distractions which all contribute to the illusion that the magician has caused a woman to levitate or some object to disappear. Our tendency to perceive causal relationships when presented with certain sequences of events leads us to perceive the laws of nature being flouted by the magician. The phenomenon of agency is like that magic show. A multitude of complex, inscrutable, and imperceptible events contribute to our actions, and we associate our phenomenal willing or intending with our actions because it is, firstly, apparent to us, unlike our more hidden and complex machinations, and secondly, willing is, as Hume would say, normally in constant conjunction and contiguous with our actions. Wegner states:

The mind creates this continuous illusion because it *really doesn't know* what causes its actions ... The mind has a self-explanation mechanism that produces a roughly continuous sense that what is in consciousness is the cause of action—the phenomenal will—whereas in fact the mind actually cannot ever know itself well enough to be able to say what the causes of its actions are. (654)

Given the fact that we act against our considered judgments at times, judgments to which we sometimes commit ourselves through resolutions or personal rules, it does seem as if willing or intending is not always sufficient for action. This does not mean that there is no relationship between intending and action. The point to be taken from this is that people act for a multitude of reasons, some of which are not accessible to us, and it is unrealistic to assume that our machinations are always accessible, that we are transparent to ourselves. What I am saying is uncontroversial, though. It is entirely plausible that some of our actions are intentional, that they stem from conscious decisions based upon judgments, while other actions have different causes.¹⁵ But, our deepest desires and beliefs,

13 In “The Folk Psychology of Souls,” Jesse M. Bering observes that “[b]y stating that psychological states survive death, one is committing to a radical form of mind-body dualism. Yet this radicalism is especially common. In the United States alone, 95% of the population reportedly believes in life after death” (453).

14 Historically, the division of the physical from the mental helped to resolve the conflict between faith and reason by “giving the material world to the scientists and the mental world to the theologians” (Searle 14). A new notion of imposed natural laws, instead of immanent laws results from Descartes’ investigations (Oakley 438). The human body, animals, plants, and all other material things are not conscious, according to Descartes, and all order is imposed from without. The notion that an object’s or organism’s behaviour cannot be known through some inherent teleological purpose in the object or organism leads to empirical observation, which is the only way to gather information about the material world (436). The irony of this is that Descartes’ combination of methodological skepticism with preexisting religious beliefs led to a dualism which informed the methodologies of the physical sciences and greatly accelerated scientific progress (452). In contrast, the relegation of the mind to the church, combined with the attribution of mysterious qualities (indestructibility, indivisibility, non-extension) to mental phenomena by Descartes, may be responsible for the relative paucity of knowledge in the social sciences.

15 “For after all an action can be explained by all sorts of causes, as for instance (a) habit, (b) a

our reasons for acting, may not always be accessible to us.

When we assume that our intuitions are reliable in this respect, there can be negative consequences. Not only do such appeals lead to a failure to accurately characterize akrasia, we also render ourselves impotent by assuming that we can think our way out of our self-destructive habits. Even when all the evidence points to the contrary, many of us are strongly invested in a conception of ourselves as entirely free to choose and act, as fundamentally rational agents. You may value a conception of yourself as radically free and capable of consistent rational self-control and you may be emotionally invested in this self-conception. This emotional investment in a particular view of human agency may undermine our ability as individuals and as a society to successfully modify our behaviours and live better lives. To clarify, I do not mean that we are not rational agents, but that the way in which we are rational agents and the manner in which we can employ our rational nature is not always straightforward. And by 'think our way out' I mean that self-mastery is not simply a matter of knowing that x is better than y and then acting on that knowledge. Moreover, we are not *causa sui*. This is also uncontroversial to many. The overall point here is that akratic actions are only a puzzle if we believe that we are capable of acting consistently on our considered judgments, and that our thoughts about what is right or best should always be enough to motivate us to do the right thing. In the following chapters, I will give reasons for thinking this is not the case, and that the relationship between our considered judgements and our actions is more complex than typical treatments of akrasia contemplate.

Akrasia and Formal Logic

Formal logic has been used in efforts to solve the paradox of akratic action. The paradox of akrasia stems from its apparent violation of the principle of non-contradiction. By acting against her all out judgment, the agent “endorses the very action of which she disapproves” (Buss 29). Donald Davidson's solution is to make it logically possible for an agent to act against her all things considered (ATC) judgment, but not against an all out (AO) judgment. The agent's ATC judgment does not commit her to acting in favour of that judgment; an all things considered judgment does not entail an all out judgment. An additional step is required which Davidson calls “the principle of continence” and “[t]hat principle tells us to 'perform the action judged best on the basis of all available relevant reasons” (Davidson qtd in Stroud 18; Stroud 18). Thus it is logically possible for the agent to act against her all things considered judgment because she has not yet made the next logical step which commits her to a particular course of action. On the one hand, Davidson's elegant argument does avoid violating the principle of non-contradiction. But Sarah Buss challenges Davidson's assumption “that to establish the psychological possibility of making a faulty inference it is enough to show that it is logically possible” (29). She observes that it is difficult to see how an agent who acts against her all things considered judgment without sufficient reason is distinguishable from someone who acts compulsively. “By [Davidson's] own admission, the weak-willed agent must regard her behaviour as 'essentially surd”

tendency to mimic the actions of others, (c) something significant about the occasion on which one first did what one is now going to do, (d) the fact that it is substitutionally representing some other action, or (e) even something as far out as post-hypnotic suggestion” (Foot 61). Timothy Wilson's *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* provides a compelling account of 'the adaptive unconscious.' Descartes' radical split between mind and body and his characterization of the mind as entirely conscious, all of its contents transparent to us, is a conceptual framework which resulted in “an impoverishment of psychology which it took three centuries to remedy” (Koestler, qtd in Wilson 10). In addition to this, the more recent unpopularity of Freud's theories of the unconscious, and behaviourism, which discards mental states entirely, has contributed to a reticence on the part of scientists to study unconscious processes.

(30). So, if one agrees with Buss, then Davidson has not preserved a key feature of akratic action: that it is done freely, that one could have done otherwise. This solution turns akrasia into an event, rather than an action. This characterization is like the agent in the example of the ice cream flavours who chooses chocolate, despite believing that all-things-considered, strawberry is best. It is weird because it represents the agent as acting for no reason at all, as if he is being manipulated by an invisible hand. This is not how people experience akrasia.

We cannot prove that a phenomenon is possible in this world by demonstrating that it is logically possible. Logical possibility does not entail physical possibility. Davidson's solution leaves us with a bizarre version of akratic action that does not match our day-to-day experiences of this phenomenon. If we pull back and examine the source of akrasia's paradox, it stems from several assumptions. One assumption is that our actions, bracketing 'automatic' day-to-day behaviours such as driving or walking and so on, are based upon judgments about what it would be best to do. Chapter two looks at Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' which posits that our actions consist in the externalization of social structures, and little to nothing of what we do is truly motivated by independently formed, all-things-considered judgments. Another assumption is that our judgments accurately reflect our true desires and interests. Chapter three looks at ways in which our consciously-formed judgments may be wrong: We may not be as transparent to ourselves as we'd like to think. I may think that I ought to ϕ because this judgment is a culturally dominant opinion, but this judgment may not be in my own personal best interest. Another assumption is that we can accurately distinguish akratic, compulsive, and free behaviours from one another. In chapter four, I will demonstrate that we have good reasons to doubt our abilities to make such distinctions. Finally, the perceived paradox may stem from a conception of ourselves as singular agents—as consisting in one 'decider' who mediates between our various impulses, desires, and preferences—a radically unified self. This is not necessarily true. In chapter five, I will discuss George Ainslie's theory of piceoeconomics which posits that the self is a “set of tacit alliances rather than an organ” (Ainslie 98). On this view, we may have many different competing interests and desires that are equally compelling and rewarding. Akratic action, according to this theory, consists in one interest undoing the work of another. Thus, instead of developing an ad hoc solution to akrasia's paradox by making akratic action logically possible, the solution lies in looking at the kinds of assumptions about agency that make it *appear* as if akratic actions violate the principle of non-contradiction.

*

*

*

We all come from a given place, and anything that we do or value is based on this. By place, I mean everything from culture, nationality, profession, gender, and historical situation to more brute facts such as mortality and embodiment. Charles Taylor says “[t]o know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand” and “stepping outside of these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood” (27). We are not *causa sui*. This is not news, but it is an important thing to keep in mind because the knowledge of what causes us to act is necessary for the possibility of any science of the human.¹⁶ Many of our values stem from our situations, including the ontological beliefs associated with our cultural and historical context, and there is no getting past this (5). It stands to reason. In the absence of such a “framework” an agent has no values or preferences beyond perhaps something base such as preferring life over death (31). This conception of ourselves as driven by the values associated with our identities is conceptually connected

16 If “[i]n doing what we do, we cause certain events to happen, and nothing—or no one—causes us to cause those events to happen.... there can be no science of man” (Chisholm qtd. in Watson “Free” 166).

to the sociological view that our identities are socially produced. In his discussion on the social production of identity, Andrew J. Weigert says “Our guiding axioms are: social organization shapes self-organization: and persons can have only those identities that are empirically available” (165). The social construction of gender is a frequently discussed example of identity production.:

Within post-structural theory, gender is understood as continually produced through a series of repetitive acts which offer the illusion of immutability and “naturalness” (Butler, 1990). In this way gendered identities are recognised as a relational set of performances constantly produced and reproduced in social practice. Power intersects with these identities in particular historico-cultural contexts so that some masculinities are rendered dominant while others are marginalised (Mac an Ghail, 1994). (Allen 74)

But, while the above discussion concerns an arguably problematic assertion of power, there is a banal, day to day sense in which we all continually produce our selves. Our identities are formed by a context, our decisions and actions are informed by this contextually-informed identity, and we recreate ourselves again and again by simply living our lives. People, can, of course, change. But change will be motivated by some deeper value or higher-order preference which will also originate in the agent's surrounding context. The next chapter looks at a theory of action based upon these principles: that our identities are formed of internalized social and political structures and our actions are externalizations of those structures by which we produce and reproduce ourselves. On this view, we may think that we act at least somewhat autonomously by forming judgments based on our circumstances and then acting upon them, when in fact the preferences and desires motivating us to act are predetermined by our social, economic, and cultural status. Akrasia, on this view, consists in the preferences and associated all-things-considered judgments of the dominant classes being at odds with those of the dominated classes.

Chapter 2: Bourdieu's Habitus

In the foregoing chapter, I argued that it was problematic and misleading to form action theories based entirely upon intuitions and assumptions. Most people believe that their actions (bracketing everyday activities which are done as a matter of routine or body memory) are guided by their independently-formed judgments. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' does not share this view. According to this theory, our calculated judgments and their associated actions are like epiphenomena: they do not represent what truly motivates us to act. Bourdieu's theory of habitus can be used to describe and explain people's choices and actions down to their most minute and 'trivial' details. Thus, in this chapter I will apply this theory to people's lifestyles and eating habits. Habitus can be used to make sense of akrasia. It is not my aim to prove absolutely that habitus is right and other action theories are mistaken. My aim is simply to demonstrate that there is more than one plausible way to account for our actions.

Bourdieu is neither a proponent of the existentialist view of an authentic self whose choices are radically free, nor, he claims, is he a strict determinist. His theory aims to bridge the gap between these two extremes. But, Bourdieu is most certainly critical of what he calls 'rational action theory' or 'RAT': "RAT is, in Bourdieu's eyes, nothing more than a sociologized version of the fond illusions which actors themselves entertain about their own rationality and powers of decision-making" and can be understood as a variation of utility theory. (Bourdieu *Practical Reason* 24; Jenkins 44-45). Bourdieu himself describes habitus as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (Bourdieu *The Logic of Practice* 53).

Bourdieu believes that the best way to understand his theory is to use it. It's a practical theory, meant for application to the social world. It is not otherwise easily described or explained, so the above paragraph is perhaps not immediately clear in its meaning, though it is succinct. Deconstructing it will yield greater clarity. When Bourdieu says "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" he means that we internalize the "social and material realities of the world in which [we are] socialized" (Sallaz 322). We internalize social structures, hierarchies of being, such as class hierarchies, or epistemological hierarchies, such as a preference for scientific over religious explanations of phenomena, and these internalized structures inform how we behave. These internalized structures make us who we are; they inform our dispositions to act one way rather than another. Because the ways we behave are informed by these internalized structures, we constantly recreate or externalize these structures when we act. Moreover, the process of internalizing the patterns produced by social structures also shapes our expectations. We come to expect the world and the people in it to conform to these patterns and we are surprised and puzzled when they do not. These structures shape the way we interpret experiences. It's a self-perpetuating cycle in which we internalize social structures and then externalize those structures, which are then internalized by our children, and so on.

An example which illustrates how habitus shapes both our behaviours and our expectations is biological sex and gender. First of all, there is a division of emotional labour which takes place along gendered lines. Men are expected to be stoic, to face adversity, physical pain, and violence, with courage and even enthusiasm. Women are permitted and encouraged to weep, to feel sadness, and to be

self-aware with regard to their emotional states. Women are generally responsible for tending to people's emotional needs by placating and comforting them, keeping the peace, and subduing anger. Children, after watching their parents, people on television, people at school, and so on, come to emulate and expect these behaviours and view these behaviours as natural and intrinsic. When we internalize and reproduce these patterns, we also reproduce a gender hierarchy. The emotional behaviours associated with masculinity facilitate professional success and make the men who possess those qualities powerful. Masculine emotional norms are associated with positions of power. Women who manifest these qualities may become powerful, but they are often judged differently for behaving in a traditionally masculine fashion. Such women may be regarded as shrill, domineering, and unpleasant while men who exhibit the same behaviours will be regarded favourably. Women are rewarded with acceptance for behaving in the more caring and sensitive ways described above. But these behaviours are not qualities associated with power and financial success. The behaviours associated with femininity are correlated with jobs that tend to be underpaid and undervalued, such as nursing, home care services, and other service-related jobs in which the capacity to empathize and behave solicitously are valued. Men who exhibit more than the sanctioned levels of sensitivity to sadness, fear, and pain, are generally viewed as lesser men and they may suffer professionally for it. People have expectations associated with sex, gender, and the relationship between the two. Women and men who do not conform to the gender norms associated with their biological sex are often penalized through social sanctions and worse. But even people who are fairly liberal-minded about gender norms and sex roles may be puzzled and surprised if they encounter someone whose sex *and* gender are unidentifiable. We may not know how to behave around people when we cannot identify their sexes or genders. As can be seen in this example, when we internalize and reproduce gendered behaviours, we simultaneously reproduce a class hierarchy which values and rewards one kind of person (whose biological sex is male and whose gender is masculine) over others.¹

Internalizing social structures is not a process by which we explicitly consider and learn norms; that is, it is not a conscious process. Habitus is a practical, embodied disposition to act which is not regulated by explicit rules. But, while acquiring one's habitus is not a conscious, reflective process, there is a tacit learning process involved and habitus itself is a kind of tacit knowledge. We learn about the social world and how it works through observation and our own behaviours are modified and guided by other people's responses. When we go about the business of living, we do not explicitly consider or contemplate these internalized social structures. Habitus is more like a "second sense,' 'practical sense,' or 'second-nature'...." (Lawler 696). It can best be described as a "feel for the game" (Sallaz 322; Bourdieu *Practical* 25)². We first internalize the structures and norms of our domestic environment and

1 "The Politics of Work and Family" in Jennifer Mather Saul's *Feminism: Issues and Arguments* provides an excellent, comprehensive discussion of the gendered division of labour and its consequences. This chapter also provides further sources, for those who are interested.

2 Habitus is, at base, an Aristotelian concept. We develop deeply-rooted dispositions to act in certain ways and, once inculcated, our characters are more or less fixed. Aristotle says:

This then is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. This is why the activities we exhibit must be of a certain kind; it is because the states of

this environment provides our deepest and most abiding dispositions. The dispositions inculcated in early childhood are “inscribed in one's body” (Sallaz 322). We express our social class, gender, and culture through embodied dispositions. A woman may walk with a different gait than a man, a poor person may gesticulate differently than a rich person, or speak at a different volume. We manifest who we are right down to our finest movements and the most mundane tasks. And we identify ourselves, our class, gender—our relative position of power—just by acting naturally. This does not mean that we consciously self-identify as members of a particular social class. Once we have matured and acquired a given habitus, we just do what we do because that's how we like to do it. Or, for example with activities such as eating, walking, and standing, we may not think of how we do these things at all. It is outsiders, social scientists like Bourdieu or members of other social classes, who classify us.

Even though we may or may not view ourselves as members of a particular social class, it is possible for us to be so classified because there are empirically verifiable behaviours and preferences associated with different social classes. These dispositions to act are regular, consistent, and predictable. Bourdieu describes class habitus as

the practice-unifying and practice generating principle....the internalized form of class condition and the conditionings it entails....the set of agents who are placed in homogenous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices, and who possess a set of common properties, objectified properties, sometimes legally guaranteed (as possession of goods and power) or properties embodied as class habitus (and, in particular, systems of classificatory schemes) (*Distinction* 95).

Tony Bennett more plainly and explicitly states:

[P]eople who belong to the same social group and who thus occupy the same position in social space tend to share the same tastes across all forms of symbolic practice. Of course, there are exceptions; his argument is a probabilistic one. But its principles are clear: those who have particular taste for art will have similar kinds of taste not just for food but all kinds of cultural or symbolic goods and practices: for particular kinds of music, film, television, sports, home decor, clothing and fashion, dance, and so on. (xix)

character correspond to the differences between these. It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference. (NE 1103b 14-25)

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to move downwards, nor can anything else that by nature behaves one way be trained to behave in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit. (NE 1103a 14-25)

Thus class is not solely determined by income. It is also delineated by relative quantities of different types of capital. There is economic capital, or relative wealth in the form of income, assets, and so on. But there is also cultural capital: "This capital, which might be manifested in particular musical, artistic, or literary tastes and competencies, Bourdieu argue[s], is to be regarded as just as much an asset as economic forms of capital—a house or money, for example" (Bennett xviii). Bourdieu compares the common, over-simplified view of what he calls "the economic game," to a roulette game in which one can change social status instantaneously. The belief that we live in an "imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity" fails to recognize other types of capital, types of capital which must be acquired and accumulated over time, sometimes over generations. Knowledge of the arts, academic credentials, titles, membership in various groups or parties, all these things are forms of cultural and social capital:

And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which governs its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (Bourdieu "The Forms")

The view that mercantile exchange is an exchange of economic capital only—that is, the exchange of that which is easily quantified—and that self-interested pursuits consist primarily in the acquisition of property, profit, and so on, fails to recognize the exchange value of cultural and social capital. Yet Bourdieu observes that the possession of titles, sanctioned or 'legitimate' knowledge, and lucrative connections is concentrated in the "dominant class" ("The Forms"). These other forms of capital have exchange value because they are difficult to acquire. And because they are difficult to acquire, they act as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining rank hierarchies.

"The embodied state" of cultural capital consists in the knowledge, manners of speaking, tastes, and so on acquired by particular individuals over time ("The Forms"). Capital is usually thought of as wealth and assets, something outside of ourselves. But our bodies and minds and the ways that we use them constitute their own kind of capital. That is, they are assets in their own right which act as a kind of currency by affording us access to positions of power, powerful friends, prestigious careers, and so on. Embodied capital is not transmitted in the obvious or sudden manner of an inheritance of property, money, or whatever. That is, cultural capital is acquired by the individual over a lifetime, beginning in infancy. It consists in a kind of mastery, or 'feel for the game,' by which one can effortlessly and unconsciously discern which tastes, behaviours, and forms of knowledge bear the mark of legitimacy, legitimacy being that which is associated with the dominant class. While it may be possible for someone in the dominated class to acquire some of this mastery through education, "all agents do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children's education beyond the minimum necessary for the the reproduction of labor-power least valorized at a given moment" ("The Forms"). The more economic capital your family has, the more time can be afforded for your education. In addition to this, you may feel no desire to pursue any formal education because your family and social environment do not value certain types of knowledge.³

3 By this I do not mean to imply that certain types of knowledge are inherently more valuable and that people who do not pursue these types of knowledge are to be judged as lacking in some way. What is at stake here is the valuation of that which confers power on its bearer. Certain types of knowledge are valued more or less historically, regionally, and so on. The supremacy of one type of knowledge over another is the result of competition within the educational field and when a person refrains from pursuing a certain type of 'legitimate' knowledge, this person maintains his or her lower status.

In addition to consisting in knowledge possessed by the individual and its associated credentials, the embodied state of cultural capital is found in the more subtle practices that form the habitus. Body language, styles of speaking, and tastes in not only the arts, but in food and the manner of its consumption, and even the state of the body itself, all distinguish a person as relatively powerful or powerless. A clear example of this is the variable ways English is spoken. A person is usually not aware of speaking with an accent unless he or she is in the presence of people who speak English with a very different accent. We do not consciously acquire accents, yet they can identify where we come from, our culture, and our class (“The Forms”). This

holds for other bodily practices as well.

"The body, a social product which is the only tangible manifestation of the 'person', is commonly perceived as the most natural expression of innermost nature" (*Distinction* 191). Bourdieu's research demonstrates that different embodied states denote one's class. A muscular, solid body, the type we associate with a body-builder or pro wrestler, is associated with the working class, while a lean and flexible body, such as the body of the yoga instructor, is associated with the upper classes (12; 187-188; 208-209). The body can be “perceived as an index of one's moral uprightness” by which a disciplined body, a body which exemplifies restraint denotes a virtuous nature while what Bourdieu calls a “natural body,” the body which signifies “letting oneself go,” is vicious in its evident surrender to ease and sloth⁴ (191).⁵

4 The view that the body signifies one's value is nothing new. Aristotle expresses the view that the body signifies one's status and character, one's essence, when he says

All, however, that these thinkers do is to describe the specific characteristics of the soul; they do not try to determine anything about the body which is to contain it, as if it were possible, as in the Pythagorean myths, that any soul could be clothed upon with any body—an absurd view, for each body seems to have a form and shape of its own... each art must use its tools, each soul its body" (*De Anima* 407b 20-25).

This way of reading a person's character through their body is also akin to Aristotle's views on slavery. He says:

But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature?

There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule. (*Politics* 1254 15-25)

Moreover, one's virtue depends upon the ability to rise above the body, above pleasure and pain:

[B]ut it is by reason of pleasures and pains that men become bad, by pursuing and avoiding these—either the pleasures and pains they ought not or when they ought not or as they ought not, or by going wrong in one or the other similar ways that may be distinguished...Hence men even define the virtues as certain states of impassivity and rest" (*NE* 1104b 20-27).

5 There is a tremendous amount of literature in social theory on the body as a signifier and the body

[There is an] interrelation between the body and the social structures of inequality... inequality is embodied, that is where physiological differences signal an individual's position within their respective social hierarchies... The 'good body' is constructed against the 'bad' other—the lower class, the overweight, the poorly dressed, the incorrectly presented, the disabled, and the old. Through the presentation of their bodily selves, individuals assert these constructions to make claims, often unconsciously, to membership within society, and for access to limited resources of prestige, occupation and income. In this way, initially biological explanations of the body are used in daily life to legitimate specific social assertions and to justify the 'naturalness' of inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity, disability, age and the sense of 'otherness' they give rise to. (White 264).

A telling example of the association between social class and the body is the web site *People of Walmart*. This site is dedicated entirely to photographs of obviously poor people whose styles of dress, bodies, and behaviours are meant to be mocked and derided. This site demonstrates that just one photo of a person can reveal a great deal about that person's relative class. It also demonstrates that many people feel entitled to laugh at the people who are shown on the site. The mere sight of these people signifies to many that they do not merit respect or privacy, that it is permissible to laugh at them. The body is ordinarily seen as an unchanging thing, a biologically-determined entity, and a person's physical appearance and overall comportment are like brute facts. If your body and comportment act as signifiers of class and are simultaneously seen as intrinsic, this can result in a belief that your class and status are natural and inevitable. This conception of our embodied nature as essential and unchanging feeds into beliefs about people getting what they deserve. It reinforces the belief that we live in a well-functioning meritocracy, when this is not true (McNamee and Miller, Jr.).

A great deal has been written on the social and economic forces which shape the body. Friedrich Engels wrote about “the physiological results of the factory system” in the mid 1800s, giving detailed descriptions of the radical changes to people's bodies shaped by industrialization (White 265). Since then, the kinds of labour commonly performed have changed for some of us and each kind of labour has its own way of shaping the body and influencing health outcomes for people. The amount of power we have in our day to day lives also has a direct impact on health outcomes. People who have low status jobs usually have jobs associated with 'low decision latitude,' meaning they do not get to make a lot of choices about how their jobs are performed. Low decision latitude has been shown to have a greater negative impact on key determinants of health, such as lipid levels, than lifestyle factors such as smoking, exercise, or diet (265-266). Thus, powerlessness may make you sick, but you may very well be held accountable because your social class is associated with lifestyle factors such as smoking or a lack of exercise. That is, it is less likely that an abstraction such as powerlessness be considered a cause of disease because people prefer concrete causes which can be pointed to such as obesity, smoking, drinking, and so on. Thus, the body is a signifier of one's status and one's status can be a reliable predictor of one's likely fate with regard to health and illness. Another interesting example of the interplay between body and status is the correlation between height and status. Although people's heights have increased across the board over time, people of a higher socioeconomic class are always taller, on average. People who come from a low socioeconomic class who are taller than the norm have “upward social mobility (as measured by educational attainment) while shorter upper-class children experienc[e] downward social mobility” (269).

as shaped by outside forces, such as economic determinants. 'Body Studies' has become a discipline unto itself. I cannot do justice to the subject in this context. An excellent resource, for those who are interested, is the *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*.

Body shapes and sizes are “not randomly distributed among the classes (for example the proportion of women whose waist measurement is greater than the modal waist rises sharply as one moves down the social hierarchy)” (*Distinction* 205). Poverty may make healthy food unaffordable, or it may limit where you can live so that you live in what's colloquially known as a 'food desert': a neighbourhood in which the only available foods are processed, packaged foods like those found at a 7-11. Moreover, poorer neighbourhoods tend to have fewer parks and recreational spaces. All these factors can certainly affect our weights and fitness levels. But Bourdieu's research and theory add a layer of nuance and complexity to the problem which merits examination. First of all, it is not merely the case that people with less money cannot afford to buy healthy foods, though this is certainly true. Bourdieu claims that there is “an adjustment between the individual's hopes, aspirations, goals and expectations, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves by virtue of their place in the social order, on the other” (Jenkins 13). A person's habitus consists partly in the belief that your situation has been chosen by you. That you prefer or desire whatever goods, be they furnishings, art, music, or, in this case, foods, that are realistically available to you. You embrace the objective conditions and possibilities for a person of your relative status. Bourdieu calls this “the subjective expectation of objective probabilities” (14). If one's objective prospects for social advancement, for a different and perhaps better future are slim, then there is no point in expending energy and resources to “master the future” (Bourdieu qtd in Jenkins 14; *Distinction* 176). Bourdieu observes that “the spontaneous materialism of the working classes” via the consumption of cheap, rich, heavy foods is a challenge, a thumbing of the nose at the restraint of the bourgeoisie. While, on one level, it acts as a refutation of the “Benthamite calculation of pleasures and pains, benefits and costs” of the upper classes, at another it simply reflects the futility of calculation and restraint in the interest of a future which never materializes or at the very least bears little fruit⁶ (*Distinction* 176).

But, there is also security to be derived from embracing the present. Bourdieu observes:

It becomes clearer why the practical materialism which is particularly manifested in the relation to food is one of the most fundamental components of the popular ethos and even the popular ethic. The being-in-the-present which is affirmed in the readiness to take advantage of the good times and take time as it comes is, in itself, an affirmation of solidarity with others (who are the only present guarantee against the threats of the future)....
(*Distinction* 176).

Moreover, the freedom to consume large portions of rich foods, the taking of 'liberties,' is “the one realm of freedom, when everywhere else, and at all times, necessity prevails” (194). This only freedom to indulge brings to mind Marx's characterization of the worker as one who leads a diminished life because she cannot realize her 'human' nature:

As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.

Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But taken

⁶ An analogous phenomenon which demonstrates that apparently self-destructive behaviours are not irrational, but are rational responses to one's objective situation and prospects is seen in the relationship between poverty, community support and crack addiction. Carl Hart's research has demonstrated that the frequency of crack cocaine use is correlated with one's objective future prospects, options, and opportunities for positive experiences (Tierney).

abstractly, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions. (Marx “Estranged Labour”)⁷

While the metaphor of animality is problematic, it makes sense that people will take pleasure from what freedoms they have in order to seek relief and comfort in the face of poverty and powerlessness. Your only respite from an otherwise dreary life may be a trip to McDonald's. Thus limited choices may lead people to take advantage of the freedoms associated with the life of the body or our 'animal' nature. This, in turn, may reinforce the popular view that members of certain classes are inherently 'base.'

Bourdieu, in his discussion of taste, refers to the class of people “who don't know how to live” (*Distinction* 174-175). With his tongue in his cheek, he burlesques the opinions of the bourgeoisie, who perceive the working classes as consumers of gross, fattening foods, people with vulgar tastes who engage in mass-produced leisure activities in overcrowded parks, whose choices are incomprehensible and base. And these boorish preferences confirm that the “class racism” of the bourgeoisie is legitimate—that the lower classes “only get what they deserve”⁸ (174-175). Although people's tastes are determined by necessity, these preferences will always seem voluntary, and so, 'natural,' that is, the product of one's inborn character or nature. And when one opts, ostensibly voluntarily, to ruin one's

7 This is a very Aristotelian take on human nature. Aristotle, in his discussion of the greatest good observes:

To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure [pleasure being the pleasures of the body]; which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment... Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts... (NE 1095b 14-20).

8 An example of this phenomenon is the reality TV show, “Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo.” The show follows the Shannons, a working-class family living in a small town in Georgia who refer to themselves as “crazy rednecks” (Wong). Keeping in mind that the show is edited to include what audiences most want to see, much of the program focuses on the Shannons as base, as living the life of the body. Every belch, fart, and sneeze is captured and these constitute a significant portion of the show's content. The mother has a tendency to sneeze repeatedly, and all of her sneezes are documented and aired. Most other documentaries would edit sneezes out. Sneezes are normally seen as irrelevant and distracting, but one of the program's chief draws consists in this focus on the life of the body. The Shannons are overweight and obese and they primarily eat processed foods, most of which are bought for cheap or free because June Shannon, the mother, is an avid couponer. Many episodes draw attention to the fact that no one in the family likes to eat vegetables. June goes so far as to gag and vomit when she tries to eat fruit or vegetables. There is a sort of morbid public obsession with these people. No one can fathom how the mother, an obese woman, has a boyfriend and her image is mocked in internet memes. People go as far as to say that she's an unfit mother because she doesn't feed her children healthy foods. But the program's hook comes from the fact that they are, apparently, very nice people who seem to enjoy one another's company a great deal. That is, they appear to be a functional and caring family and this is surprising to audiences. It is this apparent contradiction between 'vicious' persons who are comfortable in their own skin, who make no efforts to eat healthy foods or exercise, and 'virtuous' persons who love and support one another which fuels the fascination.

health, a common opinion will be that one gets what one deserves.⁹

The voluntary austerity and refined (read: complex, difficult to master) tastes of the upper classes signify ease while the “taste for things that are simple, safe and functional” is associated with relative poverty. Bourdieu draws a distinction between the tastes of poverty and wealth using the terms “taste for necessity” and “taste for luxury” (Sallaz 323). Habitus is transposable. Your habitus can be applied in various contexts because it is founded upon a few basic principles. For example, people “who prefer beef over fish may prefer action movies over romantic comedies” because beef and action movies are 'masculine' and fish and romantic comedies are 'feminine.' (323). So, in the case of tastes which reflect one's economic position, the underlying principle is one of ease versus need, and the 'taste for luxury' is considered the superior and legitimate taste.¹⁰

The taste of the dominant class is informed by what Bourdieu calls “the pure aesthetic,” which he says is “rooted in.... an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world...” (Bourdieu *Distinction* xxviii). The preference of form over substance and quality over quantity distinguishes the taste of the upper classes. Thus, the manner of “presenting, serving, eating etc.” is emphasized in a practice which “use[s] stylized forms to deny function” (xxix).¹¹ This “pure gaze”

9 Bourdieu's 'taste for necessity' is controversial because it infers that people, particularly people who make what we consider 'bad' choices, do not freely make their own decisions. This seems to make it acceptable to interfere in people's lives, to tell them that they are misguided or that they do not know what is best for themselves. In Bourdieu's defense, he does not necessarily view any particular way of living as inherently superior or inferior. He simply observes that some ways of living denote power while others denote powerlessness. Nevertheless there is a problem here, which is whether it is justifiable to interfere in people's lives via taxes on junk foods and subsidies on healthy foods or whatever, if those people's identities consist partially in having those preferences. To dictate what is right is to tell certain people that they are flawed in some fundamental way. But, if people's expectations do, in fact, change in conjunction with their objective prospects, then changes in access to certain foods or forms of recreation should influence people's preferences for those foods or activities. Yet, one might still ask whether this is morally right.

10 Aristotle embraces this view wholeheartedly. In his discussion of the relative virtues of different types of knowledge he says that “as more arts were invented, and some were directed to the necessities of life, others to recreation, the inventors of the latter were naturally always regarded as wiser than the inventors of the former, because their branches of knowledge did not aim at utility. Hence when all such inventions were already established, the sciences which did not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure” (Metaphysics 981b 18-25).

11 This is, according to Bourdieu, a sort of Kantian aesthetic and he describes the aesthetic of the working class as “Anti-Kantian” (*Distinction* 33). Kant claims that a legitimate aesthetic judgment must not be “tinged with the slightest interest” (*Critique of Judgement* 43). Appetites and desires taint one's judgments on this view. Moreover, moral considerations, for example the opinion that a building, such as a castle, is a waste of resources and merely a display of wealth and vanity must not influence one's aesthetic judgment simpliciter, which must be detached and disinterested (43). One's aesthetic judgment of an object is conceptually separated from the real-world applications and implications of the thing—and the capacity to judge disinterestedly is the most rarified and aristocratic form of taste.

rejects the human by rejecting “what is generic, i.e. common, 'easy' and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to pure and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire” (23-24). In contrast to this, Bourdieu's research demonstrates that working class people seek function and simplicity. An image is expected to “fulfill a function” by referring to moral norms or by pleasing the senses (33). The taste of luxury is a taste for the rare, a taste that requires a certain kind of mastery consisting in the ability to make fine distinctions by which one identifies legitimate taste. Thus, a hamburger from Wendy's is not the same as a hamburger from a privately owned business that sources its meats locally and makes its own condiments. It may be the case that they taste the same, but as pure representations one signifies the common and the cheap, while the other is more costly and painstakingly produced.¹² And taste in food is truly one of the deepest and most abiding ways by which we reveal our class because such tastes are inculcated from infancy onwards. They originate in the home where we are conditioned to take pleasure from particular types of food and modes of consumption (71).

It is not only the taste for certain foods, but the manner in which they are consumed which signifies one's class. Bourdieu describes the dominant aesthetic as “the combination of ease and aestheticism, i.e., self-imposed austerity, restraint, reserve, which are affirmed in that absolute manifestation of excellence, relaxation in tension” (171-172). The taste of luxury combines “reason and sensibility” so that one both knows what to prefer and wants to prefer just that (3). It is very much like the Aristotelian conception of virtue, which requires that one know what is best and simultaneously desire that which is best¹³ To desire an excess of rich foods but to refrain from consuming them is mere continence; virtue consists in also having the right desires, desires which are never slaves to pleasure and pain, to appetites. “This perfect coincidence is the very definition of ease which, in return, bears witness to this coincidence of 'is' and 'ought' and to the self-affirming power it contains” (253). To be at ease is to demonstrate that one is truly free from ordinary human “constraints” and this can be demonstrated via the “ostentatious freedom of gratuitous expense or the austerity of elective restriction” (252). This kind of effortlessness is quite rare, the result of a perfect storm of privilege and opportunity. Only the very lucky and the very few are endowed with such ease.

12 While Bourdieu associates the tastes of the working class with a taste for moral significance in aesthetic objects—a film which prescribes certain values, a painting which glorifies some conception of the good—this division is not so clean in contemporary eating practices. Bourdieu's research for *Distinction* surveys French citizens in the early 1970's. Contemporary North Americans appear to differ in that many Canadians and Americans from the dominant classes make dietary choices for moral reasons. A rising awareness of and opposition to factory farming practices motivates some people to eat no meat or to eat meat only from certain sources. Yet Bourdieu's theory still stands because specialized diets and particularly locally-sourced meats are often prohibitively expensive. It is an extravagance to be able to choose what and how one eats for reasons beyond the immediate need for sustenance (This is not to say that one ought not to do so if one can). Moreover, to choose how one eats based on a principle, rather than on necessity, demonstrates that one is removed from necessity, it signifies that one has risen above ordinary needs. To eat according to a principle is to place form over function, to live by a theoretical precept rather than according to an immediate desire. So, while the working class may prefer for works of visual art and films to affirm certain values, food must remain what it is—a source of pleasure and sustenance.

13 “Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education” (NE 1104b 4-13).

Relative quantities of capital vary within individuals, themselves. You may have a great deal of cultural capital, but only a modest amount of economic capital, or vice versa, or a great deal of both, or very little of either. These variations result in differing tastes. Bourdieu observes that there is a clear connection between income and consumption so that as one's income rises, the proportion of one's income spent on food decreases and so does the amount spent on the cheapest foods—foods which also tend to be heavy and fattening such as “pasta, potatoes, beans, bacon, pork” and so on (173). As the proportion of income spent on these rich, cheap foods decreases, the proportion spent on light, “non-fattening” foods such as vegetables, fruit, and fish, increases (173). But differing ratios of capital within individuals results in different consumption patterns, despite identical incomes, so that two people with differing levels of cultural capital but identical quantities of economic capital will have consistently different patterns of consumption. The *nouveau riche*—rich in economic, and poor in cultural capital—may prefer to conspicuously consume excess quantities of rare and expensive foods, in a manner judged as “vulgar” by people high in both types of capital or high in cultural and low in economic capital. A person high in cultural capital and low in economic capital may still engage in practices which demonstrate a freedom from necessity through “ascetic consumption in all areas” and “originality at the lowest cost” (183). Teachers, who are generally high in cultural and low in economic capital may prefer specialty coffees prepared by trained baristas, 'artisanal' breads, and locally brewed beers. These are foods which require training and experience to appreciate, yet these products are not prohibitively expensive and denote 'know-how' with regard to consumption. They thus signify a refined sensibility removed from base necessity which simultaneously renounces the coarseness of conspicuous consumption because such products are simple and 'natural,' and hence denote a certain austerity. In this way they oppose themselves to both the conspicuous consumption of the *nouveau riche* and the common tastes of the working class. (183)

The contrasting tastes of necessity and luxury are, at base, tastes for substance and form, respectively. The dominant class's preference for form over function is opposed by the dominated class's taste for what is “real” and “honest” (197-198). Thus the working class prefers “the little eating house with its marble-topped tables and paper napkins where you get an honest square meal and 'aren't paying for the wallpaper' as in fancy restaurants” (197-198). Bourdieu's example is dated, but we can see the same phenomenon at work in a preference for the clean, simple utility of the fast-food restaurant. While aesthetics certainly play a role in the design of fast food restaurants, their design, at base, is founded on utility. The durable, easy to clean chairs and tables, pleasant primary colours, and family friendly environments of fast food restaurants, are functional, welcoming, and unpretentious. You can eat the food with your hands, and your children can play and make noise. Higher end, expensive restaurants are decorated differently. The decor may change frequently, thus denoting mastery of current aesthetic trends, or it may consist in the unchanging, old-fashioned decor of a country club, which signifies 'old money.' The experience of the diner in such settings is far more complex and requires mastery of many rules regarding how the foods ought to be eaten, in what order, with which utensils, accompanied by which wines, and so on.

It is important to note that the tastes of the dominant classes always bear more weight. That is, they are viewed as more legitimate than the tastes of the dominated classes. So, working class people may, on the one hand, acknowledge the legitimacy of the dominant class's tastes by disparaging their own tastes or viewing their preferences as signs of a weak or flawed nature, while still preferring that which they are most likely to receive (Jenkins 13-14; Bourdieu *Distinction* 164). Thus, one might praise the merits of certain foods or a certain kind of lifestyle and agree that it is a superior way to live, yet never really pursue it wholeheartedly, and blame one's own weakness when one fails to adhere to that diet or fitness

regimen or whatever.¹⁴ This is another possible explanation for akratic actions. Perhaps there is a hierarchy of preferences such that the tastes of the dominant class are acknowledged by most people to be superior, but people's personal preferences map onto their own class's habitus. So one might believe that *x* is better than *y* because this is the preference of the dominant class, yet one prefers *y* because it is the preferred choice of members of one's class habitus. Thus one does *y* in spite of one's professed belief that *x* is best. In short, even when rejected, dominant tastes maintain their status as ideals to which all people should aspire and conform. Our tastes and preferences are influenced by structures which render them practically inevitable and outside of our control, so even if we believe that our own preferences are far from ideal, we may be powerless to change them. Yet, we are held responsible for our tastes and their associated behaviours and are judged accordingly.

The next chapter will look at two interrelated ideologies, healthism and medicalization, and how these conceptual frameworks influence our perceptions of weak-willed actions which compromise health. But first, I wish to conclude this chapter by demonstrating concretely the explanatory value of Bourdieu's theory when applied to the philosophical discourse on weakness of the will, particularly Sarah Buss's excellent and comprehensive article "Weakness of Will." My aim here is not to demonstrate that Buss, or anyone else is wrong, *per se*. My aim is to show the kind of insight and nuance of understanding to be gained when we incorporate social theory.

Habitus and Akrasia

The debate concerning the nature and possibility of weakness of the will has often involved a conflict between motivational internalists and externalists. As discussed, motivational internalism is generally characterized as a view which "rules out as impossible certain kinds of action contrary to one's evaluative judgment" (Stroud 20). Such a view attaches a conative force to one's evaluative judgments. Motivational externalism "emphasize[s] the motivational importance of factors other than the agent's evaluative judgment and the divergences that can result between an agent's evaluation of her options and her motivation to act" (21). Bourdieu's theory provides evidence that some compromise between internalism and externalism is most plausible. He observes that some people appear to honestly believe that they ought to ϕ , and yet fail to do so. That is, people may genuinely value and hold as superior the tastes and practices of the dominant classes, and yet continue to engage only in the practices of their own class. This is not to say that such people are not *at all* motivated by these judgments. They probably are. But, on Bourdieu's view, external factors such as resources, possibilities, and affordances, have more of an influence over our actions than judgments about how we ought to behave.

Bourdieu's work also sheds light on some arguments made by Sarah Buss. Taking an internalist stance, Buss argues that we cannot be compelled to perform an action intentionally. She says "A directly compelled intention does not make sense because intentions express an agent's goals, or purposes: if someone intends to do something, then doing it is her goal; and to say that doing it is *her* goal is to say that she can be characterized as having set this goal for herself" (17). But, our goals and preferences are only our own insofar as we identify them as our own. That is, our preferences and desires come from without, yet they are our own insofar as they reflect the inclinations associated with our contextually

¹⁴ This phenomenon is an instantiation of what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence": "the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate" (Jenkins 66). If you perceive the dominant culture's lifestyle and tastes as legitimate and your own as illegitimate, you'll perceive yourself as fundamentally flawed. Power relations are obscured via the process of "*misrecognition*" in which the beliefs and practices of the dominant culture are perceived as objectively superior, rather than as arbitrary and imposed (66).

formed personal identities. Social theory challenges the distinction between inside and outside, between the subject and her environment. This characterization of the agent is Heideggerian and offers up a plausible explanation of weakness of the will by challenging the ontological assumptions embedded in the philosophical literature on akrasia. On this view, the agent is not clearly distinct from her context; the agent is permeable. Bourdieu's theory posits that our intentions will change if our surrounding circumstances change, even if we believe that we consciously choose and prefer what we do. While, on the one hand, most people will agree that our values and preferences don't come from nowhere, I think that because we are intuitively dualists, we still imagine ourselves as having some unassailable, authentic core. And these sorts of tacit beliefs may compromise our understanding of agency and will.

Buss argues that because our intentions are our own, it is not possible for us to assess them like a detached observer without their ceasing to be our intentions. She says:

During moments when a person reflects on her priorities, she may conclude that her preference for A over B is misguided. But if this does not simply reflect a change of mind, then it is nothing but the possibility of preferring to be someone who has different preferences. It is not clear to me whether someone can be aware of this higher-order preference even as she regards A as her goal. (18)

But, in light of Bourdieu's theory, we can see that this is, indeed, possible. As discussed above, there is a hierarchy of preferences such that the tastes of the dominant class are acknowledged by most people to be superior, but people's personal preferences and inclinations map onto their own class's habitus. So one might believe that *x* is better than *y* because this is the preference of the dominant class, yet one prefers *y* because it is the preferred choice of members of one's class habitus. Thus one does *y* in spite of one's professed belief in the superiority of *x*. In this instance, the agent does probably prefer to be a person who has different preferences. In fact, it does not seem at all strange to me that a person might wish to have the tastes and established behaviours of a person with a lot of capital.

Or, perhaps this contradiction between our judgments and actions is an example of what R.M. Hare calls "Using the evaluative term 'good' or 'ought' only in... an 'inverted commas' sense":

In such cases, when the agent says (while doing *b*) 'I know I really ought to do *a*,' he means only that most people—or, at any rate, the people whose opinions on such matters are generally regarded as authoritative—would say he ought to do *a*. As Hare notes (Hare 1952, p. 124), to believe this is not to make an evaluative judgment oneself; rather it is to allude to the value judgments of other people. (Stroud 7)

When we say that the standards and practices of the dominant class are superior, we do so partially in Hare's 'inverted commas' sense in that we acknowledge the values of the dominant class—those "whose opinions... are regarded as authoritative" (7). Yet we might honestly believe that these practices are superior. Instead of being a disingenuous practice in which we disguise our personal preferences, Bourdieu's theory renders the phenomenon ambiguous. The agent believes, for example, that it is best, all things considered, to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, but "the subjective expectation of objective probabilities" causes her to see such choices as 'not for me' or 'not for my kind.' She cannot adopt these other practices without becoming a different person—someone with more capital (Jenkins 13-14). In order to change your habits, you have to believe that such changes are practical and feasible, and that you have a future which makes these efforts worthwhile. If people within your class have poor health outcomes, short lives, and few choices with regard to jobs, and so on, you may tacitly or explicitly know that making radical changes to your lifestyle will be a tremendous waste of energy and limited

resources. It may even estrange you from your family and community. While it is possible to change one's habits, sometimes changes to the way one lives threaten a person's identity and place within a community. Changes to one's lifestyle may signal to others that one is no longer a member of that group, that one is 'too good.' Thus it may be reasonable to refrain from making changes, even while you see and recognize that some other people's lifestyles are better, all things considered, in that they result in longer, healthier lives. That is, it may be prudent and reasonable for people to neglect their health at times, but, in a better world, most people would prefer to not be forced into decisions which shorten their lives and result in unnecessary suffering. Most people would probably prefer to have health, a bright future, a community, and the resources to support them all.

What I find most interesting and illuminating is how Bourdieu's theory adds to the discussion of reasons internalism and externalism. When we say that someone has a reason to ϕ , even if ϕ ing is not part of that person's subjective motivational set, it may often be the case that dominant class values are being imposed upon that person. That person may have no interest in living according to the dominant ideal, and her desires, preferences, goals, and inclinations may be seen as base and unhealthy. We may judge that, while this person claims that she has no reason to ϕ , in reality she does. My earlier example of the Shannon family on *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* comes to mind. We may watch these people and think that, even if they prefer otherwise, they have a reason to eat healthier foods, or they have a reason to pursue an education, or they have a reason to get regular exercise. Thus, generally speaking, the view that someone has a reason to ϕ is often the imposition of class values. But, as I discussed above, there may be times in which one's preferences would change if circumstances were different. And it is plausible to say that most people, ideally, want to live healthy, long lives. It seems as if they do have a reason to ϕ , but only under the right circumstances, or in another possible world.

A final problem which has not been adequately addressed is the extent to which Bourdieu dismisses conscious, rational action. Buss categorizes intentional actions into three types: 1) "all those intentional actions which cannot plausibly be represented as a response to the question: 'What shall I do?'" such as suddenly stopping one's car to avoid hitting a pedestrian, or, the less dramatic and somewhat less reflexive act of obeying a traffic light, 2) actions which are preceded by "even the slightest, briefest uncertainty about what to do" such as choosing what to wear, or some other relatively trivial act which does not require much deliberation, and 3) actions "based on the agent's assessment of various competing options" to which, Buss argues, weak-willed actions belong (15). The first and second categories of intentional action are clearly found in the habitus, which is effortless and unconscious most of the time. But, the third category leads to a problem for Bourdieu's theory. Jenkins observes:

It is difficult to know where to place conscious deliberation and awareness in Bourdieu's scheme of things. We are back with the problem of his attitude towards rational decision-making and calculation. The issue is not so much his denial of apparently calculative rationality as a social phenomenon, as his disbelief in its importance or relevance. (Jenkins 47)

Bourdieu claims that:

The lines of action suggested by habitus may very well be accompanied by a strategic calculation of costs and benefits which tends to carry out at a conscious level the operations which habitus carries out in its own way... Times of crises, in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted, constitute a class of circumstances when indeed 'rational choice' often appears to take over. But, and this is a crucial proviso, it is habitus itself that commands this option. We can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principals of these choices" (Bourdieu qtd

in Jenkins 47).

Thus, if one accepts Bourdieu's position, actions resulting from careful consideration of one's options are also the product of the habitus. The primary criticism directed at Bourdieu by his peers is that since habitus determines our actions and then reproduces the social structures structuring our actions, there is no possibility for change. Yet, things do appear to change. Jenkins observes "His model of practice, despite all of its references to improvisation and fluidity, turns out to be a celebration of (literally) mindless conformity" and "It is a world where behaviour has its causes, but actors are not allowed their reasons" (Jenkins 61). Yet, given that agency is not straightforward—many of us fail to act on our considered judgments with alarming regularity, and given that Bourdieu's theory has such great scope—a key feature of a credible theory—Bourdieu's theory merits consideration. There does appear to be one exception to the apparent determinism of the habitus, though. Jenkins notes that Bourdieu allows that "the habitus can be controlled—and it is not clear what he means by this—as a result of the 'awakening of consciousness and socioanalysis'" (Jenkins 51; Bourdieu qtd in Jenkins 51). While Jenkins seems perplexed by this claim, it does not seem so opaque to me. It seems to mean that a meta-understanding of social structures and one's position within those structures might lead to greater freedom and flexibility. Part of this project's intention is to draw attention to those structures in the hope that such knowledge will be liberating.

Chapter 3: Akrasia as Rational Behaviour

Introduction

In chapter one, I characterized obesity caused by overeating as a product of akrasia. Most overweight people have the requisite knowledge to lose weight and to maintain good overall health. Yet, even though they judge that, all things considered, they ought to lose weight, many such people fail in this endeavour. Thus, they judge that, all things considered, they ought to ϕ , they are free to ϕ , and yet they fail to ϕ . I also observed, in chapter one, that we are not transparent to ourselves and that our intuitions about agency may be mistaken. Folk intuitions about agency tend to characterize agency as a process by which an immaterial mind steers a material body. On such a view, we ought to be able to do what we judge to be best the way a driver ought to be able to steer a car. But, given how many people are overweight and obese, and given how hard such people try to lose weight, it is unlikely that this characterization is true. If it were as simple as having the right knowledge and steering ourselves in the right direction, few, if any, people would be overweight. Chapter two's discussion of Bourdieu's habitus provides another plausible theory of action in which the agent's mental schemata are isomorphic with social structures. It is these schemata which determine how we will act in a given situation—our actions reflect and replicate social structures. Akrasia, on this view, might be a byproduct of the subjective expectation of objective probabilities: the agent's preferences and choices reflect what is realistic for her to expect, given her socioeconomic class. But she may view the behaviours associated with higher levels of cultural and economic capital as superior behaviours. Thus she may believe that she ought to behave like someone with greater capital, but continue to behave in keeping with her own class habitus. This phenomenon results in what appears to be akrasia: The agent believes that she ought to ϕ , and that she is free to ϕ , yet she fails to ϕ .

In addition to my discussion of akrasia and action theory, the last two chapters also touched upon two other themes: (1) weakness of will, morality, and ethics and (2), the connection between personal identity and behaviour. I argued in the first chapter that weakness of will is a moral/ethical problem and not just a problem for action theory. Akrasia can have serious consequences for ourselves and the people around us, and deontologists, utilitarians, and virtue theorists all have reasons to believe that we ought to cultivate willpower. I also discussed the fact that our actions are informed by our identities. We need to constantly produce and reproduce ourselves by performing actions commensurate with our identities. Bourdieu's theory of habitus is a theoretical model of this phenomenon.

This chapter continues along similar lines. In this chapter I will demonstrate that what appears to be akrasia may sometimes be rational action. We may sometimes, unknowingly, be acting in our own best interests when we appear to act akratically. That is, the entire contents of our subjective motivational set may not always be accessible to us, and so we may be acting in our best interests even when we think this is not the case. I will demonstrate how this may be the case by proposing some real, plausible reasons why people may indulge in rich foods or forego exercise, that is, why they might do things which are considered unhealthy. In addition to this, I will discuss the concept of 'healthism': an ideology which makes health the highest good. Beliefs about the supreme value of health transform the failure to maintain good health into a serious moral transgression. Putting these ideas together, it may be the case that some people indulge in rich foods, or refrain from exercising because it in their best interest, given their circumstances. But, because 'unhealthy' behaviours are currently analogous to grave sins, such persons may judge that they ought to do otherwise, i.e. eat less and exercise.

Section Two: The Philosophical Case for Akrasia as Rational Action

When an agent acts akratically, her actions are characterized as irrational. The agent believes that she has a good reason to ϕ , yet she fails to do so. Instead of ϕ ing, she may even act *against* her own best interest. Or so it seems. However, some philosophers have suggested that there are times when it may be rational for an agent to act akratically. It may be the case, in these instances, that in failing to act on her best judgment, the agent does what is truly best given her desires and beliefs. Nomy Arpaly argues that while akratic action is always “less than perfectly rational” there may be times when acting on one's best judgment renders the agent “significantly irrational, while acting akratically would make her only trivially so” (491). While it is true that “the schism between best judgment and desire indicates a failure of coherence in her mind” this discrepancy may be the result of a, perhaps unconscious, need to act in one's own true best interests (491). Arpaly's argument does not rely upon external reasons for action (492). Instead, she speculates that it may be the case at times that an agent's best judgment does not cohere with the sum of her beliefs and desires. That is, her judgment that she ought to ϕ may be unwarranted, given her desires and beliefs, and so acting against this judgment may be more rational—rational in the sense of better maximizing preferences and serving interests—than to act in accordance with it. Arpaly suggests that some limitation on the agent's ability to consider all of her reasons to ϕ or not to ϕ results in a reluctance to act on her best judgment. This failure to act is not the result of weakness of will, but rather “the result or the embodiment of an awareness, inaccessible at the moment to his deliberation, of all the things that are, given his beliefs and desires, overwhelmingly wrong with [ϕ ing]” (503).

Contra Arpaly, it may be argued that an agent whose action coheres with his overall set of desires and beliefs, in spite of some best judgment to the contrary, still fails to act rationally because his action is not the result of deliberation (505). In response, Arpaly cites instances of ostensibly rational actions which involve no deliberation, such as playing a sport well and the process which she dubs “dawning” by which the agent slowly and without conscious deliberation becomes aware of some truth (506; 508). It is debatable whether excellence in sports, that is, great skill in the moment, as one plays, is rational, *per se*. There is practical reason and theoretical reason at work as the athlete hones his skill. He understands that in order to do well at a sport, he must practice and so he practices. And his skill may be improved through the application of knowledge to practice, such as knowledge of body mechanics, and so on. But, the actions of an athlete in the moment are often a product of body memory. They are the result of practice and it is unclear whether we can dub an athlete's real-time acts 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable,' though Bourdieu's theory might render athletic skill as reasonable as any other action, given the embodied, practiced nature of the habitus in which knowledge of what to do is described as “a feel for the game” (Sallaz 322; Bourdieu *Practical* 25). On the other hand, one could also argue that athletes do engage in conscious deliberation regarding risk and reward, e.g. the likelihood that a pass will get through vs being picked off and, should it be picked off, the likelihood that it will be fatal. The athlete may also make 'in the moment' judgments about the suitability of a means to an end, e.g. taking the shot now rather than waiting as an effective means of scoring. So perhaps the example of sports does not adequately exemplify the phenomenon.

Arpaly's other example of non-deliberative rational action is 'dawning.' Dawning consists in an agent's gradual awareness of an important truth without conscious deliberation. Arpaly's examples of dawning include Candide realizing that this is not, in fact, the best of all possible worlds, and citizens of the former Soviet Union who slowly realize that their world is no workers' paradise. Arpaly claims that such dawnings could occur without any deliberation. Candide could realize that this is not the best of all possible worlds without ever engaging in any conscious thought process, and without consciously questioning Dr. Pangloss's view (508). Although it seems implausible that one could suddenly realize

that some important and deeply-held belief is false without *ever* consciously thinking about it at all, Bourdieu's theory lends some plausibility to this view. Bourdieu's conception of "the subjective expectation of objective probabilities" could explain how someone might have a change of heart without deliberation (Jenkins 14). On Bourdieu's view, if our surrounding circumstances change, so may our beliefs and desires and we may acquire a new perspective without reflection. Thus, a citizen of the former USSR, instead of slowly and unconsciously changing her opinion as a result of an awareness of the contradictions between propaganda and reality would experience a change in desires and beliefs because of a creeping awareness of the goods and lifestyles associated with capitalist countries such as the US. Her awareness of other possibilities could change her expectations, and thus change her desires. In a short documentary concerning the effects of black market video cassettes of American movies in Communist Romania, just such a phenomenon is described. Irina Nistor, a translator who dubbed over 3,000 banned movies in Communist Romania reflects on the extent of censorship at the time: "There couldn't be any proof of how good life can be in the West. No expensive cars, no swimming pools. Not to mention food. Even in 'Tom and Jerry' all those big meals they run around would be cut" (qtd. in Calugareanu 2:40-2:51). It is not just ideas which can be dangerous to a regime. More visceral images, which trigger a hunger for more, and an awareness of other possibilities, can arguably have a much more profound effect. An interviewee remembers the impact of these films:

You can see behind the action. In any film. You could see what those people had. What they ate, what freedoms they had, how they spoke to one another. It was completely different. And somehow, underneath it all, you felt... what freedom was. You felt it, nobody had to explain it. (Calugareanu 5:37-5:59)

This example shows the way a phenomenon such as dawning might take root and manifest. Changes in our opinions and beliefs can come from a wordless place at times and may require no conscious deliberation.

Alison McIntyre also argues that akrasia is not necessarily irrational. She identifies "[t]wo idealizing assumptions" that support "the view that akrasia is necessarily irrational" (382). The first assumption is that of "transparency and privileged access" (382). As I discussed earlier, we are not transparent to ourselves, we cannot always know all the factors which motivate us to act. McIntyre's second idealizing assumption "concerns the appropriate standard for judging the rationality of agents" (382). There are "practical constraints imposed on agents in deliberation" (382). We have limited time, energy, and mental resources, such as memories, at our disposal, and deliberation must always consist in "making the best trade-offs between competing demands for thoroughness and efficiency" (382). Nomy Arpaly makes a similar point, observing that it is very difficult at times for an agent to truly know "what the rational choice for her is" ("On" 489). She cites Williams' discussion of Gauguin as an example of a dilemma for which no theory of rationality and no algorithm could have identified the absolutely right, most rational choice (489).¹In Williams' discussion of external and internal reasons, he observes that,

There is an essential indeterminacy in what can be counted a rational deliberative process. Practical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one, and there are no fixed boundaries on the continuum from rational thought to inspiration and conversion....there is a

1 This is an unpopular example for many people. Some have argued that Gauguin's art did not improve significantly as a result of his move to Tahiti, and that he probably left his wife without feeling particularly torn about it. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that there are choices and dilemmas that we face which have no clear answers, and never will.

wider range of states, and a less determinate one, than one might have supposed, which can be counted as *A*'s having a reason to ϕ . (110; McIntyre 386)

Given the practical constraints under which the deliberating agent must work, and given the open-ended and indeterminate nature of deliberation, we may at times make a best judgment which does not take into account important internal reasons we have to form a different conclusion. Moreover, the indeterminate and imprecise nature of practical reasoning may mean that several choices are equally valid. Thus, in acting akratically, the agent may still be acting for good reasons.

In the case of overeating as an instantiation of incontinent or akratic action, these theories are insightful and illuminating. At first glance, it seems self-evident that we ought to refrain from overindulging in food and that we ought to maintain a healthy weight. To fail to do so is self-destructive and has painful consequences. Moreover, we have a duty, as citizens, to care for ourselves and to not overburden our limited health care resources. And we have duties, as private individuals who are loved and relied upon by others, to care for ourselves. It is selfish and unfair to neglect one's health. It is also a sign of a vicious character when we cannot control our base desires. To succumb again and again to our desires, in spite of the consequences, is to be less than human, on some views. Yet, I believe that there are also good reasons for agents to succumb to their appetites.

In order to demonstrate how and why indulging, and even overindulging our appetites could be reasonable, I begin with a basic premise: Our reasons for acting have no foundation. At least not in any metaphysically extravagant sense. By this, I mean that goodness and rightness are not 'queer' entities, like Platonic forms. "What we treat as a reason is, ultimately, up to us" (Buss 37). Values always come from a social/political context and are intersubjective, but there is some room for the individual to manoeuvre. That is, there may be times when dominant values do not cohere with a person's particular subjective motivational set.

Section Three: Reasons for Being Unhealthy

The difference between my account of akrasia and the accounts given by Arpaly and McIntyre stems from the inclusion of social and political context in the discussion. I believe that the notion of external reasons for acting is often a byproduct of incommensurable values.² When I say, "J has a reason to ϕ , even if he has no desire to ϕ , or even if nothing in his subjective motivational set gives him a reason to ϕ ," it may be the case that I am simply imposing my own reasons on J. But by this I do not mean the imposition of a particular, personal reason. I mean a larger conceptual scheme or world view. There is a common narrative in pluralistic, liberal societies which states that we are all fundamentally equal. And by this I do not mean morally equal, as in deserving of equal consideration, but, somehow at base, factually equal. Even when we acknowledge that some people have more advantages than others, there is a belief that many people hold that we all have some 'neutral' core, a soul perhaps, which is more or less the same for all persons. Variation among peoples in liberal, pluralistic societies has historically been characterized in mundane non-threatening terms: varying diets, attire, and music are the extent of our differences and beneath these ostensibly superficial variations, we are the same.³ In addition to this,

² See Bernard Williams' "Internal and External Reasons" for a discussion of these concepts.

³ Charles Taylor discusses this phenomenon at length in "Two Theories of Modernity." He challenges the notion that all peoples will naturally move towards a particular world view through reason. The values associated with modernity are characterized as "acultural" on this view, when really they are the product of a particular culture. The culture which dominates at a given time will view itself as the exemplar of ideal, normal personhood.

Canadians and Americans tend to believe that they live in a classless society, a meritocracy.⁴ A belief in a classless society will also potentially cause people to assume that what is good for them must be good for everyone else, since we're all fundamentally equal. It is not my aim to discuss whether it is right or inevitable that we live in a stratified society. My claim is simply that we are more different than we are willing, at times, to acknowledge, and so what is reasonable will vary across people. I understand that this may seem self-evident to many people. Most of us understand that what counts as a reasonable course of action for one person may not qualify as such for another. The significance of my claim lies in its scope: even the values and reasons which we believe are of fundamental importance to all peoples can vary in their value and significance in different contexts. And this is the case for health.

Williams gives an example of a case in which we may appear to say that someone has an external reason to ϕ , but really we are making an optimistic internal reasons claim about that person. The example consists in a person who refuses to take medicine because he claims to have no interest in preserving his health and Williams says that in this case “we may well still be speaking in the internal sense, with the thought that really at some level he *must* want to be well” (106). And, more often than not, this is probably true. But, even if we would ideally like to pursue some good, our circumstances can make this good secondary to other goods. For example, most of us are familiar with cases of persons with life-threatening illnesses who end their lives through assisted suicide or active euthanasia. A person with ALS will very probably suffer a terrible death, and thus the option to avoid this end is seen as a reasonable choice by many people. But, it is very likely that she would certainly not want to end her life if she didn't have this disease. The desire to end one's life in this situation is not a deep and fundamental desire. It is a desire dictated by circumstances. Similarly, in the case of maintaining health by eating moderately, one's situation will determine the importance of this pursuit.

A significant, but undervalued, reason people may have for eating “bad foods” is that doing so has a “mental health function” (Berlant 41). Lauren Berlant claims that:

eating is like the 'self-medicating' practices of drinking, sex, television, sports fandom, video games, and drugs, but not because they're addictive (This varies, after all.) My claim is that these kinds of activities provide opportunities to become absorbed in the present, opportunities that suffuse people with the pleasure of engaged appetites and enable people to *feel* more resilient in the everyday” (41).

According to Berlant, “eating provides a kind of rest for the exhausted self, an interruption of being good, conscious, and intentional that feels like a relief.... We are now caught in a competition between kinds of health” (mental and physical) (41). Many people never have the opportunity to derive real satisfaction from their jobs (if they have a job at all), and many of us have to work two jobs just to get by. There is little pleasure or relief to be found in a life in which one works perhaps sixteen hours per day at jobs where one feels powerless and undignified. This isn't to deny that many people make the best of their situations by taking pride in what they do, forging bonds of friendship with their coworkers, and so on. But, even so, working at low status jobs, or being underpaid, or having no real security or benefits are all significant stressors for many people. It's also difficult to break free from a situation in which you have to dedicate so much time and energy to mere survival. And while many people want to engage in creative pursuits by which they can feel more self-actualized and more human, we are usually too tired at day's end. Marx observes that the worker who produces goods for someone else, who has no personal stake or creative input in his job, “does not confirm himself in his

⁴ See Allahar and Côté's *Richer and Poorer: The Structure of Inequality in Canada*, section 2: “The Myth of a Classless Society” for a detailed discussion.

work” (“Alienated” 88). The worker “does not belong to himself in his labour but to someone else” and the worker's activity “belongs to another and is the loss of himself” (89). Thus,

The result we arrive at then is that man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions of eating, drinking, and procreating, at most also in his dwelling and dress, and feels himself an animal in his human functions. (89)

When we combine this rather bleak, but common, situation with Bourdieu's subjective expectations of objective probabilities, it is reasonable and inevitable that people will seek comfort where they can. Coping is undervalued—people need to engage in activities which provide relief and comfort. It is unrealistic to expect anyone to rigorously maintain his or her health under such conditions. Berlant observes that “[a] symptom is a fiction the body develops to tell you that a process that you *can't* see is awry. Obesity and eating in everyday life are not just symptoms of something off in individuals. They also point to social problems in maintaining equilibrium and optimism in everyday life” (42-43).

“In *Spaces of Hope*, [David] Harvey writes that under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work.... Likewise, many arguments for exercise and healthy eating do not focus on cultivating better health: they're about having more energy to be more productive” (43). I, like Berlant, have observed this phenomenon at play in commercials for cold remedies. The claimed purpose of a cold remedy in many ads is to make you capable of working. The relief it provides is secondary. There is an expectation that people be productive and come to work, no matter what. It is a point of pride and a badge of honour for many to continue to work even under the most adverse circumstances, even when we are ill or in pain. And there is a constant, looming threat that stands alongside the view that health consists in the ability to work—the threat of poverty and unemployment if we fail to live up to this inhumane standard. Crawford notes that

[s]creening potential and current employees for behavioral, attitudinal, and health purposes has already gained considerable popularity among large corporations. Among the specific advantages cited for health screening are selection “of those judged to present the least risk of unstable attendance, costly illness, poor productivity, or short tenure”; development of a “medical placement code” to match employees to jobs by health specifications; and “protection of the company against future compensation claims” (24, p.31). (“You” 673-674)

People may respond to these inhumane expectations by “self-medicating' or lightening spaces in time [in order to] exhibit fidelity to mental health, to happiness. They refuse the productive system's insistence that you wear yourself out in order to live” (Berlant 53).

People may also choose to indulge their desires because they recognize both the limited amount of control we have over life and death, and the ways in which the pleasures of a good meal enrich our lives. There is a significant body of literature coming out of the social sciences that views with suspicion the concept of health and the dictum that health ought always to be pursued. Robert Crawford's work has been particularly influential. He coined the term 'healthism,' which he says consists in “the preoccupation with personal health as a primary—often *the* primary—focus for the definition and achievement of well-being” (“Healthism” 368). Healthism makes “healthy behaviour the paradigm for good living. Healthy men and women become model men and women” and health has become what Crawford calls a “pan-value”—it has become “an end in itself” (380-381). The WHO's definition of health reflects the all-encompassing view we have of health: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (qtd in

Crawford 381). This subsumption of all facets of human life under the concept of health has been met with criticism and concern. In response to the WHO's definition of health, Daniel Callahan gave this critique:

Such an ideology has the practical effect of blurring the lines of appropriate responsibility. If all problems—political, economic and social—reduce to matters of 'health' then there ceases to be any way to determine who should be responsible for what.... For as soon as one treats all human disorders—war, crime, social unrest—as forms of illness, then.... health is no longer an optional matter, but the golden key to the relief of human misery. (qtd in Crawford 381)

The rise of a scientific world-view in which there is no after-life has elevated the value of health to one of religious proportions. Crawford observes that “health has become the secular salvation of a society that either does not believe in eternal life or makes it a mere residual to the incarnated one, a society for which this one-and-only life becomes everything” (“Health” 404). Petr Skrabanek concurs, saying “Healthism is embraced eagerly as a path to surrogate salvation. If death is to be the final full stop, perhaps the inevitable can be indefinitely postponed. Since disease may lead to death, disease itself must be prevented by propitiatory rituals. The righteous will be saved and the wicked shall die” (16-17).

Healthism also depoliticizes social efforts to improve health and well-being and thus undermines these efforts (Crawford “Healthism” 368). Healthism promotes the view that the individual is responsible for his health. Even though the “etiology of disease” is “complex” and even though many threats to individual health come from surrounding social and political conditions over which the individual has limited control, healthism tells us that it is possible, and is, in fact, our duty to resist these factors. That is, it is up to us to privately resist the messages of advertisers, or to eat fresh food, in spite of poverty or geography, and so on (368). This ideology does not promote collective resistance or safety nets; instead it is an ideology which tells you that your health or lack of it says a great deal about your virtue, about your ability to rise up above your circumstances and take control of your unruly body. Healthism is not necessarily a bad thing because it encourages people to improve their health and well-being, and there is nothing wrong with making an effort to be healthy and feeling empowered to do so. “But it may in the process also serve the illusion that we can *as individuals* control our own existence, and that taking personal action to improve health will somehow satisfy the longing for a much more varied complex of needs” (369).

Part of healthism's focus on individual agency is conceptually tied to what Crawford calls “medical perception” (371). Crawford observes that “[m]edicine as a therapeutic or clinical science locates the problem of disease in the individual body” (371). Disease and the treatment of disease are reduced to that which can be perceived in the individual body. Thus social factors and more complex matrices of causes are ignored in favour of a more simplistic etiology of disease “understood in terms of pathogenic agents” (372). On this view, fat is a signifier, a sign of individual sickness and deviance. Unlike many other diseases (and we'll put aside whether obesity is, in fact, a disease or sign of disease), fat is always visible and thus fat people are an embodied symbol of vice and a reminder of sickness and death. Fat people are further vilified because their bodies remind us that we may lose control of ourselves. And the control afforded to us by the practices associated with the promotion and maintenance of health is used as a surrogate for control over one's economic or political situation, and thus the loss of control signified by the fat person is perceived as particularly threatening and egregious. “[H]ealthism serves to mystify and channel discontent, and perhaps deviance itself, into forms which are basically nonthreatening to the existing social order. Medicine has always performed this social control function, and now medicalized ideology does the same” (383). To engage in health

promoting practices and to demonstrate that you are healthy is also a symbolic act which denotes that you are *not* deviant, that you are, in fact, virtuous and autonomous (“Healthism” 382; “Health” 402). The fat person is a diseased other:

who 'carries' and metonymically comes to represent the feared disease, whose invisible presence contaminates the pure space of health, must be physically and culturally isolated. The presence of disease and 'the diseased' is a nearness that threatens by reminding the healthy that their health is tenuous. (“Health” 414)

Disease is viewed by some as a penalty for immorality. The thinking behind such a view can be characterized as “I am who I am because I am healthy/I am healthy because of who I am; you are who you are because you are unhealthy/you are unhealthy because of who you are” (Crawford “Health” 414). Worse still, it is purportedly through his own sloth and gluttony, and not by some chance encounter with a pathogen, that the fat person becomes who he is. Although some manner of 'just world hypothesis' underlies the ideology of healthism, and thus, even someone who passively contracts an illness 'deserves what he gets,' people still draw a distinction between those who passively contract diseases and those who deliberately engage in risky behaviours. Moreover, a shift from the objective of minimizing suffering to that of maximizing health has occurred as the populations of developed countries succumb less and less to acute illnesses and injuries and instead suffer and die from chronic conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes. Because of this, more stress has been placed on decreasing risky behaviours and implementing preventative strategies. This shift in focus from the treatment of to the prevention of illness means that more people than ever are thought of as deviants. For now you are not only deviant for actually being sick, you are also deviant for potentially being sick (380). Crawford observes, “We become deviants in our everyday lives—when we light up a cigarette, when we consume eggs at breakfast, and when we are unable to express fully our emotions. Persons who act in such a way as to predispose themselves to sickness are now considered actually to be sick” (“Health” 380). And this is particularly true for the fat person.

Thus, the pursuit of health is sometimes a coping mechanism which provides people with a sense of control, and a signifier which identifies people as virtuous. And, as we succumb more and more to chronic 'lifestyle diseases,' fatness becomes a signifier of chaos, death, and vice⁵. But, the little control afforded to us through health practices is tenuous and such practices can foster a greater sense of insecurity over the long term. We are inundated with an excess of health information which provides us with an “ever-expanding list of dangers” (“Health” 415). Crawford cites the sources of this information as:

(a) the acceleration of medical and epidemiological research, the continual revision of which demands close attention by consumers of health information; (b) continuing identification and politicization of environmental and occupational hazards; (c) continuing growth of professional health promotion and health education focusing on lifestyle and behavior change, much of it propelled by governmental agencies and funding; (d) expansion of technologies for detection and monitoring of risk factors and early stages of disease, revealing a vast terrain of asymptomatic pathologies and genetic and other predispositions; (e) emergence of immunity as a medical and lay concern, widening further the sphere of endangerment and action; (f) an ever-expanding commercial culture of health products and services. (“Health” 415)

5 For a detailed discussion of the moral panic associated with obesity see “Fat Panic and the New Morality” by Kathleen Lebesco.

The glut of information regarding dangers to our health increases our anxiety as “[t]he more knowledge acquired, the larger is the gap between the perception of danger (real or imagined) and the efficacy of action (individual, institutional or governmental)” (415). And many of the efforts we make to improve our health, which cost us a great deal in time, effort, and money, “turn out to be largely ineffective or even harmful” (416). We dedicate more resources now to screening technologies, such as mammograms, and tests and treatments which mitigate risk, such as tests and treatments for hypertension or type 2 diabetes. And, ironically, these efforts to manage risk and prevent future harms sometimes do more harm than good or simply have no benefit⁶ (Skrabanek 49). In spite of this, tests and activities which we believe or want to believe lower our risk of becoming ill and/or dying are pursued with great fervour (97). This is certainly true for diet.

Discussions concerning what we ought to eat and what we ought to avoid eating are often quite intense with people advocating for everything from fat-free vegan diets to fat-laden, meaty, low-carbohydrate diets. Recently, simple carbohydrates, particularly products such as high fructose corn syrup, have been demonized, and prior to this, fats were forbidden. In a recent historical review of diets used to control blood glucose in diabetics it was noted that these diets have tended to cycle in their popularity from low to high carbohydrate. But, the authors observe that the primary factor determining the efficacy of the diet is quantity of calories (Sawyer and Gale 1; 5). People who successfully control their diabetes eat sparingly of whatever foods they eat. The “Mediterranean diet” is another recently popular diet which people claim lowers mortality from heart disease. But, while men in Mediterranean countries have lower mortality from coronary heart disease, their life expectancy is the same as men in England; “they simply die of something else” (Skrabanek 94). Men of Japanese ancestry have differing levels of coronary heart disease which correlate with the degrees to which they have been “acculturated to Western culture” (Marmot and Syme 225). This difference can “not be accounted for by differences in the major coronary risk factors [smoking, diet, etc.]” (225). Thus, it has been postulated that social and cultural differences may be factors which influence rates of coronary heart disease, regardless of one's diet.

People sometimes advocate certain diets because they are more 'natural.' That is, such diets are purportedly ideal for the human body and the proponents of such diets create 'just so stories' about human evolution and its role in determining which foods are best. They may argue that more intensive forms of agriculture are relatively recent phenomena and the human body has not evolved sufficiently to digest their products. These kinds of diets are buoyed by the cachet of science because they employ evolutionary arguments. Framing one's reasons to act using scientific or quasi-scientific jargon and explanations imbues those actions and the actor with the cultural capital of the scientific world-view. But the only thing we can know with any kind of certainty about the human diet is that people can live well on almost any kinds of food, from blood and milk, to vegetables and rice. People's rigid adherence to certain diets and the fervour with which people promote and defend them are reminiscent of religious fanaticism and sectarianism. And this makes sense given the above discussion of health as the new morality, the 'pan-value' which stems from a scientific world view in which this life is all you have. People signify their status as believers in science through their loyalty to the “paleo” diet, or they demonstrate their responsibility as biotic citizens by eating low on the food chain. The advice given to people who struggle with their weight to “eat to live, not live to eat” is hollow, given the significance

6 For examples, see “PSA Test Should Be Abandoned as Screen for Prostate Cancer, Task Force Says.”, “Mammograms: For every woman saved, 3 overdiagnosed, study finds.” by Maria Cheng, “Too many tests?; routine medical checks get a second look.” by Lauren Neergard, and “Tight blood sugar control may put some diabetics at risk” by Serena Gordon.

we accord our eating habits. And there is nothing necessarily wrong with this. It is normal for all human activities to be imbued with significance. Everything we do says something about who we are and what we value.

To synopsise thus far, health has become, for many people, *the* primary good to pursue. Health has replaced other human qualities, such as piety, as a signifier of virtue. The pursuit of health can help people to cope with feelings of helplessness and despair in light of their relative powerlessness and may replace community involvement and political activism. In this manner, the glorification of health as the greatest good, and its single-minded pursuit, is not truly in people's best interest as it fails to get to the root of this discontent. And ironically, not only is this behaviour, at base, ineffectual, but the volume of health-related information which bombards us regularly leads to a greater sense of insecurity. We are made aware of too many threats to our health—more than we can realistically cope with—and we are simultaneously bombarded with contradictory information regarding how to mitigate these risks. Thus, the pursuit of health may leave us feeling more anxious than ever. This is certainly true for health as it relates to proper diet and weight loss. We are inundated with information regarding diet, much of which is contradictory and/or constantly changing. Given how complex and overwhelming we've made the pursuit of health, it is not unreasonable that people might simply give up its pursuit. People may resort to a more direct method of coping by simply eating what they like as I discussed earlier.

Some people claim that they would rather enjoy themselves and the pleasures life has to offer than spend their lives in the fear-filled enterprise of avoiding death. The extent of our control over health outcomes and, of course, death, is limited. Marshall Becker, a noted public health expert, observes that “heredity, culture, environment, and chance” are far more significant determinants of health than any individual risk management strategies. He laments:

We are bothering and frightening people about far too many things, we campaign under the banner of denial of pleasure, and we cannot even agree on the scientific validity and importance of most of our recommendations” (qtd in Skrabanek 50).

And it does seem as if pleasure is vilified. Risk is apparently only acceptable if it is taken out of grim necessity. Skrabanek notes,

There is no doubt that pleasures carry risks, but it is equally true that where there is no risk there is no fun. But as life is full of risks, most of them unavoidable, a moral rather than a medical explanation is required for why only those behaviours which are seen as 'hedonistic' earn opprobrium. (120)

And, some might argue that there is no good moral explanation for this denial of pleasure. A life without pleasure is not much of a life. There are, of course, many philosophical discussions about just this and these discussions usually parse the 'noble' pleasures from the base. But it is not my aim to make any such distinctions here. Life is to be enjoyed and the pleasure of a good meal is part of this. Some people might argue that people in the 'developed' world fail in their duties to other global citizens by consuming too much. The ecological consequences of mass-producing foods are grave. But a friend of mine observed recently in a discussion regarding destructive, intensive agriculture, that although we blame Western gluttony as

the source of this grotesque agri-machine farming... in actual fact, the source of high intensity mechanized meat production is the exploitative conditions of labour under unrestricted capitalism. Workers must be provided a way of reproducing their own labour, while being paid

decreasing wages. Instead of regulating the owning classes and providing infrastructure for workers to support themselves, such as high wages, medicare and employment insurance, corporations are just going to make food production as cheap as inhumanely possible. (Tooley)

Marx says “The average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer” (“Communist” 257), but intensive agriculture enables us to feed people for very little money.⁷ People can now afford to eat rich, flavourful foods despite low wages. This is ideal for employers because well-fed people are less likely to revolt. Junk food and fast food are cheap and pleasurable and, as discussed earlier, they may sometimes be a struggling person's only sources of pleasure and relief.

People who are better off often opt for organic or locally-produced foods—that is, people with more economic and cultural capital have the privilege of choosing foods for ethical reasons—and they have the opportunity to savour more luxurious or unusual meals. Craig Clairborne, food editor of *The New York Times*, said:

I love hamburgers and chili con carne and hot dogs. And *foie gras* and Sauternes and those small birds known as ortolans. I love banquettes of quail eggs with hollandaise sauce, and clambakes with lobsters and crepes filled with cream. And if I am abbreviating my stay on this earth for an hour or so, I say only that I have no desire to be a Methuselah, a hundred or more years old and still alive, grace be to something that plugs into an electric outlet. (qtd in Skrabanek 141-142)

Clairborne's quote speaks to those of us who wonder whether our efforts to control ourselves are worthwhile in the long run. Many people have made wry observations about the absurd futility of rigorous self-denial, and there are many jokes about people who deny themselves every pleasure so that they might 'die from nothing.' Death has become a sort of failure or punishment. If a person dies in any way other than at the age of one hundred and two from 'natural causes,' we look to blame the person for having died. “[T]he victim's lifestyle becomes the subject of scrutiny.... It is commonplace that when a person dies of a 'preventable disease' such as cancer or heart disease, doctors can explain the death by unhealthy 'behaviour', that is by the person's misbehaviour” (Skrabanek 53-54). We like to think that, in a just world, people who die untimely deaths did something to deserve those deaths. And, even though we know that this is not true, there is some part of us that believes that if we only do the right things, we might avoid this fate. We are like Ivan Ilych's acquaintances who, upon hearing of Ilych's death have “the complacent feeling that, 'it is he who is dead and not I’” (Tolstoy 96). Illich's *Medical Nemesis* speaks of our denial in the face of frailty and mortality:

Illich described how medicine had usurped a monopoly on the interpretation and management

⁷ Gard and Wright argue that:

people have latched on to the idea of an ‘obesity epidemic’ because it conforms to a familiar story about Western decadence and decline. The ‘obesity epidemic’, so the argument goes, is the product of an ‘effortless’ Western lifestyle which has become progressively hostile towards physical activity and dietary restraint. In other words, Westernized living makes you lazy, gluttonous and, eventually, fat. We will argue that this represents a serious misreading of Western life as it currently exists. However, it is a popular version of a familiar story which pre-dates by centuries the relatively recent spike in overweight and obesity statistics. (2)

of health, well-being, suffering, disease, disability and death, to the detriment of health itself. By 'health', Illich meant the process of adaptation to growing up, ageing, disease and death, the coping mechanisms embedded in the culture and tradition of communities. The medical monopoly deprived people of their autonomy; by supervising and minding them from birth to death (or even from before birth), the art of living and the art of dying, transmitted from generation to generation, were obliterated and lost. The cohesion of traditional communities was replaced by the loneliness of individuals, forming an anonymous mass of 'health consumers'. (Skrabanek 17)

It is reasonable that some people might choose to pursue earthly pleasures in light of our limited control over life and death. It may be liberating to let go of one's fears of death and illness in order to simply enjoy living. This is not to say that we must become gluttons and by this I do not mean that this is the only reasonable choice. As I discussed above, there are many equally reasonable choices we can make regarding how to act and I mean simply to show here that people who care little for the pursuit of health, understood as a kind of saintly self-denial, are making a rational choice.

The energy we put into health is energy that can be spent on other activities. On the one hand, most people would agree that it is reasonable to maintain sufficient health for a decent quality of life, free from debilitating pain and injury, but often people spend inordinate amounts of time exercising in gyms, training for marathons, and so on. People who diet dedicate tremendous amounts of time and attention to monitoring their caloric intake—weighing foods, counting calories, and reading about which foods to prefer or disprefer (and this changes all the time). And, the fact that most people who lose weight gain it all back ensures that this activity may be a lifetime pursuit which only ends at the grave. We need some degree of health to lead good lives; this is uncontroversial. But where do we draw the line? The problem is akin to the case of the person who spends a great deal of time and resources training for a lucrative career, then spends most of her time working because she wants the luxuries and security associated with a higher income, but cannot enjoy any of it because she is forever working. Skrabanek asks:

Who would like to be remembered as someone who spent every day of his life 'keeping fit', avoiding the sun (jogging in a wide-brimmed hat?), cholesterol and smoking friends, and depositing daily bulky stools (bran is good for you)? (50)

And this is a good question to ask oneself. For health-related pursuits can take up so much of our time that we never pursue our other interests. And the problem of pursuing health so single-mindedly does not end here. We are also rendered complacent and impotent as agents of change, as agents of social justice because we spend all of our time policing ourselves and have no time for anything else.

I will admit that my arguments here verge on the polemical. Funnily enough, Skrabanek's work, which is oft-cited in this section, is so polemical and operatic in its tone that my argument is fairly tame next to his. Nevertheless, I want to clarify that the pursuit and maintenance of good health is not just an activity which keeps us complacent and apolitical. And while "healthism" is an oppressive conceptual framework, the general view that health is of fundamental value is reasonable and by no means oppressive. But there are good reasons why people may refrain from pursuing health as the sole good, as if we might cheat death. And there are good reasons why people might simply let go and indulge their appetites either because they have little else to enjoy or to look forward to or perhaps because they have weighed the consequences and the benefits and have decided to opt for a life of indulgence.

My aim in this chapter has primarily been to demonstrate that it can be rational to act in ways which are

considered unhealthy. And such actions may be classified as akratic if the agents performing them simultaneously believe that it would be best if they engaged in healthier practices. But there is also a body of controversial literature which argues that the claims about obesity's threat to health are exaggerated and/or false.⁸ Overweight and obesity and their relationship to health and health outcomes are not as straightforward as people think. Obesity is characterized as a risk factor for certain diseases, but Skrabanek observes that:

risk factors have nothing to do with causes of diseases, and their introduction was an example of statistical trickery to provide an 'explanation' for causative mechanisms, which, in fact, are not known. For example, homosexuality is a risk factor for AIDS. Yet, clearly, it is not homosexuality which *causes* the disease, and even if all homosexuals were exterminated, it would not eradicate the disease. The possession of a driving licence is a risk factor for car accidents. The ability to swim is a risk factor for drowning....In general, the study of risk factors and their detection in individuals does not bring us nearer to an understanding of causal mechanisms. More often than not, risk factors obscure rather than illuminate the path towards a proper understanding of cause. (163)

It is not entirely clear whether obesity is a cause of disease, a symptom, or neither. And the risks associated with obesity are not significant until a person enters the upper percentiles of BMI (Austin 256-257; Lebesco 98). Thus, it may be the case that many people have no reason at all to lose weight. This is akin to Williams' view that:

A member of *S* [the subjective motivational set], *D*, will not give *A* a reason for ϕ -ing if either the existence of *D* is dependent on false belief, or *A*'s belief in the relevance of ϕ -ing to the satisfaction of *D* is false. ("Internal" 103)

D, in this case, might be the desire to lose weight based on the false belief that maintaining a lower body weight is essential for one's good health or it may be a false belief in the relevance of losing weight in order to satisfy *D* understood as a more general desire to be healthy. In either case, if these claims about overweight and obesity are true, we may have little reason to watch our weight even if we view health as the greatest good.

Conclusion

Christine Korsgaard observes that, while the contents of our minds are not "completely accessible to us," we are nevertheless reflective creatures (93-94). Thus, while I may not be the perfect, omniscient agent, I can still take a step back from my situation and reflect upon my desires and beliefs. Perhaps I need to make a decision about acting on a given desire or perhaps I need to establish a belief based on some evidence. Whatever desires, inclinations, reasons, and facts inform my decision "[I] must make [my] decisions and choices 'under the idea of freedom'" (94).⁹ Thus, "[i]f the bidding from outside is

8 See: *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality and Ideology* by Michael Gard and Jan Wright, "Fat, Loathing and Public Health: The Complicity of Science in a Culture of Disordered Eating." by S. Bryn Austin, and "Fat Panic and the New Morality" by Kathleen Lebesco.

9 Korsgaard is a Kantian, and so, for her, freedom and rationality are inextricably tied to one another. But, even if you do not ascribe to the kind of unconditioned freedom favoured by the Kantians, the idea that there is a right way to act for you, in your individual, particular situatedness, is a freedom of sorts. And it is this which may cause you to reject, consciously or unconsciously, dominant values.

desire, then the point is that the reflective mind must endorse the desire before it can act on it, it must say to itself that the desire is a reason” (94). In short, it is up to the individual to decide whether to act for any reason. On the one hand, this may seem self-evident, but on the other, it's a radical and inspiring idea. Even if you ascribe to divine command theory, it is still up to you whether to assent or revolt. And even when certain practices seem so natural that they become 'part of the scenery,' it is possible to take a step back from them. For example, when I was much younger, it occurred to me one day that people didn't have to pay to live somewhere. That is, it was not inevitable that we should have to pay for property. Up until that point, things such as rent and mortgages seemed like brute facts. It felt liberating to suddenly be free from a conceptual framework which had previously felt like part of some natural order. We certainly cannot completely disengage from our contexts, and our opinions and desires must come from somewhere, but there is still a little room to manoeuvre. It is perhaps this variability which comes from our particular situations that grants us a measure of freedom above that of the habitus.

Korsgaard, like Bourdieu and Taylor, recognizes that we derive our reasons for acting from our personal identities:

The conception of one's identity in question here is not a theoretical one, a view about what as a matter of inescapable scientific fact you are. It is better understood as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. So I will call this a conception of your practical identity. Practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions. You are a human being, a woman or a man, an adherent of a certain religion, a member of an ethnic group, a member of a certain profession, someone's lover or friend, and so on. And all of these identities give rise to reasons and obligations. Your reasons express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids. (101)

She identifies the concept of personal integrity as an example which exemplifies the close relationship between one's identity and practical reasoning. Integrity is both a moral and a metaphysical concept, denoting moral uprightness and wholeness or undividedness. She observes that integrity consists in acting in a manner consistent with the self-conception under which you value yourself. When we fail to fulfil the obligations commensurate with our identities, we jeopardize the stability of our identities. When we fail to act in a manner fitting for the self we value, “[i]t is to be for all practical purposes dead or worse than dead” (102).

The manner in which akratic action fits in to this schema may at times consist in a failure to act with integrity. We may sometimes make exceptions of ourselves, thinking that we can shirk our duties without doing any lasting damage. And these exceptions may become habitual, leading to an identity crisis in which I sorely lack the discipline and structure necessary for producing my valued self. But, sometimes it may be the case that acting akratically stems from a need to be true to myself, to act in a manner practically appropriate for me. This occurs when culturally dominant values are not commensurate with the values correlated with your personal identity. This was touched upon in the last chapter in the discussion of Bourdieu's subjective expectations of objective probabilities. The values of the dominant class are acknowledged as superior by people even while these people may implicitly endorse entirely different values through their actions. We may be told that good people value x or do x , yet we may recognize on some level that these values do not work for us. And this phenomenon looks like akrasia because it consists in believing that one ought to ϕ , yet failing to do so. But because failing to ϕ , in this case, is to act in a manner appropriate for one's personal identity, it is rational. In a similar manner, we may consciously or unconsciously reject the tenets of healthism because we know, on some level, that the values and behaviours associated with this ideology are not in our best interests.

Chapter Four: Confounding Factors

In the last chapter, I discussed some ways in which apparently akratic behaviour could, in fact, be rational behaviour. That is, rational in the sense that it serves the needs of the agent, given her circumstances. We are not transparent to ourselves and we may have good reasons to ϕ even if ϕ ing goes against what we believe are our best judgments. Deliberation has practical limitations in the form of temporal and cognitive constraints and, as a result, there may be times when we fail to consider factors which could alter our judgments significantly. In the case of neglecting my health, I may have reasons to do so but I may deny or repress them because these reasons go against cultural norms. Healthism—the view that health is the highest good and that individuals have a moral duty to maintain the best health possible—is currently a dominant ethos, but this normative framework can be oppressive and it may not always serve our best interests.

This chapter concerns ways in which our judgments about agency, itself, can be mistaken and the ways in which it can be difficult to determine when and how we are responsible for our actions. There are cultural factors which may colour our interpretations of people's behaviours for reasons which have nothing to do with the behaviours, themselves. And there are facts about human neurophysiological development which make it difficult to determine where personal responsibility lies. In the first part of this chapter I will discuss some ways in which our interpretations of behaviours can vary. By this I mean that a behaviour can be judged as compulsive or free, depending on who interprets the behaviour. And a behaviour may be considered deviant or normal depending on one's context. A useful example of this phenomenon consists in how we talk about and have historically talked about homosexuality. Homosexuality has been characterized as a sin, a crime, an illness, and a benign inborn variation. Each of these interpretations says something different about the agent. A sin or a crime is something for which one is blameworthy and it is implicit in such a judgment that the agent acts freely. But we are not held responsible for inborn traits or symptoms of disease. In addition to this, homosexuality, itself, is seen by some people as deviant behaviour and by others as normal and acceptable. The way each of us thinks about homosexuality consists of an interacting set of factors as can be seen in table 1:

Table 1: Homosexuality and Agency

| Homosexuality: Moral Assessment → | Deviant/Undesirable | Normal/Acceptable |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Etiology ↓ | | |
| Genetic Variable/Inborn Trait | Illness | Normal Variation |
| Free Choice | Crime or Sin | Individual Right or Benign Choice |

So, for example, if you believe that homosexuality is an inborn trait, but also consider it undesirable, then you probably believe it is an illness. If this is the case, then you probably believe that the homosexual ought to seek psychiatric treatment. If you think homosexuality is a choice and that it is either a crime or a sin, then you probably believe that homosexuals ought to choose to be heterosexuals and can voluntarily discontinue being homosexuals. And, of course, if you view homosexuality as normal and acceptable, regardless of whether you believe it to be biologically determined or freely chosen, you will not believe that the homosexual ought to do anything to change his orientation.¹ As

¹At present, it is considered de rigeur to say that homosexuals are 'born that way.' While, this certainly

you can see, judgments about what, if anything, we ought to do about a behaviour can vary, and our judgments regarding whether we are free to change a behaviour can vary as well. Oftentimes it is power which determines how a behaviour is interpreted. The institution which wields the most power and authority at a given time and place is responsible for interpreting and controlling behaviours. This is the subject of the first part of this chapter.

Meaning, Power, and Agency

The source of normative and epistemological legitimacy in modern worldviews has shifted from the church, to the state, to science and medicine, more recently. This is not to say that religion and the law are not authoritative to many people, but science is taking the helm as a primary source of both knowledge and value. In the transition from religious to state authority, changes to social, political, and economic life² led Hobbes and his contemporaries to alter the way we speak about human nature:

Tracts were being written about the nature of man based on a less transcendental framework. They embodied the concept of the social contract. Their terms were legalistic and their espousers, Hobbes, Rousseau, Mills, Locke, were of varying persuasion. The American and French Constitutions perhaps enthroned the tools and transformation of this thinking. They spoke of human affairs without religious reference but rather in secular terms such as justice, right, duty, franchise, liberty, contract. And as once it had been in religious teaching, so now the search for the meaning and understanding of human life was sought in the law. (Zola 44)

But the authority of law would also be undermined by an eventual crisis in faith. Egon Bittner eloquently observed that “what in the former [religion] was the authority of truth became in the latter the truth of authority. The crisis of the ministry and of jurisprudence consists precisely in the fact that the former could not sustain its truth claims and that the latter was failing in its authority claims” (qtd in Zola 46). Thus, a scientific conceptual framework has, to some degree, usurped the authority of both the religious and the legal.³ Science, generally speaking, is respected because of its apparent fairness and impartiality. When we describe phenomena using scientific terms, such descriptions are intended to be true and unbiased. So it makes sense that many people should turn to this conceptual framework in light of their disillusionment with religion and the state. Medicine is considered a scientific discipline, having “wedded itself to science” after the “bacteriological revolution and the Flexner report” (Zola 48). One result of this shift in power is that many human activities, particularly deviant behaviours, are now given medical meanings, or are 'medicalized' rather than being classified as sins or crimes.

Medicalization consists in the classification of some aspect of human life as a medical concern, rather than, say, a moral concern, a legal concern, or a private matter over which the individual has sole jurisdiction. For example, the processes of birth and death have been medicalized (though aspects of both birth and death also fall under the purview of the law and morality) (Scott and Marshall). These significant events, which historically have happened in people's homes, now often happen in hospitals.

may be true, the motivation for taking this stance is to absolve the homosexual of any responsibility for his behaviour. But, if you believe that there is nothing inherently wrong with homosexuality, why does it matter whether it is an inborn trait or a choice?

2 See I.K. Zola's “Healthism and Disabling Medicalization” for a more detailed exposition of these changes.

3 See I.K. Zola's “Healthism and Disabling Medicalization” for a detailed discussion of this ideological shift and its causes.

The term is often used in a pejorative sense because it is associated with power and the abuse of power. But this does not mean that medicalization is necessarily bad. We often medicalize behaviours in the interest of fairness and compassion, such as when we exempt someone from criminal responsibility for breaking the law when floridly psychotic. Thus, while much of the sociological literature on medicalization presents a dark view of this phenomenon, the move towards a medical model of deviance is viewed by many as a positive step:

The transformation of problems from ones of badness to ones of sickness has a ring of humanitarian concern. The love of man for man or woman for woman, the wildness of children, or the desire to continually use opiates comes to be seen in neutral, amoral terms. The onus of being "bad people" is cast off when the same phenomena are now viewed as "disease." It makes it less possible for morally upright people to ignore these people's "problems" and makes feasible development of institutional and public facilities for their care. (Conrad and Schneider vii)

In spite of its benefits, what is worrying to some people is scope of medicalization. An aspect of a human life which is medicalized becomes subject to medical authority. If the concept of health subsumes what appears to be all parts of a human life, as seen in the WHO definition, then those with medical expertise wield a great deal of power. Much of the sociological discourse on medicalization concerns power. Deviant⁴ behaviours are subject to different controls and treatments depending on how the behaviours are characterized. Problem drug use is a key example. There is an ideological power struggle taking place over how deviant drug use ought to be characterized. Some people argue that it is a medical problem, while others view it as a moral and/or legal problem. Whichever characterization takes precedence determines which experts and institutions, if any, treat or control the user.

Medicalization is also problematic because when we describe a person's deviance as an illness, we lower that person's social status and undermine her dignity. When we medicalize deviance, we change how the deviant is perceived as an agent. A person who is held morally and/or criminally responsible for some deviant behaviour is understood to be responsible for his actions, whereas a person whose deviance is characterized as an illness is viewed as a victim who has little or no self control. To be characterized as a victim of a compulsion caused by an illness or some neurological abnormality is to be made a second class citizen, for the capacity for effective agency is part of what makes a person worthy of respect (249). It is also still implicit in the judgment, that a deviant behaviour is an illness, that this behaviour is undesirable. The behaviour is still 'bad' in a sense, but the person performing the behaviour is not capable of controlling his 'badness.' Thus, the medical designation is not neutral or benign (249). This is why people who identify as queer have struggled for their identities to be normalized, rather than medicalized (vii-viii). And there are people who believe that it is not a sickness, but a reasonable choice, to be dependent on illegal or non-prescribed drugs.

Although medical interpretations of human behaviours are often shrouded in technical, scientific language, the ascription of meaning to facets of human life is imprecise:

Michael Oakeshott used the metaphor of 'blinks' and 'winks' to distinguish objective phenomena from subjective phenomena. Blinks represent facts, winks convey meaning. In medicine,

4 Deviance is understood here as behaviours which are "negatively defined or condemned in our society" (Conrad and Schneider 3). It does not mean that these behaviours are inherently undesirable; such behaviours may only be problematic insofar as they incur penalties and negative judgments.

blinks correspond to the objective signs of disease, but the concept of disease is in part a wink-construct, and the purpose of medicine is to give blinks meaning. In this process the subjective (moral) interpretation becomes paramount, but hidden in technical, 'objective', jargon, imitating the language of science. To use one of Thomas Szasz's examples, anorgasmia (the inability to experience sexual pleasure) is a 'disease', 'treated' by doctors, while the inability to weep when sad, is, by arbitrary criteria, not a disease. Similarly, addiction to drugs is a 'disease' but addiction to money or power is not. (Skrabanek 140)

In the context of this paper, what interests me about our interpretations of deviant behaviours is that these interpretations can determine whether we view such acts as freely undertaken or as the products of compulsions. This has implications for the discourse on akrasia. Akrasia is generally understood as distinct from compulsion in that the akratic agent acts intentionally and could have done otherwise. But, if the meanings we ascribe to deviant behaviours can change, then it is possible that a behaviour could be interpreted as akratic, compulsive, or neither, depending on one's historical and/or geographic location. In addition to this, Conrad and Schneider observe that “Medicalization increases directly with its economic profitability” (275). Medicalizing a problem which has historically been characterized as an ordinary part of the human condition, such as anxiety, is profitable for pharmaceutical corporations. Medicalizing obesity creates a subset of specialists—bariatric physicians—and specialization in medicine is highly profitable (275-276). A more general way to think of this is that the institution which controls the deviance—be it the church, the state, or the medical establishment—profits. And the more behaviours over which you have control, the more you profit economically (or politically—the gain does not have to be explicitly or directly economic). This makes the label of deviance, simpliciter, always suspect because people may have unscrupulous motives for defining something as deviant. And my prior discussion of reasons for overindulging and/or remaining overweight or obese demonstrates that we needn't necessarily view overeating/obesity as an illness, a crime, or a sin.

Skrabanek notes that “[d]isease designations can support dominant social interests and institutions. A poignant example is prominent 19th century New Orleans physician S.W. Cartwright's antebellum conceptualization of the disease drapetomania, a condition that affected only slaves. Its major symptom was running away from their masters” (245). The desire to masturbate has historically been characterized as an illness, and dissidents in the former Soviet Union were labelled as mentally ill. (245). Yet most of us would now consider all of these disease designations abhorrent. Around the time of Prohibition, Clarence Darrow observed that the moral panic surrounding alcohol consumption among the working classes overshadowed the greater threats to these people: industrial accidents and terrible working and living conditions. Temperance crusaders said “Let's first destroy Rum. Join with us on the moral issue. Let us get rid of Rum and then we will help you'. Darrow warned that once they had got rid of rum, they would say, 'now let us get rid of tobacco, and then we will help you’” (115-116). And current reactions to obesity are similar. “The fat body, particularly the female one, is read as a signifier of weak will, sloth, and animalistic appetite” (Austin 248). In light of this, some people may advocate for the view that fat people are undeserving of any kind of assistance, that they are a waste of resources and may be excluded from receiving certain benefits until they change, that is, demonstrate that they are worthy of being helped. In these ways, disease designations can serve interests other than that of the purportedly sick person and such designations influence our view of these people as agents.

The medicalization of deviance results in a belief that the agent acts compulsively and anyone whose deviance is interpreted as illness must turn to others for treatment:

[T]he medical excuse for deviance is only valid when the patient-deviant accepts the medical perspective of the inherent undesirability of his or her sick behavior and submits to a

subordinate relationship with an official agent of control (the physician) toward changing it. (Conrad and Schneider 247)

In contrast, healthism, while it may conceptualize many or most parts of an ordinary human life as health concerns, places responsibility for health outcomes on the individual. As I discussed earlier, healthism serves as an outlet for feelings of helplessness and insecurity. Thus it can render us politically impotent by diverting our attentions. Healthism also serves the interests of corporations:

By relocating the task of health protection to the sphere of lifestyle, health practice in the 1970s provided cover for corporate and political strategies aimed at eviscerating the regulatory regime. The diversion argument, however, must be stated cautiously. One should not assume a zero-sum game. In retrospect, it is clear that concerns about environmental health threats did not disappear. Crucially, however, public attention did shift to lifestyle hazards and individual solutions – in other words, to an arena in which health became a problem one ‘could do something about’. (Crawford “Health” 409)

In short, healthism places responsibility in the hands of the individual, and is thus a conceptual framework which characterizes people as relatively free and powerful, that is, powerful in the sense that they have the power to significantly control personal health outcomes. Medicalization absolves a person of blame or guilt for deviant behaviours, but in exchange for this absolution, that person must agree that her behaviour is unacceptable and submit to the authority of a physician. The two are entirely compatible with one another.

Conrad and Schneider speculate that deviant behaviours may also be medicalized or de-medicalized depending on their cost. It may be the case that deviant behaviours whose treatment costs are “prohibitive” will not be or will cease to be defined as medical problems (256). In addition to this the class of the person performing the behaviour may affect its designation. Skrabanek notes that:

When smoking was the norm among the middle classes, harmful effects of smoking could be calmly discussed (after all, as early as the 1880s cigarettes were colloquially known as 'coffin nails') but it would have been unthinkable to describe smokers as mentally diseased, irrational, irresponsible or deviant. The shift from medical aspects of smoking to moral exhortation only became possible when smoking declined among the middle classes. (121-122).

To sum up, deviant behaviour can be interpreted as wilful or compulsive depending on which institution has the power to treat and control the behaviour; medicalization is profitable and it confers power on medical experts and institutions, so people may have unscrupulous motives for defining a phenomenon as a medical problem; labelling any behaviour as deviant confers power on whichever institutions and experts are responsible for controlling that behaviour, so the deviance designation may be used to excess by corrupt institutions; disease designations can “support dominant social interests and institutions” (Skrabanek 245), so a problem may be medicalized in order to undermine the interests of a marginalized group; and deviant behaviours may be medicalized or de-medicalized depending on the costliness of treatment and depending on which segment of the population exhibits the behaviour. So, again, medicalization may have nothing to do with whether a problem is truly the product of an illness. What this boils down to is that our beliefs concerning which behaviours ought to be proscribed and our beliefs concerning which of these proscribed behaviours are freely undertaken often have nothing to do with the true moral status or desirability of the behaviours.

Freedom, Addiction, Akrasia, and Compulsion: When and How are We Accountable?

The discussion thus far demonstrates that we must consider carefully our interpretations of behaviours. It is difficult to truly discern akratic from compulsive behaviours (if this is possible at all). Gary Watson's discussion in "Skepticism About Weakness of Will" casts further doubt upon the way we talk about akrasia. Watson observes that the "common view" of weakness of the will posits that weak-willed actions are distinguishable from compulsive behaviours because the weak-willed agent could have done otherwise, while the person acting under compulsion could not have done otherwise (Watson 317). He argues, very convincingly, that this view is untenable. His scepticism of the common account is nonsocratic—that is, it differs from socratic scepticism about akrasia, which consists in the view that people "most desire, and hence pursue" what they believe is best, and thus it is not possible for someone to act against his best judgment (319). Akrasia, on this view, consists in ignorance of what is truly best, usually due to an error in perception by which the agent perceives the "nearer, more immediate good" to be of greater value (319). Both Watson and I believe that this does, in fact, happen, and the next chapter will deal with this phenomenon. But, Watson's scepticism is concerned with another feature of the common account of akrasia. Watson wonders how we can make sense of the notion that the weak-willed agent is overcome by a desire to ϕ , yet simultaneously could have done otherwise. If the agent's will is weak and she is overcome by the desire, how can we say that she could have done otherwise? That is, how can you be simultaneously weaker and stronger than a recalcitrant urge?

Weak-willed actions are commonly characterized as actions which are contrary to the agent's best judgment. In such cases, the agent believes that it is best to ϕ , but is overcome by a desire to do otherwise. For example, you may think it is best that you get up early, yet you are overcome by a desire to sleep in. You sincerely believe that getting up is the best thing to do, yet you continue to lie there, hitting the snooze button. If, in theory, you are capable of getting up early, why don't you get up? That is, can it truly be said that you failed to get up because you were weak-willed? If you are capable of getting up, it seems more likely that the answer lies elsewhere. There are many other reasons why a person might act in an apparently akratic manner. It could be a case of "evaluation illusion" as described in the socratic account. In such a case, the agent changes his mind about what is best as the desired object or behaviour looms closer. As mentioned above, this is the subject of the next chapter. It could also be a case of self-deception. Much of my discussion in the previous chapter concerns a kind of self-deception. People may believe that they value the pursuit of health most highly, but their actions may betray the fact that their priorities lie elsewhere—for good reasons. Another way in which we might deceive ourselves is by telling ourselves that our failure to abide by our best judgment is an exception, and not a true violation of the rule. So, in the case of sleeping in, you tell yourself that it's 'just this once.' This will also be discussed further in the next chapter. A final reason could be that the agent does not try hard enough—"insufficient effort" (337). We may sometimes underestimate how much effort is truly required to do what we believe is right. Or, upon further reflection, we may decide that it is not worth the effort to abstain from whatever it is that we desire.

In order to eliminate the contradiction—that the akratic agent is both weaker and stronger than his desire—Watson argues that weak-willed agents, when acting against their considered judgments, cannot do otherwise. He recognizes the problem this poses for distinguishing compulsion from weakness (321). Watson observes that weak agents lack "the virtue of self-control...and for this virtue, knowledge in the ordinary sense is clearly insufficient" because weakness of the will consists in acting against one's better judgments (323). The weak agent does not lack the capacity to know what is the right thing to do. But *both* compulsion and weakness of will are caused by a "failure of self-control" (323). And in both cases, the agent could not have done otherwise under the particular circumstances.

Watson observes that weakness of will and compulsion are, in fact, identical phenomena:

[T]he problem of distinguishing weakness from compulsion may be expressed in the following way... what is most striking, and leads naturally to the invocation of the notion of compulsion, is that the agents' actual motivation is independent of any conception that they have of the worth of their actions. Their motivation is in this way "alien" to them. In some significant sense, they seem motivated contrary to their own wills. Clearly, the "will" here cannot be the *strongest* motive; for compulsives do not act contrary to their strongest motive. They act contrary to their judgments of the worth of their actions. It is plausible, then, to identify the "will" with practical judgment. This suggests that the mark of a compulsive desire is its capacity to motivate the agent contrary to practical judgment. But it follows that the weak agent acts contrary to his or her judgment in exactly the same sense, and therefore acts under compulsion. (327)

Nevertheless, Watson argues that it is possible to distinguish weakness of will from compulsion. He observes that "[w]eak agents fall short of standards of 'reasonable and normal' self control (for which we hold them responsible), whereas compulsive agents are motivated by desires which they could not resist even if they met those standards" (332). The weak agent lacks the capacities of a "typical adult in our society," and is consequently the subject of shame and reproach (332-333). But the compulsive agent is one who is faced with desires that any normal person would be unable to resist and is consequently not subject to the same judgments (332). Watson argues that "we do not criticize weak agents for their principles or values but for their failure to develop or maintain the capacities necessary to make those values effective in action" (333). But, it is not necessarily fair or reasonable to assign blame for not developing one's capacities to self-regulate. The capacity for self-control is the product of years of neurological development and much of our capacity to self-regulate is acquired during infancy and early childhood. It does not seem plausible that we can blame someone for the failure to develop self-control.

The facts concerning the effects of one's social environment on neurological development demonstrate that much of an individual's capacity to self-regulate is outside of his control. In his discussion of addiction, Gabor Maté observes that "brain development in the uterus and during childhood is the single most important biological factor in determining whether or not a person will be predisposed to substance dependence and to addictive behaviours of any sort, whether drug-related or not" (185). He cites a study of seventeen thousand middle-class Americans which demonstrates that "[t]he basic cause of addiction is predominantly experience-dependent during childhood, and not substance-dependent" (Felitti qtd in Maté 185). Unlike other animals, "[t]hree quarters of our brain growth takes place outside of the womb" (186). The development of our brains outside of the womb allows us to adapt to our surroundings and learn in ways not afforded to other organisms. This feature of our development grants us great cognitive flexibility, but it can also cause us great harm. We are born with "many more neurons and connections than necessary—billions of neurons in excess of what will be required" (189). As our brain develops, a kind of "neural Darwinism" occurs, in which some connections and pathways are forged, while others are pruned off if left inert (189). And "[a]t any point in the process you have all these potentials for either good or bad stimulation to get in there and set the microstructure of the brain" (Post qtd in Maté 189). A person who is kept in a dark room for the first five years of life will never develop the ability to see because the neural structures required for sight do not develop. In a similar manner, "the dopamine circuits of incentive motivation and the opioid circuitry of attachment-reward, as well as those for the regulatory centres in the prefrontal cortex, such as the orbitofrontal cortex" are only properly developed in the right emotional environment (189). Healthy attachment relationships are necessary for healthy human brain development. Parental body language, stress, tone of voice, and facial expression all influence the development of the infant brain (191). Dr. Rhawn

Joseph explains that:

[An] abnormal or impoverished rearing environment can decrease a thousand fold the number of synapses per axon....retard growth and eliminate billions if not trillions of synapses per brain, and result in the preservation of abnormal interconnections which are normally discarded over the course of development. (qtd in Maté 191)

This neurological damage leads to behavioural problems, including "a reduced ability to anticipate consequences or to inhibit irrelevant or inappropriate, self-destructive behaviours" (Joseph qtd in Maté 193). People whose neurological development has been impacted negatively by childhood trauma will respond to their environments less flexibly in ways less "conducive to health and maturity" (195). They will be more vulnerable to drug dependency. This is just a taste of the data available on the impact of social relationships and attachments on neurological development and its behavioural consequences.

While the above discussion primarily concerns extreme cases, it demonstrates that our abilities to self-regulate and abstain from unhealthy behaviours are strongly determined by factors over which we have no control. And while most of us are not drug addicts, few of us have had perfect lives in which we have been afforded the opportunities to develop optimal capacities for self-control. Even if you are fortunate enough to have been born into an ideal nurturing environment, the above discussion demonstrates that your resultant capacities to self-regulate are not your own doing. It seems as if the distinctions between the compulsive, the weak-willed, and the competently self-regulating are matters of degree. We all exist at different ends of a spectrum of self-control, and our positions on that spectrum are, in many ways, not up to us. Hence, holding a weak-willed agent accountable for not developing a normal capacity for self-control appears to be misguided. It may be the case that, as we learn more about neuroplasticity and self-regulation, we will develop better, more effective behaviour modification strategies. And if such strategies become common knowledge, we may be able to justifiably claim that someone is blameworthy for failing to develop a normal capacity for self-control. Nevertheless, if we bracket the notion of blameworthiness, the remaining distinction/definition—that the akratic possesses a less than normal capacity for self-control, while the compulsive is faced with urges that an average person in her society could not overcome—is plausible.

It is true that many apparently weak-willed actions may, in fact, be instances of self-deception or instances in which we overestimate the value of a desire as an opportunity to satisfy it comes close. And sometimes we may have underestimated the effort required to abide by our judgments. But it still seems plausible that we may, at times, succumb to an urge or desire, despite our true belief that we ought not to do so, because we are too weak. And perhaps this desire is the kind of desire that most people around us seem to have a handle on. It certainly seems to be the case that we all sometimes fall short of ordinary standards, despite our beliefs.

I wish to now apply Watson's discussion to the problem of overeating and obesity. It seems as if plausible arguments can be made both in favour of overeating as a compulsion and as a weak-willed behaviour. Watson distinguishes compulsion from weak-willed behaviour using cultural norms. A person acts compulsively when she is overcome by a desire which would be irresistible to any normal person within a particular society or cultural group. A person is weak-willed when she is overcome by a desire which any normal person within her society could resist. He adds a somewhat confusing proviso to this which stipulates that

It does not follow from this account, however, that weak agents are those with less self-control than most others in society *in fact* have. Weakness is relative to expectations and norms, and it

is conceivable that a whole community could fall short of these. (332)

It is unclear to me how this proviso is compatible with his claim that “weakness of will involves the failure to develop certain normal capacities of self-control, whereas compulsion involves desires which even the possession of such capacities would not enable one to resist” (339). The first criteria seem to be concerned with facts about how people within a given society actually behave, while the proviso concerns the values of a community which may have nothing to do with people's actual capacities for self-regulation. So, let's bracket the proviso for the time being.

Is overeating a failure to live up to norms or is it a compulsion which few people can resist? About 20% of Canadians are obese and the combined total of obese and overweight Canadians is about 50% (“Overweight”). That's a lot of people. When we consider the tremendous quantity of calorie-dense, cheap foods which surround us and the volume of messages we receive, through advertising, about these foods, it appears plausible that we could characterize overeating in this context as a compulsion. The numbers and the context lend credence to the view that it takes more than a normal degree of self-control to overcome such temptations. But, because the numbers sit at 50%, one could also argue that these people fail to live up to normal standards and are akratic. If the numbers tip and more people are overweight and obese than not, perhaps this needs to be taken as a sign that people are being pushed beyond the ordinary limits of self-control.

Another factor which merits consideration is the relative natures of desire and temptation. Bruce Alexander's famous 'Rat Park' experiment, and Carl Hart's research on the science of addiction both demonstrate that it is not drugs, themselves, which compel people to abuse them, but circumstances.⁵ People who succumb to addictions are already troubled. As was discussed earlier, an impoverished rearing environment has a serious impact on the capacity to self-regulate. But, even if you have a normal or average capacity to self-regulate, your socioeconomic context can determine the strength of desires and temptations. Both Carl Hart and Bruce Alexander's research demonstrate that the extent to which a person abuses a drug is relative to the number of options a person has. A person who has a variety of outlets and pleasures, and things to which she looks forward, is not so easily swayed by the lure of an unhealthy temptation. But if you have little in the way of options and you cannot envision a meaningful and fulfilling future for yourself, you are more likely to opt for whatever pleasure is available. There are two aspects to this phenomenon: a rational and a perceptual. Rationally speaking, as discussed in the last chapter, it may be a reasonable choice to opt for the immediate pleasure when you have nothing to lose and little else to enjoy. But, in addition to this, a temptation is also like a stimulus. A sound is louder and more difficult to ignore at night because there is no background noise to compete with it. A colour stands out more or less and its appearance varies, depending on surrounding colours. Some medical conditions, particularly conditions which have pain and/or discomfort as symptoms, are more pronounced and unpleasant at night because there are no other stimuli to distract the sufferer. Similarly, a temptation stands out and holds sway over us when there is little else for us to pursue. This relativity of strength is another confounding factor which should make us cautious in our judgments of others. You need to know a person's particular context before you can really judge whether she is competent or incompetent at self-regulation. Thus, norms of self-regulation cannot be easily known, though it is not impossible.

If we look at Watson's proviso, that “[w]eakness is relative to expectations and norms, and it is conceivable that a whole community could fall short of these” (332), it is arguable that this is what we are doing when we say that obese and overweight people are weak-willed. It is not uncommon for us to

5 See “The Myth of Drug-Induced Addiction by Bruce Alexander for a comprehensive discussion.

proscribe common behaviours. Historical attitudes towards masturbation are a telling example. Masturbation has been historically characterized as both a sin, for which you might be punished by God, and as a medical problem which would result in feeble-mindedness and other undesirable side-effects. Yet people persisted in doing it, despite dire warnings. There does not seem to be any clear benefit to labelling people as weak-willed and, by extension, poor examples and sub-par, for engaging in common behaviours. It seems to only result in useless shame.

What is to be taken from this discussion, as a whole, is that there are many confounding and interacting factors which affect how we judge others as agents. A behaviour can be characterized as free or compulsive, depending on who interprets the behaviour. We should exercise caution and restraint when making such judgments. My interest in akrasia began with the question I believe most people ask about it: “Why is it that I can truly believe that it is best that I ϕ , yet I fail to do so?” I have what could be called a therapeutic interest in akrasia. While this project transgresses the boundaries of philosophy and employs both the social sciences and psychology, I do this for similar reasons to Aristotle who said, “[t]he present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use)... (NE 1103b 25-30). So, for myself, and for those with similar aims, understanding how the meaning we give to deviant behaviours affects how we perceive the agent, is important. For before we can be of any service to ourselves and others, we must carefully consider whether we believe it is just and reasonable to characterize a behaviour as deviance at all. And, if we deem the behaviour to be undesirable, we must be fair, careful, and cautious when we judge those who manifest the behaviour.

Chapter Five: Personal Identity and its Role in Behaviour Modification

What to Expect in this Chapter

While the foregoing chapters have looked at all the reasons we have to doubt—to doubt that our intuitions about agency are correct, to doubt that we should always do what we judge is best, and to doubt our judgments about agents, themselves—this chapter is more constructive because it is concerned with strategies of self-control. This chapter discusses the implications of George Ainslie's theory of piconomics. Because this chapter looks at the various implications of Ainslie's theory, it contains several arguments and discussions. In section two, after a brief review of the foregoing chapters, I will use Richard Holton's theory of weakness of the will as a jumping off point for the rest of this chapter. I will argue that Ainslie's research strongly supports Holton's version of weakness of will. In section three, I will show how Ainslie's theory supports the view that beliefs about the world and beliefs about one's personal identity are excellent tools for guiding and shaping behaviours. In section four, I will use Ainslie's research to shed light on why we advocate for certain diets. I will discuss how beliefs about the nature of the good and about human nature shape the view that certain diets are best for us while also giving us more incentive to stick with them. In section five, I will discuss the parallels between Aristotle's virtue-based ethics and Ainslie's theory. I will suggest that virtue-based theories of right action, which emphasize character, are better tools for guiding behaviour than rule-based theories. This is not to say that rule-based theories and virtue theory are incompatible. For example, it is entirely possible to be a utilitarian and to use virtue theory to promote the greater good. I will also show how the rule-follower is analogous to Aristotle's continent agent. The person from whom desirable, prudent actions flow effortlessly as a byproduct of their personal identity is analogous to Aristotle's temperate agent. In section six, I will discuss what Ainslie refers to as 'bright lines.' These are strict rules and boundaries concerning behaviours which are always second best to the more flexible and rewarding kind of agency associated with a virtuous character. I will suggest, in this section, that restrictive diets which classify foods as permissible and not permissible are a way of creating bright lines. Finally, in section seven, I will conclude with a look at some problems associated with Ainslie's theory. I will then close with a look at how this thesis ties in to the bigger picture and what kind of future research is needed in order to give a more complete philosophical account of the problem of obesity and its possible solutions.

Section Two: Introduction

Thus far, I have discussed ways in which akratic actions in the form of excessive or unhealthy eating habits can be reasonable, or simply inevitable, given one's social and economic class. Our behaviours may be the product of the habitus: our mental schemata and their resulting personal preferences may be isomorphic with external social structures and thus may constrain our choices far more than we may acknowledge. The subjective expectation of objective probabilities may cause us to feel as if we are freely choosing to eat certain foods, but we may simply prefer whatever we are most likely to receive. Or we may be acting reasonably, given the contents of our subjective motivational sets: Arpaly and McIntyre both make a convincing case for akratic actions which, while apparently irrational, are justifiable for unconscious or undervalued reasons. And our judgments as to whether an action, particularly a deviant behaviour, is akratic, compulsive, or neither, can be influenced by which institution has the power to evaluate and control that behaviour. Homosexuality has historically been classified as a crime, a mental illness, a sin, a personal choice, and a benign inborn variation, depending on which institution interprets the behaviour. And each of these interpretations implies something different about the agent's level of responsibility. My discussion thus far is meant to cast doubt upon

many common assumptions about agency and reasons. We may think that we are acting autonomously for private reasons, but we may simply be externalizing our habitus; we may think that we ought to ϕ , but ϕ ing may not be in our interest at all. Our assumptions about “transparency and privileged access” and the manner in which we might disregard or ignore the “practical constraints imposed on agents in deliberation” can lead to an idealized view of agency (McIntyre 382). Thus, we may perceive ourselves as akratic when we are acting for good reasons that we have not consciously acknowledged. And we may not acknowledge those reasons because they are not socially sanctioned. If health is held to be the highest good and the neglect of health is a moral failing, we may repress our doubts and contrary desires; and, finally, we may judge that someone has acted freely or compulsively but be mistaken in our judgments because those judgments have been corrupted by the interests of the church, the state, or the medical establishment.

But, what if you are aware of these distorting factors, you've taken them into consideration, and you still believe that it would be in your best interest to take steps to curb your excessive eating habits *and* that you are free to do so? This is my position. I have access to the right kinds of healthy foods, I am not overworked, and I have successfully maintained a healthy weight in the past, so I believe I am capable of maintaining good habits. While I believe that it is true that our control over health outcomes is limited, I know that there are benefits to weight loss such as decreased blood glucose levels and lowered blood pressure. In addition to this, I recognize the capital contained in the right kind of body. You will do better in life—you are more likely to be hired, to be paid more, and to be treated nicely, if you are not fat. It is unfortunate, but true, and living as if this is not the case, while perhaps principled or idealistic, is not practical. It is also simply more comfortable and more pleasurable to weigh less. Being overweight limits your mobility and makes mundane tasks arduous. Thus I believe that I *should*¹ lose weight. And just as I have made this considered judgment that I should eat less, so have many other intelligent, reflective people. Yet, most people fail to lose weight or fail to maintain their weight loss. Thus, I view my case and similar cases as true akrasia. I believe, rightly, that I should ϕ , yet I consistently act against this judgment. And this is utterly perplexing to me.

Thus, this chapter looks at current research in the science of self-control and its philosophical implications. If knowledge of how we ought to or should behave is not enough to motivate us to act, what strategies should we employ? I will argue, in this chapter, that a strong and well-developed personal identity is necessary for guiding behaviour and controlling wayward urges.² An underlying theme in the foregoing chapters has been the connection between personal identity and behaviour. In chapter one, I discussed briefly Charles Taylor's assertion that a personal identity, characterized as a framework of various roles and beliefs, was necessary for someone to act in any coherent way at all. I also mentioned the social production of identity—that we create and recreate who we are all the time. That is, in order to maintain your personal identity, you must act in ways which are commensurate with it. Chapter 2's discussion of Bourdieu is the most concrete example of this phenomenon. For Bourdieu, class and culture—significant aspects of a person's identity—are at the root of even our smallest, most mundane acts. Moreover, your particular social position determines what is possible for you to achieve and attain over the long term. Tacit or explicit knowledge of what outcomes and achievements are objectively most likely or possible for you will influence your actions. In chapter 3, I discussed Christine Korsgaard's view of practical identity. Korsgaard, too, recognizes that an identity comprised

1 I will not say “ought” because, given everything I have said in the prior chapter about healthism and medicalization, I believe that it is oppressive to say that a person *ought* to engage in a particular health practice.

2 It has recently been brought to my attention that Jon Elster has made a similar argument in his 1985 paper, “Rationality, Morality, and Collective Action.”

of aspects such as a religion, gender, ethnicity, profession, and so on is what gives an agent reasons to act as well as reasons to refrain from acting insofar as the identity proscribes certain behaviours. Moreover, Korsgaard states that the consequence of consistently acting in ways not commensurate with a valued personal identity is “to be for all practical purposes dead or worse than dead” (102). The failure to act in ways which are appropriate for one's valued identity results in a loss of personal integrity—integrity being both a moral and ontological concept. For this reason, a complete loss of integrity is akin to death.

Personal identity is also associated with beliefs—beliefs regarding moral and non-moral value. And, as was discussed in chapters 3 and 4, these beliefs determine which goals we ought to pursue, e.g. health and longevity. And our beliefs can determine how we ascribe agency or a lack thereof to persons as was seen in chapter 4's discussion of medicalization and its effect on our perception of agency. While the following chapter will look at how personal identity and belief can act as tools for regulating behaviours, the relationship between identity and behaviour goes in both directions at all times and the two are mutually reinforcing. Your particular identity gives you reasons to behave certain ways and these behaviours reinforce and produce your identity.

The contemporary philosophical literature which acts as a jumping off point for this chapter is Richard Holton's work on akrasia and weakness of will. Holton has changed the discourse on akrasia by distinguishing akrasia from weakness of will. He argues that “the central cases of weakness of will are best characterized not as cases in which people act against their better judgment, but as cases in which they fail to act on their intentions” (241). There may be times when it is reasonable and justified to change one's intentions, so Holton examines which changes of intention constitute true weakness of will. Generally speaking, “Weakness of will arises... when agents are too ready to reconsider their intentions” (241). More specifically, Holton argues that failure to act on “*contrary-inclination-defeating intentions*” or “*resolutions*” is more unambiguously a case of weakness of will because such intentions are formed for the specific purpose of not abandoning our intentions. For example, you might decide in advance that you will go to the gym every other morning and you will bolster this resolution with the thought that you will get up and go even if you feel tired and even if you really don't want to. That is, your present, level-headed self anticipates that your future self will change her mind about going to the gym. Knowing that your future self will resist this intention, you will form a tacit or explicit meta-intention to stick with your resolution to exercise. The failure to act on this kind of intention is a clear-cut case of weakness of will.

Even though Holton changes how weakness of will is defined, it is entirely possible for an act to be both akratic and weak-willed. But, Holton's characterization does not require “*synchronic* conflict, as *akrasia* demands” (Stroud 26). You can be classified as weak-willed “simply by abandoning a previously formed intention” (26).³ In the case of failing to adhere to one's diet, on Holton's view the behaviour is weak-willed because the agent abandons her resolution, regardless of whether or not she acts against a present judgment. Holton observes that “Just as it takes skill to form and employ beliefs, so it takes skill to form and employ intentions” (Holton 241). And this is the subject of this chapter: How do we develop the skills needed to consistently form and carry out our intentions? The research of

3 Holton has written several articles in which he defends his version of weakness of will against other versions. He and Alfred Mele have engaged in an ongoing debate concerning the best, most accurate description of weakness of will. It is not my interest to explore this here. Holton's view is, in my opinion, one of many valid ways to describe and discuss weakness of will. I think it is unnecessary and perhaps even counterproductive to rigidly defend one characterization of a phenomenon to the exclusion of all or most others.

behavioural economist, George Ainslie, is some of the most promising and insightful current work on weakness of will, what it is, and how it can be overcome. Ainslie's own research and resulting theory strongly support Holton's account of weakness of the will⁴.

Ainslie is concerned with why people fail to maximize reward. Conventional utility theory⁵ claims that people are utility maximizers and that any failure to maximize utility stems from an error in calculation or an error in perception. But even well-informed people knowingly act against their own interests. He argues that:

Hypotheses to reconcile self-defeating behavior with maximization of utility have cited naïveté, short time horizons, conditioned cravings, and the physiological nature of reward, but all of these explanations have failed on experimental or logical grounds. (26)⁶

Reward, on Ainslie's view, is an “elementary motivational quality... a common dimension along which all options that can be substituted for each other have to compete” (15). Appetite and reason are both sources of reward—reward can be derived from abstract concepts or more visceral drives—and a straightforward utility maximizer will act on whichever stimulus grants the greatest reward. But, conventional utility theory combined with this broad conception of reward renders willpower superfluous. Once you know that a particular option confers the most reward, you should effortlessly pursue that option. The subsumption of reason and desire under one category of reward resolves the long-standing debate concerning whether reason or desire lie at the root of motivation, and the elimination of superfluous entities or ontological categories is consistent with what Ainslie describes as a monist materialist approach to the subject matter. But we are still left with the problem of conflicting desires and self-defeating behaviours—the phenomena which make sense of the notion of a will or willpower.

Ainslie's answer to the question of why we talk about and appear to need what we call 'willpower' is the product of nearly fifty years of his own research on human and animal subjects.⁷ In the late 1960s, Ainslie theorized that our discounting curves are not exponential, but hyperbolic. An exponential discounting curve renders our preferences consistent: if you would prefer to have a drink now, you will prefer to have a drink a year from now and if you prefer A over B, you will not switch preferences at any future time, *ceteris paribus* (29). It has generally been assumed in economics that a rational utility maximizer's preferences will follow an exponential discounting curve.⁸ A hyperbolic discount curve creates inconsistencies in our preferences: if your curve is hyperbolic, you may prefer to have a drink when the opportunity looms, but regret your choice afterwards and you may prefer A over B when you consider these choices from a distance, but prefer B over A when B is imminent. Ainslie's research has

4 I would like to mention that it is Bret Chandler's “The Subjectivity of Habitus” which directed me to Ainslie's work. Chandler uses Ainslie's theory to develop a theory of individual deliberation and action in Bourdieu's theory, which, it has been argued, tends to focus on collective behaviours and neglect the individual.

5 “Utility theory” here refers to the term as used in economic theory, not philosophy.

6 See Chapter 2 of *Breakdown of Will* for the complete argument.

7 See Ainslie's website, www.picoeconomics.org, for a list of, and access to, his publications which provide the details of his experiments and their results.

8 To be clear, it is economic models which assume an exponential discounting curve. These models predict behaviour, but they do not claim to represent how people actually think about their preferences and decisions. Economic models are not reflections of individual psychology and, even if they do not represent how individuals think, they may still be accurate in their predictions.

demonstrated that both human and non-human animals' preferences and resulting actions follow a hyperbolic discount curve. Ainslie has incorporated these findings into a broader theory he has called “picoeconomics”:

Picoeconomics (micro-micro-economics) explores the implications of an experimental discovery: that people (often) and lower animals (always) discount the prospect of future rewards in a curve that is more deeply bowed than a "rational," exponential curve. Over a range of delays from seconds to decades, there are pairs of alternative rewards such that subjects prefer the smaller, earlier reward over the larger, later alternative when delay to the smaller reward will be short, but prefer the larger, later reward when the smaller alternative will be more delayed, even though the time from the earlier to the later reward stays the same. The curves that fit the observed data best are hyperbolic, that is, show value as inversely proportional to delay.

The existence of regular temporary preferences for small-early rewards predicts the development of a relationship of limited warfare among successive selves. At any given moment, a person is motivated to lock in her current preferences by creating influences or commitments to constrain her own future choices. Such strategic behavior suggests that patterns seen in the **inter**personal marketplace may underlie **intra**personal decision-making. The clearest implication is that the elusive power and freedom of the human will may represent an intertemporal bargaining situation analogous to a repeated prisoner's dilemma. Many other predictions are beginning to be explored. (Ainslie *Picoeconomics*)

The problem of self-defeating behaviour lies in the fact that a smaller, sooner reward is temporarily more valuable to us than a larger, later reward when those rewards are considered singly and not as parts of an ongoing pattern of behaviour. If “neurophysiological reward... override[s] all other considerations” then a straightforward utility maximizer will opt for the smaller, sooner option every time and undo any resolutions he or she has made. “*Akrasia* is just maximizing expected reward, discounted in highly bowed curves” (*Breakdown* 39). In light of this, Ainslie observes:

We can no longer regard people as having unitary preferences. Rather, people may have a variety of contradictory preferences that become dominant at different points because of their timing. The orderly internal marketplace pictured by conventional utility theory becomes a complicated free-for-all, where to prevail an option not only has to promise more than its competitors, but also act strategically to keep the competitors from turning the tables later on. (40)

This appears to be an oversimplification or mischaracterization of how many experts in decision theory view the matter. No one, not even most laypeople, think that anyone has a consistently well-ordered set of preferences in which one preference clearly takes precedence. A person may be faced with many choices which are nearly identical in value, yet somehow mutually incompatible. Or rewards may be qualitatively distinct in a manner which makes them difficult to compare, i.e. an emotional reward versus a physical reward (though Ainslie considers all rewards to be, at base, of an identical type, ontologically speaking). Moreover, the notion of a divided self is, by no means, new. Plato spoke at length about just this. But, bracketing this problem, Ainslie's theory still does a lot of work to explain how and why an agent might act against what is, all things considered, best for that agent over the long term. And Ainslie's theory explains what phenomenon may lie at the root of the divided self, as well as just how this might be overcome.

Ainslie's research is consistent with Holton's claim that the failure to follow through on intention is key to instances in which people act against their interests or their judgements. Whether we act against our best judgments or not, failing to follow through on our resolutions is essential to weakness of the will. A hyperbolic discounter will undo her efforts to abide by a resolution whenever a smaller, sooner reward presents itself. Thus, the problems of akrasia and weakness of will should be thought of as problems which stem from hyperbolic discounting curves—discounting curves which are, arguably, innate. In order to overcome self-defeating behaviours, we must develop strategies for altering our discounting curves from hyperbolic to exponential. This requires a great deal of effort, given how natural and easy it is for an agent's preferences to follow a hyperbolic curve. But, for many of us, the effort is worthwhile. It is worthwhile because your quality of life is, in many ways, dependent upon the ability to defer gratification and to abide by your resolutions. While I have argued that there are situations when acting in the interest of one's future may not be the best choice, there are many instances in which it is vital that we act in the interest of our future selves. Many of us have children for whom we are responsible and it is important to us that we are present and healthy for their sakes. And, given that people live for a lot longer than they used to, it is in many of our best interests to take good care of our bodies so that we might function well and live with dignity when we are much older. People also need to be able to save money in order to buy a home and prepare for their later years. In a perfect world, or at least in my perfect world, everyone would receive a basic income and everyone would have their basic needs met. But in the meantime, it is in my best interest to act with the future in mind so that I am able-bodied and can care for myself for as long as possible. And, while this may go without saying, most of us value our lives and value living in this world. Acting in our future interests by doing what we can to be healthy can prolong our lives. In short, in most cases, we are better off as exponential discounters.

Section Three: Strategies for Transforming the Hyperbolic Curve to an Exponential Curve

As discussed above, an agent's “preferences for small-early rewards predicts the development of a relationship of limited warfare among successive selves” (*Picoeconomics*). While these competing interests may appear to be antithetical to one another, they do share a common interest: you, the agent. Or perhaps more specifically, your body. If two people share one room and they have very different personalities and interests, they may have different desires regarding how the room is used. One may be an introvert and the other an extrovert. Thus, one may wish to use the room for a party, while the other wishes to use the room for quiet reflection. But neither wants to destroy the room (41). “This process—power bargaining made necessary by finite means of expression—may be all that unifies a person” (43). Strategies which harness this situation by somehow uniting these competing interests may help us to control and direct our behaviours.

While Ainslie does discuss several strategies for adhering to one's long term goals while resisting short term impulses, he discusses one strategy at length: “unit[ing] particular actions under one common rule” (80). Ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophers, cognitive scientists *and* behaviourists⁹ all recognize the power and efficacy of guiding one's behaviour through the application of a broad principle (80-81). But Ainslie observes that contemporary explanations as to *why* this strategy can be effective are lacking. No satisfying answer is given as to why a resolution to adhere to a long term plan, guided by some principle, should be motivating (81).

9 Cognitive science attributes self-defeating actions to faulty reasoning, while behaviourism attributes such actions to mechanistic reinforcement processes, so agreement on methods of behaviour modification between the two disciplines is significant.

One possible answer is found in the work of psychologist Howard Rachlin, who claims that people and animals are strongly motivated to follow patterns of behaviour. That is, patterns are inherently motivating. On his view, we do not want to break well-established patterns, and thus “a controlled drinker doesn't drink too much because it would spoil a pattern of temperance” (81). And this holds true for bad habits as well. We may succumb to a pleasurable short-term urge to get high or smoke or eat a doughnut, but repeating such actions daily will reinforce a self-defeating pattern. Ainslie and Rachlin have worked together extensively. Their work is similar and compatible. But Ainslie argues that Rachlin's theory is not quite right because, while some patterns of behaviour are easy to maintain, many require a great deal of effort: “Especially in potential addictions like overeating and drinking alcohol, people report that their urge is to break the patterns, not preserve them” (81).

Ainslie's hypothesis is that, even though a smaller, sooner reward is more highly valued than a larger, later reward when the two are considered as a single pair, smaller, sooner rewards are less valuable than larger, later rewards when these rewards are conceptualized as part of a series “with no foreseeable end” (82). This phenomenon can be explained by looking at the properties of the hyperbolic discounting curve. Hyperbolic discounting predicts that

the delayed rewards add roughly in proportion to their objective sizes, so that when their aggregate height is added in, the first sail in the series of smaller rewards doesn't protrude as high above the first sail in the series of larger rewards as it does in a solitary pair; with series of some amounts at some delays, the earliest sail doesn't protrude above its larger, later alternative at all. (82)

But, even though acting in the interest of a set of larger, later rewards can be more rewarding than pursuing smaller, sooner rewards, “making an isolated choice now and acting by rule in the future promises still more” (87). If I can get the smaller, sooner reward, but convince myself that this is an isolated act which does not ruin the integrity of my desired overall pattern of behaviour, then I stand to gain more reward. In the case of dieting, you will get more out of making some exceptions, perhaps by eating *ad libitum* on your birthday and at Christmas, but sticking with your diet the rest of the time. But, if you make exceptions on any and all holidays, birthdays, and so on, you “no longer have the credible prospect of the whole series of later, larger rewards – the cumulative benefits of [your] diet – available to choose” (87). Thus, if my desired pattern of long term behaviour is breached repeatedly, I will eventually lose the reward associated with that pattern. But, this is self-evident. It goes without saying that if you fail to consistently abide by some personal rule, so much so that your exceptions undermine any progress you might make, then you will not reap the rewards of following that rule. What makes Ainslie's theory interesting is the next observation he makes: “Personal rules are a *recursive* mechanism; they continually take their own pulse, and if they feel it falter, that very fact will cause further faltering... The will is a recursive process that bets the expected value of your future self control against each of your successive temptations.” (88-89).

Ainslie likens the will to a “bargaining situation,” specifically “limited warfare”, that is, “[t]he relationship of bargaining agents who have some incompatible goals but also some goals in common” (90). As discussed earlier, our personal identities are comprised of competing interests that are forced to bargain with one another, given their “finite means of expression”—that is, one body (43). The relationship between competing interests is like a repeated prisoner's dilemma. In a one-time prisoner's dilemma, your best bet is usually to defect, but repeated prisoner's dilemmas make cooperation the prudent choice. Competing interests, when repeatedly pitted against one another across time, will negate one another's efforts and expenditures. In such cases it is better for the agent to discern which interests are shared by the competitors. In the case of a person who wants to lose weight, but also loves

to indulge in treats, it is very likely that neither of these interests wants to be obese. Compromise consists in pursuing this shared interest.

In addition to cooperation being the prudent choice in repeated prisoner's dilemmas, the actions of agents in these bargaining situations are recursive. This applies to both inter and intrapersonal situations. So, the likelihood of my successfully following a personal rule or principle is determined by my actions which, in turn, influence my beliefs about how I will act in the future. If I follow the rule, my faith in myself increases and, at the next opportunity, I follow the rule again, and so on. Thus, “[t]he only faculty you need to recruit the extra motivation that forms willpower is a practical awareness that current decisions predict the pattern of future decisions” (116). But, as discussed above, I stand to gain more if I can make exceptions to the rule without threatening the integrity of my long term interests. If I can somehow make an exception by telling myself that it is not a violation of the rule, I can have my cake and eat it too. The problem with making exceptions is that this allowance blurs the boundary between following and not following the rule which can lead to backsliding. Thus you may make more and more allowances for yourself until you lose faith in your ability to act in your long term interests.

When the stakes are high, it is best to establish what Ainslie and others call “bright lines” (97). For example, in the case of drinking alcohol, the bright line sits between drinking and not drinking (97). For the alcoholic, it is often wiser to follow this either/or principle than to risk backsliding. But, any clear violation of a rule founded upon bright lines may completely undermine your resolve. When we allow ourselves to make exceptions by telling ourselves that they are not violations of our personal rules, this is less likely to undermine our faith in our future selves than an action which unambiguously violates the rule. In an interpersonal, repeating prisoner's dilemma, a clear defection usually leads to another defection. If you see that your partner has defected, you will probably think it to be in your best interest to cut your losses and defect, too. The same holds for intrapersonal bargaining. If the rule you are following is “Don't drink, under any circumstances, ever” and you take a drink, you have clearly defected and this may shatter your resolve instantly (116). This explains the tenuous nature of some of our resolutions and it is Ainslie's response to Rachlin's claim that patterns are inherently motivating. Will-power does follow a pattern, in that it is recursive, but that pattern can be easily broken. Because of the problems associated with strict rules and rule-following, we need to develop other, more subtle, strategies of self-control. The cultivation of a valued and stable personal identity is one such strategy as I will illustrate in what follows.

A skilled bargainer will be flexible, for you stand to gain the most if you are not constrained by oppressively rigid rules. Total abstention for an alcoholic may be her best option in the long term, but such a life will not be as rewarding as one which includes moderate drinking. Similarly, a dieter may be most successful if he adheres to a strict diet with clear rules, but he would probably be happier in the long run if he could make exceptions to these rules. And the happiest person is the one who doesn't need to constrain himself because his inclinations tend towards the moderate. But, it is hard to maintain your resolve when you are following your own rules. That is, if the rules you create are rules that you have self-consciously formed based on your own preferences and calculations, it might be too easy to modify them. Ainslie posits that we can strengthen our resolve by engaging in tacit bargaining. Tacit bargaining consists in acting because of beliefs about the world rather than acting based on consciously formed personal rules. Your behaviour will be stabilized if you think that you are acting because of some unchangeable fact about the world, rather than a changeable personal preference (108-109). For example, we may adhere to the belief that “street drugs are always irresistible once tried” even when presented with information to the contrary, because to modify this belief may lead us into temptation (109).

Ainslie observes:

An authority teaches that irresistibility is a fact; you encounter evidence to the contrary, for instance in statistics on ex-users who used only casually; you discount or somehow don't incorporate the contrary evidence, not because it seems to be of poor quality, but out of a feeling that it's seditious. (109)

We may also cultivate beliefs that things, rather than decisions, are good in themselves:

Most of our ways of speaking about reasons to decide direct attentions away from the decision-maker and to the thing to be decided about. To say that something *is* good may imply no more than that we want it, but it sounds better. To *be* good is rooted in the nature of the thing, while wanting it is just personal. (106)

Thus, "The less someone's belief seems accountable for by the objective facts, the more it's apt to be the representation of an underlying personal rule... The incentive for this kind of belief isn't accuracy or instrumental efficacy, but commitment to a standard of conduct" (110). The types of belief to which this theory applies range from highly significant to minor. The theory of evolution and the heliocentric view of the universe were (and, are, in the case of evolution) suppressed because they are perceived as beliefs which undermine a belief in the sanctity and importance of human beings (112). To believe that one is made in the image of God, and is accountable to God, is a good way to commit someone to a high standard of personal conduct. To believe that you live in the centre of the universe on a planet made for you, makes your life, including all the choices you make and things you do, meaningful and important.¹⁰ And the belief that certain laws are divinely ordained makes them non-negotiable. To abandon these beliefs is a serious business. And there are smaller, day-to-day beliefs we may hold which help us to control ourselves. Ainslie observes that he has cultivated the belief that ginger candy suppresses his appetite, even though he is still sometimes hungry after eating the candy. Yet, he maintains this belief and this is enough to stop him from overeating (109).

The theory of belief informing behaviour can be extended to beliefs about personal identity. Ainslie illustrates this point through the example of Calvinists: If your salvation or damnation is predestined, why should you bother behaving well at all? Ainslie describes the good behaviour of a Calvinist as a "recursive system: Diagnosis→behavior→diagnosis, where giving up on the good diagnosis [leads] to giving up on the behavior, which [makes] the bad diagnosis correct" (136). This strategy strengthens and stabilizes desired behaviours:

[T]he shift from seeing it as a matter of willpower—"good works"—to seeing it as mere diagnosis of a preexisting condition—your destiny—strengthens your resolve rather than weakens it: Your concern with diagnosis isn't superstitious but rational, as we've just seen, since diagnosis has causal effects; and furthermore, interpreting this concern as without causal efficacy rather than as an element of bargaining deters the arbitrage that usually compromises conscious exercises of will. (136)

This brings to mind Korsgaard's discussion of practical identity and integrity. My reasons for acting are based upon my most valued self-conception[s] and when I fail to act in a manner commensurate with

¹⁰ Though it can also be argued that such beliefs are anthropocentric and foster destructive, cruel, and selfish behaviours.

my self-conception, I lose integrity. Analogously, the person who falls prey to the inconsistencies of his hyperbolic discount curve also loses integrity and behaves as if he is several people rather than one person. Without a well-established personal identity, you have no reason to do anything, or at the very least, you will find yourself doing things for no good reason, behaving inconsistently, and feeling aimless. Thus, people who act impulsively are characterized as 'having poor ego function,' and a lack of a strong sense of self—i.e. your role and purpose—is correlated with poor self-control. Ainslie claims that “[i]t is intertemporal bargaining skill, rather than some other cognitive ability, that determines how good your 'ego functions' appear to be” (104). While Ainslie's use of 'ego functions' may be restricted to matters of self-control in this quote, ego function includes the ego's “meta-narrative position that links the parts [of the self] together into a coherent story” (Henriques).

So, meaningful, strong personal identities are integral to self-control. Like the Calvinist's belief that he is saved, your belief in the importance of your role as a parent, a teacher, a secular humanist, or whatever, will inform how you behave, which will reaffirm your self-conception, leading to more of the desired behaviour, and so on. But, if my self-conception is shaky or if it lacks gravitas, I may do things which are not appropriate for my ideal self. Thus, my tendency to succumb to short-term impulses by telling myself that such actions are exceptions to my rule may lead to more exceptions, thus eroding my sense of self or perhaps changing it to its negative equivalent. As I fail to abide by the implicit rules commensurate with my identity, I may start thinking that I am a bad parent, or a bad teacher, or a bad secular humanist, or whatever. And this belief will influence my behaviour, which will feed into this self-conception, leading to more bad behaviour, and so on. Thus, a strong, positive self-conception helps me to govern myself well. It enables me to act more spontaneously because such behaviour does not feel explicitly rule-governed. And when I act according to a more or less static conception of myself, what I do is not open to negotiation.

Section Four: Beliefs and Diet

People's beliefs about who they are inform how they behave. Your most valued self-conceptions help to regulate your behaviours, ensuring that you act in your best interests. In chapter three, I discussed health and its role as a 'super value' in our lives. Secularism, the belief that this life is all you have, and challenges to grand narratives based upon the supreme value of a deity or the state have led to new narratives based on a scientific, naturalized perspective. In the case of eating habits, some of these narratives consist in 'just so stories' based upon speculation about human evolution. People will back up their claims that a diet is ideal by saying that our evolutionary history requires that we eat particular foods. Examples include the 'paleo' diet, which does not allow for grains or foods which are believed to be the products of intensive agriculture. People who promote this diet claim that our bodies have not evolved to digest grains and legumes. Some people promote raw food diets by claiming that cooking food is a relatively recent phenomenon and that our bodies have evolved to eat raw foods. Some people say we need to eat almost no meat because our ancestors ate mostly roots and vegetables, with meat only as a rare supplement to our diets. What all of these arguments have in common is that they are based upon stories about what kind of thing we are. The argument is that you are a certain type of creature and such creatures ought to Φ . If these arguments are considered as part of a larger narrative which makes health and longevity the greatest goods, these beliefs might make it easier for people to control themselves. As I discussed in chapter 3, there may be good reasons for a person to neglect his or her health. And the degree of influence we have over health outcomes is minimal compared to factors such as class, culture, where you live, and so on. Moreover, your health is really only at risk once you reach the upper percentiles of BMI. It is not necessarily dangerous to be moderately overweight. But, like Ainslie's example of the person who, in spite of the evidence, persists in believing that “street drugs are always irresistible once tried” (109), we might ignore these facts in order to

strongly encourage ourselves to diet. Whether the belief is true or not doesn't matter if the purpose of the belief is to guide behaviour.

Section Five: The Nichomachean Ethics and Picoeconomics

The fact that we are hyperbolic discounters makes acting in our long term interests a never-ending struggle. When we engage in intrapersonal bargaining, our actions are recursive and a slip can quickly lead to a loss of resolve. This suggests that virtue-based theories of right action, which emphasize character and success, may be more helpful to us, with regard to strategies for guiding behaviour, than rule-based theories. A virtuous character actively maintains itself by acting virtuously, and happiness is never guaranteed. Aristotle says that if the “function of a good man” is “an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle” then “human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue... 'in a complete life’” (NE 1098a 15-20). He says:

Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced... This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. (NE 1103b 5-25)

According to Aristotle, human good is an “activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (NE 1098a 15-20). The significance of his claim lies in the concept of activity. Eudaimonia is active, it is a state of constant becoming. This is compatible with Ainslie's theory that willpower is recursive, self-referential process which must always actively maintain itself. But Aristotle characterizes the virtuous agent as someone whose actions “proceed from a firm and unshakeable character” (NE 1105a 35). To *be* virtuous is a step above *acting* virtuously:

Actions, then, are called just and temperate when they are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who does them *as* just and temperate men do them. It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without these no one would have even the prospect of being good. (NE 1105b 5-12)

Thus, when you act *like* a virtuous person, your *acts* are virtuous. But you, yourself, are only virtuous when virtuous actions are chosen by you “for their own sakes” (NE 1105a 33). We become virtuous by first emulating virtuous people and, given the right circumstances, we eventually want to act virtuously because to do so is simply to be ourselves. When I can guide my behaviour by imagining what an ideal person would do in my situation, there is room for nuance and flexibility. And once I take on that identity so that I am not acting *like* the ideal person, but *as* myself, acting virtuously becomes an unrestrained activity in which I respond appropriately and with ease to every challenge. This is the ideal, whereas the specificity of rules is constraining. Strictly following rules is always second best.

When our actions are in harmony with a valued personal identity, they possess an effortlessness which is lacking in rule-governed behaviours. Aristotle recognizes the value of this distinction in his contrasting conceptions of continence and temperance: “[T]he continent man, knowing that his

appetites are bad, refuses on account of his rational principle to follow them” (NE 1145b 15-20). It is temperance, and not continence, which is a virtue. The continent person has wayward urges and appetites which she controls, whereas temperance is a virtue—a state of character—which consists in having the right appetites at the right times, in the right ways, etc. Temperance, once acquired, does not require the same kind of effort, though effort must be made to become temperate. Aristotle also notes that continence is not unqualifiedly beneficial: “[i]f continence makes a man ready to stand by any and every opinion, it is bad, i.e. if it makes him stand even by a false opinion” (NE 1146a 15-20). This is a possible problem which Ainslie discusses at length. He describes four key problems which can arise from stringent adherence to rules:

[W]e tend to see willpower as an unmixed blessing that bears no relation to such abnormal symptoms as loss of emotional immediacy, abandonment of control in particular areas of behavior, blindness toward one’s own motives, or decreased responsiveness to subtle rewards. I will argue that just these four distortions are to be expected to a greater or lesser extent from a reliance on personal rules. They may even go so far as to make a given person’s willpower a net liability to her. (146-147)

Having urges to indulge oneself to excess but holding back is continence, which is not a virtue. Willpower is analogous to continence when it consists in following rules. Continence, just like acting on rules, requires effort. We are always working against a part of ourselves when we act in this manner. A virtuous character, developed over a lifetime, is the ideal because actions that come from such a character are flexible and thus maintain enough appetite so that life remains pleasurable, but enough desire for moderation to avoid the perils of excess. This, from Ainslie's perspective, is the ideal utility maximizer. This kind of virtuous character is analogous to Korsgaard's moral agent: Korsgaard recognizes the importance of integrity. We act with integrity when our actions correspond with our most valued self-conceptions. Integrity, at its best, amalgamates both long and short term desires through shared goals or principles which, via tacit bargaining, are transformed into a well-formed and stable personal identity.

Section Six: Bright Lines and Compulsions

Rigid adherence to rules can take a lot of the joy and pleasure out of life, but sometimes a person may feel that doing so is the best option, given the circumstances. For this reason, it would be a mistake to conclude that rule-based decision-making cannot be an apt, or even required, strategy in some circumstances. The alcoholic who takes the 'all or nothing' approach to drinking is probably making the best decision he can. Some problems require drastic solutions even if those solutions take some of the pleasure and spontaneity out of living. But sometimes we can adhere to a rule to the point of it becoming a compulsion. This kind of behaviour is analogous to Aristotle's example of the person who stands by his opinion, even if it is wrong. Continence can become compulsion. A prime example given by Ainslie is anorexia.¹¹ Any rules we devise concerning diet can never achieve the 'bright lines' of smoking versus not smoking, drinking versus not drinking, or any habit that we can live without. This

11 Ainslie's use of anorexia as an example is problematic and lacking in nuance and accuracy. The reasons why an anorexic compulsively pursues weight loss are psychologically complex. “Clinical studies show that fear of invasions of personal space is one of the main worries of people with eating disorders” (Giordano 95). They believe “that thinness works as a defence against staring, criticisms, aggression, and sexual intrusions” (96). A fascinating and well-written resource, for those who are interested, is *Understanding eating Disorders: conceptual and ethical issues in the treatment of anorexia and bulimia nervosa* by Simona Giordano.

is a significant aspect of what makes losing weight so hard for people who find eating particularly pleasurable and gratifying. You cannot stop eating for the rest of your life. Organizations such as Overeaters Anonymous say that if you think of your addiction as a dangerous animal, like a tiger, an alcoholic or drug addict is instructed to put the tiger in a cage and to never let it out. But an overeater must take the tiger out three times a day and safely walk it. Because it is so very hard to create bright lines for one's diet, a person who wants very much to control his or her eating habits may go too far and eat too little in order to err on the side of caution (152).

It is arguable that all weight loss regimes are efforts to create bright lines, and their success or failure depends upon whether the boundaries of the diet are appropriate for the individual. I mentioned in the last chapter that a historical review and assessment of therapeutic diets for diabetics found that the primary factor which makes such diets therapeutically effective is that the diet is low in calories (Sawyer and Gale 1; 5). Whether the diet is low or high in carbohydrates is not as important. But restricting the kinds of foods that a person can eat usually results in fewer calories consumed so disallowing certain food groups should facilitate weight loss. Thus, a lot of diets possess strict boundaries: The Atkins Diet and other similar diets prohibit all carbohydrates except for greens and some berries; raw food diets allow only raw foods; low fat diets prohibit fatty foods, and so on. These kinds of diets allow the dieter to look at a food and see it as either permissible or not permissible and this approach is easier than allowing any type of food, but restricting calories. Calorie-counting requires constant weighing, measuring, and recording, though it also sets a bright line because it requires that the dieter eat no more than x calories. To sum up, in my efforts to diet, I may increase my willpower by creating bright lines in the form of strict diets which classify foods into the categories 'permissible' and 'not permissible.' I may further increase my willpower by engaging in implicit rule-following. I can do this by maintaining certain strong beliefs about the values of health and longevity. I can further enhance my willpower by cultivating beliefs about human beings and their ideal diets. That is, I can believe that I am a certain kind of creature and it is right for creatures of this sort to eat particular foods. But, in addition to anorexia, these dietary bright lines and their accompanying beliefs can lead to another compulsive behaviour: orthorexia:

Those who have an “unhealthy obsession” with otherwise healthy eating may be suffering from “orthorexia nervosa,” a term which literally means “fixation on righteous eating.” Orthorexia starts out as an innocent attempt to eat more healthfully, but orthorexics become fixated on food quality and purity. They become consumed with what and how much to eat, and how to deal with “slip-ups.” An iron-clad will is needed to maintain this rigid eating style. Every day is a chance to eat right, be “good,” rise above others in dietary prowess, and self-punish if temptation wins (usually through stricter eating, fasts and exercise). Self-esteem becomes wrapped up in the purity of orthorexics’ diet and they sometimes feel superior to others, especially in regard to food intake. (Kratina)

People who struggle with their weights can probably, at best, hope to become Aristotle's continent agent. Temperance is the product of a lifetime of practice. It is a character trait. Ainslie's discussion of bright lines is comparable to Aristotle's advice that we steer clear of undesirable behaviours in our pursuit of virtue:

But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognizable from the pleasure and the pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent. (NE 1109b 1-7).

But neither Ainslie nor Aristotle consider this ideal. For Aristotle it is a step in a learning process whose goal is a personal mean. For Ainslie, it is a compromise for those of us who are helpless in the face of temptation

Section Seven: Conclusions

Ainslie, by demonstrating that humans, often, and animals, always, have preferences which follow a hyperbolic discounting curve, is making a fundamental claim about the nature of preference and reward. By saying that this behaviour occurs always in animal models, the implication is that this impulse is fundamental and somehow essential. Because smaller sooner options, when considered in isolation, are more rewarding than larger later rewards, it is not entirely irrational to choose the smaller, sooner option. That is, if rationality consists in maximizing utility, then it is rational to go for the smaller, sooner reward when the choice is viewed in isolation. Put together, the implication is that we are fundamentally driven to take smaller, sooner rewards and this impulse is not irrational, though it is not ideal, either. I realize that I am accepting an essentialist claim about people, even though I am quite leery of such claims. But the results of Ainslie's research in conjunction with the long-standing, seemingly intractable problem of weakness of the will, make this claim very plausible. I am not interested in any just-so stories about why we've evolved to behave this way, but accepting this behaviour as deeply ingrained and fundamental is a very positive step. It is a positive step because we can now work with it instead of against it. Instead of simply characterizing self-defeating behaviours as absurd and irrational anomalies which we can overcome by some sort of brute force or through the right knowledge (knowledge here, perhaps understood as a kind of magical, Platonic, capital K knowledge), we can accept that we are, at base, hyperbolic discounters and develop strategies for working with what we are. As was discussed above, a valued personal identity in which positive, healthy behaviours are necessary traits can help a person to more easily control him or herself. If your identity somehow does not involve such positive traits, it seems plausible that you could still negotiate and compromise between competing interests and maintain an awareness of which actions benefit both your short and long-term selves. But these strategies still have problems and limits.

One problem we need to avoid when engaged in tacit bargaining is fanaticism. Beliefs about the value of health combined with beliefs about what humans are, can turn diets into pathological moral crusades. Such diets take on greater weight and significance than they merit. In the absence of the old grand narratives, the quest for purity and goodness may take the form of an ideal based upon stories we make up about what kinds of animals we are and what we would eat in our 'natural,' 'uncorrupted' states. And, while the reasons behind this behaviour are, perhaps, new, it seems to be a new skin for an old ceremony. There have always been ascetics among us. More generally, rigid adherence to the belief that overweight and obesity are always bad and must always be met with resistance is unhelpful and even harmful. Such beliefs waste the time and energy of those people whose health is not adversely affected by their weights. Such beliefs also result in the stigmatization of overweight people, which exacerbates the problem. Stigmatization, in the case of overweight and obesity, tends to make such people reclusive, which makes them less likely to be active and more likely to overeat as a way of coping with the sadness which comes from isolation.

Still, we need beliefs to guide our behaviours and they needn't be true in any objective sense to be effective. But we need to *believe* that they are true. Although Ainslie's discussion of the relationship between belief and behaviour is useful and interesting it is, by no means, revolutionary. Plato's noble lie is an old example of the same thing. And Nietzsche's fear, that we will become nihilists, is all about belief and its impact on behaviour: His concern is that the pursuit of truth and knowledge for their own

sakes leads to a mechanistic world view which offers us little in the form of meaning or purpose, thus opening us up to brutish behaviours. As far as motivating beliefs go, longevity and health have limited appeal. Reducing human goods to living and reproducing successfully seems rather thin to me. We can give this narrative poignant, emotional appeal by adding talk about life being a fleeting and precious gift. But in the end, whether this shields us from a nihilistic outlook is probably a matter of chance. Yet, despite my doubts about beliefs concerning health being particularly motivating, it is not as if religious narratives have consistently succeeded in controlling people's behaviours. Religious edicts forbidding masturbation and premarital sex have not stopped many people from engaging in those behaviours. Thus, beliefs regarding who we are and what is valuable are necessary for guiding us and giving us reasons to act at all, but it seems as if nothing, not even the threat of damnation, can stop us if we really want to do something badly enough. The final irony of Ainslie's approach is that once we know that beliefs guide behaviour we may no longer be able to use this knowledge as a behaviour modification strategy. Once you are self-aware enough to know that you're engaged in tacit bargaining, you can't do it anymore. I cannot arbitrarily decide to believe anything I want. You have to truly believe that certain goals and activities are good in themselves in order to benefit from tacit bargaining. Once you have a bird's-eye-view of the process, it seems unlikely that you can bootstrap yourself into it.

A final aspect of Ainslie's work which needs discussing is how socio-economic class fits into it. While Ainslie acknowledges that different cultural groups have different exponential discounting rates he does not discuss how class plays a significant role in discounting rates. He observes that:

People obviously differ in their ability to maintain low exponential curves, and differ even in their long-range motivation to do it. After all, "money isn't everything." But if your neighbor adopts a rate either much higher or much lower than yours, she'll be a problem for you. High discounters will seem to be needing help for their improvidence; low discounters will seem to be taking advantage of your human weaknesses to get ahead of you. Agreeing upon what is to be a community's "normal" discount rate is a highly charged social process. There's no bright line (aside from the motivationally impossible one of no discounting at all) that can define a good discount rate for an individual or provide a norm for a society. (103)

While I agree that there is no one discount rate that is right for everyone, the rate at which we value future goods depends on what kinds of futures we foresee for ourselves. Ainslie acknowledges that there is variability, though he appears to consider it a sort of arbitrary cultural variation. The rate at which we discount future goods as well as the ability to bundle larger, later rewards in order to overcome the urge to succumb to smaller sooner ones, depends upon our future prospects. This is akin to Bourdieu's subjective expectation of objective probabilities. Your ability to control yourself will be limited if you cannot conceive of an endless series of prudent future acts based on a principle. Ainslie's ideal agent is an aristocrat. As I discussed in chapter 2,

Bourdieu describes the dominant aesthetic as "the combination of ease and aestheticism, i.e., self-imposed austerity, restraint, reserve, which are affirmed in that absolute manifestation of excellence, relaxation in tension" (*Distinction* 171-172). The taste of luxury combines "reason and sensibility" so that one both knows what to prefer and wants to prefer just that (3). It is very much like the Aristotelian conception of virtue, which requires that one know what is best and simultaneously desire that which is best. To desire an excess of rich foods but to refrain from consuming them is mere continence; virtue consists in also having the right desires, desires which are never slaves to pleasure and pain, to appetites. "This perfect coincidence is the very definition of ease which, in return, bears witness to this coincidence of 'is' and 'ought' and to the self-affirming power it contains" (253). To be at ease is to demonstrate that one is truly free

from ordinary human “constraints” and this can be demonstrated via the “ostentatious freedom of gratuitous expense or the austerity of elective restriction”(252). This kind of effortlessness is quite rare, the result of a perfect storm of privilege and opportunity. Only the very lucky and the very few are endowed with such ease. (10)

Thus, tacit bargaining requires a particular sort of personal identity. It requires an identity which involves an optimistic vision of the future. You cannot bundle future, prudent choices together if your vision of the future is limited or negative. Perhaps people with limited options and poor future prospects have historically used religious faith, which involves a belief in an afterlife and divine judgment, as a means of controlling wayward urges. But, as we become more secular, people will need real, earthly future prospects in order to engage in tacit bargaining. Put more bluntly, there is no reason to restrain oneself when the future is bleak, tacit bargaining or no. In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that measures which enhance people's sense of stability and safety, socially and economically speaking, may improve health outcomes.

For those of us with the time, resources, and future prospects to do so, the knowledge that we are hyperbolic discounters can help us to develop better behaviour modification strategies,. Even if tacit bargaining is not an option for some of us, we can try to come up with compromises for our competing interests. It is useful to consider what kinds of goals and principles might satisfy both our long and short term interests. It is also helpful to know that willpower is recursive. The knowledge that my current actions feed future actions may provide me with the motivation to act now in my long term interest[s].

Finally, I'd like to discuss the content or theme of this thesis and how it fits in to a larger scheme. Some readers of this work may have wondered why there has not been more discussion of external changes which could be made to modify behaviours. Public health experts usually recommend multi-levelled interventions which include additional taxes on junk foods, lower prices on fresh fruits and vegetables, better, safer public recreation spaces, and so on. That is, changing behaviours involves changes which are external to the individual. I have focused on the role of the individual in this work. Granted, I have spoken at length about social and political factors which shape who we are, but my discussion has remained, more or less, centred on individual behaviours and individual strategies. The discourse on akrasia/weakness of the will is generally concerned with individuals and individual behaviours. And this is another feature of the literature on weakness of the will which is frustrating. I said, in chapter 1, that “the way in which we are rational agents and the manner in which we can employ our rational nature is not always straightforward” (9). So long as we remain invested in the idea that practical reason must always consist of individuals acting on knowledge of what is best, we will not help ourselves. As I concluded in this chapter, your situation will determine your future prospects, which will affect whether you act with the future in mind or seize the moment. And, as I mentioned in chapter 2, we do not live in a well-functioning meritocracy.¹² So, it is up to us, collectively, to improve future prospects for individuals, though I am not qualified to say what sorts of actions and projects this will require. My general point is that sometimes true practical reason involves accepting our limitations and working with them. Thus, in the future I intend to round out this work via a philosophical discussion of the implications of two other self-control strategies: 1) The Odyssean strategy of 'tying oneself to the mast.' This can consist in things such as gastric bypass surgery or admitting oneself to a rehab facility. And 2) The role of the collective. This can include governmental health-intervention strategies, such as taxes on unhealthy foods, better recreation facilities, educational programs, and so on. But it can also include a more complex discussion of how the collective shapes us morally. Alasdair MacIntyre has

12 See McNamee and Miller, Jr. for a discussion of this problem.

written extensively on how the collective forms us into moral agents and his work would certainly play a significant role in such a study. Spinoza also had a lot to say about the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the collective. There is certainly a great deal of philosophical literature on collectivism, which could contribute to an interesting discussion on the role of the collective in controlling obesity.

A final point I'd like to make is of a more personal nature. Gaining weight is easy. You do not need to be particularly dysfunctional to pack on pounds. An extra 300 calories per day—the total calories of a piece of bread, a tablespoon of butter, and a banana, combined, or six Oreos—can lead to a 30 pound weight gain in one year. But, losing weight is hard, much harder than gaining it. You need to be highly motivated to succeed. You need a reason, a goal other than the weight loss, itself—and it must be real and salient. I believe that part of what prevents my own success is a lack of a positive vision of my own future. I am the only person in my family to graduate from college. I was told recently by one of my relatives that this research project is an activity suitable only for rich people and that it is frivolous —“Not for people like us.” I have no model of what life looks like for a person who has a meaningful career. Thus, I need to cultivate a vision and a model of my own future which is feasible and within reach.

Works Cited

- "Adult Obesity Facts." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Ainslie, George. *Breakdown of Will*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. PDF.
- Allahar, Anton and James E. Cote. *Richer and Poorer: The Structure of Inequality in Canada*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited, 1998. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Alexander, Bruce K. "The Myth of Drug-Induced Addiction." *Parliament of Canada*. GC, n.d. Web. 25 June 2015.
- Allen, Louisa. "Looking at the Real Thing': Young men, pornography, and sexuality education." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27.1 (2006): 69-83. *Taylor & Francis*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Aristotle. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. Print.
- Arpaly, Nomy. "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment." *Ethics* 110.3 (2000): 488-513. Web. 14 Oct. 2014.
- Austin, S. Bryn. "Fat, Loathing and Public Health: The Complicity of Science in a Culture of Disordered Eating." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 23.2 (1999): 245-268. *SpringerLink*. Web 28 Apr. 2015.
- Baker, Sarah, Kusi-Achampong, Marilyn, and Walker, Elizabeth. *Effective Public Health Interventions in the Prevention of Obesity in Children from Birth to Six Years: A Rapid Review of the Evidence*. Brampton, ON, CAN: Peel Public Health, 2011. *ProQuest ebrary*. Web. 16 April 2015.
- Bennett, Tony. Introduction. *Distinction*. By Pierre Bourdieu. Oxford: Routledge, 2010. xvii-xxiii. Print.

- Bering, Jesse M. "The Folk Psychology of Souls." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29.5 (2006): 453-462. *Cambridge Journals*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Risky Bigness: On Obesity, Eating, and the Ambiguity of 'Health'." *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. Ed. Jonathan M. Metzler and Anna Kirkland. New York: NYU Press, 2010. 41-58. epub.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. Trans. Richard Nice. Oxford: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- . "The Forms of Capital." *Marxists Internet Archive*. marxists.org, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- . *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1980. PDF.
- . *Practical Reason*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. Print.
- Bratman, Michael. "Practical Reasoning and Weakness of the Will." *Nos* 13.2 (1979): 153-171. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Broadie, Sarah. "Another Problem of Akrasia." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2.2 (1994): 229-242. Web. 25 July 2014.
- Bruni, Frank. "Dr. Does-It-All." *New York Times Magazine* 18 Apr. 2010: 42. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Buss, Sarah. "Weakness of Will." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 78.1 (1997): 13-44. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Calugareanu, Ilinca. "VHS vs. Communism." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 17 Feb. 2014. Web. 14 July 2015.
- Chandler, Bret. "The Subjectivity of Habitus." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 43.4 (2013): 469-491. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 25 June 2015.

- Cheng, Maria. "Mammograms: For every woman saved, 3 overdiagnosed, study finds." *The Charleston Gazette* 30 Oct. 2012. *LexisNexis Academic*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Conrad, Peter and Joseph W. Schneider. *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992. epub.
- Crawford, Robert. "Health as a Meaningful Social Practice." *Health* 10.4 (2006): 401-420. *Sagepub*. Web. 10 May 2013.
- . "Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life." *International Journal of Health Services* 10.3 (1980): 365-88. *Sagepub*. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- . "You Are Dangerous to Your Health: The Ideology and Politics of Victim Blaming." *International Journal of Health Services* 7.4 (1977): 663-80. *Scribd*. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Davidson, Donald. "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?" *The Essential Davidson*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. 72-89. Print.
- Elster, John. "Rationality, Morality, and Collective Action." *Ethics* 96.1 (1985): 136-155. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Apr. 2014.
- Foot, Philippa. *Natural Goodness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. Print.
- Gard, Michael and Jan Wright. *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality, and Ideology*. London: Routledge, 2005. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Giordano, Simona. *Understanding Eating Disorders: Conceptual and Ethical Issues in the Treatment of Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. PDF.
- Gordon, Serena. "Tight blood sugar control may put some diabetics at risk." *U.S. News & World Report* Mar. 2011. *Proquest*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

- Hare, R.M. *The Language of Morals*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952. PDF.
- Henriques, Gregg. "The Elements of Ego Functioning: The Six Elements of Ego Functioning." *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers, 27 June 2013. Web. 25 June 2015.
- "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, Inc., n.d. Web. 14 July 2015.
- Holton, Richard. "Intention and Weakness of Will." *The Journal of Philosophy* 96.5 (1999): 241-62. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992. *MyiLibrary*. Web. Apr. 20 2015.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Trans. James Creed Meredith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982. Print.
- Kitcher, Philip. "Philosophy Inside Out." *Metaphilosophy* 42.3 (2011): 248-260. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Korsgaard, Christine. "The Authority of Reflection." *Foundations of Ethics*. 3rd ed. Ed. Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo. Malden: Blackwell, 2008. 93-106. Print.
- Kratina, Karen. "Orthorexia Nervosa." *NEDA*. NEDA, n.d. Web. 23 June 2015.
- Lawler, Steph. "Habitus." *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*. Ed. Dale Southerton. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011. 696-98. *SAGE knowledge*. Web. 22 Apr. 2015.
- Lebesco, Kathleen. "Fat Panic and the New Morality." *Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality*. Ed. Jonathan M. Metzler and Anna Kirkland. New York: NYU Press, 2010. 96-109. Epub.

- MacLean, Lynne, et al. "Obesity, Stigma and Public Health Planning." *Health Promotion International* 24.1 (2009): 88-93. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Marmot, Michael G. and S. Leonard Syme. "Acculturation and coronary heart disease in Japanese-Americans." *American Journal of Epidemiology* 104.3 (1976): 225-247. *Oxford Journals Archive*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Marx, Karl. "Alienated Labour." *Karl Marx: selected writings*. 2nd ed. Ed. David McLellan. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. 85-95. Print.
- . "The Communist Manifesto." *Karl Marx: selected writings*. 2nd ed. Ed. David McLellan. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. 245-272. Print.
- . "Estranged Labour." *Marxists Internet Archive*. Marxists.org, n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Mather Saul, Jennifer. "The Politics of Work and Family." *Feminism: Issues & Arguments*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. 5-44. Print.
- Maté, Gabor. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010. epub.
- McIntyre, Alison. "Is Akratic Action Always Irrational?" *Identity, Character, and Morality*. Ed. Owen J. Flanagan and Amlie Oksenberg Rorty. MIT Press, 1990. 379-400. MITCogNet. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- McNamee, Stephen J. and Robert K. Miller, Jr. "The Meritocracy Myth." *Sociation Today* 2.1 (2004): n. pag. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.
- Navaneelan, Tanya, and Teresa Janz. "Adjusting the Scales: Obesity in the Canadian Population after Correcting for Respondent Bias." *Health at a Glance. Statistics Canada Catalogue* 82.624-X (2014). *Statistics Canada*. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.
- Neergaard, Lauran. "Too many tests?; Routine medical checks get a second look." *Charleston Gazette* 24 Jan. 2012. *LexisNexis Academic*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

- Oakley, Francis. "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: The Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature." *Church History* 30.4 (1961): 433-457. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- "Overweight and Obese Adults (self-reported), 2013." *Health Fact Sheets. Statistics Canada 82-625-X* (2014). Web.
- People of Walmart*. Three Ring Blogs, 13 July 2015. Web. 14 July 2015.
- "PSA Test Should Be Abandoned as Screen for Prostate Cancer, Task Force Says." *CBC.ca*. 27 Oct. 2014. Web. 27 Apr. 2015.
- Rachlin, Howard. *The Science of Self-Control*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. PDF.
- Rawls, John. "The Sense of Justice." *The Philosophical Review* 72.3 (1963): 281-305. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- Sallaz, Jeffrey J. "Habitus." *Encyclopedia of Identity*. Ed. Ronald L. Jackson, II, and Michael A. Hogg. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2010. 322-25. *SAGE Knowledge*. Web. 21 Apr. 2015.
- Sawyer, L. and E.A.M. Gale. "Diet, delusion and diabetes." *Diabetologia* 52.1 (2009): 1-7. *SpringerLink*. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.
- Scott, John and Gordon Marshall. "Medicalization." *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. *Oxford Reference*. 2009. Web. 24 June 2015.
- Searle, John R. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. PDF.
- Skrabanek, Petr. *The Death of Humane Medicine and the Rise of Coercive Healthism*. Suffolk: Social Affairs Unit, 1994. PDF.
- Stroud, Sarah. "Weakness of Will." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition)*. 16 Jan. 2008. Web. 14 Apr. 2014.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/weakness-will/>.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge:

Harvard UP, 1989. Print.

Tierney, John. "The Rational Choices of Crack Addicts." *The New York Times*. The New

York Times Company, 16 Sept. 2013. Web. 14 July 2015.

---. "Two Theories of Modernity." *The Hastings Center Report* 25.2 (1995): 24-33.

JSTOR. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*. Scarborough: The New

American Library, Inc., 1960. Print.

Tooley, Lynette. "the source of this..." *Facebook* 6 Sept. 2014. Web. 28 Apr. 2015.

<https://www.facebook.com/lyn.rainshine.7>.

Wallace, R. Jay. "Addiction as Defect of the Will: Some Philosophical Reflections." *Law*

and Philosophy 18.6 (1999): 621-654. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

Watson, Gary. "Free Action and Free Will." *Mind* 96.382 (1987): 145-172. *JSTOR*. Web.

20 Apr. 2015.

---. "Skepticism about Weakness of Will." *The Philosophical Review* 86.3 (1977): 316-

339. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Aug. 2014.

Wegner, Daniel M. "Precis of *The Illusion of Conscious Will*." *Behavioral and Brain*

Sciences 27.5 (2004): 649-659. *Cambridge Journals*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

Weigert, Andrew J. "The Social Production of Identity: Metatheoretical Foundations."

The Sociological Quarterly 27.2 (1986): 165-183. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

White, Kevin. "The Body, Social Inequality and Health." *Routledge Handbook of Body*

Studies. Ed. Bryan S. Turner. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012. 264-274.

Ebook Library. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Williams, B. (1981). "Internal and External Reasons." *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981. 101-113. PDF.

Wilson, Timothy D. *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2002. PDF.

Wong, Tony. "They Had You at Honey Boo Boo HONEY BOO BOOISMS." *Toronto Star*. Torstar Syndication Services, 25 Aug. 2012. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

Zola, Irving Kenneth. "Healthism and Disabling Medicalization." *Disabling Professions*. Ed. Ivan Illich. London: Marion Boyars, 1977. 41-68. PDF.