

Full-Information Theories of Individual Good

Our motivations often change as we become better informed, and it seems obvious that these changes are for the better. Thirsty though I am, I would no longer wish to drink the liquid in that glass were I to learn that it is poison and not water. My desire to see that man hanged would vanish upon my learning that he is the defense attorney and not the accused. And my desire to give up my career as a philosopher and become a lifeguard would diminish if I were to learn that lifeguards earn even less than philosophers. In each of these cases, the latter desire seems to reflect progress over the former, and the fuller information seems responsible for that progress.

Considerations like these have played a central role in a number of theories of rational desire and action, individual good, and morality. Prominent among these are the enormously popular full-information theories of individual good. For example, Peter Railton holds that "an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality," and he uses this account of nonmoral goodness to build up his account of moral rightness.¹ Similarly, Richard Brandt proposes that we treat as rational all and only those desires that would survive a process of "cognitive psychotherapy"—roughly, "maximal criticism and correction by facts and logic." He then suggests that we treat as rational those actions which a person with such desires would perform if fully informed, and that we replace the phrase "the best thing to do" with "the rational thing to do," since "the latter expression contains all that is clear in the former."²

Despite a good deal of criticism,³ much of it involving clever and appealing counterexamples, full-information theories of

individual good have shown remarkable resilience. In part, their resilience is due to the fact that the theories have a strong intuitive appeal of their own: they appear to accommodate two very powerful intuitions, one motivational and the other epistemological, about the nature of the values they seek to define. Bringing these intuitive underpinnings into focus will help us to get beyond the counterexamples, and to see both why full-information theories continue to hang on and why they should ultimately be rejected. In what follows I argue, in part, that no single theory can adequately accommodate both intuitions. Although I focus mainly on the theories of Brandt and Railton, much of what I say will apply to other approaches in the neighborhood. Brandt and Railton are among the most thoughtful proponents of the full-information line of thinking, and their theories offer an interesting contrast, representing alternative ways of accommodating the intuitions that underlie the approach. Understanding how their theories go wrong may help us to see how we might better approach the questions to which they are addressed.⁴

1. The Appeal of Full-Information Theories

Full-information theories appeal to us because of the way they appear to accommodate two powerful intuitions. The first is motivational. The theories typically embrace a version of internalism. They characterize a person's good (or reasons for action, etc.) in terms of her motivations. The motivations in question need not be actual. Dispositions to be motivated would suffice. Likewise, the circumstances in which the person is disposed to be motivated need only be hypothetical. Although no one reasonably expects to be fully informed, we can still ask about the motivations a fully-informed person would have. The important thing is that it is *her* motivations that count, however unlikely or idealized the circumstances in which they would come into play.

The attractiveness of the internalist link between a person's motivations and her good is undeniable. It is appealing to think that one's good depends on something in oneself. And there may be other advantages to internalism beyond this raw intuitive

appeal. For example, it may help us to avoid a problem of alienation faced by externalist approaches. Why take an interest in one's good, if it need not be connected to one's motivations? Internalism may also help us to explain why people normally do take an interest in their own good. Of course an externalist can attempt to explain this phenomenon as well, by positing a desire to pursue one's good, whatever it may be. But that merely relocates the worry about alienation. Why have such a desire, when one's good might have nothing to do with one's (actual or potential) motivations?⁵ Finally, we might think that there is no good alternative to maintaining the internalist connection between value and motivation. As one recent discussion suggests, "[I]t may be a strength of 'idealized response' views that there seems nothing for value to be, on deepest reflection, wholly apart from what moves, or could move, valuers—agents for whom something can matter."⁶

The second intuition is that our fully-informed motivations are improvements over our uninformed ones. Call this the epistemic intuition. As plausible as it seems to treat a person's good as linked to her motivations, it does not seem plausible to link it with just any motivations she might have. The epistemic intuition urges us to put aside the motivations we have when laboring under a mistaken or incomplete apprehension of the facts, and look instead to those we would have in ideal epistemic conditions.

Full-information theories bring these two intuitions together, yielding an approach with tremendous surface appeal. It can reconcile the very plausible Humean idea that only beliefs are directly subject to rational criticism with the equally plausible Kantian idea that some of our motivations nevertheless *are* irrational. Since at least some of these motivations depend causally on beliefs, we can criticize them indirectly by criticizing the beliefs on which they depend. At a deeper level, the approach appeals to a sense that our cognitive and motivational sides are separate and importantly different from one another. We identify with our motivational natures in a way that we do not identify with our cognitive natures. Cognitively perfect people, we might think, would be cognitively identical to one another. Motivationally, on the other hand, we are individuals. Thus we can imagine ourselves

epistemically perfected, but with our underlying motivational natures intact. And doing so appears to generate a perspective that is of special relevance to us as ordinary people contemplating our goods.

Despite their great appeal, however, full-information theories are untenable. Why that is so depends in part on how the theories get cashed out. In what follows, I begin by examining Brandt's and Railton's approaches in turn, arguing that each fails to accommodate one of the intuitions that underlie the full-information approach. While Brandt's approach fails adequately to accommodate the epistemic intuition, I argue, Railton's does better in this regard, but only by employing an idealization that undermines his internalism. In any case, I go on to argue, all such theories ultimately fail to accommodate the epistemic intuition, because of their causal approach to the questions they purport to answer. Finally, I argue that the intuitions on which the full-information approach is based are not really as attractive as they might have seemed, and that in view of all these problems, the approach should be abandoned.

2. Manner of Presentation and the Epistemic Intuition

In this and the following section I develop the objection that Brandt's account fails adequately to accommodate the epistemic intuition—that a person's informed desires are improvements over his uninformed ones. This happens in two ways. First, his proposals about the manner in which information is to be presented go beyond anything that could be justified by that intuition. On the other hand, his proposals about how much information the subject is to get do not go as far as they should. In this section, I develop the first of these claims.⁷

Information can be presented in a variety of ways, and the manner of presentation may have a significant impact on the motivational outputs we can expect. For example, information may be more or less vivid, and more vivid information will often affect us differently than less. Take, for example, Mel's motivation to exercise. Suppose Mel reads a newspaper article that

momentarily reminds him of the benefits of regular aerobic exercise. Such a reminder might well motivate him to begin a training program. But watching a well-done documentary (especially one with stories about particular people) is likely to have a far more significant motivational impact than any mere recitation of the facts, no matter how detailed.⁸ Similarly, repetition can have an impact on motivation. Mel's motivation to exercise may at first increase along with the number of occasions on which he views the documentary. Of course, if he sees too much, he may start to lose the motivation again. We should not expect the trajectories of these impacts to be linear.

How should full-information theorists respond to these differences in presentation? For two reasons, they must not offer result-driven answers to questions about the appropriate manner of presentation. The first has to do with their internalism. It would defeat that internalism to hold, for example, that Mel is fully informed if and only if he has watched the documentary often enough to be motivated to begin exercising, but not so often as to lose that motivation. We might as well appeal to the outcome directly, dispensing with Mel's role altogether.⁹ The second reason is that understanding is an epistemic notion, not a motivational one, even if understanding sometimes has an impact on motivation. Although Mel might be motivated to exercise if he only understood the potential benefits, it is also possible that he understands them perfectly well, but nevertheless lacks the motivation to do anything. While having certain motivations might sometimes be *evidence* of fuller understanding, it is always possible for a person to understand fully, but fail to be motivated in the way we have in mind.

Still, vividness and repetition can have an impact on how well informed a person is. A more vivid presentation, for example, may penetrate a subject's awareness more deeply than a dim one. Thus, even if a dim awareness would pass some minimal threshold for knowledge, a fuller awareness would represent epistemic progress. Similarly, repeatedly confronting the same information might better allow it to "sink in," and once again, this seems to represent an epistemic improvement. Perhaps for this reason, Brandt imagines his subjects confronting maximally vivid

information, repeated until further repetitions would no longer affect their motivations.¹⁰ After all, if some repetitions (or increases in vividness) would bring some improvement, shouldn't maximal repetitions (or increases) bring maximal improvement, allowing the information, as Brandt says, to "register" fully? Despite its initial allure, however, this maximizing approach to repetitions and vividness faces serious problems, because it cannot be justified by the epistemic intuition.

a. Repetitions

Look first at repetitions. One advantage of these is that they may increase the chances that information will be stored in long-term memory. Perhaps some of our short-term beliefs count as knowledge, but more stable knowledge clearly represents an epistemic advance. Another advantage has to do with *degree* of awareness, and repetitions can improve that as well. For example, they may help to make some beliefs more accessible than others, or to bring them closer to the focus of attention. They may also improve the subject's degree of confidence. The epistemic intuition applies to all of these dimensions of knowledge, and a full-information theorist should take them into account. Increasing the number of repetitions is one way to begin doing so.

In spite of the epistemic advantages that sometimes flow from repetitions, however, the epistemic intuition does not justify maximizing them, since motivational impact does not always signal epistemic improvement. No doubt one's motivations will often change as one becomes more and more fully aware. But there is a limit to how much epistemic improvement can result from continued repetitions, and there is no guarantee that the motivational changes will cease when that limit is reached. In the example given above, Mel was first more, then less, inclined to begin exercising, upon confronting repeated representations of the same facts. But it would be a mistake to hold that he did not fully apprehend these facts until his motivations stopped changing and he no longer had a strong motivation to exercise. As we saw, the later repetitions may simply have made him indifferent to those benefits, without further improving his understanding at all.¹¹ If

so, then the motivations to which they gave rise ought to be treated as irrelevant from the standpoint of the theory. No doubt it is difficult to specify when further repetitions would cease to produce epistemic improvements, and the answer will differ from case to case. But to maximize repetitions merely in order to avoid this difficulty is to buy a clear criterion at the expense of a coherent rationale.¹²

Brandt, of course, is not concerned with repetitions merely for the sake of epistemic improvement. He wants to allow the information to have some effect on motivations. (If a subject had taken a pill that somehow disconnected his motivations from any influence of new information, there would be no point to his undergoing cognitive psychotherapy.) In an ordinary person, repetitions would sometimes have the effect of achieving this connection between the subject's motivations and the information he receives. But, even so, a similar problem arises. There does not seem to be any non-arbitrary way of specifying how much or what sort of a connection between information and motivation cognitive psychotherapy should aim for. Drawing the line at maximal repetitions merely papers over the problem.¹³

b. Vividness

A second requirement Brandt puts forward is that information be maximally vivid. And it is plausible to think that a gain in vividness can sometimes result in epistemic progress. Consider, for example, Darwall's case of Otto, who is considering whether to take an unpleasant-tasting hangover preventative before going to bed.¹⁴ Otto's decision to eschew the medicine stems from his inability vividly to imagine how bad he will feel in the morning if he fails to take it, together with his vivid awareness of how bad it would taste now. Were he vividly to imagine both, he would choose to take the medicine, and his motivation for doing so would flow from his fuller awareness of the situation—precisely the sort of response to epistemic improvement the full-information theorist is looking for.

On the other hand, it is not entirely clear what "vividness" is supposed to mean. As in Otto's case, a more vivid presentation

will often enable a subject to know how certain experiences would feel. But there is more to vividness than that. Likewise, a more vivid presentation will often convey more information (or more detailed information) than a pale one. But there may be more to vividness than mere quantity or detail as well. One thing that is clear is that vividness is a function of both the information and the perceiver.¹⁵ What is vivid to you may be less so to me. That suggests that vividness has something to do with the capacity of a given presentation to affect the perceiver. Thus, it might be tempting to identify vividness with degree of motivational impact.¹⁶

A problem with this approach is that when changes in motivation follow a nonlinear trajectory, it will not be clear which impact is greatest. (Which showed the greater impact: Mel's motivation to exercise, or his later motivation not to?) More important, requiring maximal vividness, defined in this way, would raise a problem analogous to the one raised by requiring maximal repetitions. The motivational impact of a presentation is not always a product of epistemic improvement. (Laughing at Mel's potbelly might motivate him to begin exercising, but not because he would come to understand anything better than he did before.) A full-information theorist should be interested in vividness only insofar as it will bring about epistemic improvement. Thus, if he defines vividness in this way, then he should not require maximally vivid presentations.¹⁷

The maximizing approach to repetitions (and perhaps to vividness) fails because it goes beyond the justification provided by the epistemic intuition. That intuition supports calling for repetitions and vividness only insofar as they would produce epistemic improvements. But this is not the only way Brandt's account fails to accommodate the epistemic intuition. In another respect, it does not go far enough. The problem has to do with the question of how fully informed the subject is expected to be. I turn to that next.

3. How Much Information?

Strictly speaking, Brandt's theory is not a *full*-information approach at all. "Cognitive psychotherapy" involves confronting "all *available* information," by which Brandt means, "the propositions accepted by the science of the agent's day, plus factual propositions justified by publicly accessible evidence (including testimony of others about themselves) and the principles of logic."¹⁸ Although that is an immense quantity of information, it is still less than all.

In taking this approach, Brandt chooses a position intermediate between two others. On the one hand, he rejects the proposal that we treat desires as rational only if they would survive confrontation "with the factual beliefs an agent would have had at the time of action, if his beliefs had been fixed by *his* total observational evidence and the principles of logic . . ."¹⁹ Brandt does not say why he rejects this proposal (except to say that his alternative "seems more useful"), but presumably he wants to give more weight to the epistemic intuition—that information improves desires. Moreover, he uses his notion of rational desire to build up his account of rational action, and recommends that we substitute questions about what it is rational for an agent to do for questions about what it is best for him to do. What is best in this sense should not depend on the limitations of the agent's experience.

On the other hand, Brandt also rejects the proposal that we treat desires as rational only if they would survive confrontation with the information that would be available to an omniscient being. He rejects *this* proposal because he wants his theory to be a useful tool for evaluating desires. No matter how much we would like to have it, some information is beyond our reach, and thus cannot be used to criticize desires. Brandt recognizes that even information that is available in his more moderate sense might be "intolerably expensive [for the subject] to get, so that trying to get it might itself be irrational."²⁰ But, he thinks, it is still possible for *others* to criticize desires on the basis of such information, even if the subject himself is in no position to do so.²¹ Of course, it might be irrational for *anyone* to get the information. So, if utility were the

only concern, the limitation would have to be extended to exclude information that, although technically available, is practically unavailable.

Regardless of how we interpret this limitation, however, the utility gained by it is purchased at too high a price. For one thing, the epistemic intuition is just as strong for unavailable information as it is for available information. Suppose the liquid in the glass in front of me contains a powerful carcinogen undetectable by the methods of current science. My desire to drink it is no less objectionable than it would be if the carcinogen were familiar. Of course, in the first case I could not learn of my precarious situation, even by consulting the experts. But, as we have seen, what makes my desire objectionable does not depend on my failure to get the information, since I do not always have a responsibility to do so. It depends on the existence of facts that, were I aware of them, would cause the desire to change. Why should it matter whether these facts are publicly available?

Furthermore, given Brandt's suggestion that we substitute questions about what it is rational for an agent to want for questions about what it is best for the agent to do, his approach leads to an unacceptable relativization. If the carcinogen were suddenly to come to the attention of the scientific community, then by Brandt's criterion, drinking the liquid would suddenly become a bad thing for me to do. But whether or not drinking it is good to do should not depend on what modern science, unbeknownst to me, has or has not discovered. Similarly, it should not depend on the period in which I happen to live. It is not plausible that smoking a pipe was a good thing for Freud to do, merely because he lived at a time in which tobacco's carcinogenic properties could not have been discovered.²²

Finally, desires affected by *false* information need not be improvements over those held before confronting it. But the propositions accepted by the science of one's day might not be true. And even if they are, true information can still lead to false beliefs. An unscrupulous prosecutor can secure a conviction by presenting incriminating evidence and withholding exculpatory evidence. But so can one who is simply unaware of the exculpatory evidence. In either case, the information that is presented causes

the jury to draw a mistaken inference. With respect to the issue of guilt or innocence, they were better off before they learned the incriminating facts. Similarly, a subject informed of all that the science of his day has to offer may sometimes be led to draw reasonable, but false, conclusions. And once again the motivational changes that flow from these false conclusions need not be changes for the better.²³

There is another important respect in which Brandt's subjects would end up less than fully informed. Any normal person has substantial cognitive limitations, and thus could never really come to know all of the information the account treats as relevant. The consequence is that on his approach, a person's good is relativized not only to the science of her day, but to her cognitive abilities as well. For some people, even the most vivid presentations, repeated "as often as you like," would not suffice to achieve maximum cognitive penetration of certain information. Paradoxically, on Brandt's account, these people's desires are immune to criticism in light of that information, since they would not be affected by cognitive psychotherapy, but the desires of more cognitively able individuals are not immune to criticism in light of the very same information. To put it crudely, the smarter you are, the more exposed to criticism are your desires; the less intelligent you are, the less they are. A person's good should not be tied to her intellectual capabilities in this way.²⁴

4. An Alternative

The obvious solution to these problems is to imagine subjects with improved cognitive abilities, and exposed to all of the facts. And that is precisely what Railton does. Instead of treating as relevant only information available to contemporary science, Railton treats all information as relevant. And instead of asking about the motivations of ordinary people repeatedly confronted with this information, Railton asks what their idealized counterparts—people with "unqualified cognitive and imaginative powers"—would want their less-informed counterparts to pursue. These idealized counterparts would know everything there is to know. They would

"not want any more information," because "there is no more to be had" ²⁵

In the next section, I will argue that this idealization leads to serious problems. But it is worth noting first how it may help to solve another problem faced by full-information views—the problem of order of presentation. As Railton himself notes, differences in order of presentation will sometimes carry different motivational impacts. If so, then there might be no determinate answer to the question of what the counterpart would choose for his less-informed self, since that could depend on the order in which the counterpart considers the information. On the other hand, favoring any particular order of presentation would achieve determinacy only at the expense of arbitrariness.

In response to this worry, Railton argues that the differential effects are likely to be diluted upon receipt of more and more information. ²⁶ Furthermore, he says, a fully-informed person would be aware of her susceptibility to these differential impacts, and this awareness would diminish their actual effects to insignificant levels. ²⁷ But this response is inadequate. In the analogous context of "belief perseverance," there is evidence that our tendency to make mistaken inferences based on order of presentation may sometimes diminish upon receipt of information about that very phenomenon. But, as Railton himself notes, there is also evidence that our beliefs are often quite resistant to change. In fact, this resistance persists even when subjects are informed about the phenomenon of belief perseverance itself. ²⁸ Analogously, "motivation perseverance" might be similarly resistant to undermining through more complete information.

Although Railton's response is inadequate, it might be possible to exploit his idealization in order to avoid the indeterminacy that threatens his account. Of course it would not do to make demands on the subject's motivational responses, requiring, for example, that she have the same response no matter what the order of presentation. That would undermine the account's internalism. Instead what is needed is an adjustment in the subject's cognitive apparatus. As things stand, we can only keep a few "chunks" of information in mind at any given time. And, presumably, these will have a disproportionate effect on motivation, compared with

that of previously considered data. But if we imagine short-term memory and attentive capabilities expanded to the point where all information can be considered simultaneously, then we might achieve determinacy without modifying the subject's motivational dispositions.²⁹

5. Why Idealization Threatens Internalism

As we have seen, Railton's criterion looks to the choices, not of ordinary people, but of their idealized counterparts—beings capable of knowing everything perfectly. But beings with "unqualified cognitive and imaginative powers" would have to be vastly different from ordinary people. Railton does not say what sort of powers he has in mind. But it seems likely that, in addition to greatly improved short-term memory, they would require massively expanded long-term memory as well, in order to store all of the data they would be receiving. And merely storing and recalling the information are not sufficient, since memorizing facts does not guarantee that one fully grasps them and sees their interconnections. A fully-informed person would require a far greater capacity for comprehension than that of any ordinary person. But even that is not enough. Informing oneself takes time, and *fully* informing oneself would take more than a lifetime for any ordinary person. A fully-informed person would have to be able to process information very rapidly indeed if her preferences were to appear within a reasonable amount of time.

So far, I have focused only on changes in intellectual capabilities. But more than intellect is required if one is to become fully informed. Changes in the subject's imaginative faculties would be necessary as well, especially in light of the kinds of things a fully-informed person would have to know. Much of what there is to know has to do with what it would be like to have certain experiences. And surely this sort of knowledge is relevant from the standpoint of the theory. Mill's confidence that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" was justified, he thought, on the grounds that he (unlike the fool) knew both sides of the question. But that knowledge was, in part, knowledge of

what the pleasures of each sort of life feel like, and Mill acquired it, if he did, by experiencing both.³⁰ Similarly, a person who has sampled a variety of Chinese dishes is better informed than one whose experience is limited to chop suey and egg foo young.

Since the changes in preference that result from these experiences (such as the desire to incorporate more Chinese food into one's diet) seem to represent improvements in just the same way as changes due to greater knowledge of other kinds, we should treat as fully informed only someone who has the knowledge she would have after a full range of such experiences. But actually having all of these experiences is impossible for ordinary people. The idealization gives us a way around this problem, for we can envision our subjects as having imaginative powers far beyond those of ordinary human beings. One aspect of imagination that would have to be significantly enhanced is the capacity for empathetic identification. In order for Emily to make a fully-informed decision about whether to make a donation to charity, for example, she would have to know exactly how it feels to suffer in the way that each of her potential beneficiaries is suffering, and how it would feel for each of them to be benefitted in the ways her donation would make possible.³¹ Even an extraordinarily sensitive person would require enormous improvements in this regard.

Finally, for ordinary people, capacity for learning depends on certain features of our affective and conative lives as well. First, the subject must have a desire to learn. Beyond that, she must be psychologically prepared in many other ways as well. Stress, depression, elation, boredom, nervousness, and infatuation are just a few of the emotional factors that can interfere with the ability to learn and understand new information fully. No matter how vivid the presentation or how often she confronts it, Emily might be too despondent ever really to see how much good her contribution would do. Or too much in love. And just as these factors can cause interference, so can personal interest. It might be difficult for Emily to see just how much good her money can do for others, while at the same time aware of what it can do for her.³² A fully-informed person would have to be free of these sources of interference, or immune to their effects on his cognitive abilities.

Even if slightly different changes would do the trick, the severity of the idealization spells trouble for the internalist character of the full-information approach. Whatever normative force was supposed to come from holding a person's good to depend on his own motivations appears to be vitiated by the drastic changes the idealization would involve. A subject's counterpart would be so different from that subject that it is hard to see how his motivations—even his motivations for the subject—could be relevant to the subject's good or to the rationality of his desires.

The answer the full-information theorist must give is that although the counterpart is *cognitively* very different from the subject, he is *motivationally* identical. That being so, the argument could continue, the worry about internalism is misguided; the counterpart is in this respect a perfect surrogate for the subject. After all, the argument would go, everyone has a certain basic motivational nature—a set of dispositions to be motivated in various ways under various circumstances. Among these circumstances are those in which one's mental capacities are radically modified. What is changed is not this basic motivational nature, but only the actual motivations one ends up having. And the full-information theorist need not be bothered by these changes, any more than he should be bothered by the changes in motivation that occur when an ordinary person becomes better informed. It was in expectation of such changes that the full-information view got off the ground in the first place.

But there is a more significant problem here. Given the aims of his approach, the full-information theorist should not be interested in motivational changes that would come about merely as a result of the idealization itself. He is concerned to find the motivations that would flow from the subject's being better informed—not from being the sort of person who could be. And some aspects of the idealization seem very likely to result in changes in motivation, regardless of whether the subject gets fuller information. A more empathetic Emily, for example, might be more inclined than her real-life self to choose a career as a social worker, even without the knowledge that her enhanced empathy would make possible. The same is true for emotional changes. If the only way to inform George is to cure his depression, then it seems likely that his

informed motivations will trace, in part, to the curing of the depression, and not just to the epistemic improvements he is now in a position to realize.³³ Most worrisome of all are the cases in which we cannot fully inform a person without first changing her motivations themselves. Perhaps Sally could not fully understand the options before her unless she cared more about the people who would be affected by her choices. If so, and if the changes are made, then we should not be surprised if they have an impact on her ensuing motivations.³⁴ Since, in all of these cases, idealization appears to change the subjects' basic motivational natures, theories that idealize in these ways fail to capture the internalist intuition in a satisfactory way. There is no justification within the full-information approach for treating the subjects' new motivational natures as relevant to their goods.³⁵

Railton might be tempted to respond that we are overlooking the second-order feature of his view.³⁶ After all, a subject's good is not what her idealized counterpart would want for *herself*, but what the counterpart would want for *the subject* to want or pursue. Perhaps Mary's counterpart could not become fully informed without a stronger desire to learn. But surely this would not affect the counterpart's desires *for Mary*. The counterpart would know that, unlike her, Mary does *not* love learning. Likewise, Emily's counterpart may be more empathetic than Emily, but surely she would not want Emily to follow preferences that stem from that empathy alone (and not from the enhanced knowledge that the empathy makes possible), since the counterpart would be aware that Emily herself still lacks it.

This reply would miss the point of the objection. If Mary's counterpart's love of learning is strong enough, she might want Mary to pursue learning in spite of Mary's indifference to it. And insofar as this desire is attributable to the idealization, the connection between Mary and her counterpart is weakened. Likewise, Emily's lack of empathy is part of her basic motivational nature. Eliminate it only to improve her epistemic position, and you wind up with a person whose basic motivational nature is different from Emily's. No doubt many would think the counterparts' basic motivational natures represent improvements over those of the original subjects. But the internalist intuition

requires that we leave the subjects' own basic motivational natures intact.

6. The Epistemic Intuition Revisited

In the preceding sections, I argued that a more moderate view like Brandt's fails, in various ways, to accommodate the epistemic intuition. Idealizing the subjects appeared to give the full-information theorist a way out, but only by undermining the internalism. Either way "full-information" is interpreted, I argued, one of the intuitions cannot be accommodated fully.

But there is another problem with the full-information approach, and it is common to both versions. With or without the idealization, these theories are unable to stay within the parameters of the epistemic intuition after all. The problem stems from the fact that they are *causal* theories. They seek the *effects* on motivations of full information. And just as the idealization necessary for fully informing people can have unwelcome effects on their basic motivational natures, so the circumstances of informing them can have unwelcome effects on their actual motivations. Given the causal nature of the approach, there is no way to avoid winding up with motivations tainted by the influence of factors other than information itself, and hence not made relevant by the epistemic intuition.

The reason is that getting information is itself a causal process. As such, it can have impacts on motivation quite apart from the impacts of the fuller information alone. Earlier we saw that maximizing repetitions (and perhaps vividness) is inconsistent with the aims of the full-information approach, since these factors may have effects on motivation even after all epistemic improvements have taken place. But if these factors can affect motivations when they do not produce epistemic improvements, then they can affect motivations even when they do produce such improvements. Yet the epistemic intuition gives us no reason to seek the motivations that trace to these factors, but only those that reflect the information itself.³⁷

In fact, repetitions and vividness are not the only non-informational factors that can affect motivations. If information is to be confronted, it must be confronted in some circumstance or other, and the nature of the circumstances may have an impact on the resulting motivations. Mel's counterpart might be more inclined to want Mel to exercise if he hears the facts from a man with a loud voice or while sitting on a hard stool than he would if he hears them from a woman with a soft voice or while sitting in a comfortable chair. And that is true even if exactly the same information is conveyed and the counterpart believes it completely. Thus, there will not always be a single motivational response to the information itself, but only to the information *in the circumstances in which it is presented*. A different set of circumstances might well have a different effect.³⁸ But although the epistemic intuition makes the effects of the information itself relevant, it does not make relevant effects on motivation that trace, even in part, to the circumstances in which that information is acquired. Thus actual confrontations will sometimes have impacts with which the theory ought not to be concerned.

Full-information theorists might respond that although it is impossible to prevent these influences as a causal matter, we can nevertheless distinguish them as a theoretical matter. Thus, a sophisticated full-information theorist could ask, not what a person would want herself to want if she had gone through a process of becoming fully informed, but if, *per* (nomologically) *impossibile*, she had been influenced by nothing but the fuller information itself. As Railton argues in another context, "In general, it is not an objection to a counterfactual that it involves hypothesizing circumstances that are, in the actual course of things, nomologically impossible."³⁹

It would be ironic for a theory that makes questions of value depend on a causal matter (and that is presented in the spirit of naturalism) to take refuge in imagining massive alterations in the laws of nature. But irony is no guarantee of incorrectness. Still, it is not at all clear that such massively impossible counterfactuals *have* determinate truth values. Counterfactuals about what people would want in causally impossible circumstances are still causal counterfactuals. As such, they depend on causal laws—in

particular, laws of psychology. But the laws of psychology would have to be vastly different from the actual laws if they were to rule out all of the unwelcome influences I have pointed out. And since these are the very laws that support the counterfactuals, it is not at all clear that enough is left of them to insure that the counterfactuals have determinate truth values.⁴⁰

It is also not clear that the full-information approach would be plausible if it required that we imagine such wide-scale changes in the laws of psychology. We know too little to be confident of that. Perhaps my counterpart would no longer wish for me to shun the poison liquid in a world in which he would react no differently to yelling than to whispering, and in which one's motivations would not be influenced by massive alterations in one's cognitive capabilities alone. Without knowing how the laws of psychology would be altered, we are in no position to judge whether the approach maintains whatever plausibility it initially appeared to have.

7. Rethinking the Intuitions

Even if it were possible to eliminate the unwelcome effects on motivation of factors other than the information itself, the full-information approach would still face serious objections. For one thing, information itself may have effects that ought to be unwelcome from the standpoint of any adequate account of value. To see this, we need only look at the range of information a fully-informed person would have to know.

What sorts of things would such a person be vividly aware of? He would have to be thoroughly acquainted with every kind of pain imaginable: what it is like to be burned at the stake, what it is like to be burned in an oven, what it is like to be eaten by sharks, what it is like to drown, and for that matter, what it is like to be eaten by sharks while drowning. But it is possible that this knowledge would scar him, and leave him no longer caring about anything but avoiding these horrible experiences, or preventing his counterpart from having them. And these are merely physical pains. He would have to possess a vivid appreciation of all

psychological pains as well. He would have to know unspeakable loneliness, sadness, and self-doubt. But this knowledge might leave him too depressed to care about his own or his counterpart's welfare. He would have to know what it would feel like to believe that everyone hated him, or pitied him, or felt revulsion at the very sight of him. But this knowledge might make him wish he or his counterpart were dead. Granted, he would also know (if it were true) that he will not suffer horribly and that others do not really despise him, but there is no reason to think that this knowledge would always prevent these sorts of unwelcome effects on his motivations. Likewise, he would know all manner of pleasures, but there is no reason to think that this knowledge would somehow counterbalance that of the pains. On the contrary, it might have unwelcome effects of its own. Perhaps once he is fully aware of the pleasures, he would be seduced by them, and wish for himself or his counterpart to pursue them at the expense of everything else. But if he would, surely we need not treat his informed desires as the final word on his or his counterpart's good.

And we have still barely scratched the surface. So far I have emphasized knowledge of what it is like to have certain kinds of experiences. But full information would encompass much more than that. What remains would be staggering in its own right, and might well have effects that should also be treated as unwelcome. For example, many people are suffering, and our fully-informed subject would have to know each of their stories in every detail, even if this knowledge would make him feel so bad about being better off that he would no longer want any enjoyments for himself or his counterpart. Meanwhile other people are experiencing pleasures, and our subject would know that he and his counterpart will never experience most of these pleasures.⁴¹ But he would have to know of them just the same—once again, in every detail. He would have to know just how cruel some people can be, even if this knowledge would jade him and leave him wishing that he or his counterpart never pursue contact with others again. He would know everyone's thoughts, including everyone's thoughts about him. He would know exactly how and when he and everyone else will die, and how everyone in history died too. Why should

we think that the motivational changes that would flow from such knowledge would always be changes for the better?

In fact they would not. The idea that perfect information would *always* improve desires is *not* plausible, and the approach that relies on it is bound to have implications that are profoundly counterintuitive. For one thing, information that appears irrelevant to certain motivations could nevertheless have an influence on them. Although the knowledge of what it would feel like to be tickled for two years straight might seem relevant to my preferences about whether to be tickled, it does not seem relevant to my preferences regarding whether to be a lifeguard. But there is nothing to stop it from having such an influence if I, as a psychological matter, am so put together as to no longer care what I or my counterpart does for a living after learning what this would feel like. Second, even information that does seem relevant could cause someone to have motivations that have nothing plausibly to do with the sorts of value the approach aims to characterize. Knowledge of the suffering of others might cause her to despair. Knowledge of pleasures unavailable to her might drive her insane with jealousy. But the motivations of a despairing or insane person—even her motivations for her less-informed (and non-insane) counterpart—hardly seem relevant to these question of value, much less conclusive.

Can counterintuitive implications like these be avoided? It would not be appropriate to build further psychological changes into the idealization in order to do so. Imagining subjects to have psychological properties that, unlike their actual properties, would make them immune to effects such as these would once again undermine the internalism. Perhaps, instead, the counterintuitive implications can be explained away. As Railton suggests:

We can explain a good deal of our objection to certain desires—for example, those involving cruelty—by saying that they are not *morally* good; others—for example, those of a philistine nature—by saying that they are not *aesthetically* valuable; and so on. . . . People, or at least some people, might be put together in a way that makes some not-very-appetizing things essential to their flourishing, and we do not want to be guilty of wishful thinking on this score.⁴²

No doubt this reply will help with some of the counterintuitive cases that have been offered in the critical literature. But we ourselves would be guilty of wishful thinking if we were to assume that it will help with all or even most of the cases we can imagine. Surely much of what is counterintuitive in these cases has nothing to do with these other sorts of value. If Jack's counterpart reacts to the fact that others do not like Jack as much as Jack had hoped by wishing for Jack to die in the most painful way imaginable, the problem with his desire is not that it is immoral or unaesthetic. It simply has nothing to do with Jack's good.

The full-information approach might have seemed plausible for certain very simple cases: Railton's Lonnie is a dehydrated traveler whose fully-informed counterpart would wish for him to drink clear liquids instead of milk, since he would know that the clear liquids would make Lonnie feel better, while milk would make him feel worse.⁴³ But the difference between Lonnie's beliefs and those of his counterpart is relatively minor, and involves information Lonnie would have wanted to know anyway. As we have seen, a *fully*-informed person would have to possess a far greater range of information than this. When we even begin to consider what that would involve, we can see the implausibility of holding a subject's good to depend on his, or his counterpart's, response to full information.

Earlier we saw that restricting the scope of relevant information to the science of the subject's day would lead to an implausibly relativized account of individual good. Now it appears that treating all information as relevant would lead to equally implausible results. It might be tempting to try to split the difference, and find a criterion somewhere in between. But to do so would miss the point. Even the more moderate approach is susceptible to counterexamples like those mentioned above. Information about how people feel about Jack or about the suffering and pleasure of others is well within the grasp of social science, and so would be treated as relevant by even the more moderate approach. The real problem is that it is not always true that full information—even full available information—would improve desires. The most we seem able to say is that sometimes it would and sometimes it would

not. Thus, our initial read on the epistemic intuition was too coarse. Our more reflective intuitions are much more fine-grained.

Perhaps what is needed is a theory that incorporates these more fine-grained intuitions, and asks for our *well*-informed motivations, instead of our fully-informed ones. But it is hard to imagine a criterion that could capture what we are looking for here, especially one that would constitute a satisfactory reduction of the sort Railton, at least, has in mind. And even if we could come up with such a criterion, a serious problem would remain. In many cases, the reason that informing a person does not improve her motivations has nothing to do with the information itself, but instead lies in her motivational nature itself. There are undoubtedly people whose motivations, no matter what their epistemic position, would have nothing to do with their goods or with what it is best for them to want or to do.⁴⁴ My four-year-old, for example, has immature motivations, and the immaturity would not vanish if he were suddenly to become fully informed. But if he can have immature motivations, then so can anyone. Likewise, insane people sometimes have insane motivations, and often would have them no matter what they knew. The problem in these cases is not that people have been exposed to the wrong information or to too much of it. The problem lies in their motivational natures. If so, then at least in these cases, the internalist intuition seems to go too far as well. Once again, an idea that seemed plausible in certain core cases seems quite implausible once we get beyond those cases.

8. Conclusion

Full-information theories fail in part because fully informing people would change their motivations in ways that have nothing to do with the information itself. But they also fail in different ways, depending on how strictly they interpret "full information." More moderate versions, like Brandt's, fail because they interpret it in a way that does not take the epistemic intuition seriously enough. More extreme versions, like Railton's, fail because in taking that intuition further, they cannot do justice to its internalist

counterpart. And these intuitions go too far anyway. Our fully-informed motivations would not always be improvements over our less-informed ones; sometimes they would be far worse than the ones with which we started. In some cases that is because the information would cause people to have motivations that do not reflect their goods. In others it is because there is something wrong with their motivational natures themselves.

Still, the intuitions that lie behind the full-information approach have a core of plausibility. Perhaps information would not always improve desires, but often it would. And perhaps our motivational natures are not always bound up with our goods in the ways the theory claims. But surely they are relevant. Whether we can find an account that preserves what is right in these intuitions is a question worth pursuing. In the meantime, however, we should put the full-information theory to rest.⁴⁵

Notes

1. Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): 5-31, p. 16. See also "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163-207, pp. 173-78, 190.
2. R.B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) pp. 10, 15. Among those who have accepted similar views are Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 85-100, esp. pp. 96-98; Richard Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 101-6, 214-16; John Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behaviour," in A.K. Sen and Bernard A.O. Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1982), pp. 55-56; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 407-24; and Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, seventh ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), pp. 109-13. For a related, but significantly different view, see David Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value," (symposium) *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, sup. vol. 63 (1989), pp. 112-38.
3. See, for example, Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 129-40; Norman Daniels, "Can Cognitive Psychotherapy Reconcile Reason and Desire?" *Ethics* 93 (1983): 772-85; Gilbert Harman, "Critical Review," *Philosophical Studies* 42 (1982): 119-39; Connie Rosati, "Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open

Question Argument" (forthcoming in *Noûs*); and David Sobel, "Full Information Accounts of Well-Being," *Ethics* 104 (1994): 784-810.

Particularly powerful objections are raised by J. David Velleman in "Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 353-71. Velleman directs two main criticisms against Brandt: that his definition of "good" alters the ordinary meaning of "good" in indefensible ways, and that it leaves questions about what is good empirically indeterminable. Although I am sympathetic with much of what Velleman has to say, I take issue with him on a few important points, and argue that some of his claims make sense only if we understand certain more fundamental problems with the full-information view. For the most part, however, my criticisms take a different approach than his.

4. These issues are of interest in other contexts as well. For example, many are tempted by the method of wide reflective equilibrium as an approach to moral reasoning. But it is worth asking how informed an equilibrium we should be seeking, and an evaluation of full-information theories may help us to answer this question.
5. See Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 57. For a related point, see Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-13.
6. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward *Fin de siècle* Ethics: Some Trends," *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 115-89, pp. 176-77. See also "Facts and Values," p. 9. This point of view is often connected with philosophical naturalism. See *Impartial Reason*, pp. 55-56 and "Facts and Values," pp. 25-29. For a naturalist who rejects internalism about value, however, see David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 217-36.
7. For interesting criticisms of Brandt's approach (along mostly different lines) see Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 18-19; and Nicholas L. Sturgeon, "Brandt's Moral Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 389-422.
8. Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980), pp. 47-49. Partly, of course, the change may be due to Mel's coming to understand facts of which he was previously unaware (such as the fact that a particular person appeared vigorous and healthy after a few months of moderate exercise) or focusing on previously-known facts for a longer period of time. Partly, however, it results from his confronting the same facts, but presented in a way that makes them come alive for him (such as they might if he were to see pictures of the vigorous specimen).
9. On this point, see Darwall, "Internalism and Agency," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 6, *Ethics* (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing, 1992), p. 165. Brink makes a similar point in a related context. Arguing that what he

calls "counterfactual desire-satisfaction theories of value" will sometimes have counterintuitive implications, he notes that it is always possible to avoid these implications by introducing additional constraints on the subjects' capacities. But, he argues, such constraints are incompatible with the theories' internalism (his term is 'subjectivism') (*Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, p. 230). While Brink is right that severe result-driven constraints would undermine these theories' internalism, he overlooks the possibility that less severe constraints could do the trick, while still leaving some constitutive role for the subject's motivations. (Whether such constraints could be well motivated is, of course, another question.)

10. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, pp. 111-12.
11. It is possible, in fact, that the later repetitions had the effect of worsening his epistemic position. Suppose the reason for his indifference is that, in view of his comparatively unhealthy condition, he can no longer bear to attend fully to the information. Such a failure of attention hardly represents epistemic progress, and the theory should not require repetitions that would bring it about. On the other hand, there is no reason to think that his indifference must be the product of such a failure.
12. For the view that Brandt's criterion was chosen with an eye toward empirical determinability, see "Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," pp. 364-65. Railton distinguishes the question of determinability (whether we can know the truth values of the counterfactuals about what fully-informed people would choose) from the question of determinacy (whether they have determinate truth values at all), and argues that indeterminability would not undermine a theory of value. It may be that there are facts about what is good for a person, but that they are beyond our epistemic reach ("Facts and Values," pp. 23-24). But there could be a more significant problem here. If the standards of epistemic optimality are themselves indeterminate, then counterfactuals about what people would choose in epistemically optimal circumstances will be indeterminate as well.
13. The objection discussed here was raised by an anonymous referee.
14. *Impartial Reason*, pp. 89-91, 94-96.
15. On this point, see Railton, "Facts and Values," p. 22.
16. An alternative would be to define it in a way that ties it to epistemic improvement. For example, Shelly Kagan thinks it possible that vividness is just a matter of detail (Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 284). Since Kagan views vividness as a property of beliefs, every gain in vividness is, on this suggestion, an epistemic gain, and there is no gap between the maximally vivid presentation (for a given fact/subject pairing) and the ideally vivid one. On this view, however, vividness turns out not to be a separate desideratum after all.
17. Velleman argues that the motivational impact of exposure to the facts is empirically indeterminable, since the *kind* of impact will depend on which of various vivid presentations the subject confronts. If it were true, however,

that the presentations had only one kind of effect, which differed only in degree, then perhaps "fully confronting the facts would require undergoing that effect to the fullest extent, which would in turn require confronting the most vivid representation" ("Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," pp. 367-68). But even this concedes too much. Why should we be interested in the fullest motivational impact, regardless of whether that impact reflects any cognitive improvement?

18. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 13. (Emphasis added.)
19. *Ibid.* (Emphasis added.)
20. *Ibid.*
21. Thus we should not be misled by his use of the phrase "rational desire." Sometimes we think of rationality as making the most one can out of the information one already has. But Brandt has something else in mind, since he distinguishes between objective and subjective senses of "rational." Desires that can be criticized only in light of information practically unavailable to the agent (but "available" in Brandt's more general sense) are objectively irrational, but subjectively rational (*ibid.*, pp. 72-73). When Brandt suggests that we substitute "the rational thing to do" for "the best thing to do," he intends the objective sense of "rational."
22. Brandt, of course, intends his definition as a *reform*. But even a reform can sometimes take us too far away from what we set out to characterize.
23. Even without leading to a mistaken inference, partial information may provoke a motivation that would alter on a fuller view. If I hear something bad about a person, I may wish him ill, even if I would wish him well if I were more fully informed. But the original motivation need not have been based on any inference about his overall character.
24. Daniels makes a related point in "Can Cognitive Psychotherapy Reconcile Reason and Desire?" p. 776.
25. "Moral Realism," pp. 173-74.
26. "Facts and Values," p. 21.
27. Railton responds similarly to worries about the differential effects of alternate, but equally vivid, modes of presentation (*ibid.*, pp. 21-22).
28. *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment*, pp. 175-79.
29. Idealization might also eliminate the need for repetitions, since idealized subjects would (presumably) not need them. And it might help with the problems about vividness as well. Perhaps we can imagine subjects so perceptive that even a pale presentation would be sufficient to inform them perfectly.
30. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in Samuel Gorovitz, ed., *Utilitarianism with Critical Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 20. Mill may have been exaggerating when he claimed to know the fool's side of the question.

31. Railton distinguishes an individual's good, which can include his ideally-informed concerns about the well-being of others, from his welfare, which cannot ("Facts and Values," p. 30, n. 9). Similarly, Brandt draws a distinction between "the best thing for me to do" and "the best thing for me to do from the standpoint of my own welfare" (*A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 16).
32. Darwall argues that attention to subjective considerations (roughly, facts whose expressions make reference to oneself) inhibits vivid awareness of objective considerations (whose expressions do not) (*Impartial Reason*, pp. 134-36). But it would be an exaggeration to claim that such inhibitions always accompany attention to subjective considerations. And we should not overlook the many other ways in which attention to one set of consideration can inhibit vivid awareness of others. A very generous person may not be able fully to grasp how much her contribution will cost her, as long as she thinks about how much it will benefit others.
33. Even apart from the idealization, problems stemming from the dependency of motivations on mood are sure to crop up, and they spell trouble for the determinacy of the counterfactual. George may not be too depressed to become fully informed, but when he is depressed he may be less generous than when he is happy. In asking for the single motivational response to full information, the theory assumes too simple a picture of human motivation. In real life our motivations are quite variable. Yet stipulating in favor of one sort of mood seems arbitrary.
34. In fact, the changes in her cognitive abilities might themselves produce motivational changes. Since that depends on how these cognitive changes would be accomplished, and we have no way of knowing that, we cannot be sure that the unwelcome changes could be avoided.
35. Recognizing the possibility of motivational changes that trace to the idealization itself can help us to understand a point that might have been unclear in Velleman's arguments against Brandt. Velleman focuses, in part, on the question of empirical determinability—whether we could discover what our fully-informed motivations would be. But in a footnote he addresses the question of determinacy as well, claiming that if there are a number of different ways in which a person could be changed in order to effectuate her being fully informed, then counterfactuals about what her counterpart would choose will have indeterminate truth values ("Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," pp. 368-69). But that is true only if the resulting motivations would vary depending on how she is changed. And that can only happen if the changes themselves would have an impact on her motivations. What I say above shows why we can expect that they would, and why that is a problem even if the new motivations would not vary. To whatever extent these new motivations result from the idealization itself, they are impurities from the standpoint of the theory, and taking them into account would undermine the theory's internalism.

36. For an early criticism of Rawls's first-order approach, see Robert K. Shope, "The Conditional Fallacy in Contemporary Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 125 (1978): 397-413.
37. Brandt recognizes that the confrontation itself may sometimes affect our desires, independently of the information conveyed: "If every time I thought of having a martini, I made myself go through the multiplication tables for five minutes, the valence of a martini might well decline." His response is to hold that, "a thought is functioning properly in the criticism of desires only if its effect is not one its occurrence would have on any desire, and only if its effect is a function of its content" (*A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 112). But this response is inadequate. The diminution in Mel's motivation to exercise may be due precisely to his thinking further about exercise, even though his doing so is no longer helping him to become better informed.
38. Velleman has something like this in mind when he argues that there are an infinite number of ways in which the same facts may be presented, and that there is no justification for favoring one mode of presentation over another. He argues that this possibility of multiple modes of presentation undermines the empirical determinability of counterfactuals about how subjects would respond to full information, since there is no empirical method for discovering all of the possible modes of presentation, and hence what people's fully-informed motivations would be. He appears to concede, however, that these counterfactuals have determinate truth values, on the grounds that, for each person, there is a fact about how that person would be motivated after confronting all possible presentations ("Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," pp. 365-71). (He credits this suggestion to Railton.) But if there are infinitely many possible modes of presentation, why should we think that there are determinate answers to our questions about how people would respond to them all? And even if there are, these are not the questions full-information theorists should be asking. The reason the various individual presentations have differing effects is that the circumstances or modes of presentation themselves, and not just the information, can affect the subjects' motivations. But only the information is relevant—not these other factors. Confronting all possible presentations would only compound the problem.
39. "Facts and Values," p. 24.
40. A fortiori, it is not clear that these counterfactuals would have truth values that are empirically determinable.
41. Similar cases are discussed in Harman, "Critical Review," p. 128; and Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value," p. 152. Among the many others who have described cases in which fuller information seems to lead one away from one's good are Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, pp. 20-22, 183-88; James Griffin, *Well Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 12-13; and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 117-26.
42. "Moral Realism," p. 177, n. 20.

43. Ibid., pp. 174-75.
44. Brink makes a similar charge against the theories of value he calls subjectivist (*Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*, pp. 229-30).
45. Richard Brandt and Peter Railton provided models of good philosophical thinking during my years in graduate school. I am grateful to them for inspiring me to continue working in ethics. As usual, Barbara Rachelson and my colleagues at the University of Vermont generously provided much helpful discussion, commentary, and criticism. I am especially indebted to Sin Yee Chan, David Christensen, Hilary Kornblith, Arthur Kuflik, William Mann, and Derk Pereboom. A number of anonymous referees also helped me to improve the paper. I am grateful to all. This paper is dedicated to the memory of William Frankena.

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