

## BOOK REVIEWS

Pollock notes that his argument-based, procedural, “proof-theoretic,” account is mildly idiosyncratic. Indeed, it is, but he might have drawn attention to work by Donald Nute (“Defeasible Reasoning: A Philosophical Analysis in Prolog,” in *Aspects of Artificial Intelligence*, ed. J. Fetzer (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1988, 251–88) or the work of Horty, Thomason, and Touretzky on “direct” theories of defeasible inheritance reasoning (for example, “A clash of intuitions: the current state of nonmonotonic multiple inheritance systems,” *Proceedings of IJCAI-87* (Morgan Kaufmann, 1987), 476–82.) Still, Pollock’s account is the richest and most detailed one we have of the structure of defeasible reasoning, and is all by itself worth the price of admission.

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*PRACTICAL REFLECTION*. By J. DAVID VELLEMAN. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989. Pp. x, 332.

There are two ways of getting true beliefs. The first is to bring our beliefs into conformity with the facts. The second is to bring the facts into conformity with our beliefs. Velleman’s thesis is that the central motivation in all human behavior is the desire to achieve self-knowledge, and to achieve it primarily in the second way—by acting so as to ensure the truth of our beliefs about ourselves. “The desire to know what you’re doing . . . disposes you to undertake only those actions which you’re aware of expecting yourself to perform” (49). Hence, what we call *intentions* are simply self-fulfilling expectations.

I cannot do justice in a short review to the enormously rich, complex, and often persuasive theory of rational agency that Velleman builds around these basic ideas. I shall therefore focus on what is for me the most important criticism of Velleman’s project. On his account, fulfilling our own expectations is supposed to be a way of ensuring that those expectations will have (will have had?) the status of *knowledge*. I do not wish to deny either that the desire for self-knowledge is a powerful motive, or that we often act so as to fulfill our own self-concept.<sup>1</sup> What I am questioning is

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<sup>1</sup>We are, of course, often motivated to fulfill particular self-regarding beliefs, because of the nature of their *content*; but it is quite another thing to say with

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whether the latter is, or could be, a means to the former. Vellemanian expectations cannot count as knowledge because they are neither (a) *true*, nor (b) *justified*, nor (c) *caused by the facts*; hence, their fulfillment is no path to self-knowledge.

That they are not caused by the facts is clear enough;<sup>2</sup> so let's consider their justification. Self-fulfilling expectations are their own evidence, Velleman argues, because they're guaranteed to be veridical; you are justified in forming either of two incompatible expectations, so long as whichever one you form will thereby be the one that comes true. "When the question is what you will have for lunch, you are entitled to say whatever you like, because you'll have whatever you say" (163).

But even if the expectation is justified as soon as it's formed, the forming of it is *logically* prior to the justification; thus the expectation's formation and its consequent justification occupy different logical moments despite sharing the same instant of time. Hence, the expectation is formed without justification. A belief can be justified only by conforming to established realities, not by shaping new ones.

Velleman's answer is that the same utterance (for example, the statement "I'll have the salad," when addressed to a waiter) can both conform to the world (qua prediction) and shape the world (qua prescription) (cf. 100 n. 21). But while our language may permit an utterance to have both these features, one feature remains logically prior to the other. In saying "I'll have the salad," I am performing two logically distinct acts: first, a prescription, and second, a prediction that *presupposes* the prescription. If intentions are to be analogous to such cases, as Velleman suggests, it must be possible to distinguish within them also a prior conative component and a posterior cognitive component.<sup>3</sup>

Self-fulfilling beliefs lack truth value as well. Suppose an action A results from an expectation E, which in turn results from some prior causal factor C. In virtue of what could E be true? Not A, because A *presupposes* E, its

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Velleman that self-regarding beliefs motivate (even defeasibly), regardless of their content.

<sup>2</sup>For the realist, cognition, no matter how active in its operation, is fundamentally passive in its essence; the relation of consciousness to its object is a relation of effect to cause. For the idealist, it's the other way around; thus Velleman offers us what is in effect an idealist theory of practical reason.

<sup>3</sup>Yes, a single, undivided mental state *can* have both mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit (cf. 100 n. 21)—*but not with respect to the same item*. The judgment that a state of affairs S is desirable has a world-to-mind relation to *the desirability of S*, and a mind-to-world relation to *S itself* (cf. Huw Price, "Defending Desire-as-Belief," *Mind* 98 (1989): 119–27, at 120–21). Vellemanian expectations are supposed to have both directions of fit to the same item (that is, the expected behavior); that is why they cannot themselves be single and undivided.

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cause. What a realist conception of truth requires, beyond mere disquotationality, is *asymmetry of dependence*; truth no less than justification requires beliefs to conform to antecedent realities rather than shape new ones.<sup>4</sup> So a prospective account, according to which E is true in virtue of A, must be rejected.

Velleman might reply that E is true in virtue not of A but of C (assuming C is deterministic). Such a retrospective account would get the asymmetry going in the right direction; but what then becomes of our license to predict our lunch? To preserve that license, Velleman must claim not only that if E were different, A would be different, but also that if E were different, E would still be *true*. But on a retrospective account, such an E would have to be true in virtue of its cause; and this would commit Velleman to the backtracking counterfactual claim that if E were different, not only A but C would be different. Yet Velleman rejects such backtracking counterfactuals as illegitimate,<sup>5</sup> and insists that the counterfactual connection between E and A licenses an agent to expect one action even in the face of “conclusive motivational evidence” that she is causally determined to perform another (163; cf. 58 n. 13; 152; 165–66)—since if she were to expect something different from what she knows she’ll do, she *would* do something different. In assessing the truth of the counterfactual, we apparently keep the actual causal situation fixed. Hence Velleman cannot appeal to the retrospective account either.

Vellemanian expectations thus fail the tests of truth, justification, and dependence on the facts; accordingly, they do not constitute knowledge, and we can make no cognitive gains by acting on them.

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Categories* 14b18–22; *Metaphysics* 1051b6–9.

<sup>5</sup>J. David Velleman, “Epistemic Freedom,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1989): 73–97, 95, n. 11. The backtracker is allowed to govern prior *knowledge* only because Velleman construes predictive knowledge as a soft fact (*Practical Reflection*, 152, and more explicitly in “Epistemic Freedom,” 84). What causes obtain at a given time is presumably a hard fact, so this way out is blocked.