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Author(s): J. David Velleman

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## Brandt's Definition of "Good"<sup>1</sup>

J. David Velleman

Richard Brandt has argued that the word "good" should be defined as meaning that a thing is rational to desire, in the sense that one would desire it after a process of "value-free reflection" that Brandt calls "cognitive psychotherapy."<sup>2</sup> In cognitive psychotherapy, as prescribed by Brandt, the patient draws on "the propositions accepted by the science of [his] day, plus factual propositions justified by publicly accessible evidence . . . and the principles of logic" (p. 13); and he represents to himself, repeatedly and vividly, every item of such information that stands to exert a specific effect on his desires—that is, an effect impinging only on particular desires and attributable to the content of the information represented (p. 112).<sup>3</sup> The desires that one would have after such treatment are the ones that are rational for one to have, according to Brandt, and "good" should be defined as meaning "rational to desire" in this sense.

Brandt's definition of "good" has a venerable history and, it appears, a promising future. It is closely akin to definitions offered by Henry Sidgwick<sup>4</sup> and John Rawls.<sup>5</sup> Its account of rational de-

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is descended from a somewhat longer paper entitled "Should 'Good' Be Defined as 'Rationally Desired'?" which was descended, in turn, from a much longer paper entitled "Can Rationality Be the Foundation of Ethics?" For helpful comments on one or more of these papers, I am indebted to Paul Boghossian, Richard Brandt, Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, Donald Herzog, Louis Loeb, Donald Morrison, Adrian Piper, Peter Railton, Richard Rorty, Nicholas White; and to anonymous readers for *The Philosophical Review*, who commented on several different versions.

<sup>2</sup>*A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 113. Hereinafter, all references to this work will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup>In this sentence I am giving Brandt's definition of the phrase "all available relevant information," which specifies what the patient must consider in cognitive psychotherapy. The first half of the sentence quotes Brandt's definition of available information, and the second half paraphrases his definition of relevance.

<sup>4</sup>*The Methods of Ethics* (London, England: MacMillan, 1907), pp. 105–115.

<sup>5</sup>*A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 407ff.

sire has been heartily endorsed by Richard Hare.<sup>6</sup> And most recently, a similar definition has been deployed by Peter Railton under the banner of moral realism.<sup>7</sup>

I have serious qualms about Brandt's definition and its kin. This paper expounds my qualms.

#### THE STRATEGY OF REFORMING DEFINITIONS

Brandt doesn't claim that his definition of "good" is what the layman has in mind when using the word. Rather, he claims that his definition is a revised version of the layman's meaning—a version from which confusions and irrelevancies have been eliminated. Thus, he says that "to ask whether an action is rational or a desire is rational is to capture everything important in the traditional normative questions" (p. 14). Similarly, he says that his sense of the word "rational" "captures all that is clear" in ordinary talk about normative issues (p. 15). Or again, he says that "rationally desired" can be substituted for "good" in any sentence "which makes an identifiable point" (p. 127). Hence whatever is unimportant, unclear, or unidentifiable in ordinary evaluative discourse is not meant to be preserved in Brandt's language of rational desire. Here too, Brandt follows Sidgwick, who presented his definition of "good" "as giving philosophical precision to the vaguer meaning with which [it is] used in ordinary discourse."<sup>8</sup>

Brandt insists, however, that his reformed evaluative language will serve the same practical function that ordinary evaluative language currently serves. He believes that ascertaining what's good in his sense will still settle the practical questions of what to desire, what to choose, and what to pursue—as he illustrates in the following example.

A Harvard professor is offered a position in Los Angeles (as Brandt tells it) and is weighing the pros and cons of the offer. Brandt recommends that the professor ask himself whether he would prefer the new position after cognitive psychotherapy. As it turns out, the professor would already prefer the new position if

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<sup>6</sup>*Moral Thinking; Its Levels, Method and Point* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 101–105; 214–218.

<sup>7</sup>"Moral Realism," *The Philosophical Review* 95 (1986), pp. 163–207, and "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986), pp. 5–31.

<sup>8</sup>*Methods of Ethics*, p. 112.

only he weren't "appalled by the thought of detaching himself from Harvard" (p. 125); and his aversion to leaving Harvard may well be the sort of attitude that cognitive psychotherapy would extinguish. According to Brandt, "if he found that his basic reason for preferring to stay at Harvard is irrational, his practical problem would be resolved." Brandt thus claims that although his definition of "good" will slightly alter what our concept of goodness *is*, it should not change what the concept *does* in guiding our attitudes and actions.

But if we revise the content of our evaluative terms without altering their practical function, we shall in effect have changed our minds about how to conduct our practical affairs. Currently we strive to desire, choose, and pursue whatever is good in our ordinary sense of the term; whereas Brandt would have us strive to desire, choose, and pursue whatever is good in his sense. Hence Brandt's linguistic reforms are not just an exercise in semantics: they embody a substantive ethical proposal, a proposal about how to live.

In defending this proposal Brandt takes two slightly different approaches. Sometimes he says that his terminology will enable us to ask the questions that we have really wanted to ask all along when seeking practical guidance. He thus suggests that in trying to desire, choose, or pursue what's good in the ordinary sense, we have misrepresented and hence disserved our own deepest aspirations, which will be better served by deliberation conducted in his reformed terminology. At other times, however, Brandt claims, not that his terminology articulates what we already want to know for practical purposes, but that it articulates what we should want to know—or, more precisely, what we shall want to know once we have reflected on the choice between his definitions and ours. Here Brandt concedes that desiring, choosing, and pursuing the good as ordinarily conceived is what we have aspired to until now; but he contends that we shall change our minds when we have glimpsed the possibility of desiring, choosing, and pursuing the good as he conceives it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>This latter approach is predominant in an earlier article of Brandt's, "Moral Philosophy and the Analysis of Language," in *Freedom and Morality*, edited by John Bricke (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 1976), pp. 1–22.

These two approaches to the defense of linguistic reform are not necessarily incompatible. Often there is no clear distinction between changing our goals and merely rearticulating them.<sup>10</sup> In either case, Brandt has to persuade us that judgments about the good as he conceives it are the judgments that we now want to live by, whether or not they are what we have wanted to live by all along. And in this Brandt fails, in my opinion, and was destined to fail, for philosophically interesting reasons.

#### WHAT GETS LOST IN BRANDT'S TRANSLATION

Brandt implies that his definition of "good" diverges from the ordinary sense of the term only to the extent of omitting its unclear or unintelligible elements. He thus invites us to believe that all we have to lose by adopting his definition of "good" are elements of meaning that we shall be glad to have lost.

Unfortunately, Brandt never identifies the elements of meaning that we shall lose, nor does he explain why he finds them unclear or unintelligible. We are of course attracted by the prospect of lightening our conceptual load, by jettisoning bits of nonsense and confusion. Yet the bits to be jettisoned are, in reality, particular thoughts and particular questions that can be framed in our old vocabulary but not in Brandt's new one. And Brandt doesn't give us an opportunity to identify them or assess their value before he throws them overboard. In effect, he wants to be given the run of the cargo hold, in the name of conceptual streamlining, with no questions asked.

I shall begin my critique of Brandt by identifying some of the thoughts and questions that his definition of "good" would prevent us from expressing. I shall then attack Brandt's grounds for thinking that these thoughts and questions are less worthy than the ones that his definition would enable us to express. My thesis is that Brandt has no defensible reason for preferring the elements of meaning that he preserves to the ones that he discards.

*What's lost.* Brandt's definitional reforms would prevent us from justifying any changes in our desires other than the changes that

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<sup>10</sup>This point is made by Charles Taylor in "Responsibility for Self," *The Identities of Persons*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 294ff.

would be wrought by cognitive psychotherapy. For in Brandt's terminology, what's good, and hence worth wanting, is—by definition—whatever we would want after cognitive psychotherapy. Among the things we actually want, the only things that aren't worth wanting, in Brandt's sense of the phrase, are the things that cognitive psychotherapy would stop us from wanting; and among the things we don't already want, the only things that are worth wanting, in Brandt's sense, are the things that cognitive psychotherapy would cause us to want. Hence the only changes in our desires that can be justified in Brandt's language are the changes that would occur if we exposed ourselves to vivid representations of the facts.<sup>11</sup>

Yet cognitive psychotherapy is not the only kind of motivational therapy there is. We can alter our desires, not only by exposing ourselves to the facts, but also by exposing ourselves to other kinds of influence—to the influence of other people, of literature, of prayer, or of our own self-censure and self-praise. And the possibility of such motivational therapy is often the theme of our evaluative discourse. When we ask what to desire, we're often asking, in effect, which persons to emulate, which regimen of self-discipline to undertake, or which influences to succumb to.<sup>12</sup> Our reason for considering these noncognitive means of self-reform is not that we think of them as shortcuts to the same motivational state that would be produced by cognitive therapy. On the contrary, what commends these therapies to us is precisely that each of them holds out the promise of leaving an inimitable imprint on our motives. Thus we are often willing to consider motivational changes even though they strike us as feasible only through noncognitive means.

In Brandt's language, however, motivational changes that could be achieved only by noncognitive means are, by definition,

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<sup>11</sup>To be more precise, they are the changes that would occur if we exposed ourselves to vivid representations of the *available relevant* facts. Henceforth I shall omit these qualifying terms, since they have no bearing on my arguments.

<sup>12</sup>Brandt explicitly distinguishes cognitive psychotherapy from some of these alternatives. He says that cognitive psychotherapy "relies simply upon reflection on available information, without influence by prestige of someone, use of evaluative language, extrinsic reward or punishment, or use of artificially induced feeling-states like relaxation" (p. 113).

changes for the worse, insofar as they would leave us wanting things other than what we would want after purely cognitive therapy. Brandt's language is therefore fundamentally prejudiced against many familiar kinds of motivational change, in favor of the motivational status quo.

This prejudice is especially stark in light of the possibility that some noncognitive forms of therapy might work changes that cognitive therapy not only couldn't work but also couldn't undo. Some desires that we are not currently disposed to acquire from confronting the facts may, once acquired by other means, be able to withstand such a confrontation. Training in "est," for instance, might instill ambitions that wouldn't be instilled by information alone but, once instilled, wouldn't be dispelled by information, either. What is the difference between these potentially new ambitions and the old ambitions that we wouldn't lose through cognitive psychotherapy alone? The difference is not that those old ambitions are resistant to the facts, since the new ones would be, too, if we acquired them. The difference is merely that we already have the old ambitions but not the new ones. Indeed, the new ambitions would be rational, in Brandt's sense of the term, if only we already had them; but since we don't have them, and cannot acquire them merely by facing facts, Brandt would call them irrational.

Conversely, some of our current desires that wouldn't be removed by information might not be restored by it, either, if removed by other means. Daily meditation, for instance, may banish desires that the facts would never have banished but are equally unable to reinstate. These desires aren't incompatible with the facts, given that we have them; but neither would their absence be, if we didn't. Why, then, should we have them? Brandt's only answer is that we should have them because we do have them and couldn't get rid of them through exclusively cognitive means.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Paul Boghossian has pointed out to me that Brandt might draw a somewhat different conclusion about the desires that I have discussed in these two paragraphs. Brandt might say that the objects of these desires are good for us if we want them but not if we don't want them, the upshot being that we cannot go wrong whether we want them or not. This conclusion would still foreclose the question that we want to ask—namely, whether the objects are worth wanting—but it would foreclose this question in a slightly different way, by depriving the question of any answer rather than by forcing a particular answer upon it. The desires in question

Thus Brandt would prevent us from asking whether the things that we currently want are less worthy than things that we could learn to want only by practicing such noncognitive forms of therapy as est or meditation. Such a question would make no sense when expressed in Brandt's terminology, since in Brandt's terms, the latter objects are, by definition, not worth wanting.

Brandt's language wouldn't do justice to our question even if we rephrased it so as to ask—not what's good, and hence worth wanting—but which desires are good, and hence worth having. Brandt would translate the question "Which desires are good?" into the question "Which desires are rational to desire?" and he would take the latter question to mean, "Which desires would we want after cognitive psychotherapy?" Yet when we wonder whether to change our desires, we aren't just asking whether we would want to change them after our present desires had been exposed to the facts.

Of course, we wouldn't consider changing our present desires unless we had some present desire to change them; but the question whether to reform our desires is not simply a question about the validity of our present desire for self-reform, since that desire may itself be one whose reform is in question. Our efforts at

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would become by definition immune from criticism rather than by definition correct or incorrect.

Of course, there are desires about which we are willing to say that we cannot go wrong whether we have them or not—for instance, my desire to have soup for today's lunch. Brandt might wish to argue that these desires are the only ones that would be such as to withstand information, if we have them, but not be implanted by it, if we don't. In that case, the only desires that his theory exempted from criticism would be ones that we do not care to criticize anyway.

One problem here is that a desire's sensitivity to information depends on how it is anchored in our psychology, whereas our interest in criticizing the desire depends largely on its content. It therefore seems unlikely that the desires rendered uncriticizable by Brandt's definition would be precisely the ones that we have no interest in criticizing. A more fundamental problem is that we do not regard our license to criticize a desire as depending on whether the presence or absence of the desire would be reversed by information. That's the point of my argument, above, to the effect that we sometimes take seriously the question whether we ought to pursue motivational reforms that would require noncognitive therapy. The fact that information alone would leave us as we are in respect to some desire neither settles nor rules out the question whether we ought to have it.



changing our motives are often aimed at changing, among other things, our motives for those very efforts; for often the person we want to be would have different motives from ours for wanting to be the person he is. Hence even if our preference for his personality wouldn't withstand cognitive psychotherapy, his might, and his is the one we prefer. Surely, then, in wondering whether to become a different person, we aren't asking ourselves whether the person we are, if well informed, would still want to be different.

Finally, Brandt's language also contains a bias in favor of our current traits of character, which partly determine how information affects us. For example, we may be especially fickle or steadfast in our preferences, and hence especially susceptible or resistant to the motivational force of the facts. Furthermore, the same facts may exert different motivational forces on personalities of different kinds. Images of alien cultures may rouse us to wonderment if we're cosmopolitan, whereas if we're provincial, the same images may arouse contempt; the thought of a storm at sea may thrill us if we're brave but sicken us if we're timid; and our hearts may grow either hard or tender at the sight of other people's pain. Surely these different traits of character would dispose us to acquire different desires in response to the facts. Yet according to Brandt, the desires that we are currently disposed to acquire in response to information are, by definition, rational desires for us to have. Brandt's language therefore leaves us no means of questioning our current dispositions for responding to information. Again, Brandt can ask whether information would make us want to alter our dispositions for responding to information; but what information would make us want is already dependent on our current dispositions for responding to it; and we needn't take these dispositions for granted, as Brandt's theory would do. In asking whether it would be good to be less fickle than we are, for instance, we needn't be asking whether the facts would cause a fickle person like ourselves to undergo a change of heart about being fickle. In asking whether it would be good to be softer of heart, we needn't be asking whether the facts would soften us, given how hard-hearted we are.

*An illustration.* Let me illustrate these remarks by elaborating on Brandt's example of the Harvard professor who's weighing the merits of a job offer from Los Angeles. Brandt imagines that the professor's reservations about accepting the offer may arise from a

desire that wouldn't withstand confrontation with the facts. Perhaps the professor is appalled at the thought of leaving Harvard because he wants to win the approval of his parents, who think that he should be loyal to the family *alma mater*; and perhaps his desire to win his parents' approval would diminish if only he wasn't continually visited by disproportionately vivid images of their beaming or scowling faces. In that case, his reservations about the new offer—as they stand—are irrational, according to Brandt's definition.

Yet the professor's deliberations are unlikely to hang simply on how the facts would affect his present motives. In wondering whether leaving Harvard would be a good thing, the professor may be asking far more than whether factual information would make it attractive to him as he is now. He may be asking, instead, whether to be different—more loyal, perhaps, more ambitious, or more adventurous. He may be wondering whom to emulate among his teachers and senior colleagues: the globe-trotters or the sticks-in-the-mud? Indeed, he may be wondering whether he shouldn't cultivate a more mature, more realistic motive for deferring to his parents' wishes. Knowing that his current motive for pleasing his parents is the figment of an infantile imagination won't necessarily settle the question whether wanting to please them is a good thing. For he may still wonder whether his childish need for parental approval shouldn't have given way by now to an adult sense of filial devotion.

None of these questions can be answered by identifying which desires would be rational, in Brandt's sense. The professor isn't asking himself, for example, whether new motives for pleasing his parents would result from a confrontation with the facts. He may know that cognitive psychotherapy would dissolve his current, immature dependence on his parents without precipitating a new, mature concern for them—and hence that it would remove but not replace his current motive for considering their wishes. He may know that the only way for him to cultivate a selfless concern for his parents would be, not to irradiate himself with facts, but to emulate the example of his older brother. But he still may not know the answer to his question. After all, the fact that exposure to information wouldn't make him more considerate of his parents may be, not an indication that he shouldn't be more considerate of them, but rather an indictment of the sort of person he is. Perhaps

the older brother would be drawn closer to his parents, not alienated from them, by an awareness of the facts. If the professor could only be more like his brother, he too could have filial motives that the facts would reinforce rather than undermine. Wouldn't it be a good thing if he cultivated those motives? Brandt's definitions would prevent the professor from asking this question, rather than help him to answer it.

Finally, the professor cannot answer his question by ascertaining whether he'd still want to cultivate different motives if he underwent cognitive psychotherapy. Of course, he must have some motive for considering self-reform, but that motive may in fact be one whose reform is being considered. The professor's only motive for cultivating a selfless concern for his parents may be the self-centered thought that mommy and daddy won't love him any more if he doesn't. No doubt, this thought would lose some of its motivational force if he viewed his parents more realistically. But the thought of losing his parents' affection has moved him to consider whether to cultivate a genuinely selfless concern for them. It has thus moved him to consider replacing such self-centered thoughts as motives for having that very concern. Why should he care whether his current motive for becoming more selfless would survive exposure to the facts? He's thinking of acquiring a disposition that would constitute a different motive for valuing selflessness—namely, a genuine concern for others. Hence the professor does not mean to gauge the value of motivational change by the validity of his current motive for it; whereas Brandt's language would put no other standard at his disposal. Brandt's language would therefore force the professor to ask a different question from the one he wants to ask.

In sum, the professor wants to assess, not only his actual motives for wanting to stay at Harvard, but also other motives that he could develop by various familiar, noncognitive means. Brandt's definition of "good" would block this line of inquiry. His definition therefore eliminates from our ordinary sense of "good," not just confusions and irrelevancies, but also perfectly serviceable aspects of meaning.

*What's left.* There are, of course, some practical questions that Brandt can answer in his vocabulary, and he tries to arouse our interest in them; but he never manages to dampen our interest in the other questions, which he cannot pose. For example, Brandt

points out that "people—including the reader—do dislike having to think that their desires are irrational in my sense," because of the dissonance between such desires and reality (p. 157). Now, if we were wondering merely whether to have well-informed or ill-informed desires, Brandt's point about our aversion to cognitive dissonance might put our question to rest. But what we want to ask is, not whether to have well- or ill-informed desires, but which set of well-informed desires to have. And as I have argued, the possibility of noncognitive therapy puts many alternative sets of well-informed desires within our reach. There are the well-informed desires that we would have if exposed to information as we are now; and then there are the well-informed desires that information would induce in us if we underwent some other form of therapy first. All of these desires are on a par as far as consonance with reality is concerned, and so Brandt's point about cognitive dissonance cannot justify his choice of one set over the others.

Thus, the Harvard professor, as I have described him, is not undecided between his current, unrealistic dependence on his parents and the more realistic indifference that he'd feel after cognitive psychotherapy. Rather, he's undecided between the indifference that he's now disposed to feel after cognitive psychotherapy and an equally realistic concern that he would feel after cognitive psychotherapy if only he were more like his brother. Hence the professor's aversion to having ill-informed desires is no reason for him to confine his attention to the desires that would be produced in him by information alone. He can acquire many well-informed desires other than the ones that would result if he acquired nothing but information. Unfortunately, the question whether to cultivate such desires cannot be accurately translated into Brandt's vocabulary.

Brandt also argues that rational desires, in his sense of the term, are the most conducive to our happiness. Ill-informed desires, as he points out, are often for the attainment of things that we won't in fact enjoy or for the avoidance of things that we would enjoy, or at least wouldn't dislike (pp. 153–154). Acting on well-informed desires is therefore a more efficient means of accumulating enjoyments. And since we want enjoyment, Brandt argues, we should want to know which desires we would have if we were well-informed.

But again, our desire for enjoyment is no reason to confine our

attention to the potential products of cognitive psychotherapy. The reason why we can cultivate new desires, in many cases, is that we can cultivate new tastes, which dispose us to enjoy different things, and which therefore produce different desires in the light of full information. The question we ask when wondering whether to alter our desires may therefore be, not what we'd want if we knew what would make us happy as we are now, but whether to change what would make us happy. The desires that would result from such a change would be different from the ones that cognitive psychotherapy would produce by itself; and so they are different from the desires that Brandt would call rational. But they would be no less conducive to our happiness, given our altered tastes, than Brandt's rational desires would be, given the tastes we have now.

#### ARE BRANDT'S QUESTIONS CLEAR?

Hence Brandt's stated reasons for preferring his evaluative questions fail to persuade us. However, I suspect that the ultimate reason for his preference is one that he never fully expounds as such.

When Brandt first sets out to redefine evaluative language, he announces that his goal is to arrive at questions that can be settled empirically. He aims "to answer the traditional questions about the good and the right . . . [by] rephras[ing] these questions in terminology sufficiently clear and precise for one to answer them by some mode of scientific or observational procedure, or at least by some clearly stateable and familiar mode of reasoning" (p. 2). And he promises:

We shall see [that] clear questions emerge, as the ones we want to answer for purposes of action. Once we know what these are, we can use the ordinary methods of science and observation to determine the answers (p. 22).

Now, Brandt doesn't explicitly present the empirical nature of the resulting questions as a reason for preferring them to their ordinary-language counterparts. Rather, he tends to suggest that his questions are the ones that we do or should want to ask in any case, and that their susceptibility to empirical methods, though a

welcome feature, is not to be our reason for adopting them. Yet Brandt does defend his linguistic reforms as preserving "all that is clear" or "identifiable" in our ordinary questions; and the passages just quoted indicate that clarity is closely associated in Brandt's mind with empirical determinability. Hence the suspicion remains that what distinguishes the questions that Brandt wishes to preserve from those which he is content to discard is that the former are clearer precisely in the sense of being empirical. Perhaps, then, Brandt's underlying reason for wanting to ask what a person would desire after exposure to the facts, rather than what's good in the ordinary sense of the term, is that the former question strikes him as the only one that's sufficiently clear and precise to be answered by the methods of science and observation.

Unfortunately, Brandt is mistaken about the clarity of his own question. To ask what a person would want after exposure to the facts is not to ask a determinate question at all, and hence not to ask a question that empirical tests could settle. And as I shall argue, any attempt to sharpen this question robs it of any interest it may have held for us in the first place.

*The problem of representation.* The problem here is that "exposure to the facts," in the context of Brandt's theory, has no determinate meaning. For in Brandt's theory, the phrase refers to a regimen of mental representation; and the same facts can be represented in many different ways, with different motivational consequences.

Suppose, for example, that I suffer from heart disease so advanced that my only chance for survival lies in receiving a heart transplant. And suppose that I would be inclined to go through with a transplant if only I weren't appalled by the thought of having another person's heart lodged in my chest. According to Brandt, I ought to wonder whether my aversion to a transplant is rational; and whether it's rational depends on whether it would survive exposure to the facts. What exactly would constitute such exposure?

To begin with, the facts in question would have to be represented in a particular medium, and there is more than one medium available. I can state the facts, I can picture them, I can diagram or map them, and their motivational impact may well depend on their medium of representation. Surely mental pictures of open-heart surgery would affect me differently from a mental flow chart or narration. Furthermore, each medium of represen-

tation affords me considerable latitude in style and perspective. For instance, I can describe the operation in medical jargon, using words like “incision,” “suture,” “clot,” and “hemorrhage”; or I can describe it in layman’s terms with words like “slice,” “sew,” “gob,” and “gush.” If I choose instead to picture the operation, I can picture platelets and leucocytes rushing to the scene of damaged tissue; or a seething chest cavity laid bare by steel instruments; or an operating table surrounded by machines and gowned figures; or perhaps even a quiet Midwest town in which there stands a gleaming hospital, whose operating theater is bustling with activity one dark winter morning.

Each of these representations would exert a different motivational impact from the others. The clinical description of a heart-transplant operation would probably be reassuringly scientific; the layman’s description would be disgustingly graphic. A microscopic view of the operation would be violent; the telescopic view may be downright placid. Just consider the difference in motivational impact between calling the operation a cardio-transplant and calling it a heart-swap.

To ask simply about the motivational impact of the facts, then, is not to ask a determinate question. There is no single motivational impact associated with the facts in themselves. The facts would exert various impacts, when presented in various media, perspectives, and vocabularies. Consequently, I cannot resolve my practical dilemma by asking what I would want after exposure to the facts, since the only accurate answer to that question is, “It would depend on how I looked at them.”

The only way of eliminating this problem would be by resorting to an unacceptably naive form of realism. The necessity of deciding how to represent the facts in cognitive psychotherapy wouldn’t trouble us if we thought that one medium or style of representation were favored by the facts themselves—that the facts were such as can be accurately conveyed only in pictures, or only in a particular vocabulary. But this form of realism would require that the test of correspondence to reality differentiate, not only between incompatible representations, but also between seemingly compatible ones. It would require that the world be in itself pictorial or verbal, technical or slangy, close up or far off, so as to distinguish the one true representation from the false ones. Surely no realist would really be so naive.

*Coping with the problem.* Although Brandt cannot eliminate this problem, he might at least attempt to cope with it. For he could easily specify a particular medium, perspective, or vocabulary as the one to be used in cognitive psychotherapy. To ask what was good in Brandt's sense would then be to ask what one would want after exposure to a particular representation of the facts—a question to which there would be a determinate answer that might be ascertained, at least in principle, by the methods of empirical psychology.

Yet if Brandt clarified his definition of "good" in this fashion, he would thereby make the definition even harder to defend. For he would incorporate into the meaning of "good," not only a prejudice against motivational reforms that would require noncognitive modes of therapy, but also a prejudice against reforms that would require nothing more than exposure to alternative representations of the facts. In the course of deliberation we frequently ask ourselves—not only whether we should try to emulate others, whether we should pray for guidance, and so forth—but also whether we ought to look at matters from one perspective or another. And this latter question would be ruled out by Brandt's clarified definition, since one way of viewing the facts would be defined as yielding correct desires, and all other representations would be defined as yielding incorrect desires, insofar as they yielded different desires at all. Brandt's clarified definition would therefore entail a commitment to living by the motivational influence of a particular point of view; and he would have to explain why we should accept that commitment.

In fact, Brandt's definition may already contain a clarification of the sort that I have in mind, since he says that the representation to which the patient should expose himself in cognitive psychotherapy is the one that's "ideally vivid" (pp. 111–112). Perhaps Brandt believes that his requirement of ideal vividness narrows down the representational possibilities to a single one.<sup>14</sup> I doubt, however, whether this requirement distinguishes among different modes of representation at all. Is a vivid picture more vivid than a vivid description? Surely, the difference between such alternative representations is a difference in kind of vividness, not in degree:

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<sup>14</sup>Professor Brandt has told me that, being an empiricist at heart, he regards sensory images as the most vivid mode of representation.



the one is vivid visually, the other verbally, and neither is more vivid purely and simply.

Even if the requirement of ideal vividness did select for a single mode of representation, Brandt would be unable to justify that selection. He might have been able to justify it if (as he may believe) the most vivid representation of a fact had a motivational impact that differed only in degree from that of its less vivid alternatives. In that case, to represent a fact most vividly would be to let it exert fully the same motivational impact that it would exert only partially if represented differently. There would be a single motivational effect attributable to the facts, and fully confronting the facts would require undergoing that effect to the fullest extent, which would in turn require confronting the most vivid representation. But as we have seen, alternative representations have motivational effects that differ in kind and not merely in degree. How can Brandt suggest that one of these effects is privileged simply because it is the strongest?

*All the angles?* One might think that Brandt could avoid having to choose among the various ways of representing the facts in cognitive psychotherapy simply by stipulating that they are to be represented every which way. Perhaps rational desires should be defined as the desires that we would have, not just after exposure to all of the facts, but after exposure to all of the facts from all angles and in all lights.<sup>15</sup> This revised definition of rational desire would

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<sup>15</sup>I owe this suggestion to Peter Railton. Railton has written about the problem of representation in his "Facts and Values," pp. 19–25, partly in response to an earlier draft of the present paper. However, Railton addresses a somewhat different version of the problem from the one that I raise here. Railton asks whether the possibility of alternative representations renders questions of goodness *indeterminate*; whereas I am asking whether it renders them *empirically indeterminate*. (Railton's discussion also differs from mine, of course, in that it concerns his own definition of "good," which differs from Brandt's in crucial respects.)

I happen to think that questions of goodness, as defined by Brandt or Railton, turn out to be indeterminate as well as indeterminable, but not because of the possibility of alternative representations. The questions are indeterminate because they hang on counterfactuals about what someone would want if he knew everything, and there is no unique way of evaluating such counterfactuals. Since a person isn't actually capable of knowing everything, his knowing everything would require significant alterations in his actual psychological makeup; and there may be many different alterations that would do the trick. Consequently, there may be many dif-

have an appeal of its own, quite apart from its apparent utility as a solution to the problem of representation. After all, saying that a person has looked at an issue from every angle is a common way of saying that he has deliberated about it well.

But when we say that someone has looked at an issue from every angle, we aren't speaking literally. We don't mean that he has represented the issue to himself in every medium of representation, from every perspective. Rather, we mean that he has canvassed those particular angles which we consider illuminating for the issue at hand—always at least two, of course, but rarely more than three or four. The problem for Brandt is that there are not three or four standard angles from which we think that every issue should be viewed; and so there is no standard regimen of reflection that we would be willing to enshrine in our definition of "good." Each issue, or kind of issue, obliges us to experiment with a different selection of representational possibilities. Indeed, some issues oblige us to invent new representational possibilities—new vocabularies, new graphic conventions, new methods of projection—in order to review them to our satisfaction.

Thus, if Brandt wanted to prescribe what we ordinarily mean by considering an issue from all angles, he would have to define the good as that which one would want after representing the facts in whichever ways were most illuminating for the issue at hand. And then his definition would no longer yield empirical questions—that is, unless Brandt knows of some empirical test that detects illuminating representations, which I doubt.

Alternatively, Brandt could prescribe exposure to the facts represented, literally, in every possible way. But he would not thereby improve the clarity of his definition, since the phrase "all possible representations" is not empirically determinate, either. The problem is not just that this phrase encompasses more actual languages and graphic conventions than we are capable of testing in practice. The problem is that, in order to yield a satisfactory definition of "good," the phrase would have to encompass every possible language and every possible graphic convention—every mode of representation that we might ever invent in order to illu-

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ferent possible states of affairs satisfying the antecedent "if he knew everything . . ." yielding different truth-values for the counterfactuals in question. Compare: "If you were a pig, you'd like mud." (Here again, I am indebted to Paul Boghossian.)

minate an issue. And there is no scientific method for generating a catalog of possible future inventions.

To say that I ought to reflect on the subject of heart surgery from every possible angle, literally speaking, would be to say something that was hopelessly vague and open-ended. Suppose that I told myself the story of the proposed operation in the style of Homer, the style of Proust, the style of Hemingway, and the style of Gertrude Stein. Would I have exhausted all of the illuminating ways in which the story might be told? Could I exhaust all the illuminating ways of telling the story by telling it in the style of every author who ever lived? Surely, I'd have to tell it in the style of every possible author. And what, pray tell, is the scientific or observational method for ascertaining the impact of a possible author?

*Just the facts?* One might object that the descriptions likely to be written by poets or novelists would be too figurative and fanciful for cognitive psychotherapy, which is restricted to representing the facts. But this objection would merely draw attention to another respect in which Brandt's definition is unclear—namely, in its reference to factual representations. Even someone who is a thoroughgoing realist about the facts should hesitate before postulating a clear distinction between representations that are factual and representations that are figurative or fanciful. One can think that there is a particular way the world is, and that correspondence to the world is what makes a representation true, without also thinking that there is a clear distinction between representations that do nothing more than show how the world is and representations that do other, less respectable things as well. Perhaps all representations tinge their subject matter with some extraneous color, because they must employ a verbal or visual or, in any case, symbolic medium, with purely fortuitous connotations, in representing what is in itself neither verbal nor visual nor in any way symbolic. If so, Brandt won't be able to give clear instructions for cognitive psychotherapy by saying "Just report the facts." He will have to say exactly how colorful the report is allowed to be. And then he will have to explain why we should define "good" as including objects that we'd want after exposure to a report *that* colorful but not objects that we'd want only after exposure to a slightly more colorful report.

Suppose that the beating heart laid bare in surgery looks like a

caught fish writhing on the deck of a boat. When I say so, if it is so, am I giving a factual report? Brandt could banish all similes from cognitive psychotherapy, of course; but then he'd have to explain why motivational effects peculiar to this very illuminating kind of representation should be defined as deleterious. And if Brandt allows some similes in cognitive psychotherapy, where is he going to draw the line?

Brandt faces a dilemma, then. If he gives a clear and precise specification of how the facts are to be represented in cognitive psychotherapy, his definition of "good" will commit us to viewing every practical issue in particular ways, no matter how future issues, as yet unimagined, beg to be viewed. If he doesn't give a clear and precise specification of how the facts are to be represented, however, his definition of "good" will not yield questions that can be settled, as he claims, by the methods of science and observation.

#### CONCLUSION

I see no reason to prefer Brandt's meaning of "good" to the ordinary sense of the term. What's good in Brandt's sense is not necessarily more conducive to our pleasure than what's good in the ordinary sense; desiring what's good in Brandt's sense need not be more consonant with reality than desiring what's good in the ordinary sense; and evaluative questions do not gain empirical clarity when translated from our ordinary vocabulary into Brandt's. Why, then, should we give up asking the many questions that cannot be asked in Brandt's vocabulary?

I think that Brandt's definition of "good" begins with a sound intuition. The intuition is that something is wrong with a desire if it would be extinguished by information—that one shouldn't want anything that one wouldn't want if one knew more. But Brandt tries to make this modest intuition yield a moral theory, and in so doing he tortures it beyond recognition. First he turns the intuition on its head, so as to say, not that one shouldn't want what one wouldn't want if one knew more, but rather that one *should* want whatever one *would* want if only one knew more. And then he treats the notion of "knowing more" as if it were, not a vague and context-dependent ideal, but an effective procedure for generating correct desires.

*The University of Michigan*