Setiya situates his discussion within the debate concerning *practical reason*. Although we are not concerned with the details of this debate in this class, some rough-and-ready understanding of the issue may be of assistance.

**Practical Reason**

The key distinction here is between *theoretical reason* and *practical reason*. This distinction is highly controversial, as Setiya’s paper makes clear.

Roughly speaking and according to one important conception, the key difference between these two types of reason is the nature of the **conclusion** of reasoning of that kind.

**Theoretical reasoning:** the conclusion is a *belief* or *judgement*.

**Practical reasoning:** the conclusion is an *action* or *intention* to act.

If, as a result of noting that $3^2 + 4^2 = 25$, for example, you conclude that 25 is the sum of two squares, this conclusion is the outcome of theoretical reasoning. You believe, as the result of theoretical deliberation, that $3^2 + 4^2$ is the sum of two squares.

If, as a result of deliberation about your nephew’s interests, your desire to see him enjoy his birthday and so on, you buy him a collection of minerals and a book about rocks, this outcome is the product of practical reason. You form an intention to act in a particular way and act in that way as the result of practical deliberation.

This raises an important question.

- Does practical reason involve choosing our ends (goals, values, projects)?
- Or is practical reason limited to figuring out how to pursue the ends we happen to have (realise our goals, respect our values, complete our projects)?
  - If so, then practical reason is purely *instrumental*. It is merely a useful tool for pursuing our ends, whatever those ends happen to be. If our ends are good, the outcomes of (effective) practical reasoning will be good. If our ends are wicked, the outcomes of (effective) practical reasoning will be evil.

The instrumental view of practical reason is broadly (neo-)Humean. On Hume’s view, reason is motivationally inert. It merely serves as a tool for the pursuit of ends which are selected by the ‘passions’. Desire and feeling motivate. Reason simply serves whatever ends desire and feeling provide.

Let’s assume that your desire to see your nephew enjoy his birthday is virtuous, you are well-informed about his interests and have a good understanding of his level of intellectual development and so on. So your end is selecting a gift which will make your nephew happy, and this end is a good one. In that case, the outcome of your deliberations concerning his birthday is good. The product of practical reason — buying your nephew the minerals and rock book — is virtuous action.

There are several ways in which this might go wrong.

1. You might not be very well-informed about your nephew’s interests and capacities. Perhaps minerals was last year’s hobby and he now finds them boring, so that the minerals and rock book do not make him happy. Or perhaps you are mistaken about his level of intellectual development, so that you select a book which is either incomprehensible to him or far too simplistic.

   In this case, your end is selecting a gift which will make your nephew happy, and this end is a good one. In that case, the outcome of your deliberations concerning his birthday is good. The product of practical reason — buying your nephew the minerals and rock book — is virtuous action.

This first kind of failure is (relatively) uncontroversially considered a failure of practical reason: you fail to select effective means to your end of giving your nephew a gift which will make him happy.

2. You might have a vicious desire e.g. a desire
to see your nephew’s birthday ruined and your nephew in misery. After considerable deliberation, you select a highly explosive cake which, as expected, severely injures your nephew and completely ruins his day.

In this case, your end is ruining your nephew’s birthday. In the absence of exceptional factors (e.g. this is the only way to slow down your nephew’s pursuit of genocide), your end is a wicked one and the outcome of your deliberations concerning your nephew’s birthday is evil. The product of practical reason — buying your nephew the highly explosive cake — is vicious action. The action is both viciously motivated and wrong.

Nonetheless, unlike the first kind of failure, in this case, the action does achieve your end of making your nephew miserable. You select effective means to your end of ruining his birthday. The problem in this case is not with the selection of effective means to your end, but with the end itself.

It is uncontroversial that something has gone very wrong in this case. The question is whether this is a failure of practical reason or a failure of another kind.

Discussion: Terminology

- In a group, discuss questions 1–4 (thesis and terminology).
  - Note that de re/de dicto and counter-factual are explained briefly on page 202 of the course packet, although I would obviously be happy to answer further questions about these terms.

Discussion: The Argument

- In a group, please discuss question 5. What is Setiya’s argument?
- Clarify the conclusion.
  - The conclusion is the claim that the author is trying to persuade you of.
- What are the premises of this argument?
  - Premises are claims which an argument relies on i.e. the points it starts from.

Discussion: Evaluation

- In a group, please discuss question 6. Is Setiya’s argument a good one?
- Is the argument valid?
  - An argument is valid if, and only if, the conclusion follows logically from the premises so that the premises could not possibly be true without the conclusion being true as well.
- Is the argument sound?
  - An argument is sound if, and only if, two conditions are satisfied. First, the argument must be valid. Second, all of the premises must be true. It follows that the conclusion of a sound argument is true.

Reflection

- Recall the discussion of Speer in Jenni (2003) and the excerpts from Speer (1970) included in last week’s handout. How would Setiya evaluate Speer, assuming we take him at his word as Jenni does? Would this assessment identify the problem accurately?
- Is ‘general efficiency’ a vice?
- Might efficiency in the pursuit of virtuous ends ever be vicious?

References