



You're Not Trying

ABSTRACT: At one point or another, most of us have been accused of not trying our hardest, and most of us have leveled similar accusations at others. The disputes that result are often intractable and raise difficult questions about effort, ability, and will. This essay addresses some of these questions by examining six representative cases in which the accusation is leveled. The questions discussed include (1) what trying one's hardest involves, and (2) the conditions under which complaints about lack of effort are true, and (3) how much their truth matters. One conclusion that emerges is that both the relevant form of effort and the impediments to making it can vary greatly, while another is that trying one's hardest is less important than trying as hard as one could reasonably be expected to try.

KEYWORDS: effort, attention, willpower, control, responsibility

Complainant: You're not trying.

Accused Sluggard: I am too.

C: Not hard enough.

AS: I'm trying as hard as I can.

Most of us have participated in dialogues like this, both as complainant and as accused. Having done so, we know how intractable the disputes are and how difficult they are to resolve. We also recognize, albeit dimly, the deep and complicated issues that surround the relevant notions of effort, will, and ability. My aim in this essay is to bring some of these issues to the surface by examining a number of representative examples. The questions to be addressed include (1) what trying one's hardest involves, (2) the conditions under which complaints about lack of effort are true, and (3) how much their truth matters.

I

To bring out the range of contexts in which agents can be said not to try, I offer the following six cases.

1. **Hot Reactor.** Ben is a reasonable and cooperative person, but he is a hot reactor. When he encounters a traffic jam, a food spill, or some other minor inconvenience, his first reaction is to bellow and fume. Although he quickly calms down, his outbursts greatly upset his wife

I have benefited from comments by Vida Yao and Wan Zhang. I am especially grateful to my wife Emily Fox Gordon for her very helpful suggestions; for more on Ben and Ruth and the others, see her novel (2009).

- Ruth, and he repeatedly and sincerely promises to resist them. When he fails, as he repeatedly does, *The Dialogue* invariably ensues.
2. *Jaunty Angle*. Ruth abhors filth but is indifferent to mess. Her books, manuscript pages, used coffee cups, and unfolded clothes are strewn haphazardly around the house. Since childhood, her propensity to leave every screw top at a jaunty angle has left a trail of toothpaste smears and pickle juice spills. She periodically resolves to be neater, but rarely notices the disorder that surrounds her. Whenever Ben musters the energy to point this out, his observation funnels them into *The Dialogue*.
 3. *Fairies*. Hayley, Ben's secretary, just cannot get the hang of moving text around in Word. Whenever Ben tries to explain, her mind strays back to her plans to augment the collection of glass fairies that decorate her work space. Despite Ben's efforts to pull his punches, the conversations that ensue are recognizable as versions of *The Dialogue*.
 4. *Unemployed*. Isaac, son of Ruth and Ben, has been between jobs for two years. He occasionally checks in at the Putting Hands to Work office, but is easily discouraged when nothing is available. It sometimes occurs to him to look around on the internet, but his unimaginative searches quickly devolve into gaming. Whenever Ruth and Ben point out that he might display a bit more initiative, *The Dialogue* begins.
 5. *Moving Day*. Charles and Ricia are Ruth's friends, and Isaac is helping them move. To avoid an extra day's charge, they need to return the truck by 9 p.m. This is possible if they work steadily, but Isaac is pleading fatigue and taking increasingly frequent breaks. Finally, with the deadline drawing near, Ricia initiates *The Dialogue*.
 6. *Breaking Through*. Ruth is nearly done with an essay that she has been working on for months. Although the essay holds great promise, Ruth has not fully worked out the relations among its elements, and her facile ending reflects this. When Ricia gently prods her to think harder, *The Dialogue* again ensues.

In each case, there is something—trying—that the AS professes not to be able to do any more of than he is already doing, and my guiding question is when, if ever, such professions are appropriate. However, before I can address this question, I must clarify the somethings that I am dealing with. When these agents say they cannot try any harder, what are they saying they cannot do, and what if anything do their claims have in common? Are there as many ways of trying as there are occasions for *The Dialogue*? Is there a single core form of effort that is common to all the cases? Or does the number of morally important ways of trying lie somewhere between these extremes?¹

¹ One philosopher who inclines toward the view that there is a single core form of effort is Gwen Bradford (2015); she proposes a single unit of measurement—the eff—in terms of which the intensity of any two

II

To work toward answers, it is useful to imagine how some of our dialogues might continue. Suppose, therefore, that the Ben of Hot Reactor, the Isaac of Moving Day, and the Ruth of Breaking Through are each asked *why* they think they cannot try any harder. What kind of answer might each give?

Where the Ben of Hot Reactor is concerned, the natural answer is that his loud expostulations are not within his control. They are as automatic as withdrawing one's hand from a hot burner or blushing when embarrassed. It may be possible to keep your hand on a hot burner if you are prepared for the pain, but it does not seem possible when the pain takes you by surprise. And, just so, Ben may insist that he has no more purchase on his initial expressions of frustration than he does on any of his other reactions to occurrences that take him by surprise. We may imagine Ruth objecting that Ben would not bellow if he spilled his coffee in class or if someone cut him off when the dean was in his car; but we may also imagine Ben responding that the fact that his automatic reactions are restricted to certain contexts does not make them any less automatic.²

The response we can expect from the Isaac of Moving Day is very different. Although he, too, may plead a lack of control, his appeal will be not to the unmanageable immediacy of the situation, but rather to the strenuous efforts that he has already made. His paradigm will be not the reflexive withdrawal of a hand from a hot stove, but the muscle depletion that limits a weightlifter's repetitions. Just as an accumulation of lactic acid reduces the amount of force that a lifter can exert, Isaac will represent the accumulated impact of his previous exertions as reducing the amount of willpower that he can now muster. We may imagine Ricia remarking that Isaac would somehow manage to keep working if he had a gun to his head, but we may also imagine Isaac replying that the need to escape death is a powerful supplementary motivator that is simply not present in the current case.

Ruth's response in Breaking Through will be different again. Whereas Ben and Isaac both know what (not) to do but view themselves as incapable of (not) doing it, Ruth's explanation of why she cannot try harder to end her essay is precisely that she *does not* know what to do. Because insight is a gift—because the muse can be courted but not coerced—Ruth will insist that the understanding she lacks is not something that can be willed. She has already performed all the familiar courting rituals—getting a good night's sleep, rehearsing her argument in the shower, trying out various additions and deletions, and so on—but nothing has worked. Thus, when queried, she will reply that trying harder to find the right ending makes no more sense to her than trying harder to wiggle her ears.³

instances of effort can be compared. Although Bradford is not officially committed to any particular account, she writes, 'my attempts at a further analysis of effort have led me to think that it is indeed primitive' (39).

² I have argued elsewhere (Sher 2009) that agents can be blamed and held responsible for voluntary behavior of whose wrong-making features they are not, but should be, aware. The current case, by contrast, is one in which the agent is aware of the wrong-making features of behavior whose voluntariness is compromised by its spontaneity.

³ The idea that each person has a repertoire of actions that he can perform without doing anything else (and that wiggling one's ears is generally not among these) is explored by Arthur Danto (1963).

Taken together, these examples suggest that there are at least three ways in which an AS can attempt to deflect the charge that he is not trying as hard as he can. To do so, he can argue either that (1) the behavior in question is too automatic to be subject to his will, that (2) although the required acts or abstentions can indeed be willed, he lacks the strength of will to perform them, or that (3) his repertoire of available actions does not include either the required act or abstention itself or any others that will indirectly yield the desired result. I will turn shortly to the question of how convincing these responses are, but before I do that, I will briefly examine their relevance to the other three cases. When we ask how Ruth might extend *The Dialogue* in *Jaunty Angle*, how Isaac might do so in *Unemployed*, and how Hayley might do so in *Fairies*, do we encounter only instances of the patterns of response that have already emerged, or do their best answers take some other form?

Ruth's best answer in *Jaunty Angle* is clearly a variant of our first pattern. When she is asked why she cannot try harder to put things away or screw tops on correctly, her natural response will be that her insensitivity to her surroundings and the habitual nature of her routine movements both serve to prevent these actions from even presenting themselves as possibilities. In this case as in *Hot Reactor*, the most convincing explanation of the agent's inability to try is that there is no moment at which she recognizes the *need* to try. Because they share this feature, both explanations are of the same basic type.

But not so the explanations that Hayley and Isaac seem likely to offer in *Fairies* and *Unemployed*. It is true that when Hayley's thoughts wander from what Ben is saying, the resulting lapse of attention is not something she chooses; but it is also true that we often do choose to concentrate in ways that *prevent* our thoughts from wandering. Although we cannot advance our understanding by brute force⁴—that is Ruth's problem in *Breakthrough*—we often can do so by forcing ourselves to concentrate on what others are saying. Thus, when Hayley loses her focus while Ben is explaining how to highlight the portions of text that need to be moved, her lapse is best viewed as a failure of will, and her claim that she is trying as hard as she can is best understood as a claim that her will is not strong enough to sustain a greater effort at concentration. Here the proper analogue is not Ben's failure to recognize the need to restrain himself in *Hot Reactor*, but rather Isaac's purported lack of willpower in *Moving Day*.

The final example, *Unemployed*, is also the least clear-cut; for the feckless Isaac seems deficient in both imagination and willpower. Given this double deficit, we can imagine Isaac defending his claim that he is trying as hard as he can to find work by arguing either that (1) he cannot think of anything that he might do to increase his chances that he is not already doing, or that (2) he is so discouraged and tired of trying that he just cannot bring himself to do any more. Because the latter argument implies that there are other actions that would improve his chances, the two rejoinders do not seem fully consistent, but that is not a concern here. For present purposes, what matters is simply that whichever rejoinder Isaac makes, his way of extending *The Dialogue* will conform to one or another of our original patterns. It will be analogous either to his own earlier plea of exhaustion

⁴ For penetrating discussion of the limitations of brute force willing, see Leslie Farber (1968).

in *Moving Day* or to Ruth's appeal to her lack of options in *Breaking Through*. Although this hardly shows that the cited three patterns exhaust the field, it does suggest that they demarcate the territory from which any deeper inquiry into the upper limits of effort must begin.

III

When someone says he is trying as hard as he can, his aim is generally to escape some form of blame or censure. Thus, one obvious test of whether the person has successfully defended his claim is whether the truth of what he says in its defense would get him off the hook. Guided by this test, I now turn from the question of what it means to say that one cannot try any harder to the question of when, if ever, such claims are defensible.

My answer to this question is a bit complicated. On the one hand, although I am willing to concede that the class of agents who genuinely cannot try any harder is not completely empty, I do not think that class has many members, and I doubt that those who occupy the AS position in *The Dialogue* are often among them. However, on the other hand, I also think that even when an AS *is* capable of trying harder, it is often possible for him to escape condemnation by invoking his modal situation in a more nuanced and normatively inflected way. In the remainder of my discussion, I defend each claim in turn.

To bring out my reasons for thinking that most AS's are capable of trying harder, I again enlist the roster of familiar characters, beginning with the Ben of *Hot Reactor*. Because Ben's explosiveness has been an issue of long standing, Ruth's complaints about it are bound have a diachronic component. When he erupts and she complains that he is not trying hard enough to control himself, we can take her to mean not only that he is not putting forth a maximal effort right now, but also that he has not previously been doing everything he can to prevent displays like the one to which he is now subjecting her. The fact that her charge has both a diachronic and a synchronic component makes the task of rebutting it significantly harder; for in order to rebut Ruth's charge, Ben will have to establish that he is fully maxed out in both dimensions of effort.

As I have presented it, Ben's explanation of why he cannot try harder is simply that his outbursts come upon him so suddenly as to be anterior to deliberation and will. One way in which Ruth might contest this explanation is by calling attention to the many contexts in which Ben's recognition of what he has reason to say or do is no less immediate than his recognition of the situation that provides the reason. However, to block the implication that he does not need a period of reflection to appreciate his reasons for not blowing up, Ben may reply that he can only think this quickly when his mind is not swamped by emotion. Because this rejoinder is not obviously incorrect, Ben may indeed be on solid ground when he rejects the synchronic version of Ruth's complaint.

But even if he is, the immediacy of his outbursts will at best explain why he cannot try harder to suppress them at the moments when they are triggered. It will not explain why he cannot try harder in the intervals between them to prevent himself from having more of them. To establish that he is trying his hardest in this further

way, Ben would need to show that even in the coolest of hours, he is incapable of performing any (further) actions whose aim is to eliminate or reduce the frequency of his subsequent eruptions. However, despite the obscurity of the causal pathways to this outcome and the uncertainty of the prospects for achieving it, Ben is surely in a position to perform many actions that would have a non-zero probability of success. He might, for example, be able to diminish the force or frequency of his explosions by talking to a therapist, wangling a prescription for tranquilizers, taking up yoga or meditation, pledging to eat another disgusting thing for each additional thirty seconds of fulmination, or simply reaffirming his resolution to Ruth every morning over breakfast. While none of these tactics is guaranteed to work—indeed, even if none seems at all promising—each is something that Ben could do with the aim of eliminating or diminishing the frequency of his outbursts. Because doing A with the aim of bringing about B just is trying to bring about B, they are all ways in which Ben could try harder not to explode.

And just as the Ben of Hot Reactor could make more of an effort to alter the causes of his objectionable behavior, so too could the Ruth of Jaunty Angle. Like Ben's choleric outbursts, Ruth's disorderly ways have been a long-standing problem, and like Ben's outbursts, too, they are rooted in a feature—in Ruth's case, her lack of awareness of her surroundings—that removes them from the realm of will. Just as the recurrent nature of Ben's outbursts will lead Ruth to complain not only that he is not trying his hardest to suppress them when they occur, but also that he has not been trying his hardest at other moments to eliminate them, the recurrent nature of Ruth's slovenliness will lead Ben to lodge complaints of both sorts against her. Moreover, just as the diachronic version of Ruth's complaint is borne out by Ben's failure to do various things that might damp down his temper, the diachronic version of Ben's complaint will be borne out by Ruth's failure to do various things that might cause her to become more aware of her surroundings. She might, for example, have accomplished this by festooning her computer monitor with Post-it Notes, signing up for a course of aversive therapy, scheduling regular reminder phone calls, or authorizing Ben to post photographs of the most egregious of her messes online. Because there are many things that Ruth could do with the aim of causing herself to become less disorderly, the fact that she has not been doing any of them will mean that Ben is right to say that she is not trying her hardest to be neat.

IV

Hot Reactor and Jaunty Angle are not the only cases in which the behavior that elicits The Dialogue takes place over a period of time. The Isaac of Unemployed has not worked for two years, the Hayley of Fairies has repeatedly failed to pay attention, the Ruth of Breaking Through has been working on her ending for weeks, and even the Isaac of Moving Day has been slacking off for hours. In view of this, would not the complaints to which their behavior gives rise also have a diachronic element? And, if so, then would not the fact that they have not been doing

everything they can to alter the problematic behavior also show that they are not trying their hardest?

Although I do think that none of these agents is likely to be trying his hardest, I do not think extending the argument of the preceding section is the best way to establish this. There are, indeed, at least two problems with this strategy, the first of which is that not all of the relevant complaints *have* a diachronic component. When Ricia and Charles complain that Isaac is not trying hard enough to finish loading the truck, they clearly do not mean that he could have been doing more to modify his character or environment in a way that would cause him to rest less frequently. What they are saying is much simpler: that Isaac is not trying as hard as he can to keep working *when he feels the urge to rest now*. And neither, albeit for a different reason, can Ricia's complaint about Ruth include the claim that she is not doing everything she can to cause herself to see her essay more clearly. The reason this cannot be any part of Ricia's complaint is simply that Ruth *is* doing everything she can to cause herself to see her essay more clearly. That, after all, is just what courting the muse is. Here again, Ricia is saying something simpler: namely, that when Ruth is actually writing, she is not doing enough of some elusive but recognizable thing—it could be called *bearing down*—that she will need to do if she is to break through her fog.

The other problem with the strategy of basing the claim that our remaining agents are not trying their hardest on their failure to do everything they can to alter the causes of their behavior is that whatever is preventing them from trying harder now may also have impeded any past ameliorative efforts. This problem is not raised by what I said about Ben and Ruth because the factors that account for Ben's explosiveness are not operative when he is not exploding and the factors that account for Ruth's messiness do not impede her ability to step back and ask how she can improve. However, if the Hayley of Fairies were asked why she has not tried to improve her concentration, she might well reply that figuring out how to do this would itself require more concentration than she can muster. Similarly, if Isaac were asked why he has not taken any steps to alter the pessimism and lack of energy that have been holding him back, he might well reply that he just cannot summon the energy to throw himself into a project that is so unlikely to succeed. When I say that Hayley and Isaac could offer these replies, I do not mean to suggest that they are satisfactory—I think, in fact, that neither is—but I do mean that the proposed strategy is at best a sideways move. Even if we replace the question of whether Hayley and Isaac are trying their hardest to do what is required with the question of whether they have been trying their hardest to become more able to try, we will have to confront some version of the question of whether they are operating at the outer limits of their willpower.

So *are* they operating right at those outer limits? Should we accept Hayley's claim that she just cannot force herself to concentrate long enough to absorb Ben's explanations? Does Isaac really lack the strength of will to keep working until the truck is full (and to keep pounding the pavement until he finds a job)? That depends, of course, on how we conceptualize willpower, but that is not an issue that I can engage with here. Thus, to keep things manageable, I will simply rely on the approach that I find most plausible. Following Richard Holton, I assume that

‘willpower works very much like a muscle, something that it takes effort to employ, that tires in the short run, but that can be built up in the long run’ (2009: 120). Holton’s analogy (which, not coincidentally, is just the one I attributed to Isaac earlier) is appealing for a number of reasons, not the least of which is how well it dovetails with the psychological literature on ego-depletion (for discussion of this connection, see Sripida [2010]). A variety of studies have shown that the amount of effort that a motivated agent can devote to a demanding task varies inversely with the amount of effort he has recently devoted to other (not necessarily similar) demanding tasks.⁵

This suggests that just as each person’s physical constitution imposes an upper limit on the amount of weight he can lift or the speed at which he can keep running over a given span of time, each person’s mental constitution similarly imposes a limit on how much he can concentrate or persevere over any given period. On this view of the matter, our question about Hayley is whether the amount of willpower that she would have to exert in order to follow Ben’s explanation from beginning to end exceeds the amount that is available to her during that span, while our question about Isaac is whether the work he has already done has depleted his stock of willpower to the point where he can no longer persevere. Because Hayley and Isaac exist only in imagination, these questions have no objective answers; but because Hayley and Isaac are stand-ins for the sorts of real-life people who would say the things they say, we can address the questions by imagining what we would say if confronted with people like them.

And what I, at least, would say is what I have already envisioned Ricia as saying to Isaac: namely, that you would somehow manage to keep going if you had a gun to your head. This is surely true, and the Isaac who would have enough willpower to keep going if he were under threat is the same as the Isaac who claims that he cannot bring himself to keep going now. When it is viewed in this light, Isaac’s imagined reply, that having a gun to his head would provide him with additional motivation, will actually work against him; for by implying that he could summon the will to keep going if he were sufficiently motivated, he is in effect conceding that his previous exertions have *not* exhausted his current stock of willpower. Because this is so, and because a similar response could presumably be extracted from Hayley, we may reasonably conclude that neither she nor Isaac is making a maximal effort now.

But what, finally, of Ruth, considered now under the aspect of embattled essayist? When Ruth stares at her monitor—the one that is unencumbered by Post-it Notes—is she also capable of making that extra push that will finally bring the strands of her essay into focus? This question is harder than the others because the gun-to-the-head argument does not work as well here. Because Ruth’s problem is precisely that she does not know how to end her essay, it is far from obvious that her performance

⁵ So, for example, one study compared the problem-solving behavior of one group of subjects who had had to resist the temptation to eat chocolate chip cookies instead of radishes—a form of mental effort—with that of another group whose members did not have to make that effort. When both groups were asked to solve a problem that in fact had no solution, the members of the first group, who had recently had to exercise self-control, did not persevere as long as the members of the second. For discussion of this case and others, see Baumeister et al. (1998).

would improve with a gun to her head; and neither, therefore, is it obvious that this counterfactual supports the conclusion that she is not trying as hard as she can now.

Yet although these things are not obviously true, they are not obviously false either. It has been established by stipulation that before her writing sessions, Ruth does everything she can to make them as productive as possible. However, because what actually goes on during those sessions can itself be decomposed into a further set of (mainly mental) activities, it remains possible that being under threat would motivate her to replace some of the less effective of these component activities with others that are less pleasant but more effective. Spurred on by mortal fear (or by a publisher's deadline or the tenure clock), she might finally be moved to consider abandoning the elegant section that does not quite fit with the rest of the essay, to continue rereading the manuscript until she can finally hold all of it in her head at once, to embrace the disturbingly dark conclusion that she has been shying away from, or simply to stay put until each roughly right next sentence or transitional phrase occurs to her. These are all things a writer can do to bear down, but because they are hard, it often takes willpower to do them. And because the gun-to-the-head test may indeed show that Ruth is not doing as much along these lines as she could, it may also show that she, like Isaac and the others, is not trying as hard as she can now.

V

Yet even if she is not, it does not matter much; for the important question is not whether a person's inability to try harder is sufficient to get him off the hook, but rather whether it is necessary. Moreover, when we ask this question, we find that trying one's absolute hardest is generally not a requirement for avoiding censure. Although a person's efforts are indeed relevant to our ability to blame him, what matters about those efforts is not whether he could try even harder, but only whether they measure up to some independent normative standard.

To see why this is so, we need only remind ourselves of what genuinely trying one's hardest can involve. For one thing, because every moment at which an agent is not performing whatever action he thinks would have the best chance of achieving a desired outcome is a moment at which he could be trying harder to achieve it by performing that action, genuinely trying one's hardest will often require taking some action at every waking moment. In addition, if the best way for agents like Ben or Ruth to alter their future behavior is to commit themselves to undergoing some form of unpleasantness whenever they have a lapse, then for Ben, trying his hardest may require following through on his pledge to eat a bowl of cockroaches or worse while for Ruth it may involve acquiescing in a series of very public humiliations. And, again, even if Isaac were to lug boxes without respite from dawn to dusk in the hot Texas sun, the fact that he would continue through the night if he could thereby gain a fortune or avoid being killed will mean that he is not trying his hardest when he stops after fifteen hours. But, whatever else is true, the efforts that an agent must make if he is to escape censure will rarely if ever blanket his waking hours, rarely if ever involve repeatedly subjecting himself to deep disgust or abject shame, and rarely if ever require

pushing on until he collapses. Even if Ben and Ruth and Isaac could make a lot more effort than they actually do, it is hardly reasonable to expect them to go to these lengths.

To avoid imposing such requirements, we will have to refine the test that we have been using to determine whether an AS's efforts are sufficient to get him off the hook. Instead of taking that test to require that the AS make as much effort as he can, we will have to take it to require only that he make as much effort as can reasonably be expected of him. This is, I think, all that any (sane) complainant has ever really meant, but making it explicit sheds new light on what is really at issue between the parties to *The Dialogue*.

For if what determines whether an AS is subject to censure is not whether he has tried his hardest, but only whether he has made all the effort that he could reasonably be expected to make, then the most likely point of disagreement between him and a complainant is not whether he could have tried harder, but rather whether it was or is reasonable to expect him to do so. When an AS says he cannot try any harder, what he standardly means is not that this is literally impossible, but only that it is either so difficult or so morally problematic or so undesirable in some other dimension that it would not be reasonable to expect him to do it. When it is understood in this way, *The Dialogue* is transformed from a purely factual dispute into a predominantly normative one.

As so transformed, it raises a variety of new questions, both about what determines how much effort any AS can reasonably be expected to make and about how the discussion's normative turn affects what we should say about Ben and Ruth and the others. However, to provide adequate answers to the first set of questions, I would have to say far more about a variety of predictable subjects than I have either space or patience for, while to address the second, I would need to draw both on that discussion and on many details about the six cases that I have not yet provided. To save on both length and tedium, I will not do any of this, but instead will end with a simple and brutal exercise of authorial prerogative. Here, with brief commentary, are my own summary judgments about whether each of our agents has tried hard enough to avoid blame or censure:

1. Ben in *Hot Reactor*: I think Ben is blameworthy, but I am not entirely sure why. I take seriously his claim that his initial outbursts are too spontaneous to be subject to his will, but I also take seriously Ruth's observation that he would not have an outburst if the dean were in the car. We clearly would not hesitate to blame someone whose spontaneous reactions involved punching rather than yelling, and this suggests that there are cases in which the only efforts to alter behavior that satisfy the reasonable-expectation test are ones that succeed.
2. Ruth in *Jaunty Angle*: There is more time to undo a mess than to suppress an outburst, so Ruth has a greater range of potentially effective ways of altering her behavior than Ben. Whether she can reasonably be expected to adopt any of them depends on whether

- she could do so without wrecking her routine or paying an unacceptably high psychic price. I suspect that she could.
3. Hayley in *Fairies*: How much concentration does it take to absorb a five-step explanation? Assuming that Hayley is of normal intelligence, I do not think she has much of a leg to stand on.
 4. Ruth in *Breaking Through*: This is a complex case. Many (though not all) of the ways in which a writer can try harder require some form of intellectual courage, and to that extent, Ruth's failure to bear down does appear to reflect badly on her. On the other hand, because she is strongly motivated to find an appropriate ending for her essay, we may also assume that she has at least considered some of these moves, and hence that at least in her own scheme of things, the benefits they offer do not justify the costs. Thus, overall, whether she could be reasonably be expected to try harder is unclear.
 5. Isaac in *Moving Day and Unemployed*: There is nothing unclear here; some people are just lazy.

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