

**The Mistake in "I'll Be Glad I Did It" Reasoning:  
Why Curing Deafness isn't Wrong,  
and Aborting You or Me Wouldn't Have Been Either**  
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**Abstract**

Some deaf activists today argue that we should not cure deafness in babies, because to do so would be to imply that we should wish all deaf adults had been cured. They argue that in order to properly value people who are deaf—and to recognize their value—we must be glad that they are the people they are. Because we can and should be glad they are the people they are, and because who they are has been shaped by their deafness, we learn that in general deafness should not be cured.

Some anti-abortion activists point to the value of you and me in explaining why abortion is wrong. You and I are valuable, everyone should be glad that you and I have come to exist. Everyone should be glad that *you and I* were not aborted. But there is nothing special about us. So everyone should want abortions not to happen *in general*. In general, abortions should not be performed.

Both of these arguments are provocative and, to some people, compelling. I discuss arguments like these and argue that they fail.

*Note to GALA members: you can skip section III if you prefer.*

**I. The Puzzle**

In this paper, I will consider a common type of practical reasoning—‘I’ll be glad I did it’ reasoning—and some ethical arguments that either rely on this type of reasoning or are closely related to it. We use “I’ll be glad I did it reasoning” all the time. For example, last night I was trying to decide whether to work on this paper or go out to a movie. I realized that if I worked on the paper, then today I would be glad I did it. Whereas, if I went out to the movie, today I would regret it. This enabled me to see that I should work on the paper rather than going out to a movie. This looks like excellent reasoning:

Paper argument:

1. If I work on my paper, I’ll be glad I did it.
2. Therefore, I should work on my paper.

When we're having trouble making a big life decision, we often try to picture what will happen each way we might choose, and imagine how we'll feel in that outcome. When choosing between two jobs, we might use this reasoning. Suppose you are choosing between two jobs and you know quite a lot about what the two jobs will be like. In one, you will make a lot of money but have to work eighty-hour weeks and see little of your family. In the other, you will make considerably less money—though enough to support yourself and your family. You'll have much more time for your family. The money is attractive. But overall, you realize you'll be glad to have the time with your family if you take the second job—you'll be glad you made that choice. It seems this is a good way of realizing that you should take the second job.

Now consider a very different case in which one might use this reasoning. Suppose you and your spouse have just had a baby, Stevie, and Stevie turns out to be deaf. The doctors tell you that you can choose whether to cure Stevie's deafness: you can choose to give Stevie a cochlear implant and this would enable Stevie to hear and to grow up able to function normally in the hearing community: Stevie would be able to understand spoken language and would develop the capacity to speak himself. Stevie wouldn't ever be able to hear as well as people without any hearing impairment, but his disability will not fundamentally impact his life. In the alternative, you might choose not to cure Stevie's deafness. Suppose you focus on this option. Indeed, suppose you think of this as the default option, since other things equal you would prefer not to put your baby son through an invasive surgical procedure. You realize that if you choose not to cure Stevie's deafness, that Stevie will very likely grow up to be a happy deaf adult. Furthermore, Stevie's life and personality will in many ways be shaped by his deafness.

His disability will lead him to have certain strengths he otherwise would not have had, and it will shape his interests and his friendships. He will have access to deaf communities and culture, and these will play valuable and significant roles in his life. Deaf culture will give him valuable experiences that have no equivalent in the hearing world. You know all this, because you have several adult friends who are deaf, and you see how their deafness has played a substantial role in shaping their personalities. You recognize that they would have been completely different people if their deafness had been cured when they were young (though, in fact, it couldn't have been, as the technology didn't exist then). Were they to ask themselves whether they wish they had been cured as babies, they would say "no"—they value the lives they have had and the selves they had become. They don't identify with the utterly different people they would have been if their deafness had been cured, and so they don't wish things had gone that way. Similarly, the parents of your deaf friends do not wish their children had been cured of deafness when they were babies: they love their children as they are and as the people they have become. They don't wish their children had become utterly different than they in fact are. Thinking of your own case, you realize that if you choose not to cure Stevie's deafness, he will become a deaf adult whose personality and character have been shaped by his deafness. You will then love him as the person he is, and you will be glad you chose as you did; you will not wish he had become an utterly different person, as he would have if his deafness had been cured. You thus reason as follows:

#### Deafness Argument

1. If I do not cure my baby of deafness, I'll be glad I made that choice.
2. Therefore, I should not cure my baby of deafness.

So you choose not to cure your baby of deafness. (And notice that the argument is strengthened by considering the future wishes of your baby. As an adult who has been shaped by her deafness, it's very likely that your child will be glad her deafness was not cured when she was a baby.)

If the reasoning that leads me to work on my paper rather than going out to a movie is good reasoning—and surely it is—then it looks like the Individual Deafness Argument must be good reasoning as well. But it may not strike us as good reasoning. What can we say to undermine the argument? This question presents the first part of the puzzle that my paper is concerned to address: is “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning good or bad? It seems it can’t be bad, in light of the Paper Argument, which is clearly a good argument. But it seems it can’t be good, in light of the Deafness Argument.

While the Deafness Argument may just seem to be making a mistake (though we haven’t figured out what that mistake is yet), it’s related to another argument that’s taken very seriously today in discussions of deafness and cochlear implants. There is a strong movement among deaf advocates to argue that deafness should never be cured in babies. One of the arguments that deaf adults make, in support of this position, can be summarized as follows:

#### General Deafness Argument

1. I’m glad I wasn’t cured of deafness.
2. My preference is reasonable—indeed, it is the preference that everyone should have about my situation.
3. Therefore, everyone should have had this preference even back when I was a baby.

4. There's nothing special about my case.
5. Therefore, in general, everyone should prefer not to cure babies of deafness.
6. Therefore, everyone should not cure deafness in babies.

This argument picks up on the way that deaf adults may take affront at the idea that deafness should, and may, be cured in babies. They think that to prefer curing deafness in babies mandates the view that those who are glad their deafness was not cured are making a mistake—and it mandates that we wish their deafness had been cured, so we do not value them as they are.

The reasoning in the General Deafness Argument is similar to “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning. In “I’ll be glad I did it reasoning”, we move from a preference held *after* an action to a preference that we should have *before* choosing whether to perform the action—which then guides the agent in acting. The General Deafness Argument similarly moves from a preference held *after* something is settled—whether deafness was cured in childhood—to a preference that should *generally* be held, including *before* that issue has been settled.

The second, and final, part of the puzzle I will address is: what is wrong with the General Deafness Argument and arguments like it?

The first part of the puzzle arises again in a case in which a woman is pregnant and trying to decide whether to continue the pregnancy. She thinks about what things will be like if she continues the pregnancy. She will end up raising the child, and she will love him. Once she has the child, she realizes, she will love him as a mother typically loves her child. At that point, she will treasure him and be very glad to have him. She

will prefer things as they are, that her child exists; she will certainly not wish that she had chosen to abort him. The woman thus reasons as follows:

#### Anti-Abortion Argument

1. If I don't abort, I'll be glad I made that choice.
2. Therefore, I should not abort.

Like the Deafness Argument, this argument seems suspicious. Some people will say that it is clearly not a good argument. But it is hard to see what is wrong with it, when we compare it with the argument that I should work on my paper rather than go out to a movie.

There is a general analogue of this argument that raises the second part of our puzzle. This argument is often made by those whose parents seriously considered aborting them. These people think to themselves that we should all be glad they were not aborted, because they are wonderful valuable people. But they realize their cases are not special. So, they conclude that we should prefer that all abortions not occur—and that all abortions would be wrong.

#### General Anti-Abortion Argument

1. I and my parents are glad I was not aborted.
2. Our preference is reasonable—indeed, it is the attitude everyone should have.
3. Therefore, everyone should have had this preference even back when I was a fetus.
4. Therefore, my parents should have continued their pregnancy: they would have acted wrongly in aborting me.
5. But my case is not special.

6. Therefore, all abortions are wrong.

Like the General Deafness Argument, this argument moves from a reasonable preference after-the-fact (after an abortion was not performed) to a reasonable preference *in general*.

It is the second puzzle of this paper to say what is wrong with arguments like this.

## II. Expanding on the Puzzle

In this section, I will mention two more arguments that raise the puzzle of this paper. But first I will note one refinement we can make in our understanding of “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning.

Sometimes “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning is *clearly* bad reasoning. Suppose I am asking whether to take a drug that would warp my perceptions of the world so that, although the drug would lead me to make terrible choices that would seriously harm me, while I make those choices I would be very happy with them and glad that I took the drug. In this case, my being glad I did it will be unreasonable. If I know all this ahead of time, then I know that if I take the drug, I’ll be glad I did it; but I won’t infer that I should take the drug. For another example, suppose that I know that if I go on a certain exploration, I will encounter a lot of misleading evidence that will convince me I have made an important discovery and the expense and inconvenience of the exploration is worth it—though that won’t be true. In this case, though I know that if I go on the exploration, I’ll be glad I did it, I won’t infer that I should go on the exploration. These two cases show us that “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning fails in some cases: it fails when my being glad I did it will be unreasonable or a result of misleading evidence. But notice that the deafness case does not have either of these features. It is perfectly reasonable to be glad that one is the person one is, with one’s particular personality and

character traits, and not wish to be different; and it's reasonable to love one's child as he is and to be glad he is as he is. Furthermore, these attitudes do not result from any misleading evidence. Rather, they result from an accurate understanding of the situation: that the deaf adult's life has been shaped by his deafness, and that he would have been different had his deafness been cured.

So, we must focus on reasoning that follows this form:

1. If I make this choice, I'll be glad I did—and that won't be unreasonable or due to misleading evidence.
2. Therefore, I should make this choice.

The first part of our puzzle, more clearly stated, is this: is the above good reasoning? If not, then much of our ordinary reasoning is bad reasoning. If it is, then the Abortion Argument and the Deafness Argument are good arguments.

Another case that raises this puzzle is as follows. Suppose that a fourteen-year old girl is considering conceiving a child. She knows that she is very young, and that it will be easier for her to be a mother when she is older. She knows that if she had a child now, it will be much harder for her to get a good education; she may well have a less meaningful and fulfilling professional life if she conceives now. Nevertheless, she also knows that if she conceives now, she will raise a child who she will come to love dearly. She will love him and be glad that he exists; she will not wish she had waited to conceive later in life. She reasons as follows:

Teenage Mother Argument

1. If I conceive now, I will be glad I did it.
2. Therefore, I should conceive now.

This argument strikes us as wrong. She should wait until she is more prepared to be a good mother. But what can we say to explain why the argument is wrong?

I will mention one final argument. Suppose that it is a time of peace, when joining the Army Reserves carries little risk of being thrown into serious combat, and little risk of death. I might consider whether to join the Reserves, and I might reason as follows. If I join the Reserves, it will change me in significant ways. I will become more respectful of authority. I will become less “lazy”, and much less like a “wimp”. I will become strong, self-assured, and more able to take care of myself. My attitudes toward these character traits will also change. I now don’t mind what others would call my “laziness” and “wimpiness”; and I like my tendency to challenge authority. But I realize that if I join the army, I will come to value the changes it will bring about in my character. I might then be moved by the following argument:

Army Argument:

1. If I enter the Army Reserves, I’ll be glad I did it.
2. Therefore, I should enter the Army Reserves.

This may seem like a good argument. But I’ll argue that it is not.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One might object that the arguments I have presented fail because in the cases they discuss, *both options* available are such that if the agents take them, they’ll be glad they did. There must be something wrong with the claim that if I’ll be glad I did it, then I *should* do it—if this claim can lead to the conclusion that I *should* take both of two incompatible options. In section VI, I discuss this worry and argue that a weaker claim—if I be glad I did it, then it’s *reasonable* to do it—also raises problems in the cases I present in sections I and II. For example, we will get the conclusion that it’s reasonable for the fourteen-year-old to conceive. My solution to the original “I’ll be glad I did it” problem, presented below, also solves this problem.

### III. The Reflection Principle for Desires

*This section can be skipped.*

In order to solve our puzzle, we can try to see what *explanation* might be given for “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning. What might make this good reasoning? I propose that the following principle might seem to underline this reasoning:

Reflection for Desires: If a person believes that she will come to prefer that p be true, and she believes that she won’t be in a worse epistemic or evaluative position at that time, then she should now prefer that p be true.

This principle might underlie “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning as follows. We might expand that reasoning in this way.

1. I predict that in the future I will be glad I made choice C—I will prefer to have chosen C—and this preference will be reasonable and not based on misleading evidence.
2. Reflection for Desires
3. Therefore, I should now prefer to make choice C.
4. Therefore, I should make choice C.

(Note that this argument only applies to cases where we have already decided to make choice C; the argument can be used to try to justify that choice. If the choice hasn’t already been made, then the future preference can’t be *predicted* so Reflection for Desires won’t apply.)

Reflection for Desires can also be seen to underlie the General Deafness Argument and the General Anti-Abortion Argument, if we expand that argument type as follows:

1. I and my parents are glad that p is true.
2. This preference is reasonable, and it was predictable back when my parents were determining whether to make p true.
3. Reflection for Desires.
4. Therefore, back when my parents were determining whether to make p true, they should have chosen to make p true.
5. There is nothing special about our case.
6. Therefore, everyone in situations like ours should make the choice that corresponds to making p true.

So, these two types of argument might be good arguments *if* Reflection for Desires is true. But why should we think Reflection for Desires is true?

We might suppose that Reflection for Desires is true because we independently think an analogous principle holds for beliefs.

Some philosophers have argued that this principle is true:

Reflection for Beliefs: If a person believes that (a) she will have a certain degree of belief in p in the future, and (b) she won't then be in a worse epistemic situation than she is now in, then she should have that degree of belief in p now.

Briefly, they find this principle plausible because they reason as follows. If one's future self is in at least as good an epistemic situation as oneself, then one should treat one's future self as an *expert* or *authority*. If an authority reasonably believes p to a certain degree, then one should believe p to that same degree.

One might object to Reflection for Desires right off the bat. One might argue that desires are not rationally constrained *at all*. But even if we think that no desires are rationally required, and that no desires are rationally forbidden, we should acknowledge that there are rational requirements that desires be *consistent* in certain ways: in particular, there are rational requirements that all-things-considered desires be consistent.

Thus, while it's perfectly consistent to have both the desire that you eat the piece of yummy chocolate cake being offered to you and also have the desire that you refrain from eating the cake, you shouldn't have both desires as all-things-considered desires. And similarly, if you know that watching a movie tonight would prevent you from finishing your GALA paper tonight, then you shouldn't have both an all-things-considered desire to finish your GALA paper tonight and an all-things-considered desire to watch a movie tonight.

Someone might claim that no one could actually have inconsistent all-things-considered desires. That's a lot like claiming that no one could actually have inconsistent beliefs. People do have inconsistent beliefs all the time. But when two beliefs are obviously inconsistent, and the person is aware that she has both beliefs and that they're inconsistent, it becomes less plausible that the person actually holds both beliefs. Nevertheless, people often have inconsistent beliefs because they either don't realize the beliefs are inconsistent or they don't ever, at one time, realize that they hold both the beliefs (though they know them to be inconsistent). Similarly, people may hold inconsistent all-things-considered desires because they either don't realize the desires are inconsistent or they don't realize they hold both desires.

Throughout this paper, I am only concerned with all-things-considered desires. So I leave the modifier “all-things-considered” implicit. Furthermore, I am concerned not only with desires about states of affairs in the future, or of which the person is ignorant; I am also concerned with desires *about the past*, where the person knows how the past happened. We often wish that something had happened differently in the past. And we also often don’t wish that things had happened differently—more than that, *we are glad things happened as they did*. This particular attitude plays a crucial role in the paper. It’s an attitude that’s difficult to describe properly, because it is more than just *being glad* or happy that things happened as they did—it is *preferring* that things happened as they did to things having happened differently. I would like to say it is *desiring* that things happened as they did rather than differently, but this sounds awkward. We typically think of desires as about things that haven’t happened yet, and might still happen (but not always; we can say that Tom desires Mary’s love, though he knows he will never get it). So I often talk of “preferences” as well as desires—I take preferences to simply be all-things-considered desires.

Just as desires are rationally constrained to be consistent, they may be subject to other rational constraints. Reflection for Desires may be one of those constraints.

#### **IV. Objecting to the Arguments**

In this section, I will explore how we might object to the arguments I outlined in sections I and II: the two Deafness Arguments, the two Anti-Abortion Arguments, the Teenage Mother Argument, and the Army Argument.

One way we might object to these arguments would be to deny that facts about reasonable preferences imply any facts about what we should do. “I’ll be glad I did it”

reasoning relies on moving from a *reasonable preference* I would have if I perform an action to a claim about *whether I should perform* the action. I suggested in section 3 that this reasoning might go via a reasonable preference in the present: because this preference would be reasonable in the future, I should have it now, and then I should act on this preference now. But what does the mere fact that a preference is reasonable tell us about which actions are reasonable? I think that some qualified version of the following claim is true:

- (i) If someone ought to prefer that choice C be made, then she ought to make choice C.

One qualification we clearly need to make has to do with moral obligations that conflict with reasonable preferences. Suppose that my father needs a heart transplant this week or he will die. However, my father is low on the donor list and is virtually certain not to get the transplant in time. I see that there is a brain-dead patient whose heart is ready to be taken to the next person on the donor list. In this case, it is utterly reasonable for me to *prefer* the outcome in which I steal the heart and save my father's life. However, that does not make it reasonable to *act* on this preference. It is not reasonable to steal the heart, because I am morally prohibited from stealing the heart. We can revise the principle as follows:

- (ii) If someone ought to prefer that choice C be made, *and the overall moral considerations do not prohibit making choice C*, then she ought to make choice C.

This suggests that "I'll be glad I did it" reasoning has to be augmented. It must go like this:

1. If I make this choice, I'll be glad I did—and that won't be unreasonable or due to misleading evidence.
2. It's not morally prohibited to make choice C.
3. Therefore, I should make this choice.

In all the arguments I've discussed, there is no *moral prohibition* on making the choice proscribed by the conclusion. So we could easily revise those arguments to include a premise along the lines of premise 2 here.

No doubt other qualifications to (ii) are needed as well. For example, it does not seem that we're rationally obligated to choose an option we prefer *slightly* over another option. So perhaps the claim should be:

- (iii) If someone ought to *greatly prefer* that choice C be made, and the overall moral considerations do not prohibit making choice C, then she ought to make choice C.

In any case, I think some version of (iii) is true and can support the arguments of sections 2 and 3.<sup>2</sup>

Let's look for another way to object to these arguments. We might object by seeking to deny that the preferences on which the arguments rest would be *reasonable*. According to this line of thought, the preferences of the deaf person's parents have been warped by their attachment to their child as she is. They fail to see that things would

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that the reasoning I go through at the beginning of this section moves from the claim that a preference is reasonable to the claim that one *ought* to have that preference. This is an assumption that would be made by those seeking to justify "I'll be glad I did it" reasoning—because, as I discuss below, they must think of reasonable preferences as tracking what is best. However, given that I think that reasonable preferences don't always go along with what is best (as I argue below), I think this assumption may be wrong.

have been better if their child had been cured, and that they should therefore *prefer* that their child had been cured, although their child would then have had a completely different character. Similarly, consider the fourteen-year-old who becomes a mother. She loves her child and is glad that her child has come to exist—she prefers that she conceived. But it would have been better if she had waited until she had gotten older. Again, her love for her child warps her understanding and leads her to prefer the current state of affairs, which is actually worse.

This line of thought relies on the following claim:

- (iv) If one way the world might have been is *better* than another way the world might have been, and a person is in a position to know that fact, then she should prefer that the world be the first way.

I think that (iv) is an attractive claim, but that it is false. The deaf child's parents could grant that things would have been better if their child had not been deaf. But things would then have been *very different*. They feel that they would have then had a *different child*—not literally a different child, but a child with a completely different personality, character, and sense of self from the child they actually have. In loving their child, they love who he has become. They are glad he has become who he is, they value him as he is, and they cannot prefer that he had come to be so different—indeed, they prefer things as they are. Surely these preferences are utterly reasonable.

Similarly, consider the women who became a mother at 14 years old. She may well recognize that things would have been better if she had waited to become a mother later and if she had had a different child. The case here is even easier to make out than for the deaf parents, because this woman would literally have had a different child if she had

waited. She may recognize that if she had waited, she would have come to have a wonderful child that she would have loved and that that relationship would have been *as good* as her current relationship with her child. She may even grant that it would have been *better*: there would have been far fewer strains, because she would have been mature enough to be a more responsible parent. She may conclude that things would have been, overall, *much better*, if she had waited. Nevertheless, she loves the child she actually has, and does not wish that she had not conceived—she prefers things as they are. This preference, I claim, is utterly reasonable.

We have now reached the first substantive claim of my paper. I want to flag it, because so far all the principle I have articulated and discussed are either plausible principles that I will argue are false (such as the claim that “I’ll be glad I did it” reasoning is good reasoning”) or claims that are not my main focus (such as (iii)):

*My First Claim:*

*Preferences for Loved Ones are Okay:* It can be reasonable to prefer that someone one loves have come to be the person she is, or that someone one loves have come to exist, although one recognizes that there is an alternative in which things would have been *better*.

Because I endorse this claim, I think that we cannot undermine the arguments of section III by saying that the later preferences they discuss are unreasonable; I think these later preferences are clearly reasonable.

Let’s see if this claim can help us to see where the arguments go wrong. I think the arguments overlook the way that desires can be reasonably influenced by things like *whom we love*. In the cases talked about by the arguments in section III, the time

between the action choice point and the later preference about that choice, does not involve a change in information or a change in ability to judge what is desirable, so it may look like what it is reasonable to desire does not change between those two times either. However, the time between the action choice point and the later preference does involve a change in whom the agents love. It makes sense to prefer one's twenty-year-old deaf child *as she is* because one loves her *as she is*. But when the child is a baby, one does not yet love her *as she will (or may) become at 20* if her deafness isn't cured; because one does not love her in that way, it is not reasonable to prefer that her deafness not be cured. So such a preference can't make it reasonable to fail to cure the deafness. Similarly, having become a mother at 14 years old, a woman may love her child and reasonably prefer that her child exist. But before conceiving, she does not yet love her child, so her preference to have a child then is not reasonable (since things will be so much worse if she conceives now rather than waiting). So, such a preference cannot make it reasonable to conceive now.

It seems that there is an explanation of the reasonableness of the preferences at the later times—due to whom the agents love—while having those same preferences at the earlier times cannot be similarly shown to be reasonable. So the later preferences cannot justify acting in line with those preferences at the earlier time.

### **V. Why the Arguments Fail**

I claim that the arguments fail because they rely on later preferences that are reasonable at that time, but that would not be reasonable at the earlier time.

The move from a preference being reasonable at a later time to its being reasonable at an earlier time might rely on the following idea:

Preferences aim at the valuable. What's valuable doesn't change, and it isn't relative.

If this claim is true, then a reasonable preference at one time would be reasonable at an earlier time—if at the earlier time one predicts that preference, knows it will be reasonable, and knows it won't be the result of misleading evidence. One thereby knows that the later preference will be just as good as one's current preferences can be, at aiming at the goal of preferences: the valuable.

Let's grant that preferences do aim at the valuable, or at what is best. However, this claim must be qualified in two ways. First, what's valuable is *relative*: it differs from person to person. Second, what it's reasonable to value *changes* over time, because preferences aim at the valuable only *in general*, not in all cases.

What's valuable is relative because what's valuable *to you* may well be different from what's valuable *to me*. We may both be valuing *reasonably* and properly, even when we both have all the relevant information, while we nevertheless value differently. You will value your existence very highly (not only your continued existence, but *that you came to exist*), as well as your family, your life projects, and the events which shaped your personality and your preoccupations. Some of these things may not be valued at all by me. And vice versa, for what I value.

What it's reasonable to prefer changes over time, because although *in general* one must prefer what is best, one is permitted to prefer what is not best in some cases. I claim:

*Preferences for Loved Ones are Okay*: It can be reasonable to prefer that someone one loves have come to be the person she is, or that someone one

loves have come to exist, although one recognizes that there is an alternative in which things would have been *better*.

The permission to prefer one's loved ones is just one of many agent-relative permissions. We're permitted to prefer that our loved ones have come to be the particular persons they are (to have the particular personalities and character traits they have), and we're also permitted to have such preferences about *ourselves*. We're also permitted to have preferences about the *projects* we've come to be engaged in. This is a partial list of our agent-relative permissions.

These permissions *change over time*. I now lack an agent-relative permission to prefer that I suffer a life-changing experience later this year and emerge with a particular set of life lessons and character traits; but after I have gone through that experience (assuming I in fact will), I will then have an agent-relative permission to prefer that those things have happened. This shows that *as identity changes*, what it's rationally permissible to desire changes too. (This is the "mushy" kind of identity—as character, personality, and personal history changes, so what it's permissible to desire changes too. This isn't, of course, numerical identity.)

To say that there are *permissions* to desire in certain ways suggests that certain desires are *default* or *prima facie mandatory*. I don't actually have such a picture in mind. Rather, something weaker will do. All we need is the claim that, other things being equal, each person is required to prefer whatever she considers to be best. Let's suppose that there are no rational constraints on people's ordering of possibilities from better to worse—we are rationally permitted to see any possibility as better or worse than any other possibility (but we must be consistent). Then what's *prima facie mandatory* is

simply that one prefer an option one deems better to an option one deems worse. The agent-relative permissions I've been discussing are permissions to deviate from this requirement. The fourteen-year-old mother acknowledges that it would have been better for her to wait and conceive later, but she prefers things as they are—and she's not irrational in doing so.

We can understand what sometimes goes wrong in “I'll be glad I did it” reasoning as follows. When this reasoning goes well, that's because the fact that I'll be glad I made a certain choice is an indication that that choice would be *best*. Therefore, it's a good idea to make that choice now. However, sometimes when I'll be glad I did something, that preference will be *reasonable* although it won't be a preference for what would be best. The key insight is this:

*Sometimes it is reasonable to prefer an outcome even though the alternative would have been better. It's reasonable of parents to prefer that their adult deaf child have come to be who she is, even though it would have been better if their child had been cured of deafness. It's reasonable of a mother who conceived as a teenager to prefer that her child exist, even though it would have been better if she had waited to conceive later.*

I think that this fact is generally not recognized, and failure to recognize it has a great deal of responsibility for the current movement among deaf advocates against curing deafness in babies. They think that their preferences for their lives as they are, are reasonable if and only if their lives as they are, are best for them. So they conclude that they must in general think that it's best for deaf children not to be deaf. And they think that others, who think curing deafness in children is best, must conclude that any

preferences against a deaf child's being cured, or having been cured, is unreasonable: so deaf adults attribute a critical view of their own preferences for their own lives, to anyone who advocates in favor of curing deafness. They feel that those who cure deafness in children are treating those with disabilities as inferior and as less valuable.

My point is that we can think those with disabilities are very valuable, and we can value them as they are, and prefer them as they are, even while we recognize that an alternative for them would have been better and even as we choose that alternative for others.

## **VI. Another Objection to the Arguments**

Some of the arguments I discuss are susceptible to the following worry. The Anti-Abortion Argument, the Teenage Mother Argument, and the Army Argument are all arguments from the claim that a person will be glad if she takes a particular option to the conclusion that she *should* take that option. The worry is that in these cases, it's also true that if the person takes the *other option*, she'll be glad she did. Consider the case of the fourteen-year-old who is deciding whether to conceive now. Suppose that if she does not conceive now, she will wait and conceive a different child later, in her twenties. She will grow to love this child and be glad she had this child; call him Tommy. She will realize that if she had conceived at fourteen, her life would have taken a different path and she would never have had Tommy. The result is that if she chooses not to conceive now (at fourteen), she will be glad she did. So either way she chooses, she will prefer her actual choice. We can then consider an argument parallel to the Teenage Mother Argument, with the conclusion that she *should not* conceive now. Obviously something must be wrong with the "I'll be glad I did it" reasoning behind the Teenage Mother Argument if

such reasoning can also lead to an incompatible conclusion, given the same basic facts of the case.

Does recognition of this problem with the arguments demonstrate everything that's wrong with "I'll be glad I did it" reasoning? I don't think so. We tend to think that cases in which either option will leave one glad one did it are cases in which both options would be *reasonable*. We might say, "in this case you just can't go wrong!" We could then suppose that the following two arguments, made by the fourteen-year-old, are both good arguments:

1. If I conceive now, I'll be glad I did.
2. Therefore, it's reasonable to conceive now.
1. If I don't conceive now, I'll be glad I made that choice.
2. Therefore, it's reasonable to not conceive now.

These two arguments are not incompatible. Their conclusions could both be true. But nevertheless, they are bad arguments. This is so, because it's simply false that it's reasonable of the fourteen-year-old to conceive now. Her life will go so much better if she waits to conceive, that it would be unreasonable to conceive now.

Thus, to fully see what's wrong with "I'll be glad I did it" reasoning, we need the explanation I have given, that future reasonable preferences sometimes do not make those same preferences reasonable now.

## **VII. When Does "I'll Be Glad I Did It" Reasoning Succeed?**

In light of everything we have seen, it seems that the following type of argument may be a good argument:

1. If I make this choice, I'll be glad I made it

2. My preference will be reasonable and won't be based on misleading information.
3. My preference will not be reasonable merely due to features about my future situation that are not true of me now—that is, not merely because of features of my character, features of those I love, and who I love, which cannot justify a preference now.
4. This choice is not morally prohibited.
5. Therefore, it's reasonable for me to make this choice.

Most of the time, we successfully perform “I'll be glad I did it” reasoning without thinking about whether premises 2, 3, and 4 are true, and yet these premises are true. So most of the time, when we engage in this type of reasoning, we are relying on a claim (1) that genuinely supports our conclusion (5) in drawing the conclusion. We are not, however, in possession of a good understanding of *why* this is good reasoning—because we fail to realize that we need 2, 3, and 4 to be true as well.

The above argument is weaker than a typical “I'll be glad I did it” argument, because its conclusion is simply that it's *reasonable* to make a particular choice. It seems the following is also a good argument:

1. If I make this choice, I'll be glad I made it
2. My preference will be reasonable and won't be based on misleading information.
3. My preference will not be reasonable merely due to features about my future situation that are not true of me now—that is, not merely because of

features of my character, features of those I love, and who I love, which cannot justify a preference now.

4. This choice is not morally prohibited.
5. *If I don't make this choice, I will regret it.*
6. *This regret will be reasonable, won't be based on misleading information, and won't be based on features of my future situation that are not true of me now.*
7. Therefore, I *should* make this choice.

Note that we do need premise 6, including its final clause. Now that we've noticed that there can be changes one undergoes which make it reasonable to *be glad things happened* that were not for the best, we must allow for the possibility that there can be changes one undergoes which make it reasonable to *regret* that things happened which were for the best.