

Instrumental Reasons

There are instrumental reasons to facilitate the realization of anything of value whose realization is not profoundly impossible, regardless of whether it is one of our ends.

1. Some things that we have reason to do we do simply by doing them. In doing so we may also be doing something else:¹ e.g., I can travel to New York only if I first stop talking at this colloquium, get out of my chair and put on my shoes. None of these are essential elements of going to New York, but they are, in the circumstances, preconditions for doing so. Often, however, things are different, and we can perform an action only by performing another action first, one that is not a constituent part of the main action that we can then proceed to perform.² Another example would be, we may turn on the light by flicking the light switch. I do not flick on the light switch by doing anything else. I just flick it on. I do turn on the light by flicking the light switch, the second act being, in the circumstances, a constituent of the first, of my turning on the light (though not of the action-type of turning on the light). Often things are different, and we can perform an action only by performing another action first, one that is not a constituent part of the main action that we can then proceed to perform.³

“When we have an undefeated reason to take an action, we have reason to perform anyone (but only one) of the possible (for us) alternative plans that facilitate its performance.”⁴

Facilitative principle : If I have a reason to be in New York, I have reason either to get out of the chair, drive to New York or take a bus or train. The reasons for taking facilitating actions –
Facilitative reasons.

The way in which facilitative reasons depend on circumstances is that we have facilitative reasons only in circumstances in which the source reason is not defeated. Example: Imagine that I have to choose which of three films, A, B or C, to go to. I can see any, but no other option is available. Imagine further that all three are worth seeing. So I have reason to see each of them, but cannot see more than one today. Finally, let it be assumed that, for some reason, I should see A or B rather than C, but there is no better case for seeing A rather than B, nor the other way round. In this situation, I have reason to facilitate seeing A as well as reason to facilitate seeing

¹ Davidson, “Actions, Reasons and Causes” (1963)

² If the nearest bus stop to New York is at the train station, then going to that location is part of both the plan to get to New York by bus and the plan to get there by train. – Facilitating steps

³ Davidson, “Actions, Reasons and Causes” (1963)

⁴ Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason* (Harvard U.P. 1987, chapter 3).

B, but no reason to facilitate seeing C. For example, I have reason both to buy a ticket for A, and to buy a ticket for B, but no reason to buy a ticket for C. Because it is a good film I still have reason to see C. But because in today's circumstances that reason is defeated, I have no reason to facilitate action conforming to it. This is nothing to do with seeing C not being my end. I have no end, no decision what to do.

Suppose that I resolved my doubts and do intend to see film A. I have reason to facilitate doing this, but do I still also have reason to facilitate seeing film B? The answer depends on whether my intention means that now the reason to see A is stronger than the reason to see B. If it is, the reason to see B is defeated, and I do not have reason to facilitate seeing B. If, however, my intention does not affect the stringency of the reasons for either option, I still have reason to facilitate both. You may ask: since I cannot see both why do I have reason to facilitate both? Given my intention I will not do so, rather I will buy a ticket for A. That will affect my reasons about which film to see. I will have a better reason to see the film I have a ticket for. This means, according to the facilitative principle, that I no longer have a reason to facilitate seeing B, as the reason to see B has been defeated. If, however, I buy a ticket for B, I have reason to change my intention, as now the case for seeing B is stronger than the case for seeing A. ⁵

⁵ Joseph Raz (2005)