

## **CAN ONE CONSISTENTLY HOLD THAT “ULTIMATE GOALS” ARE NOT JUSTIFIED WHILE “SUCCESSFUL WORKINGS” ARE?**

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**ABSTRACT:** Contextual Behavior Science distinguishes successful workings from ultimate goals in terms of justification. Workings are justified when they successfully meet the verbally stated goals. Since ultimate goals are not workings they cannot be justified. The Contextual Behavior Scientist faces a dilemma. It is argued that on one hand they are forced to restrict justification of the workings to an idiosyncratic perspective; to the subjective desires or ultimate goals of the individual. On the other hand, the reliance on the historical, social, verbal, and evolutionary context, which in part justifies “successful workings” will begin to provide justification for the ranking of “ultimate goals.” That is, the resources available are just those that appeal to the normative values (epistemic and otherwise) already instantiated in our common historical, social, verbal, and evolutionary context and which are already in place whether workings are justified or not.

*Keywords:* Successful workings, ultimate goals, Contextual Behavior Science, reasons

In “Contextual Behavioral Science: Creating a science more adequate to the challenge of the human condition” (CHC), the authors state that “as the functional contextualist sees it, the ultimate purpose of behavioral science is to change the world in a positive and intentional way...” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p. 1). They list three guiding principles that a scientific practice should aim at in the development of analytical goals. These goals should demonstrate “precision, scope and depth based on verifiable experience” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p.1; Barnes-Holmes 2000). While Contextual Behavior Science (CBS) maintains that the three principles define the goals of CBS, other criteria are also mentioned. They go on to state that “CBS is a strategy of scientific and practical development that gathers together a coherent set of philosophical assumptions and strategies of knowledge development and application” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p.1). This enterprise of gathering a coherent set of philosophical assumptions is argued to be a fundamentally social enterprise. The “social enterprise” is defended not merely in that any scientific enterprise must take into consideration how its knowledge is integrated with knowledge in related fields, that is, has depth, but that “language itself begins and ends as nothing but a social behavioral tool, not a passageway to pre-organized reality” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p.4). The very idea that language is a “social behavioral tool” begins to place the scientific enterprise outside of the specific interests of the individual.

Minimally, one is intended to understand the “pragmatic theory of truth” as the ability for a belief or proposition to meet an agreed upon set of criteria. These criteria set the standard of what the theory accepts as a reason that counts in favor of holding a specific belief (i.e., that the working

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is successful). Whether these criteria in fact hold or not, asks for justification and invites critical appraisal. The very act of assessing and adjusting one's belief when a critique warrants it, or holding on to the original proposition when warranted, increasingly takes on the role of what it means for a proposition to be true. For the purposes of this article the terms "truth" or "true" will be used as a placeholder for "successful workings."

Speaking of the CBS truth criteria (successful workings) Linda Hayes (1993a) states the following:

I have become convinced that the utility criterion, for the purpose of evaluating the relative adequacy of scientific beliefs, is not useful... I believe that the utility criterion is useful for the purposes of justifying that which one is already doing for other reasons. It serves the purposes of whoever uses it for what reason they wish to use it. (p. 42)

The question then becomes whether these "other reasons" are as open ended as implied. That is, whether they can be reduced to the subjective interests of the individual. Schoneberger, quoting Rorty, states that

Justification is "always relative" to an audience (p.4) – i.e., relative to the normative practices of a particular linguistic community. Therefore, Rorty argued that the goal of inquiry cannot be to accurately represent reality's alleged intrinsic nature, rather "to justify our belief to as many and as large audiences as possible (1998, p. 39). (Schoneberger, 2016, p. 236)

Metaphors like "direction" and even "success" are seen as sufficiently clear to explain how the pragmatic theory of truth is to be understood. Understanding how the direction is successful is intended to explain how we get to the ultimate goal. What counts as a reason that the direction is successful is explained by appealing to the normative practices in play (for example, depth, simplicity, modus ponens, to name some of the criteria), and thus begins to reference the normative practices of the scientific community rather than the subjective interests of the individual. Ultimate goals cannot be justified as they are not workings. What are the reasons that count in favor of an action to be assessed as successful and what prevents one from counting "reasons" as applying to the choice of ultimate goals?

Linda Hayes distinguishes the naïve from the not-so-naïve realist. The naïve realist holds "that the universe existing independently of the knower can be known approximately as it actually is. Knowledge is viewed as representative of the world, as a mirror image of the world" (L. Hayes, 1993a, p. 37). If the correspondence theory of truth (CTT) as understood by Hayes' definition of the naïve realist is denied us, then we are left with the social, verbal, and environmental resources to determine what is true (whether the criteria hold or not). These resources are broader than any specific field and encompass not only what things we hold to be true (whether or not the working is successful) but also the kinds of implications that are placed on us when we assert that something is true, i.e., "successful." The degree to which the argument that goals can be ranked goes forward successfully, will begin to set limits on how one might understand Hayes' "It serves the purposes of whoever uses it for what reason they wish to use it" (L. Hayes, 1993a p. 42). That is, the kinds of reasons that we can "wish to use" are in part restricted to the normative practices of the specific field of study and those other normative practices that are already in place. These "reasons" then allow us to evaluate some ultimate goals as better justified or more worthwhile.

If the appeal to “verifiable experience” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p.1) is not to be understood as an appeal to a CTT (i.e., the CTT of the naïve realist), how are we to understand what this appeal means? Principles like precision, scope, depth, strategies of knowledge development, application, and coherence are not immediately adapted to the criteria of ‘verifiable experience’ and are more readily understood as values the scientific community has endorsed in general. There is no arguing that principles like those described here are commendable. The difficulty is that they raise problems if one argues, as the contextualist does, that only workings can be justified and that ultimate goals (to which the above quotes are meant to refer) cannot be justified (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012; S. Hayes, 1993b).

### **Workings, Goals, and Ultimate Goals**

Hayes argues that goals are specific and provides examples such as: “To produce a consistency of beliefs,” “To understand and make sense of the world,” “To have fun,” “To speak nonsense,” “To look intelligent,” and “To give talks” (S. Hayes, 1993b, pp. 15, 16). A goal may include any consequence that can be put into words and is specific to the person and their interests. Hayes’ list of personal desires, goals, or outcomes, includes not only those outcomes a scientist might identify as their goals but also those projects any individual may have, for example, “being a good person” or “being honest.”

The consequence or goal is here seen as both prior to, and constitutive of, the criteria used to assess whether the term “successful working” can be applied. To understand how successful workings can be applied, one must understand how the consequence is already “part of the original activity” (S. Hayes, 1993b, p. 13, see Linda Hayes’ challenge, 2019). The claim that the goal is already part of our understanding of how to apply the criteria “successful working” is further explained by the direction of the activity. The need to explicitly identify the goal provides us with an understanding of what is, or is not, a “successful working” and whether any working is in the *right direction*. The fact that others are able to critique whether the direction is appropriate implies a common set of values and accepted criteria.

As already mentioned, goals themselves cannot be assessed unless they are one goal in a hierarchy of goals.

There is no way to apply successful workings usefully without a goal. If so, since successful working is the means by which conceptualists evaluate events, it must be the case that goals themselves cannot ultimately be evaluated or justified; only stated. To evaluate a goal via successful working would require yet another goal, but then that second goal could not be evaluated. (Hayes, 1993b, p.17, and similarly Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p. 4)

That ultimate goals cannot be evaluated is defended in Hayes’ critical appraisal of James’ pragmatism. Hayes argues that had James explicitly stated his ultimate goal (which had religious overtones) it would have had to compete with the ultimate goals expressed by other people, none of which could have been defended (S. Hayes, 1993b, p.18; Barnes-Holmes, 2000; Barnes & Roche, 1997). Hayes goes on to state that people would just “vote with their feet” (S. Hayes, 1993b, p. 18). The assumption is that ultimate goals are either of interest to a person or not, but that no justification can be given for them. The appeal to the individual’s interests seems to be more aptly characterized as “subjectivism” rather than some kind of “relativism.” The very fact that these personal interests cannot be defended begins to characterize a kind of subjectivism. However, this

undermines the role that the language “begins and ends as nothing but a social behavioral tool” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Wilson, 2012, p.4) is intended to play.

### **The Dilemma**

Goals come in two types: ultimate goals, and nested, or process goals. As defended in Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, and Wilson (2012), and again in “Analytic goals and varieties of scientific contextualism” (VSC, S. Hayes, 1993b; see also Barnes-Holmes, 2000), no defense of an ultimate goal is given. Hayes, Barnes-Holmes and Wilson (2012) argue:

Because purposes establish the criterion for pragmatic truth, logically they cannot themselves ultimately be right, correct, or true. They can be nested (smaller into larger; process goals into outcome goals), but they cannot ultimately be justified. If truth is a matter of workability, defending the validity of ultimate purposes is a fool’s errand. Outcome goals and values thus must ultimately be stated naked and in the wind. (p. 4)

The contextualist faces a dilemma. On the one horn she must avoid the identification of “successful workings” with an idiosyncratic perspective of an individual or group of individuals. Restricting the assessment of “successful workings” to this individual or group of individuals will increasingly fall prey to a kind of subjectivism. The ability to assess whether some working is successful will uniquely depend upon the behavioral stream of this individual, (Barnes Holmes, 2000; Barnes & Roche, 1997). The importance of the assessment of successful workings, as a social enterprise, will be minimised. The other horn she must avoid is the appeal to criteria that are independent of her immediate project and ultimate goal. These criteria will include for example, simplicity, depth, scope, *modus ponens*<sup>2</sup>, and that the assumptions are coherent. The Contextual Behavior Scientist will need to explain why these broader criteria cannot be used to provide a ranking of the ultimate goals themselves. The contextualist needs to explain how actions towards a goal can be assessed by other individuals without falling on one of the horns of the dilemma. At the same time, the contextualist cannot allow the actions and goals to bleed into each other muddying the very distinction their argument depends upon. (One must wonder what is meant by “cannot ultimately be justified” and in what sense “successful workings” are ultimately justified.)

### **Ambiguity Between Ultimate Justification and Ranking**

The dilemma identified in the preceding section highlights an ambiguity between two readings of the quotation provided at the beginning of that section (see above quote Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Wilson, 2012, p.4). On the first reading, ultimate goals such as demonstrating the usefulness of a specific treatment, having fun, and being honest are not differentiated in their ability to garner evidential support<sup>3</sup>. That is, goals cannot “ultimately be right, correct, or true” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes and Wilson, 2012, p.4). Conversely, workings garner their justification relative to their relation to the goal. Since the contextualist doesn’t adhere to a CTT (in the sense of the naïve realist) goals cannot be “ultimately right, correct or true” (S. Hayes, 1993b; Hayes & Long, 2013; Wilson,

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<sup>2</sup> Wright (1995, p. 212) provides the following example in ethics. Premise 1: Stealing is wrong. Premise 2: If stealing is wrong, conniving at stealing is wrong. Conclusion: Conniving at stealing is wrong. The important point is that if a person holds premises 1 & 2 but does not accept the conclusion a “grotesque rational failing” is exposed.

<sup>3</sup> For purposes of the argument little distinction will be made between goals and ultimate goals. In practice goals can be restated to express possible ultimate goals.

Whiteman, et al., 2013). On the other reading, when two goals are compared there are no criteria to which one can appeal to rank one goal as better or more justified than another. All ultimate goals are equally indefensible. The two different readings ask for different kinds of arguments to support them. In the case of the first reading, “what are the grounds of support” that one can give to an ultimate goal, seems to rely on the fact that we have already dismissed the CTT (naïve realist’s view) as a non-starter (Barnes-Holmes, 2000; S. Hayes 1993b). On the other reading, the claim is that we cannot provide reasons for choosing one ultimate goal over another.

How ultimate justification fails for a goal may affect whether or not a ranking can occur but need not. The Contextual Behavior Scientist’s commitment excludes the ability for the individual to reference an independent, absolute world (i.e., the naïve realist’s view of CTT). That leaves justification as a function of the “anthropological, biological, cultural, and personal histories” (L. Hayes, 1993a), the warp and woof of our social life. Values such as precision, scope, depth, and coherence are expressed in terms of their usefulness in reaching the goal identified in the first sentence of the CHC, “As a functional contextualist sees it, the ultimate purpose of behavioral science is to change the world in a positive and intentional way” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2012, p. 1). The question then becomes whether the verbal community, with resources from their “anthropological, biological, cultural, and personal histories,” have adequate resources to assess goals as worthwhile or not so that a tentative ranking of goals can be justified (Schoneberger’s contingent truth). “Ranking” of goals here does not demand an absolute ranking; rather, given what we know now, our historical context, and the values here and now, one goal can be given reasons for being better, more important, or better justified.

### **Are all Ultimate Goals Equal?**

If, in fact, justification of a “successful working” is a social enterprise as suggested in the previous section, do all goals have the characterization of being idiosyncratic to the behavioral stream of the individual in the relevant manner? The authors of CHC argue that “From this perspective on science, the product of science is verbal” (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2012, p.2). And again, “successful working *must be a matter of contacting verbally specified consequences*” (S. Hayes, 1993b, p. 16, italics in the original; see also Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2012 p. 1). Assessing “successful workings” is always relative to the verbally stated goals, which reflect the interests of the person. On the other hand, ultimate goals can either lead to an infinitive regress of *reasons* or goals, or must end in the seat of the individual’s personal and idiosyncratic sentiments. Clearly the only foundation is that of the personal interests of the individual, the point being that no common evaluative criteria are applicable.

The metaphor of “direction” may provide criteria for getting to destination A by driving a car but is not very helpful in understanding a goal like “having fun.” Some projects, whose value is found in the doing of them, don’t have any clear direction and seem to depend upon the behavioral stream of the individual. My “having fun” is surely dependent on my behavioral stream and subject to my sensibilities. At first glance this may in fact seem to support the CBS’s argument that ultimate goals (values) cannot be justified. “Successful workings” can then at best be assessed if one imaginatively adopts the values system (goals) of that individual.

One might wonder whether goals like “having fun” and “saving a life of a neighbor by phoning 911 for an ambulance” are the same in the relevant manner, in terms of garnering support. (The specificity of “phoning 911 to save a life” need not affect its being an ultimate goal; it could

be expressed in more general terms. The more specific account is used here to bring out the issues that are more easily missed.) “Having fun” is localized to a specific person and the unique behavioral stream of that person. The goal of “phoning 911” to help someone from dying, for example, has a different force. The kinds of “workings” that are implied by “having fun” are uniquely referenced to the specific behavioral stream of the individual who is pursuing the goal of having fun. Phoning 911 in order to save someone’s life has a different pull. With respect to the two mentioned ultimate goals, different answers are forthcoming to the following two questions. “Is it successful?” and “Is the goal relevant, or important, or worthwhile?” Asking whether a specific action is successful for having fun is to ask the person pursuing that as a goal, for example Mary. Asking whether “having fun” is important, or relevant, or worthwhile is to ask Mary whether it is worthwhile for her. In contrast; phoning 911 with the goal of saving someone’s life, is not dependent upon Mary or some specific person. It begins to ask for what are the relevant reasons for saving the person’s life. Similarly, asking whether saving someone’s life is relevant, or important or worthwhile is not dependent upon Mary or some specific person’s idiosyncratic sentiments; even if we change the question to ask whether the life of any person (even if they happen to be a despicable character) is worth saving.

Questioning whether saving someone’s life is important or worthwhile asks what we value as a society and the answer will depend on how our society is structured, who we are as entities that participate in a community, and our use of language to understand and make sense of it. In the case of “having fun,” success is dependent on the person’s unique behavioral stream. In the case of “saving some one’s life,” not phoning 911 has what Lovibond calls a “pull to objectivity.” By giving reasons, and that these reasons play the appropriate part of identifying what “successful working” means here, they take on the role of providing criteria that are outside of the individual’s preferences. These reasons take on the role that facts play when distinguishing good arguments from bad arguments (Lovibond, 1983, p. 72). The reasons we provide refer us back to the normative practices that are in play. In the case of “having fun” there is little room to debate with Mary whether it is successful or worthwhile. In the 911 example, both the workings and the goal can be given reasons for why it is successful or appropriate or not. Yes/No responses are applicable, even if disagreement is the outcome. In the case of “having fun,” the Yes/No response is uniquely dependent upon the behavioral stream of the individual. This difference begins to draw evaluative differences that distinguish between those types of goals that are clearly subject to the localized individual and those which reference the verbal behavior as a communal practice and the kinds of values this implies.

### **Justification as a Social Enterprise**

The contextualist’s characterization of how ultimate goals cannot be justified sidelines the very content that judgements (including value judgements) implicitly make reference to. These values include the shared values (i.e., normative judgements) that are already present in our history of interaction, sharing of a language, and in our assessment of a working as successful. For example, that the Contextual Behavior Scientist’s goals have depth (i.e., don’t contradict claims held to be true in other fields) and are coherent (i.e., don’t contradict claims held to be true in behavior analysis) are criteria that are applicable beyond any specific discipline. Criteria such as depth and coherence tie the Contextual Behavior Scientist to the larger verbal community. Without these common criteria, the Contextual Behavior Scientist would have no relevant tie to us. She will have no apparent history and does not participate in any verbal community we might recognize as ours.

This line of reasoning devalues the very historical situatedness that CBS endorses. The appeal to interests that are idiosyncratic to an individual (or a group of individuals), and an individual who has no contact with a history we can identify with, leaves one wondering how to understand or interpret her behavior (the following section will begin to develop of this line of argument). “Why should we care about what this creature would find compelling? .... After all there is no such thing as a rational creature of no particular neuro-physiological formation or a rational man of no particular historical formation” (Wiggins, 2002, p. 119).

The judgement that depth applies (i.e., that it takes into consideration other bits of knowledge from other fields in a coherent, properly inferential, and useful way), is an example of a judgement that is not restricted to the scientific process. As Jacobs, (2020) argues,

to say one's theory of truth is “successful working” alone is not enough. As S.C. Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, and Wilson (2012) make clear, there are corollaries to their successful working that must be stated and heeded for not just scientific and practical purposes, but for knowledge development itself. Those corollaries include prediction-and-influence with precision, scope, and depth. (p. 175)

The success of any “working” is determined by whether or not, under the appropriate criteria, it is reasonable that the “working” will get you to the goal. What is “reasonable,” and what the criteria are, is in need of explanation. Regardless of how one wants to replace the term “reasonable,” it must at the very least incorporate practices, arguments, and interpretations of common histories (Barnes-Holmes overlapping behavioral streams for example, 2000); that is, values instantiated through practice.

These assessments reflect the resources of the verbal community at large. They are implicit in any assessment in which a verbal interaction is attempting to ascertain whether some proposition holds or is warranted. If they are to be concepts or values at all they must not be context-specific (McDowell, 1996, p. 11). As Jacobs points out they need to be heeded “for knowledge development itself” (Jacobs, 2020, p. 175). If this were not the case one would be left with the odd claim that the kinds of assessments or judgements that are demanded in a specific science, for example, have no grounding in how we interact in other areas. Demonstrating “depth” would lose its ground. The question arises whether the values, as identified by the Contextual Behavior Scientist, can only be used relative to some goal or if they are constitutive of arguments in general, irrespective of a goal. The values identified by Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, and Wilson (2012) are ones without which it would be difficult to understand the world. The very idea that only workings can be assessed demands that we can identify the kind of thing it is, that the concept can apply to it, and that the judgement can apply to it, takes advantage of a judgement that is independent of a mere instrumental analysis.

The contextualist’s argument is in danger here of lapsing into subjectivism. If “successful working” is uniquely determined by the values of the goal setter(s), the insistence that a specific goal needs to be explicitly stated must be seen as providing grounds for the rest of us to assess the activity’s utility. Whatever criteria the term “direction” is intended to capture, the criteria are open to discussion and critique. Counterexamples and reference to other factors are intended to be relevant to whether the application of “success” is appropriate. These same criteria seem not to be relevant when we ask Helen, for example, whether she is having fun and whether it is important to her. This argument ignores how the analysis of “successful working” relative to an outcome already

entails a value statement that is independent of the “explicitly stated, specific, *a priori* goal.” Without this common backdrop of values, discussion begins to break down.

### **Exploring the Interplay of Justification and Social values**

In the following example of a conversation between John and Mary, the breakdown of the conversation is explored. This breakdown is exposed in the relationship of John’s goals and the normative practices that are implicated in providing reasons for those choices (goals).

“John, I don’t understand why you took the mountain road given that you said you wanted to arrive early, (i.e., your goal). Had you taken the bypass you would have arrived earlier and without using as much gas. In fact, given the condition of the mountain road you put everyone in the car in danger.” “Helen, you are right that I did take a slower road, but I realized once on my way that I wanted to see the cliffs off the mountain road.” Notice under this construal, Helen’s arguments are not effective. If Helen’s comments are meant to be critical of John’s choice of “successful workings” they have no bearing on it as John has identified a different interest; one to which Helen’s criteria are not relevant. John always has the option, despite his clearly articulated goal, to change his mind, to ignore his earlier desire or to regard it of no interest to the choice he has made. Helen could respond with the following, “Your choice was clearly unfair. You put everyone in danger. You should have at the very least let the other people in the car know what you were doing and given them a choice. You were very lucky nothing happened” (see the Ruiz and Roche quotes below). John of course might just retort, “It was my car and my gas” or some similar comment. Comments like that make it apparent that he is insensitive to the concerns Helen has mentioned and may be avoiding justification of his ultimate goal. The fact that he is indifferent isn’t the point being made here. The criteria Hayes has identified as allowing us to assess whether or not the direction (choice relative to a specific outcome) someone is taking is successful seems at the very least to be incapable of making a difference unless John is willing to take on a host of values (normative practices) as relevant to his choices; that is, unless he will acknowledge her reasons for criticizing him as reasons for not taking the bypass. The problem is that words like “safety” and “danger” not only have an evaluative connotation but also begin to express descriptive content. If John doesn’t take on at least some of these values how is his reply to be understood? For example, has he misunderstood the meaning of “danger” or “safety?”

As mentioned, John may just be completely insensitive to Helen’s comment which we would typically see, at the very least, as confusing. If John has misunderstood what the terms “danger” or “safety” mean, we should then wonder at John’s response. Saying something like “It was my car and my gas” is clearly attempting to justify his personal desire or interest by providing a reason for his actions. Our confusion arises by trying to reconcile John’s understanding of “danger,” “safety,” and “friendship” with his statement “It was my car and my gas.” Unless one sees John as duplicitous, a straightforward reconciliation is problematic. For example, the concepts “danger” and “friendship” have typically normative content which imply specific actions. John’s response suggests that he doesn’t recognize the normative content of these terms. Notice the “my” in “my car and my gas” is not reciprocal with respect to the passengers; any one of the passengers could have said “What about *my* safety?” The issue is that if John is appealing to a right of ownership, it is difficult to see how he cannot recognize the right to safety of his passengers. Once again, “successful working” seems not to be open to criticism from outside of his goal.



Clearly, any goal suggested by stating “It was my car and my gas” that attempts to provide some justification is not merely a description of how to meet the outcome but is implying something like a right. One need not tax one’s analytical skills too much to see how John’s response here begins to remove him from anything we recognize (see Stroud 1965). Take, for example, the concept of “friendship” (or “danger”). How would anyone understand John’s use of the claim that they are friends when they understand that John had no interest or respect for their safety? Lack of trust that John respected their interest would begin to affect their trust in John’s statements in general. Take, for example, the characterization of the passengers as friends. Mary’s appeal to John to take into consideration the value of “friendship” may not meet its intended target, unless the goal incorporates the same values system of ‘friendship.’ John can, of course, maintain that he did take their friendship into consideration but argue that her concept of “friendship” just differs from his. Assessment of the intermediate or instrumental working is being more and more coopted by John’s goal and begins to lose its grip on how we typically use the term. Further to this, the values inherent with the concepts “friendship,” “safety,” “being reasonable,” and “defining fun,” aren’t here the kinds of backdrops that provide a common starting place for John and Mary to have a discussion. Recall that the term “successful working” is to be assessed as to whether the outcome was met. The difficulty is that if the assessment of the working can only be assessed by the individual any kind of claim of the assessment as being “objective” or common loses its intended weighting. If only John can assess whether or not it was successful, then the assessment cannot be “objective” or common in the relevant manner. Clearly, some goals are more subjective than others. For example, in the case of “seeing their faces” as they approach the cliffs off the mountain road, one might argue that the assessment of whether “seeing their faces” was successful is uniquely dependent upon one person’s view. The question then is how are we to understand the other values John may express and how will they be affected? Any such response is intended for Helen to understand. John expects Helen, at least to some degree, to participate in the values system that appreciates ownership rights and provide reasons for his choice of “workings.” John could of course just ignore Helen’s argument but as we will see that raises a concern with the project.

Regardless of how one understands John’s response, it is unclear that we should take it at face value, and not merely because his retort is one that suggests he is willing to play the language game of providing reasons for his actions. If John is like many (and maybe all of us) he will participate in many different goals, some which may apply more universally and others which only apply in certain contexts. Conditions in which these goals are applicable must surely not only be subject to the situation at hand but also to why they apply here or not here, or why they apply almost always. The relation between these goals and the conditions of their application are clearly those that satisfy conditions of rationality. The definition for rationality needed here is nothing more than I am aware of what I am doing and that it makes sense to me to do it now and here. The “making sense to me” is a very weak rational requirement and is not intended to provide any overarching universal rational rules. The kind of justification needed here is that we are able to justify our behavior to ourselves. The process of ordering goals for oneself implies a rational system of some sort (See Scanlon, 2014, pp 56, 57). It is surely reasonable that if someone provides reasons, if only to themselves, and one holds many different goals, these reasons will to some degree have to be made sense of. This process will need to make use of the language of reasons in general. Of course, John can decide not to play the language game at all but where would that leave him? Without these requirements, it is not clear we would be able to understand what John was saying. In a related matter, Wiggins argues,

(a) that there can be no such thing as meaning unless there is the possibility of the interpretation of subjects by interpreters (and interpreters by subjects); (b) that interpreting subjects have to see one another as party to some however tenuous norm of rationality all departures from which stand in *prima facie* need of explanation; (c) that the idea of such a norm of rationality imports the idea of information, where the discrimination of good from bad information has its rational culmination in belief. (Wiggins, 2002, p 149, italics in the original)

Let's consider another possibility. Had John responded to Helen's criticism by stating "Yah but that would have taken away all the fun" how would the contextualist be able to respond? John's goal was to see their faces as they encountered the dangers off the mountain road. Can the contextualist provide any reason to order goals in terms of those which take precedence over others? Ruiz and Roche argue that the functional contextualist's truth criteria are thoroughly relativistic (Ruiz & Roche, 2007, p. 8). They then go on to state that,

This truth criterion creates an epistemological gulf between contextualists and non-contextualists such that research findings and even methodologies cannot be easily compared (see Barnes-Holmes, 2000). This raises how radical behaviorists and contextualists can assess the value of each other's work and communicate on those matters meaningfully. (Ruiz & Roche, 2007, p. 8).

### **Concluding Remarks**

One way to understand what the contextualist is doing is to recognize that when she outlines her description of the contextualist position she is already incorporating standard uses of arguments to convince us. Her arguments make use of premises and conclusions, they rely on well-established standards such as: consistency within the premise, that the conclusion follows from the premises, and simplicity (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2012) that are seen to express good arguments, and as such they are subject to our appraisal of being good or bad. That is, they already accept a range of epistemic values that appeal to our judgements as exhibiting good or convincing reasons (Putnam, 2002). One objection may be that the argument is beside the point. The real issue is about the action and whether it is going in the right direction, is goal-directed, and the likelihood that it will get there. Even then, how is one to assess this direction? What other kinds of choices are involved? "Is optimal efficiency a consideration?" "Other's well-being?" "Do other attempts or examples play a role, and if they do, what are the kinds of considerations that make them relevant?"

That any view of the world is integrated with other bits of knowledge and can be applied to what we experience more generally is necessary to have a view at all (see McDowell, p. 12, 1997). The ability to use concepts like "behavior" demands that we conform to these other bits of knowledge and is not subject to any individual's subjective beliefs or desires. The use of the term "behavior" demands that we know it applies to living organisms, that it can be observed or potentially be observed, that it can be counted, that behaviors can be distinct, and that there is a start and end to them (there is duration to them), for example. Furthermore, when it is used in other contexts it may be used metaphorically (e.g., cars only metaphorically behave). The ability to use each of these different skills places normative demands on the person who is using the term. These normative demands exert control over the use of words like, "workings," and "goals." In a similar manner, the ability to use the word "friendship" demands that we know it can be applied to humans, and at times to non-human animals, and that we can identify these behaviors; that it entails specific

actions and that these actions can be identified. Certain actions (e.g., lying, cheating, or disregarding a person), are not acts that friends engage in, unless exceptional reasons arise. In each of these cases the normative requirements are not entitled by the subjective desires or idiosyncratic uses of the individual. For example, when the terms “behavior” or “friendship” are applied to a car, and it is not intended to be metaphorical, our confidence in the person using the terms correctly is weakened. Our belief that we understand what they mean begins to waver.

The assessor, as the goal setter, already belongs to a verbal community. Determining whether or not some direction is appropriate, relative to the stated goal, involves participating in the kinds of choices (not only epistemic values) the community already endorses. Assessing the direction, and whether or not it is potentially successful, demands that the assessor accepts the standards set by the verbal community to determine the relevant criteria applicable in each case that is being assessed for “successful working.” If, in the end, it is only the goal setter who can assess whether an action is successful, the demand that the goal be explicitly verbally stated seems to be without importance or at the very least misleading. The two claims of “successful working” and “verbally specified consequences” are clearly an attempt to ensure that some kind of unbiased or common assessment can take place. The question arises as to whether a description of the criteria for successful workings can be described in such a manner as to avoid the kinds of values (epistemic and otherwise) already identified. Graber and Graber (2019, p. 693), for example, point out that the adoption of subjective terms in the Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysis (ABA code) arguably would signal a more general “cost of the linguistic and conceptual rigor of behavior analysis.” They go on to point out that “social validity metrics are already well established in ABA,” and social values are in part a determinate of an intervention (2019, p. 693). In the same manner, normative practices and epistemic values are already implicated when goals are chosen. Take, for example, how providing a person with a break card seems to just fall out of a Functional Analysis (FA) that has identified escape as the function. Once someone has performed the relevant FA the action that is necessary seems obvious. For example, in the case of escape, teach a more appropriate alternative response<sup>4</sup>. The relevant point is that in order for the response to “fall out” demands more than just some kind of operational response. The assessor here must also have some commitment to the FA process itself. The contextualist will find an out here. Given that “successful working” is determined by the direction, the goal is already part of the original activity. For the contextualist this means that to understand the activity, the goal and the commitment to it, provides the criteria to determine whether the direction is successful. The requirement that the goal is explicitly stated is of help only if the criteria that are going to be of use in the assessment are not merely the personalized values of the goal setter. For example, if one questions the outcome of a FA the protagonist must provide a reason why the FA is faulty. Without providing a reason, the protagonist has misunderstood, made an error, or is simply uninformed about what an FA can do. Whatever the reason for disagreement, the reason must conform to both the normative practices of the discipline and the more general normative practices.

The kinds of values the verbal community holds relative to any “successful working” will not be merely epistemic values. As already suggested, values which include other people, and how to behave with respect to them, are already present in the criteria used to assess “successful

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<sup>4</sup> The point isn't intended to trivialize the intervention. More will need to be done that just provide an alternative response

working.” This goes for the assessing of the scientist’s goals as well as assessing some of the more personal goals of an individual.

Given the fact that a goal setter is already participating in a verbal community, one isn’t too surprised that the contextualist is in agreement with these values. Recognizing that these values are not simply hers but just those that the verbal community has accepted, and has good reason to accept for the most part, is to recognize that the criteria that will determine whether something is a “successful working” or not is not merely goal informed. It is unclear that the contextualist can appeal to anything else. Data are already part of the verbal picture to which she is committed. The hallmark of what constitutes a “successful working” is not merely an outcome that is relative to a specific goal of any one individual.

The question is of course how do we understand the criteria of “successful workings?” When someone is assessing whether or not a specific working is a successful working what is this person assessing? The Contextual Behavior Scientist seems to be left arguing that what is being assessed are verbal reports. Regardless of how she makes a determination of “successful workings,” appealing to “how the world is” or some early sensory experience is not in the root metaphor of the contextualist. Regardless of how one defines verbal behavior, the relevant characteristic being questioned is that it comes to us with built-in categories and practice (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2012). If this characterization is correct, the idea that verbal reports are already part of the conceptual makeup of the verbal community has to some degree already taken place. Assessing verbal reports is then dependent upon these conceptual characteristics and practices she already has at her disposal, independent of any specified goal.

The demand that the goals are explicitly and specifically stated is surely to be understood as buttressing a claim of neutrality or, at the very least, criteria that anyone can use irrespective of one’s own personal goals or commitment to them. Neutrality here is not meant to suggest that no perspective is present; rather, that if there is a perspective it is not one that needs to be accounted for at this time. Like Neurath’s boat, any part of the boat can be fixed but not all of it at the same time. The contextualist’s criteria demands that the ability to assess a successful working is not merely an ability that her followers are endowed with but that the greater scientific community, irrespective of their specific goals, can participate in. As such, these criteria are at least part of the kinds of values or commitments the verbal community at large has endorsed. The kinds of arguments and discussions we enter into ask for responses and justifications we expect to be understood due to this shared verbal community and recognizable commitments.

The danger that the contextualist faces is that successful workings look to be (are intended to be) neutral or common criteria, that is, the criteria are more generally applicable. The degree to which the goal is already part of the “original activity” begins to weaken claims of neutrality (in the minimal sense defined above) that “successful workings” might have. Our understanding of whether or not some activity is a successful working will already incorporate the values of the goal as arguments for whether or not the direction is a successful working. The contextualist must worry that the goal might already bias the understanding of “successful workings” and thus not be as neutral or common as implied. If, on the other hand, the contextualist intends to entertain the kinds of values that are appealed to when any kind of assessment is performed or general ones, then the contextualist owes us an explanation of why these same kinds of values (epistemic and others) cannot be applied to the tentative ranking of ultimate goals. Stated in another way, if ultimate goals

are idiosyncratic to the goal setter, then the degree to which a goal is already part of the original activity is the degree to which assessment as a neutral or common activity is confounded.

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