Desire and Value

in Practical Reasoning

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Contents

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Declaration

This thesis is entirely the original, unpublished and

previously unsubmitted work of the author.

Abstract

Intentional actions are those which are performed because the subject sees something to be said for performing them; the subject sees performing the action "in a positive light". Intentional actions are therefore susceptible to a distinctive kind of explanation, which explains them as intentional; that is, which accounts for them in terms of their unique property, of being performed because the subject sees that there is something to be said for doing so. Practical reasoning is the process of figuring out what there is reason to do; that is, what actions are best supported by the considerations available to the subject. To put it another way, practical reasoning is the process of figuring out which actions there is the most to be said for; so practical reasoning explains intentional action "properly", i.e., in terms of its special properties.

Many philosophers, loosely following the lead of David Hume, have argued for a close connection between desire and intentional action. If desires explain intentional actions properly, then they must do so through practical reasoning; that being the case, how do they do it? Another sizeable group of philosophers, the anti-Humeans, have argued that desires cannot explain intentional actions properly; they claim that desires are not the right sorts of things to appear in the premises of arguments, do not count in favour of any action, do not constitute evaluations of any action, and are in any case too fickle and lawless to take part in distinctively normative forms of explanation.

The central question in this thesis is, what is the role of desire in practical reasoning? I put forward a characterisation of desire which explains how some desires can explain intentional actions properly, and leaves the question open whether all intentional actions are properly explained by desires.

Introduction

1. The Problem in Everyday Terms

Alan is trying to decide whether to go to the cinema, or spend the evening filling in his tax return. "I need to send off my tax return", he thinks to himself, "but that doesn't mean I need to do it right now. I really want see that new film, and tonight is the last showing. I'll go to the cinema tonight, and do my tax return tomorrow."

In this example, Alan is doing something which you will probably find familiar; he is thinking about different courses of action, weighing their advantages and disadvantages, and trying to decide what to do. In the end, he decides that the best option is to go to the cinema tonight, and worry about the paperwork tomorrow. If, later that same evening, we were to ask Alan why he went to the cinema even though he still has to sort out his tax return, he might well say "because I wanted to"; and, chances are, we would find that a satisfying explanation. We would then know that Alan had gone to the cinema because it was what he had wanted to do; and going to the cinema because one wants to seems like a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

An enormous variety of actions and decisions seem closely analogous to Alan's, in this respect. Choices not just about films, but all sorts of pursuits, seem to be settled by what one wants; we read books, listen to music, paint, hike, cultivate, collect and explore, because those are the things that we want to do. By and large, we eat the food we want to, and keep the

company we want to. Mundane activities also seem to be explained by desires; we carry umbrellas because we want to stay dry, or lock the door because we don't want to get burgled. Much more involved and far-reaching projects seem to come down to what we desire, too; if we are lucky enough, we study the subjects which captivate and enthral us, and pursue the career options that we find fulfilling. Certainly, we aim only have romantic relationships with the people we truly, deeply want to.

All this might make one wonder what, if anything, can't be explained by desires. In the example above, Alan's wanting to go to the cinema seems to make it the case that going to the cinema is a reasonable, sensible, justifiable thing for him to do. Would we feel the same way if he had instead wanted to paint himself blue and streak through Wembley stadium? Perhaps not. We might be inclined to think that, although from Alan's point of view there is something to be said for doing so (and we could even agree with him about this), his desire is not a good enough reason to make this sort of eccentricity reasonable or sensible. Then again, we might think that this sort of desire is aberrant or misplaced in some respect; that it is so bizarre and absurd that it cannot possibly reflect Alan's considered view of what is worth doing – and if it does, then Alan needs a stern talking-to. It is most probably just a passing fancy; a whim of Alan's, that would disappear under closer scrutiny, or just dissipate over time.

Let's suppose, then, that Alan's desire to paint himself blue and streak through Wembley stadium is just a temporary foible, and that it would not make sense for him to act on it for exactly that reason; it is a mere impulse which will not last, and does not reflect Alan's more sober view of the sorts of things that are good to do. This seems like a fair diagnosis of this specific case, but it gives rise to important questions; what proportion of a person's desires are in fact passing fancies like this one of Alan's? With regard to those desires which are not whimsical, and which seem, on the face of it, worth acting on, we can ask: are they different in kind from foibles, or is it

only matter of degree? That is, are settled desires just long-lived whims, or do they differ from them in some other respect? If it turns out that deeply-held desires are nothing other than fancies that stick around, we may well wonder if explanations which refer to them are really as satisfying as they might at first seem.

What if Alan had wanted to kidnap the mayor's daughter and hold her to ransom? It seems intuitively plausible that no desire of Alan's could make it the case that kidnapping the mayor's daughter was the thing to do. We watch films or enrol on courses because we want to; we don't kidnap people. The suggestion that Alan might do something like this because he wanted to almost seems to call his state of mind into question; the explanation, "I kidnapped the Mayor's daughter and held her to ransom because I wanted to", does not seem like the product of a sound mind. Or at least, not one with a sense of empathy, or respect for the safety and dignity of others; as an explanation, it sounds flippant to a point somewhere close to criminal insanity. If it would be mad for Alan to act on his desire to kidnap the mayor's daughter, then what makes it sane for him to act on his desire to go to the cinema? Is it anything to do with differences between the desires themselves, or is it wholly to be explained in terms of the difference in their objects? If it is the latter, then we might think that, in fact, explaining actions in terms of desires is not a useful general strategy, even if it works in specific cases.

Let's suppose that on his way to the cinema Alan sees someone struggling to get onto the bus with a pushchair, and stops to help them out. Acting kindly, in this instance, means taking on a minor inconvenience which could permissibly be overlooked, and in doing so gaining no tangible benefit for oneself. Now, assuming there is such a thing as a truly kind and selfless action, helping a stranger onto a bus seems like a pretty good candidate. If Alan were to explain his performing this action by saying "I did it because I wanted to", however, then it would seem as if the initial

assessment were false; Alan was not acting selflessly after all, he was acting to satisfy his own desires. Like Kant's "friend of humanity", Alan was not acting out of kindness or compassion, he was pursuing his own agenda; the stranger was simply lucky that their needs and Alan's happened to coincide on this occasion. It appears that desires cannot be invoked to explain kind actions; acting to satisfy a desire is never the same as acting out of kindness.

This last example is an instance of a much more general problem; whenever a desire is used to explain an action, the desire "pulls focus" in a way that tends to distort the nature of the explanation in a way that can seem counter-intuitive. Alan could have explained his going to the cinema by saying "I'm going to see this film because I like the director's other work" or "because it is likely to be a lot of fun"; that is, he could have explained why he was going to see the film by saying something about why going to see the film is a worthwhile thing to do. If he were to say "because I wanted to", then it is not clear that he would have done this. Strictly speaking, he would not have said anything about the film at all; he would have asserted a fact about the contents of his own mind.

It seems at once undeniable that desire plays an essential role in our decisions and actions and clear that it is incapable of doing so. Which impression is closer to the truth? Why is there such a confusing conflict? Might there be an underlying thread to the sorts of problems I have sketched above? Addressing these questions properly requires setting up the puzzle in a more theoretical framework.

2. The Problem in More Abstract Terms

Intentional actions, unlike tics and twitches, are susceptible to a distinctive kind of explanation, namely, explanation in terms of the subject's reasons for performing them. Susceptibility to this kind of explanation is a defining feature of intentional actions, so these kind of reason-giving

explanations properly explain intentional actions. That is, they explain intentional actions as intentional actions, not as bodily movements or events of some other kind.

This understanding of intentional action is relatively uncontroversial, but it gives rise to a host of much more difficult questions; not least among which is, how are reason-giving explanations to be understood? To what explanatory set-up are we referring when we say things like "S phied because P", or "because they thought that P" or "because they wanted P"? What is the form of a reason-giving explanation?

Practical reasoning is the process of figuring out what to do; weighing considerations, drawing inferences and arriving at practical conclusions. In this sense, "practical reasoning" includes not only those instances where the subject explicitly, consciously considers different options, compares them against each other in light of their merits, and so on; it also covers those cases where it is so clear to the subject what they ought to do, or the action required is so familiar, that no forethought is required. Not just those cases that are analogous to working out that answer to a maths or logic problem with pencil and paper, but also those analogous to just seeing the answer, without writing down any workings-out. Explicit, deliberative practical reasoning occurs when, for example, the subject is confronted with an unfamiliar situation, or the stakes are high, or the balance of reasons appears fairly even. Implicit, intuitive practical reasoning occurs, for example, when the subject is required to perform a simple, familiar task, or when the price of failure is negligible, or when the reasons in favour of one course of action seem to dramatically out-weigh the other[1].

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1 Alan Goldman seems to have this deliberation/reasoning distinction in mind when he begins (Goldman 2009) with the words: "Days, weeks, months go by in which I engage in no real deliberation about what to do. I do not think I am unusual in this regard." He continues: "Practical deliberation is the exception and not the rule, but that does not mean that agents ordinarily act without reasons for what they do" (p.2).

George W. Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 was (probably) the outcome of practical reasoning; but so was his tying his shoe-laces that morning (and, indeed, dodging a flying shoe some five years later).

The justification for thinking about practical reasoning in this broad sense is that it matches the ubiquitous nature of intentional action. If everything from putting one's shoes on to going to war is intentional action, then there is every reason to think that all of those actions are properly accounted for by explanations of the same form. So thinking about practical reasoning in the broad sense sketched above allows us to understand and explain all intentional actions by appeal to a single form of explanation.

Practical reasoning is the process of figuring out what to do, which properly explains intentional action; but what goes on when the subject tries to figure out what to do? In the example at the start of the chapter, it looks as if Alan is constructing an argument which supports one course of action over some alternatives. With minor paraphrasing, the argument could be presented like this:

> P1. I need to fill out my tax return
>
> P2. I want to see the film
>
> P3. I do not need to fill out my tax return this evening
>
> P4. Tonight is the last opportunity to see the film
>
> C. I'll go to the cinema tonight, and do my tax return tomorrow

There is nothing unusual about Alan's reasoning, though it does have one interesting feature (in fact, it has several features worth discussing, but this one is, in a sense, the most fundamental); in this example, Alan does what he wants to do. More specifically, in this instance of practical reasoning, it seems as if Alan's going to the cinema (let's assume he does) is explained in the right way by his wanting to do so. Since going to the cinema is an

intentional action, this looks like a simple, commonplace example of an intentional action being properly explained by the subject's wanting to perform it. Ordinary people conduct reasoning like Alan's all the time; this much seems fairly clear from reflection on our own experiences of deliberation, and observing and discussing those of others[2].

It might not seem as if this is an especially interesting feature, when one considers how many everyday decisions seem to turn on what we want to do, at least to some extent. But the idea that desires can properly explain intentional actions, and that they can do so through practical reasoning, turns out to be rather difficult to make sense of. The core reason for this, which I have tried to bring out in the examples in the previous section, is that in many respects desires seem poorly equipped to take part in reason-giving explanations (i.e., proper explanations of intentional action).

For example, suppose that at 6:50pm tonight the balance of reasons is in favour of Alan leaving the house at 7pm to go to the cinema. If, in the minutes before he leaves, the bus is delayed, or the film screening cancelled, or the last ticket sold, then it might turn out that come 7pm, Alan ought not to leave his house. This seems plausible. It would not seem plausible, however, that if the bus is on time, the screening is going ahead and there are tickets available but an easterly wind is blowing, then come 7pm Alan ought not to leave. And conversely, if at 6:53 the screening were cancelled, we should think that Alan would no longer have a reason to leave his house at 7:00. Nor would it seem plausible if, with no change in the situation whatsoever, the balance of reasons shifts back and forth. If at 6:50 Alan has a reason to leave at 7:00, and nothing else changes between 6:50 and 6:53,

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2 Although there seems to be at least as many different motivations for Humean views as there are Humeans, the claim that the view seems to capture a theory-independent truth about the way non-philosophers reason is flagged as a reason to hold the view by, among others, (Finlay 2007), and (Audi 1989).

then it is reasonable to expect that at 6:53 Alan will still have the same reason to leave that he had at 6:50.

Unfortunately, desires often exhibit exactly these troublesome features; they can arrive or disappear without warning or apparent cause, and persist after they ought to have been satisfied; subjects often desire things that they do not otherwise regard as worth pursuing, and lack desires for things that they judge to be valuable. If desires and reasons for action are intimately related, then it seems plausible that reasons for action would inherit the kinds of instability characteristic of desire.

Put simply, desires do not seem to be responsive to the subject's other mental states, and to their objects, in the way we expect they would have to be were they to play a role in reason-giving explanations. This gives rise to two central issues; the normativity problem, and the problem of self-absorption. Exposing the true nature of these problems, their causes and solutions, is part of the project of this thesis, so no full statement of the problems can be given at this stage. A preliminary characterisation, based on the discussion in this chapter, might go like this:

Normativity Problem: It is not clear how normative conclusions can be derived from desires. Desiring to perform an action does not seem to be a reason to do so; nor does desiring to perform an action constitute a positive evaluation of doing so.

Self-Absorption Problem: When desires appear in practical reasoning or practical arguments, they distort the subject of that reasoning; reasoning from desires tends to be reasoning about how to satisfy those desires. Practical reasoning is not, by nature, reasoning about how to satisfy one's desires; it is reasoning about how to act.

For instance, recall that I defined practical reasoning as the process of figuring out what to do; that is, what there is sufficient reason in favour of doing. Now, notice that when Alan says "I want to see the film" he is not, strictly speaking, saying that there is anything good about, or even worthwhile about, seeing the film. He is stating a quite different fact; the fact that he wants to see the film.

Had he said "I want to paint myself blue and streak through Wembley Stadium", it would be less clear that his doing so was supported by reasons. Had he said "I want to kidnap the mayor's daughter and hold her to ransom", we would have been sure it wasn't. Notice also that Alan is not, strictly speaking, making any claims about the way the rest of the world is, but only about his own desires, it seems as if his reasoning is, in some sense, about his desires. This is clearer if we consider just P2, P4 and the first conjunct of the conclusion:

> P2. I want to see the film
>
> P4. Tonight is the last opportunity to see the film
>
> C. I shall go to the cinema tonight

Here, Alan's reasoning seems to be explicitly concerned with his desires, not with what he ought to do. Insofar as practical reasoning is about reasons to act, Alan does not seem to be reasoning practically at all. Perhaps we should conclude that the example I presented is not actually familiar and ordinary at all – i.e., that reasoning involving desires is really uncommon, dissimilar from ordinary practical reasoning.

Chapter 2

The Self-Ascriptive View

    This chapter is concerned with the simplest, perhaps most obvious way of thinking about how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments, and two main objections to that view. These two objections are particular expressions of the self-absorption problem and the normativity problem. I argue that the normativity problems can, perhaps surprisingly, be overcome, or at least much attenuated; but the shallow self-absorption problem puts paid to the self-ascriptive view.

1. Introduction

    If desires are necessary for practical reasoning, then how do they appear among the premises of a practical argument? An obvious thought would be that, in the premises of every correct practical argument, the subject ascribes a desire to themselves. If this is the case, then it would seem plausible that correct practical arguments would take the form of practical syllogisms, where the major premise is a desire self-ascription and the minor premise is a claim about how to satisfy that desire. From these premises, a practical conclusion to perform an action alluded to in the minor premise (such as, for example, an intention to do so) is inferred.

    The main strengths of this view are its familiarity and plausibility. If you recall the main example from chapter 1, it seemed natural to transcribe Alan's episode of practical deliberation in the form of a practical syllogism with the major premise "I want to see the film". Alan's reasoning there did

not seem unusual; part of the point in that example was to elicit the intuition that most people's reasoning, most of the time, was rather like Alan's. Indeed, self-ascription seems to be the "default" Humean view in the literature; especially in anti-Humean arguments. When philosophers are putting together arguments against those who claim that desires play a special role in intentional action explanation, they typically characterise the view they are opposing as one on which subjects' reasons for action are desire self-ascriptions, or at least involve them in some important sense[3].

Although appealing, this account (which I'll call the self-ascriptive view; see section 2) suffers from numerous problems. The self-ascriptive view claims that subjects reasons from a premise that self-ascribes a desire, and a premise about how to satisfy it; this looks like an argument about how to satisfy a desire, not about what there is reason to do. The basic non-Humean challenge developed in the previous chapter is that desiring to do something is not the same as having a reason to do it; or at least, it is not immediately obvious that they are the same, and it cannot be assumed that they are without serious argument. In the absence of such an argument, it is hard to see how a self-ascriptive practical syllogism constitutes an argument about what one ought to do, rather than merely what would satisfy one's desires.

This concern can be developed in two directions. First, it could be argued that no normative conclusion can be legitimately inferred from a desire self-ascription and a proposition about how to fulfil that desire. Secondly, it could be argued that, even if it were possible to infer normative conclusions from desire self-ascriptions, it is not true that every instance of practical reasoning involves a desire self-ascription. In this chapter, I consider three objections of the first type (sections 3.1, 3.3 and 3.5) and two of the second (section 4.1 and 4.2); I will provide solutions to the first four

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3 See, for example, (Alvarez 2008, sections III and IV), (Alvarez 2009, especially section IV), (Darwall 2001), (Anscombe 1963, section 11), (Dancy 2000 p.35) and (Heuer 2004, section 2).

problems (in the sections immediately following the problems, i.e., 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, and 4.2) which I take to be sufficient to keep the self-ascriptive view on the table, if not exactly conclusive responses. The fifth problem, however, proves decisive.

An objection of the first type is put forward by G. F. Schueler in (Schueler 2003). Here, Schueler targets not the claims of the view itself (not as I have defined it, anyway), but its main strength. He puts forward an explanation of the fact that desire self-ascriptions are very widely available as explanations of intentional action which provides no support for the self-ascriptive view, so undermining the claim that the self-ascriptive view is *prima facie* plausible since desire-self-ascriptions are widely available as explanations of intentional action. I argue that Schueler's explanation is not itself plausible, since it would predict that desire self-ascriptions would not be used to explain intentional actions in the way they in fact are. If Schueler's explanation were correct, then desire self-ascriptions would have very limited application as explanations of intentional action, and it would be impossible to use them in a range of cases where we in fact can and do use them.

The second objection is that the self-ascriptive practical syllogism is an instance of the naturalistic fallacy; desire self-ascriptions and instrumental propositions are mere statements of fact, from which normative conclusions cannot be legitimately drawn. I argue that this objection only works on the assumption that desire self-ascriptions are to be read as simple statements of psychological fact, and that it is very implausible that they should be read this way. Ascriptions of other mental attitudes are not read this way, even when they are used to explain intentional actions properly. I suggest that self-ascriptivists should instead claim that desire self-ascriptions are to be read appositionally; that is, as modifying the part of the sentence which states what the subject wants. This

is a modification of Jonathan Dancy's account of the role of belief self-ascriptions in action explanation, from (Dancy 2000).

Adopting an appositional model for desire ascription, however, brings its own difficulties. The third objection is that, were desire self-ascriptions to be read appositionally, then they would not be part of the reason for which the subject acts, and therefore need not appear in the premises of the subject's practical argument. In fact, some version of this objection could probably be found for any account of how desires feature among the premises of practical arguments except the crude reading of the self-ascriptive view, according to which desire self-ascriptions are to be read as statements of psychological fact. I argue that, unlike belief self-ascriptions, desire self-ascriptions make a difference to the role which the premises they appear in can play in a practical argument; therefore there is a reason for them to appear in the premises of a practical argument. Finding out exactly what difference they make, and justifying the claim that they do make some such difference, depends on the possibility of giving a fuller account of what desires are and how they come to be normatively significant, which I will not attempt until chapters 5 and 6.

So much for the problems relating to normativity. The fourth objection is that if, as the self-ascriptive view claims, subjects necessarily reason from their desires, then subjects must necessarily be selfish. Since not everyone is selfish all the time, we can tell that the self-ascriptive view is false; it is committed to a false account of the psychology of reasoning and action. I argue that it does not follow from the claim that subjects necessarily reason from their desires that they are necessarily selfish, since selfishness is a matter of what one desires, and how one weighs one's own interests or welfare against that of others. The self-ascriptive view does not, and indeed should not, have any commitments about what desires subjects actually act on, and hence cannot be committed to portraying subjects as selfish.

The fifth and final objection, again from Schueler, is that the self-ascriptive view is committed to the claim that correct practical deliberation necessarily involves the subject entertaining a desire self-ascription as a consideration which counts in favour of action; yet it seems clear that not every instance of correct practical deliberation includes the subject thinking about what desires they have, at all. As such, the self-ascriptive view is committed to a false view of the psychology of reasoning and action. Schueler's objection, it seems to me, poses an insurmountable obstacle to the self-ascriptive view; there is no way to overcome it without relinquishing one or more of the distinctive claims of the self-ascriptive theory. I argue that the best way to respond to the objection is to claim that even correct practical deliberation need not match the practical argument to which it corresponds word-for-word; if it must, then it would be impossible to give the same explanation of an intentional action in different tenses, which seems absurd. What matters is that the deliberation and the practical argument agree about the states of affairs and relations between them that explain the intentional action properly. Allowing this to be so, however, does not help the self-ascriptivist, since it makes it hard to understand why even the premises of the practical argument must involve a desire self-ascription. This response bodes well for other versions of the Humean theory of practical reasoning, however.

2. The Self-Ascriptive View

The self-ascriptive view follows quite naturally from commitment to three separate claims, none of which are particularly unfamiliar and only one of which, (b), is controversial. It is the simplicity and plausibility of these claims which motivates the self-ascriptive view; so although proponents of the self-ascriptive view tend to hold (a-c), they are not commitments of the

view itself. Two straightforward and explicit commitments of the self-ascriptive view, (d) and (e), are explained at the bottom of this section.

(a) Intentional Action

Some actions are performed for reasons; that is, the subject takes it that there is something to be said for performing the action, and therefore does so. These are usually called "intentional" actions. Many philosophers think that intentional actions are an important class of actions, but that not all actions are intentional; others have argued that to be an action at all means to be performed for a reason. An action is intentional when some consideration that the subject takes to count in favour of performing the action, leads to its being performed; that is, when what leads the subject to perform the action is that they take it that there is a good reason to perform it. This entails that normative reasons, considerations that count in favour of performing certain actions, must in some sense or other be capable of motivating subjects to perform them.

(b) The Humean Theory of Motivation

Desires are a necessary (but insufficient) condition for action. Subjects only act when they have a desire which the action promises to satisfy, and it is the desire which provides the motivational impetus necessary for action. What exactly desires are remains, for the time being, an open question; at this stage it is safe to say that they are non-cognitive, satisfiable mental states. It has been claimed that desires have distinctive phenomenal characteristics[4], that they typically tend to produce pleasure

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4 See, for example, (Sidgwick 1892), (Schueler 1995, p.9), (Shaw 1992) and (Schiffer 1976), which is discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, and in (Schueler 1995, chapter 3).

when satisfied or discomfort when frustrated[5], and that some desires tend to direct one's attention towards their objects[6]. All of these claims are very contentious, and play significant roles in the debate between the Humeans and non-Humeans over motivation and practical reasoning. There is a further dispute over whether, when a desire seems to be what counts in favour of performing an action, it is the desire itself that counts, or the object of desire, or the future state of pleasure or relief which satisfaction of the desire promises. For the purposes of this chapter, no terribly precise definition of desire is required (giving an account of desire is a major part of the project in chapter 4-6).

(c) The Correspondence Thesis

"[F]or every intentional action there is a corresponding practical argument" (Audi 1989, p.108). Practical arguments are those which present considerations in support of a practical conclusion. The practical argument which corresponds to the performance of a particular intentional action by a particular subject is the one which structures the episode of practical reasoning by which the subject comes to act. A practical argument structures an episode of reasoning when, were the subject to reason their way to action with a high degree of consciousness and explicitness (i.e., were they to employ deliberative rather than intuitive reasoning), then they would be "running through" that argument. (The relationship between practical arguments and practical reasoning is discussed further

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5 That there is a connection between desire and pleasure and/or relief is a tremendously widespread assumption, although the nature of the connection is by no means agreed upon. See (Fehige 2001, section 1) for a list of philosophers from many different backgrounds who share some version of this assumption.
6 Scanlon discusses the capacity of some desires to direct one's attention in (Scanlon 1998, p.43).

in chapter 3 section 6; for the purposes of this chapter, all that is required is the assumption that making claims about the premises of practical arguments entails commitments about the mental states involved in practical reasoning.)

It is natural to infer from (a) and (b) that, in the case of intentional action, the subject's reason for acting is that they have some desire which might be satisfied by so acting, and that this counts in favour of acting that way.

(d) Self-Ascription

The first claim of the self-ascriptive view is that the correct way to express a desire in the premises of a practical argument is through self-ascriptive phrases like "I want" or "I desire".

From (c) and (d), it follows that whenever there is intentional action, the corresponding practical argument will feature as a premise a proposition which self-ascribes a desire, like "I wanted...", or similar. Given this fact, along with (b) and (d), it seems plausible that correct practical arguments would be practical syllogisms which desire self-ascriptions as major premises:

(e) The Self-Ascriptive Practical Syllogism

Correct practical reasoning takes the form of a practical syllogism, where the major premise is a desire-self-ascription.

Major Premise – the motivational premise: I want to phi.
Minor premise – the cognitive premise: My A-ing would contribute to realising phi.
Conclusion – the practical judgement: I should A

Because simple syllogisms like this can be built up into longer sequences known as poly-syllogisms, the practical syllogism can be thought of as the most basic unit of practical reasoning, out of which much more complicated arguments might be composed. This seems to be what Robert Audi means when he describes the practical syllogism as the "most basic schema" for practical reasoning. According to (a), in the case of intentional action, whatever it is that the subject takes to count in favour of performing the action, is what motivates them to act. (b) states that what motivates the subject to act is a desire which might be satisfied by so acting; so by combining (a) and (b), we arrive at the claim that, in the case of intentional action, what the subject takes to count in favour of acting is a desire which would be satisfied by so acting. This is the fundamental commitment that any Humean theory of practical reasoning must seek to defend, in some shape or form. So it is crucially important, from the perspective of finding a working Humean theory of practical reasoning, to be clear about whether prospective objections show that it is impossible to hold both (a) and (b), or whether they bear on something else that is commonly held along with (a) and (b), such as (d). To put it another way: it is important to be clear about whether a prospective objection counts against all Humean theories of practical reasoning, or just some particular version, such as the self-ascriptive view.

(Of course, it might be argued that Humeans ought not to advance theories of practical reasoning at all; that the Humean account is more properly suited to giving more basic, psychological explanations of action, not the sort that are distinctive of intentional action. In the next chapter, concerned with Pettit and Smith's view, I will argue that the Humean will not find a more stable position by retreating into the background.)

3. Three Expressions of the Normativity Problem, and Responses

The basic anti-Humean challenge, as sketched in the previous chapter, can be summarised as the claim that desires are not the right sorts of things to explain intentional actions properly. Regarding normativity, the problem is that desires can appear not to be normatively significant; wanting to do something is not the same as, and may be wholly unrelated to, having a reason to do it. In the previous chapter, I glossed that objection as the claim that desires are fickle; they come and go seemingly without explanation, and their objects are not up to the subject to decide. They lack the sorts of connections to their objects, and to the subject's considered evaluative standpoint, that seem to be required if they are to take part in proper explanations of intentional actions.

In this section, I will set out three different ways of developing this basic opposition into a philosophically interesting objection. The first is a kind of "debunking" explanation of the intuitive appeal of the self-ascriptive view; Schueler aims to show that self-ascriptive theorists have correctly ascertained that desire self-ascriptions are always available for explaining intentional actions, but they have overlooked the fact that the explanations in which desire self-ascriptions are always available are not explanations in terms of practical reasoning, and are only available because they do not ascribe genuine desires. So the fact that intentional actions can always be explained by desire self-ascriptions does not support the view that desire self-ascriptions necessarily appear in the premises of good practical arguments. The intuitive appeal of the self-ascriptive view is thus "explained away".

The second objection is that the self-ascriptive practical syllogism arrives at a conclusion about how things ought to be from premises about how things are; it is a form of the naturalistic fallacy. The third objection, which applies to the self-ascriptive view but also affects the Humean

theory more broadly construed, is that mental attitudes do not explain actions; at best, their contents do. More precisely, Dancy objects that we can recognise cases where a mental attitude (i.e., the state itself, as distinct from its content) explains action, and they are noticeably different from ordinary cases of intentional action; so it cannot be true that actions are explained by mental attitudes, such as desires.

The self-ascriptive view can respond to the first two objections without significantly changing the view itself. I will argue that Schueler's debunking explanation does not succeed in undermining the *prima facie* plausibility of the claim that desire self-ascriptions are always available. Schueler claims that desire self-ascriptions explain intentional actions by conveying the idea that the subject has adopted a project of which the action in question is a component part; but they do not express a commitment on the part of the subject to the claim that there is any reason to adopt that project in the first place, and hence that there is any reason to perform the action. Therefore, according to Schueler, desire self-ascriptions do not explain intentional actions properly. I will argue that this part of the argument is implausible; in the most familiar types of cases where "I want to" is used to explain an intentional action, it seems clear that the subject does commit themselves to the idea that there is something to be said for performing the action.

The second objection, that the self-ascriptive practical syllogism is an instance of the naturalistic fallacy, is easily overcome by demonstrating that the objection only works if the desire self-ascription in the major premise is to be read at face value, as an assertion of a psychological fact, and that this is a contrived and unnatural way to read it. I will suggest, based on Dancy's claims about belief ascriptions, that desire ascriptions are to be read appositionally; that is, as qualifying the proposition which specifies the reason for which the subject acts, not as stating that the reason for which the subject acts is a mental attitude.

The third objection is primarily directed against the self-ascriptivist who does, in fact, read self-ascriptions appositionally. If one reads desire ascriptions in explanations of intentional action appositionally, then it appears that they and, by extension, the attitudes they ascribe are not part of the reason for which the subject acts. There are other ways of reading attitude ascriptions in explanations of intentional actions, and the self-ascriptive view is not wedded to the appositional model; I will argue, however, that an analogous objection can be deployed against any account of how one is to read desire ascriptions which holds that they are not to be read at face value. More important is what a proponent of the Humean theory of practical reasoning (but not specifically the self-ascriptive view) ought to learn from the responses that are available to the self-ascriptive view, and the efficacy of this third objection against it. I will argue that the best response for the self-ascriptivist is to argue that desire self-ascriptions make a difference to what inferences can be drawn from the premises in which they feature in a completely different way to belief self-ascriptions; though the self-ascriptive view, lacking any substantive characterisation of desire, cannot justify or even fully elaborate this claim. So the third objection reveals that the self-ascriptive view is insufficient as a characterisation of the role of desires in explaining intentional actions properly.

3.1 Schueler Debunks the Appeal of the Self-Ascriptive View

According to Schueler, proponents of the self-ascriptive view have correctly noticed that it is always true to say of a subject who acts intentionally, that they wanted to do what they did; from this, the self-

ascriptivists infer that the reason for which the subject acts is their wanting to, and hence that their wanting to must be recorded in the premises of their practical argument. Schueler argues that the self-ascriptivists have jumped to their conclusion. The reason why it is always true to say of a subject who acts intentionally that they wanted to act as they did is not that every intentional action is properly explained by the subject's wanting to perform it. Rather, it is because every intentional action has a purpose, and the English phrase "I want to" can be used to express the idea that one is acting with a purpose. So the fact that it is always true to say of the acting subject that they want to act as they do only amounts to the claim that the acting subject always acts with a purpose. In the sense in which it is true to say that every acting subject wants to act as they do, this fact does not entail that every subject who acts intentionally has a genuine desire to act that way, since having a purpose in acting does not entail having a desire. The self-ascriptivists have correctly ascertained that the phrase "I want to" can be used to explain any intentional action, but mistakenly assumed that the phrase explains intentional actions through practical reasoning; according to Schueler, the phrase "I want to" can play a role in a different form of action explanation, called teleological explanation. In this section I will briefly explain what Schueler takes teleological explanation to be, and his claim that intentional action is necessarily teleological, then evaluate his argument for the claim that the self-ascriptivists have mistaken teleological explanation for explanation in terms of practical reasoning. The point in offering such an argument is that it helps to undermine the *prima facie* plausibility of the claim that desire self-ascriptions explain intentional actions properly, which is both one of the main motivations for the self-ascriptive view, and a useful defence against objections which aim to expose the view as implausible, rather than impossible.

Teleological explanations represent intentional actions as contributions to or efforts towards a project or goal. That is, not as segments

of an occurrent action, but as steps or stages in the completion of a task, or the achievement of a goal. Not all intentional actions are literally parts of longer intentional actions, like phases of a journey. My reading Schueler's book can be understood as a contribution to the much, much longer project of writing my thesis, even though this need not entail that, as I read "*Reasons and Purposes*", I am literally writing my thesis. Schueler views teleological explanations in this way, as relating intentional actions to goals.

Alan's running for the bus can be given a teleological explanation, for example; it can be understood as a step towards his goal of seeing the film. From the observer's perspective, this gives us a way of grasping what Alan is doing; his catching the bus is part of a planned sequence of actions and events of which Alan's goal is the eventual outcome. From Alan's perspective, it makes sense for him to run for the bus in light of this goal; he needs to catch the bus in order to get to the cinema in time to buy a ticket before the screening starts, so he can see his film. Running for the bus is an early stage in his overall plan to see his film (probably one which was added in response to changing circumstances, but part of the plan nonetheless). Of course, it is not essential to the idea of a teleological explanation that more than one intentional action is required to achieve the subject's goal; Alan's running could be teleologically explained by relating it to his goal of getting to the bus stop before the bus leaves, and remaining silent about his overarching goal of seeing the film.

Schueler argues that for every intentional action, it must be possible to give a teleological explanation. This is because intentional actions are performed for reasons, and reasons are considerations which count in favour of action in light of some end. For example, the bus's leaving soon is a reason for Alan to run if he intends to get to the cinema on time, but not if he doesn't. Moreover, Schueler claims that it will nearly always be possible to formulate a teleological explanation by using phrases like "I want to phi". This is because of the double meaning of the English word "want".

Sometimes, "want" is used to ascribe or express a genuine desire, but sometimes it is used in a weaker sense, to express the subject's having a plan about what to do (or in the second-person case, below, the plan we think they ought to have, or that we are imposing on them). For example, we use "want" in phrases like "I really want a cup of good tea right now", or "I want my team to win!", but we also use it in phrases such as "I want to finish this assignment before I leave tonight", "you want to turn left at the traffic lights", or even "you don't want to do that". In these cases, it does not seem plausible that the word is being used to refer to a genuine desire. The second-person cases make this especially clear; when giving directions, it is not normal to pass comment on the mental states of the person to whom you are speaking, but it is quite normal to use locutions such as "you want to take the next right".

In these cases, Schueler claims that "want" is used to express the idea that there is a reason to act in the way the speaker says they or their interlocutor want to; "you want to turn left at the lights" really means "you ought to turn left at the lights", or perhaps the weaker claim, "there is some reason for you to turn left at the lights". Similarly in the first-person case, "I want to finish this task before I leave" means "I ought to" or "there is some reason for me to finish this task before I leave". In this sense of "want", it will be true of any subject who acts intentionally that their action can be properly explained using a "want" phrase; but this does not count in favour of adopting the self-ascriptive view, since the explanations in which desire ascriptions feature are teleological ones, not proper explanations of intentional action. A "proper" explanation of intentional action is one which reveals the subject's appraisal of the action as normatively supported by some further considerations; a teleological explanation, in Schueler's sense, merely relates the action to some further goal or pattern of activity to which it contributes. It's a further question whether there is a reason to pursue that goal; and if the goal itself is not

worth pursuing, then the fact that the action contributes to its fulfilment is no reason to perform it. Schueler objects to the possibility of "bootstrapping" reasons into existence by adopting goals that are not themselves supported by reasons.

According to Schueler, then, "I want to" is always available as an explanation of intentional action because it is a way of giving a teleological explanation, and every intentional action is necessarily susceptible to teleological explanation. The self-ascriptivists argue that "I want to" is always available as an explanation of intentional action because it is a way of ascribing a desire to oneself, and every intentional action is necessarily explained properly by the subject employing a practical argument which includes a desire self-ascription as its major premise. So Schueler and the self-ascriptivists offer competing explanations of a phenomenon that they agree exists; the ubiquity of "I want to" as an explanation of intentional action. The point in offering a competing explanation of the fact that "I want to" is universally available as an explanation of intentional action is to undermine any support the self-ascriptive view might derive from that fact. As such Schueler does not (so far as this argument goes) aim to show that the self-ascriptivists' account of the phenomenon is incoherent, or even obviously false; rather, he offers a different account which we ought to prefer on the grounds that it carries less substantial commitments regarding our understanding of practical reasoning and the explanation of intentional action.

3.2 Undermining Schueler's Debunking Explanation

Unfortunately for Schueler, his teleological explanation predicts that phrases like "I want to" would be used to explain intentional actions in a way that's quite different to how desire ascriptions are actually used. Schueler claims that when these phrases are used to explain intentional

actions teleologically, they do not provide proper explanations of intentional action. He argues that when "I want to" is used to teleologically explain an intentional action, it does not provide a proper explanation of that action, because it is not a way of expressing the claim that there is some reason to adopt the end to which this action contributes (and if there is no reason to achieve some end, then the fact that some action is a means to that end is not a reason to perform it).

One way to respond to this argument would be to show that desire self-ascriptions in fact explain intentional actions properly; this would establish the truth of the self-ascriptive view (or justify the adoption of self-acriptive commitments as part of a wider view), and so render Schueler's argument redundant. But there is an easier option on offer. The self-ascriptivist is only interested in defending the claim that the availability of desire ascriptions to explain any intentional action properly makes the self-ascriptive view *prima facie* plausible (which Schueler attacks by offering an alternative explanation of the fact that desire ascriptions can always be used to explain intentional actions). In order to defend this claim, it is only necessary to show that ordinarily desire ascriptions are used as if they were proper explanations of intentional action; agreement with our ordinary explanatory practices is a rich vein of *prima facie* plausibility. Then, if Schueler were to maintain that his teleological account of the explanatory role of desire self-ascriptions is correct, he would have to give us a convincing reason to accept that our everyday explanatory practices misuse desire self-ascriptions. I will first put forward an example of how desire self-ascriptions are used to explain intentional action, then offer an analysis of the example which purports to show that the speaker (i.e., the one who gives the explanation of the action) either intends their explanation to account for the intentional action properly, or else is saying something incoherent.

Sometimes, often in the early hours of the morning, it strikes me that it would be really good to have a treacle sponge pudding; I vividly imagine the taste and the texture, and it feels to me as if having one is, simply, the thing to do. When I get this feeling, I often decide to make a treacle sponge pudding. When my flatmates ask me why I am rooting about in the cupboards for mixing bowls and flour and suchlike, I tend to say "I want a treacle sponge, so I'm going to make one!".

In this example, it seems natural to say that my desiring a treacle sponge explains my actions. Certainly, it seems as if my flatmates ought to be and would be satisfied with my explanation. Moreover, when I explain my action by saying "I want to", I do not seem to be offering the sort of explanation that, for example, a Freudian psychoanalyst might give of my action (I harbour a deep-seated and dimly understood desire for treacly desserts as a result of an unsavoury experience in my formative years – I'm not giving that kind of explanation). And I do not seem to be giving the sort of explanation that a neuroscientist might give; I'm not using the term "desire" to gesture towards some pattern of brain activity. Nor am I giving a mere characterisation of my behaviour; when I say I am looking in the cupboard because I desire a treacle sponge, I seem to be saying something more than that this is the thing which I am doing, or which I tend to do. And even though I explain my action by reference to a desire, I am not saying that I'm just compelled to act, or that I have in some way given in to temptation against my better judgement.

In short, in appealing to my desire to explain my action, I do not seem to be offering a "sub-optimal" or "apologetic" explanation of what I am doing; on the contrary, I seem to be offering the most familiar, most illuminating sort of explanation of my action that there is. It seems that my desire explains my intentional action properly; that is, it explains my action by revealing to the observer the positive light in which I saw my action. Or if you prefer, it explains my action by making it known to the

observer what I saw to be said for acting this way. I take it that there is nothing strange about this example; we are all familiar with the phenomenon I am describing here, and the sort of explanation it makes available. These examples are quite commonplace.

In the treacle pudding example, I distinguished between two kinds of explanation of intentional action, which I shall call "primary" and "alternative" explanations. Primary explanations commit the speaker to endorsing the evaluations that lead the subject to act, whereas alternative explanations do not; so alternative explanations are offered when the speaker does not intend to commit themselves to sharing the subject's evaluations. Alternative explanations are those which are ordinarily only offered when the primary explanation is unavailable. Discovered false belief cases provide the most obvious examples. For instance, imagine a subject who mistakenly takes home the wrong coat after a party; they might explain their action by saying "I thought this was my coat, but it turns out isn't." Here, the speaker is the same person as the subject, but at a later time; and here, the speaker does not want to endorse the judgements made by the subject, so they offer the kind of explanation which does not commit them to endorsing the judgements the explanation makes use of. In referring to the subject's beliefs, the speaker would not be committing themselves to the thought that there was in fact any reason for the subject to take that particular coat; but this is consistent with the explanation showing that the subject saw their action in a positive light.

On the assumption that it is always more informative to explain an action by reference to what really is valuable, to correct evaluations and to endorsements where possible, it is clear that primary explanations will be offered in preference to alternative explanations, because they have greater explanatory worth. When we ask why a subject is acting in such a way, part of what we want to know is whether there is a good reason for them to act like this, so that we can take that reason into account in our

own reasoning, and so that we can learn something about the evaluative perspectives that we and others ought to have. As such, if our interlocutor is being sincere and helpful, then they will prefer an explanation which reveals to us what reasons there are to act; being fallible themselves, the best they can do is to prefer those explanations which can be given using evaluations which they themselves endorse.

If there really is a distinction to be drawn between primary and alternative explanations (and I take it there is), then primary explanations must always be intended as proper explanations of intentional action, since the speaker takes the subject's evaluation of the considerations which favour their action to be correct, and to explain their action properly. The important question, then, is whether desire self-ascriptions are typically offered as primary or alternative explanations; if they are typically offered as primary explanations, then our explanatory practices treat desire self-ascriptions as if they explain intentional actions properly, and the self-ascriptive view can draw plausibility from that fact. If they are typically offered as alternative explanations, then at best the issue will be undecided and at worst it will favour Schueler's teleological model. This is because I have left it open whether alternative explanations are used to properly explain intentional actions or not. The difference between a primary explanation and an alternative explanation depends on the speaker's endorsement of the evaluations used in the explanation, not on whether or not the explanation succeeds in accounting for some intentional action properly. This being so, if desire self-ascriptions are used in alternative explanations, then it will still be the case that we cannot be sure, so far as this argument goes, whether they properly explain intentional actions or not; so Schueler will have succeeded in undermining the *prima facie* plausibility of the self-ascriptive view (or rather, this response will have failed to stop him).

In a purely statistical sense, it would be true that desire self-ascriptions are typically used in primary explanations if the majority of instances of explanation by a desire self-ascription are primary explanations. So far as I can tell, there is no data available on how desire ascriptions are actually used, in this sense. In light of this deficit, I will instead aim to show that there are familiar ways of using desire self-ascriptions to provide primary explanations of intentional action. This will not be enough, of course, to show that desire self-ascriptions must be primary explanations, or that all primary explanations must be given by desire self-ascriptions; but what is at stake here is the *prima facie* plausibility of the self-ascriptive view, not its truth.

Primary and alternative explanations of intentional action differ not just in the way they relate the speaker's and subject's evaluations to each other, but in terms of the practices of asking for and giving explanations in which they are embedded. That is, we can tell when an explanation is being given as an alternative. This holds true in the case of desire self-ascriptions; when a desire self-ascription is used to explain an action, we can tell whether or not the speaker endorses the subject's evaluation of their action. We can tell because speakers make it clear if they do not endorse the subject's evaluations, because it is (or at least, when it is) in their interests either as sincere and helpful interlocutors to be understood to hold only the evaluations that they in fact endorse. This is especially clear in the case where the subject and the speaker are one and the same; a speaker who intends to give an alternative explanation of their own action is at pains to distance themselves from what they now recognise as a mistaken evaluation, and this will be reflected in the way they present the explanation. Alternative explanations of one's own action are often accompanied by, or included as part of, apologies; or are qualified using phrases the emphasise the passage of time between the action and the giving of the explanation; or come with explicit rejections of the

evaluations employed at the time. We use phrases like "I'm sorry, I just wanted to...", "at the time, I wanted to...", or "I wanted to... which I now see was wrong of me". Moreover, it appears that in the absence of any attempt by the speaker to make clear that the explanation on offer is an alternative one, not a primary one, it is natural to infer that the speaker endorses the subject's evaluations. This, I presume, is because primary explanations have greater explanatory power than alternative ones, and in conversations where there is a presumption of co-operation, we tend towards better explanations over poorer ones.

When desire self-ascriptions are offered as explanations of intentional actions, it will nearly always be the case that the speaker and the subject are the same person. This could only fail to be so if the speaker has made some sort of mistake, or if the reason for which the subject acts is someone else's desire self-ascription, which would not be a case of a desire explaining an intentional action by playing a special role (see chapter 1 section 3). In those cases where the subject and the speaker are the same person, if they offer an alternative explanation of their action, then either they must be offering an explanation of their action after the event, or else they are caught up in some incoherence or self-deception. Alternative explanations are given because one does not endorse the evaluations that lead to the action, and hence cannot sincerely offer a primary explanation; so to give an alternative explanation of an action one is in the process of performing would imply one sees nothing to be said for performing the action. If the subject were aware of anything to be said for performing it, even a reason they take to be insufficient, then that could be offered as a primary explanation. Since an intentional action is one which is properly explained by the subject's seeing it in a positive light, it would appear that if a subject can give only an alternative explanation of an action they are performing, then it cannot be an intentional action at all. So any case where a subject is performing an intentional action which

they explain by using a desire self-ascription must be an instance of using a desire self-ascription as a primary explanation.

So, explanations which make use of desire self-ascriptions are nearly always spoken by the subject; there are some explanations of one's own actions which must be offered as primary on pain of incoherence; in any case, it is natural to presume that explanations are primary explanations unless we are given a reason to think otherwise; and there are familiar, accepted ways of flagging an explanation as alternative, which are easy to recognise. From this, it seems to follow that there are two classes of cases where desire self-ascriptions must be primary explanations: those where the subject offers a desire self-ascription as an explanation of an action they are currently performing, and those where the speaker speaks sincerely, is not mistaken, and does not mark out the explanation as an alternative. The existence of these two classes of case provides some justification for the claim that desire self-ascriptions are typically used as primary explanations of intentional action; which is to say, desire self-ascriptions are usually intended to explain intentional actions properly. This provides the self-ascriptive view with a source of *prima facie* plausibility in the face of Schueler's debunking argument. Furthermore, if the above argument is correct, then Schueler would have to provide a different account of the explanatory practices I have mentioned, or an explanation of how and why it is that they are in error.

It might be thought that were the self-ascriptivist to offer the above response, they would be making a very substantial concession to Schueler. The strength of the self-ascriptive view comes from the idea that it is a necessary truth that whenever intentional action takes place, it can be properly explained using a desire-ascribing phrase like "I want to"; all I have shown is that it usually can be, and that desire-ascribing phrases are normally used in that way. This is a far cry from the very general claim the self-ascriptivists started out with.

The argument I offered above provides a basis from which to defend the much stronger claim. The self-ascriptivist would need to endorse my distinction between primary and alternative explanations; and the claim that whenever a desire self-ascription is used to explain an action, it must be offered as a primary explanation (on pain of incoherence); and that every intentional action can be explained (not necessarily properly) by using a desire ascription. If it is always possible to explain an intentional action using a desire ascription, and desire self-ascriptions are always proper explanations (incoherent subjects notwithstanding), then unless there is some reason to think that an explanation of an intentional action using a desire ascription could be offered third-personally but not first-personally, then it follows that every intentional action can be properly explained by a desire self-ascription. For example, suppose Alan is running for the bus. Since his action is intentional, it can be explained using a desire ascription phrase, like "he wants to". If Alan were to offer such an explanation himself, then it would be a primary explanation, and hence would have to be a proper explanation (unless Alan were lying or deeply confused). There is no reason to think that Alan could not offer this explanation himself; so it is possible to explain Alan's action properly by reference to a desire self-ascription.

I take it that every subject is like Alan, and that therefore the following hypothetical claim is true: if the subject is sincere, coherent, not affected by some complicating factor which would make it inconceivable for them to offer in the first-person an explanation of their action which is available from a third-person perspective, and it is possible to explain that intentional action (in any sense, not necessarily properly) using a third-person desire ascription, then it will be possible to properly explain their intentional action using a desire self-ascription. This is still not quite the very general claim that every intentional action can be properly explained

using a desire self-ascription, but at least it covers what might be called the "normal" cases of intentional action.

3.3 The Naturalistic Fallacy

Practical reasoning is the process of figuring out what to do; that is, what there is reason to do. Assuming there are such things as reasons, it makes sense to assume that it must in principle be possible for subjects to be right about what reasons there are to perform a particular action. That is, it must be possible for subjects to reason in such a way that their reasoning is structured by a sound practical argument[7]. That being the case, it is reasonable to require of a theory of practical reasoning that it does not make it impossible in principle for a subject to reason correctly. If there wasn't at least the possibility of reasoning correctly about what to do and then as a result actually doing it, it is hard to see what the point could be in engaging in such reasoning in the first place.

The self-ascriptive view claims that correct practical arguments have as their premises a desire self-ascription and a proposition which states that performing some action or type of action is a way to satisfy the desire. From these, according to the self-ascriptive view, it is legitimate to infer a normative, practical conclusion. It could be objected, however, that neither a desire self-ascription nor an instrumental proposition has any normative significance, so a normative conclusion cannot be legitimately

7 The question of what it means to act for a good reason (i.e., on the basis of a consideration which really does count in favour of acting that way) is a particularly vexed one, which I do not intend to enter into here. For the purposes of this chapter, it is best to understand Schueler as claiming that it must be possible for subjects to reason in such a way that their reasoning is structured by a sound practical argument, and not to worry too much about what it takes for a practical argument to be sound. The key text on this problem is (Dancy 2000), where Dancy argues that understanding what it means to act for a good reason requires us to renounce the common ground in which the disagreements between Humeans and cognitivists take place. As such, I think it is best to regard the debate about what it means to act for a good reason as orthogonal to the debate between Humeans and their opponents with which this thesis is concerned.

inferred from them [8]. A desire self-ascription is claim about what psychological states the subject is in, and the sort of instrumental proposition described above is just a claim about the relationship between actions of a certain class and a particular outcome. Neither of these says or need entail anything about what the subject ought to do.

3.4 Evading the Naturalistic Fallacy

One way to remedy the naturalistic fallacy directly is to regard the afflicted piece of reasoning as if it is missing some premises, and treat it accordingly. In the following example, the original argument on the left is fallacious; adding the missing premise produces the argument on the right:

P1: There is a shortfall in the NHS budget.	P1: There is a shortfall in the NHS budget.
P2: The shortfall could be met by raising taxes.	P2: The shortfall could be met by raising taxes.
	P3: There is a reason to bring about any state of affairs in which the NHS has more money to spend.
C1: Taxes ought to be raised.	C1: Taxes ought to be raised.

So far so good. The practical syllogism, however, is not readily susceptible to this kind of treatment. In the example above, P1 describes a deficiency in an aspect of the world described by the argument; in that sense, P1 is analogous to the motivational major premise in the practical syllogism. P2 connects a state of affairs with a consequence of that state obtaining, much in the same way as the minor premise in a practical syllogism connects an action (the bringing about of a state of affairs) to a

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8 The naturalistic fallacy is traditionally attributed to philosophers who attempt to analyse goodness in terms of some natural properties. G. E. Moore coined the term in his objection to J. S. Mill in (Moore 1903). For discussion of this issue see, for example, (Nowell-Smith 1954), Searle (1964) and (Frankena 1939). Schueler and Stroud press the naturalistic fallacy on the Humeans in (Schueler 2003, p.92) and (Stroud 2011, ch.4).

desire (which would be satisfied by that action). P3, the extra premise, is a hypothetical imperative which links P1 to the state of affairs described in P2, by stating that there is a reason to bring about any state of affairs in which the deficiency described in P1 would be less severe, of which the action described in P2 is one. But the conclusion, C, follows from P2 and P3 alone; if there is a reason to do anything that would free up NHS money, and a certain action would, then there is a reason to perform that action, regardless of whether the NHS needs the money or not.

Major: I want to phi	Major: I want to phi
Minor: Psi-ing is a way to phi	Minor: Psi-ing is a way to phi
	Evaluative: If an action is a way to phi, then there is a reason to do it.
Conclusion: I ought to psi	Conclusion: I ought to psi

The major premise is superfluous to requirements; the conclusion follows from the minor and evaluative premises alone. Introducing an evaluative premise in order to rid the traditional practical syllogism of the naturalistic fallacy renders the major motivational premise inoperative, purging the syllogism of its characteristic structure as well.

The self-ascriptivist could respond by modifying their characterisation of the practical syllogism so that the conclusion is not a judgement about what the subject ought to do, but is something more practical and less normative, like a statement or expression of an intention. Not "I should A" but "I shall A", or even "I A". Statements of intention are not straightforwardly normative; they do not seem to make claims about what the subject ought to do, but only what they will do. In response, it could be argued that even if the conclusion of the self-ascriptive practical syllogism is not a judgement with normative content, the explanation of the subject's action which the practical syllogism is supposed to provide had better be a normative explanation, or else it will not explain the

subject's intentional action properly. Intentional actions are those which are performed for reasons, and hence which are properly explained by revealing what the subject saw to be said for acting that way. Even if the conclusion of a practical argument is a non-normative statement of intention, it must be possible to refer to the practical argument in order to properly explain the subject's intentional action; it is hard to see how this could be possible if (as the proponent of the naturalistic fallacy objection claims) the premises of the argument are not normatively significant, but are mere statements of fact. So even if the practical syllogism (suitably altered) is not, strictly speaking, an instance of the naturalistic fallacy, if it were the case that its premises are not normatively significant then the self-ascriptivist would still face a problem. As such, both this problem and the naturalistic fallacy proper could be solved by showing that a normative conclusion can be legitimately inferred from the premises of the self-ascriptive practical syllogism. Therefore I will refer only to the naturalistic fallacy objection for the remainder of this section.

The naturalistic fallacy objection to the self-ascriptive view crucially depends on the claim that desire self-ascriptions are to be taken at face value, as reports of psychological facts. Only if this is so can it be objected that the premises of the self-ascriptive practical syllogism are (both) mere statements of matters of fact. The objector claims that desire ascriptions are to be read at face value, as reporting non-evaluative facts, and hence are not normatively significant; the self-ascriptivist could agree that if desire self-ascriptions were to be read at face value, then they would be normatively insignificant, and then go on to argue either that since desire self-ascriptions are normatively significant, they must not be read at face value, or that desire self-ascriptions are not to be read at face value (for reasons not dependent on the claim that they are normatively significant), and therefore might be normatively significant. Pursuing either option requires the self-ascriptive theorist to put forward an argument for the

claim that desire self-ascriptions are normatively significant; I will not present any such argument on behalf of the self-ascriptive theorist until the end of this section, after the objections to the self-ascriptive view have been made clear. I am going to look into the second option first, since showing that desire self-ascriptions are not simple statements of psychological facts might give us some insight into how, or in virtue of what features, they could be normatively significant.

It is always fair to assume that a statement should be read at face value unless there is a reason to think otherwise; in the case of desire self-ascriptions, however, there is such a reason. We can see this by considering the role that self-ascriptions of other mental states are sometimes put to in action explanation. If self-ascriptions of other attitudes sometimes feature in the explanation of intentional actions and are clearly not to be read at face value, then there will be a good reason to think that desire self-ascriptions are not to be read at face value either.

For example, consider the recent debate between Dancy and Hyman regarding the role of knowledge in the explanation of intentional action[9]. Neither think that knowledge ascriptions should be read at face value, though they offer different reasons for thinking this. Dancy argues that ascriptions of knowledge, belief, certainty, etc., are to be read "appositionally"; that is, as qualifying the proposition known/believed/etc., not as introducing psychological facts. Dancy claims that sentences like "he ran because he believed the bus was about to leave" should be treated as if they mean "he ran because (so he believed) the bus was leaving". The function of the self-ascription is usually to allow the speaker to make or withdraw commitments to the truth of the proposition which is supposed to be the reason for which the subject acted. A speaker who says "his reason for running was that the bus was leaving" seems to commit themselves to

9 See,for example (Hyman 2010), then (Dancy 2011), then Hyman (2011).

the truth of the proposition that the bus was leaving[10]; this commitment can be cancelled by inserting "as he believed" into the sentence. But the insertion of this phrase should not be understood as changing the speaker's claim about what the subject's reason was. In either case, the speaker claims that the reason for which the subject acts was that the bus was leaving; in the former case, they present this as a truth, and hence a good reason for action, whereas in the latter (where they use a belief self-ascription) they do not commit themselves to its truth, and hence do not present it as a good reason for action. They do not, however, present the subject's belief as the reason for which they acted, even when they use a belief ascription to explain their action.

Hyman also thinks that ascriptions of knowledge or belief should not be read at face value. Discussing an example in which the subject is going to the train station to meet their daughter off the train, he writes ""My reason for going to the station is that I believe that my daughter is arriving on a train" does not mean that I am being guided by a fact about my state of mind" (Hyman 2011, p.365). Regarding the ascription of knowledge, Hyman writes that when the subject knows something to be the case and acts in light of that fact, "if he knew that [the world was a certain way], we can say *either* that he [acted] because he knew that [the world was a certain way] or that he [acted] because [the world was that way]. In this kind of explanation, knowledge is transparent: we can look straight through it to the fact" (p.367). Much like Dancy, Hyman argues that employing an attitude ascription does not (or at least, does not necessarily) commit one to the claim that the reason for which one acts is the attitude itself, rather than its content.

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10 In fact, Dancy claims that in using this particular formulation, the speaker does not make even a cancellable commitment to the truth of the proposition which is the subject's reason. This strikes me as false, and a straw poll of friends and colleagues reveals that it seems false to them, too.

Of course, there are important differences between desiring, believing and knowing, which might make it difficult, even impossible, for a proponent of the self-ascriptive view to make use of either Hyman's strategy or Dancy's. Hyman's strategy is much more complicated, depending as it does on a particular account of knowledge as an ability, and on related claims about the nature of proper explanations of intentional action. Since there is no apparent connection between either of these required grounds and the Humean view, I will not go into Hyman's account any further; it is primarily interesting for my purposes in that it provides another example of attitude ascriptions in action explanation not being read as reports of psychological facts. Having said that, Hyman's mysterious claim that when the subject knows some fact and acts in light of that fact, we can "see through" the knowledge to the fact known, could shed some light on how a Humean theory of practical reasoning should proceed. I will try to explain what I think Hyman means, and how it relates to the Humean project, after the third objection (below).

Dancy's appositional view seems more readily adaptable to Humean purposes, though it still poses problems. For a start, part of the point in reading attitude ascriptions appositionally is that it allows Dancy to claim that the attitude ascription is not part of the reason for which the subject acts; the reason is the content of the attitude, nothing to do with the attitude itself. If the self-ascriptivist is to make the claim that desire self-ascriptions are to be read appositionally as a way of showing that desire self-ascriptions need not be read at face value, then they will also need to provide some reason for thinking that the self-ascriptions need feature in practical reasoning at all.

If explanations featuring desire ascriptions can be rewritten appositionally, then the view that desire self-ascriptions in action explanations are to be read appositionally will at least be available, even if it turns out to be false for some other reason. When we rewrite a belief-

ascribing explanation appositionally, we take the proposition which is the content of the belief and present it as the reason for which the subject acts, then present the belief ascription as qualifying that proposition. In the case of desire-ascribing explanations, there is not (or does not appear to be) a proposition which can be separated from the desire self-ascription. From "he believes that the bus is leaving", we can separate the proposition "the bus is leaving"; but from "he desires another cup of coffee" we get "another cup of coffee", which is not a proposition.

One might argue that we should use a proposition which specifies what the subject wants, such as "he comes to have another cup of coffee to drink"; or in the first-person case, "I come to have another cup of coffee to drink". Then the desire self-ascription can be inserted appositionally in one of a number of ways: "I come to have another cup of coffee, as I desire"; "As I desire, I come to have another cup of coffee", "I come to have, as I desire, another cup of coffee", etc.. All of these are grammatically correct, but hardly sound like natural, idiomatic English; in particular, none of these alternatives sound anywhere near as clear and familiar as "I want another cup of coffee". Since the question at issue here is in what sense should we understand desire ascriptions, not how they should be phrased, it seems reasonable to think that the familiar form of desire ascription is as suitable as any other. What matters here is whether we can (in fact, whether we do) read desire ascriptions not as reports of psychological facts, but in some other way.

In the propositions above, I have used the phrase "come to have" rather than the more natural "get", since the former phrasing implies that the proposition specifies a way in which the world might be changed by the subject, rather than simply a way the world might be. The propositions being discussed here are intended to play the role of major premises in a practical syllogism, so they have to specify goals; i.e., states of affairs which might be brought about by the means specified in the minor premise. Even

so, it must be said that even "I come to have a cup of coffee" seems more like a prediction than a goal; and moreover, it does not appear to be an evaluation of my coming to have a cup of coffee. That is, the subject who uses this proposition in their practical reasoning does not, to that extent, seem to see their coming to have a cup of coffee in a positive light. Although non-Humeans may argue that having a genuine desire for something doesn't constitute seeing it in a positive light either, there is at least an argument to be had there; at first blush, desiring something does seem to be a way of holding it in a positive light. Merely entertaining the thought that it will happen, as a subject would when their practical reasoning included a proposition like "I come to have another cup of coffee", does not even appear to be a way of holding it in a positive light (see also chapter 6 sections 2 and 3, where I develop this line of thinking into a response to several non-Humean accounts of desire).

The idea that propositions like "I get a cup of coffee" seem to be predictions suggests a way of understanding how desire ascriptions are supposed to qualify these propositions in a way which would be useful in action explanation. According to Dancy, a belief ascription employed in intentional action explanation is not to be read as a statement of psychological fact, but as a qualified statement of the subject's reason, which is the proposition believed. The role of belief ascriptions is to allow the speaker to suspend or withdraw their commitment to the truth of the proposition which is presented as the subject's reason for acting. It could be argued that desire ascriptions in intentional action explanation are not to be read as statements of psychological fact either, but rather as qualified statements which specify the subject's reason for acting. A belief ascription allows the speaker to present the subject's reason for action without endorsing it as a good reason; that is, it allows the speaker to cancel or withhold a commitment to the truth of the proposition which is the reason for which the subject acts. A desire ascription allows the speaker to present

the performance of some action or the coming about of some state of affairs not merely as an open possibility, but as the one the subject views in a positive light (if, of course, desiring something constitutes seeing it in a positive light). The proposition "I go to the cinema this evening" simply specifies a state of affairs which does not yet obtain; a way the world might be. Asserting it would amount to a prediction. The proposition "I want to go to the cinema", when the desire self-ascription is read appositionally, is a positive evaluation of a going to the cinema this evening.

If desire ascriptions can in fact play this role, then there might be justification for the claim that desire ascriptions feature in the premises of practical arguments. Explanations in terms of practical reasoning, being proper explanations of intentional action, are supposed to reveal the positive light in which the subject sees their action. If the role of desire ascriptions (read appositionally) is to make a mere prediction into a proposition which specifies a goal the subject sees in a positive light, then it seems plausible that desire ascriptions should appear in the premises of practical arguments. In this respect, desire ascriptions are very different from Dancy's belief ascriptions; but that should come as no surprise, since the ascribed attitudes are completely different.

Of course, offering this sort of account of the role of desire self-ascriptions in practical reasoning depends on the claim that desiring to do something does in fact constitute seeing it in a positive light, which anti-Humeans will deny. The point, however, is that by employing Dancy's appositional model for understanding attitude ascriptions, the self-ascriptivist can shift the point of disagreement away from the role of desire ascriptions, to the normative significance of desires generally. This suggests that, although there may be problems with the claim that desires explain intentional actions properly (at all), there is no further, particular problem with claiming that they do so through self-ascriptive premises

appearing in practical reasoning. This is at least a moderate victory for the self-ascriptivist.

3.5 Appositionally-Read Self-Ascriptions are not Reasons for Which the Subject Acts

A third objection, put forward this time by Dancy, purports to show that it cannot be the case that every reason to act is an attitude ascription, since those cases where the reason for which the subject acts is an attitude ascription can be distinguished from ordinary cases. Above, I suggested that the self-ascriptivists can avoid any suggestion that their practical inferences are naturalistically fallacious by claiming that desire self-ascriptions are to be read appositionally. This third objection poses a particular problem for that view, since it seems to show that if attitude ascriptions are read appositionally, then they are not part of the reason for which the subject acts; and therefore presumably need not appear in the subject's practical argument. So the self-ascriptivist faces a dilemma: accept that desire self-ascriptions are to be taken at face value and that, therefore, the self-ascriptive view commits the naturalistic fallacy; or else claim that they are to be read appositionally, and that, therefore, they need not be part of the reason for which the subject acts, so the self-ascriptive view erroneously claims that desire self-ascriptions are necessary for practical arguments.

It does not appear to me that the self-ascriptive view can overcome this line of objection without considerable modification, if at all. Below, I set out what I think it would take for the self-ascriptive view to surmount this objection, and a reason for thinking that the objection could be modified to apply to any version of the self-ascriptive view which holds that desire ascriptions are not to be read at face value (even those which do not claim they are to be read appositionally). More importantly, I will argue

that a similar objection applies to any version of the Humean theory of practical reasoning (though with less dramatic effects). As such the proponent of any Humean theory would be well-advised to shape their account with this sort of concern in mind. At the beginning of the section 4, I will show that Dancy's objection brings to light a different sort of problem which poses a potentially much greater difficulty to the proponent of the Humean view.

3.6 Response to Dancy's Objection

One might find the claim that desires (or indeed beliefs) play a special role in explaining intentional actions properly to be problematic, for the following reason: assuming that proper explanations of intentional actions are given by presenting the reason for which the subject acts, when a mental attitude explains an intentional action properly, it must be the reason for which the subject acts. If a mental attitude of a given type is required for intentional action (as Humeans say about desires, or some cognitivists say about beliefs, for example) then it follows that the reason for which a subject acts is always an attitude of that type. But, they say, we can tell when the reason for which a subject acts is a mental attitude; those cases are unusual. In fact, they are downright weird. It simply cannot be true that every instance of intentional action is an instance of one of these odd cases; everyday experience makes it clear that this is not so. Now, if the self-ascriptivist responds as I have suggested they should, by claiming that the desire ascription in the explanation is to be read appositionally, then the proponents of this objection will claim that the desire ascription is not part of the reason for which the subject acts, at all. To say that the desire ascription is to be read appositionally is to say that it is to be understood as modifying or qualifying the subject's reason, which seems to entail that it is distinct from that reason. If the desire ascription is not part of the

subject's reason itself, then there does not seem to be any justification for claiming that the desire ascription should ever be among the premises of the subject's practical argument, never mind the claim that it necessarily must be.

The point behind this objection is that the only way in which an attitude ascription can be part of the reason for which the subject acts, is if it is read at face-value; and where attitude ascriptions are read at face value, the explanations they give rise to are too odd to plausibly be part of the mainstream of human life. For example, take Dancy's "crumbly cliff" case. Dancy describes a subject who is preparing to scale a cliff, and believes that the cliff is unstable. The subject decides not to climb the cliff, since they think that their belief that the cliff is crumbly might make them hesitant or overly cautious, which may result in them making mistakes and getting injured. It is not the case that they choose not to climb for the reason that the cliff is crumbly; rather, they choose not to climb for the reason that they believe that the cliff is crumbly. This is, according to Dancy, what it means for a mental attitude to be the reason for which the subject acts[11]:

> Consider a case where my reason for acting is genuinely that I believe that p. For instance, that I believe that the cliff is crumbling is my reason for avoiding climbing it, because having that belief I am more likely to fall off (I will get nervous). This is a case where that I believe what I do is genuinely my reason for action, in a way that is independent of whether the belief is actually true. As I might say, whether the cliff actually is crumbling or not doesn't matter. I believe that it is crumbling, and this alone is sufficient to motivate me to stay away from it. I recognize that if the cliff were not crumbling, I

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11 By way of comparison, see Hyman's views on knowledge and knowledge ascriptions (Hyman 1999, especially p.440-1)

would still have just the same reason not to climb it as if it were,
so long as I continue to believe it to be crumbling. But this is a
quite unusual situation, not at all the normal case. (p.124)

The possibility of reading desire ascriptions appositionally seems to
give the self-ascriptivist an easy response to this objection. They can agree
with Dancy that the subject in the crumbly cliff case is doing something
odd, but claim that the oddness derives from the fact that in their
reasoning (as Dancy explains it) the attitude self-ascription has to be read
at face-value, and this is not how attitude ascriptions are usually read.
There is a truth to this which Dancy will readily acknowledge; it is his view,
after all, that attitude ascriptions are usually to be read appositionally. But
he also thinks that attitude ascriptions are not part of the reason for which
the subject acts, which is why they are to be read appositionally. The
crumbly cliff example only works as an objection if it is grounded on the
claim, which Dancy takes himself to be justified in making, that if a mental
attitude turns out to be the reason for which the subject acts, then the
ascriptions which appears in the subject's practical argument will have to
be read at face value.

The self-ascriptivist cannot accept this claim; that is, the self-
ascriptivist must argue that not even the attitude ascriptions which appear
in practical arguments are to be read at face value. They are to be read in
some other way; perhaps appositionally. In that case, Dancy would object
that the self-ascriptivist will have to explain why it is that attitude
ascriptions should be understood appositionally even though they feature
as part of the subject's reason; the point in reading them appositionally,
from his point of view, is to show that they are not part of the subject's
reason, but merely qualify it.

In order to overcome the objection, the self-ascriptivist would have
to put forward a good reason for thinking that appositionally-read desire

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self-ascriptions must feature in practical arguments. Reading attitude ascriptions appositionally has three alleged benefits; it avoids shifting the focus of the explanation from the object of the attitude to a psychological fact, it allows us to see that attitude ascriptions modify or qualify the part of the premise which corresponds to the content of the ascribed attitude, and that they are not part of the reason itself (according to Dancy, at least). The self-ascriptivists will want to keep the first two features while finding some way around the third. This may be problematic since, on Dancy's construal, the second feature is evidence for the third as much as for the first; the fact that attitude ascriptions qualify the part of the sentence which corresponds to the contents of the ascribed attitude, is evidence for the claim that the ascriptions themselves are not part of the subject's reason, only their contents are. Perhaps the most promising line of response for the self-ascriptivists is to show that the qualifications imposed by desire ascriptions make some difference to how the subject's action is to be explained, and that difference is best expressed or recorded by having the desire ascription appear in the premises of the practical argument. The self-ascriptive view claims that desires, which make a difference to what there is a reason to do, are best featured in the premises of practical arguments through self-ascription. The response I just suggested holds that whether or not a desire for some non-obtaining state of affairs can be ascribed to a subject makes a difference to whether or not that state of affairs (qualified by a desire ascription) can be used to explain their intentional action properly; that is whether that state of affairs qualified by a desire ascription is one of the premises from which the subject reasons their way to action.

In exploring how to understand desire self-ascriptions appositionally, above, I gestured at some ways in which desire self-ascriptions change the role played by the phrase which the self-ascription qualifies. It appears that desire self-ascriptions, to put it loosely, make goals

out of mere possibilities; a desire ascription marks the difference between the thought that a certain course of action is available, and a positive evaluation of it. A proper elaboration and defence of this idea will have to explain how (i.e., in virtue of what features) having the desire which the ascription refers to constitutes seeing some action in a positive light, which means going beyond the confines of the self-ascriptive view as I have represented it here. I have characterised the self-ascriptive theory as primarily an account of the featuring relation; that is, an account of the relationship between a desire and the premise in the subject's practical argument to which it corresponds. The self-ascriptive view as I have set it out says nothing about what desires themselves are, but only makes claims about how desires are related to the premises of practical arguments.

The self-ascriptive view as represented in this chapter does not have the resources to meet this challenge; the important question is whether the view can be augmented in such a way that it can overcome this objection. I will remain agnostic about whether it can or not; partly because it turns out that the best ways to engage with this objection also militate against the self-ascriptive view (see chapter 5), and partly because the objections discussed in the section 4 present much more direct, pressing problems for the self-ascriptive theory. In the last sections of this chapter, therefore, I will attempt to set out what I think the proponents of non-self-ascriptive Humean theories of practical reasoning can learn from this objection to the self-ascriptive view, and the measures that the self-ascriptive view can take to defend against them.

4. Selfishness and the Self-Absorption Problem

Dancy's "crumbly cliff" case gestures at a different and more problematic issue for the self-ascriptive view, and the Humean theory of practical reasoning more generally, which is that, normativity problems

aside, the theory seems committed to an implausibly self-centred psychology of reasoning and action.

Supposing we understand the crumbly cliff case in the way I have suggested: the climber's reasoning is odd not merely because it involves a belief ascription, but because it involves a belief ascription which has to be read at face value (in order to meet Dancy's characterisation of the case as one in which the climber's reason for staying put is his own belief that the cliff is crumbly). Then we can imagine a very similar case in which the reason for which the climber stays put is best captured by a belief ascription, but one which is not to be read at face value. In this case, it is hard to see why the belief ascription should appear in his practical argument at all, since (as I argued above) the only way it changes the premise is by making clear that the subject takes the proposition in that premise to be true, and it is not usually necessary to make this explicit. Where it does have to be pointed out, i.e., where a belief ascription appears in the premises of the subject's practical argument, it may be that there is a sense in which the subject is "reasoning from" their belief, even if the reason for which they act is best captured by a premise which features a belief self-ascription in apposition, not a mere statement of psychological fact. For example, belief ascriptions are sometimes used to express uncertainty, or to acknowledge that one's belief is insufficiently justified without cancelling one's commitment to the truth of the belief; people say things like "I believe he is in the next room", or "I believe United will win the league". And because most practical deliberation, let alone most practical reasoning, is not conducted with a self-conscious feeling of uncertainty, we have at least a *prima facie* reason for thinking that most practical arguments do not, in fact, include belief ascriptions in the premises.

Now let us return to the discussion of desire ascriptions. Where Alan's running for the bus is explained properly by his desiring to get to

the cinema, the self-ascriptivists will claim that one of the premises in his practical argument must be a desire self-ascription, like "I want to get to the cinema on time". I have argued that the desire self-ascription here should be read appositionally, as qualifying the phrase "to get to the cinema on time". Even supposing it is, there does seem to be a sense in which Alan is reasoning from his desire to get to the cinema on time, rather that directly from the mere thought of getting to the cinema on time. In fact, it seems much clearer that Alan is reasoning from his desire than that the climber is reasoning from his belief, even where both ascriptions are read appositionally, since Alan's desire makes a difference to the role played by the premise in which it features, and it is not clear that this is the case with regard to the climber's belief. Insofar as other Humean views besides the self-ascriptive view claim that desires make a difference to how a premise performs in an argument, it seems that they too will be committed to saying that subjects reason from their desires. There's nothing surprising about this.

The self-ascriptive view will claim that every intentional action is to be explained just like Alan's, in that every sound practical argument features a desire self-ascription. Indeed, any proponent of the Humean theory of practical reasoning broadly construed will claim that every intentional action is to be explained somewhat like Alan's is here, in that every sound practical argument necessarily includes a premise which features a desire (though they may disagree with the self-ascriptivists' account of the featuring relation).

There's nothing surprising about this either; but taken together, the points from the above three paragraphs give rise to a problem for the Humean theory of practical reasoning broadly construed. If it is the case that we can tell when a subject reasons from their mental attitudes themselves rather than from the contents of those attitudes, and that the Humean theory is committed to claiming that subjects always reason from

their mental attitudes themselves, then it appears that the Humean theory is committed to a false claim regarding the psychology of reasoning: namely, the Humean theory is committed to the claim that subjects necessarily reason from their own mental attitudes, but we can tell that this is not the case. I'll call this the "self-absorption problem". In the subsections below I will first set out a simpler but related problem regarding selfishness, which I take to be interesting since it goes some way to showing the importance of the impartiality principle; though this problem is not, in fact, an issue about self-absorption in the more technical sense in which I will be using the term. Then, I will outline two versions of the self-absorption problem, which I will label the "shallow" and "deep" self-absorption problems; the adjectives are supposed to describe the nature of the problem, not the extent to which the subject is self-absorbed. The shallow problem of self-absorption can be applied to the self-ascriptive view with particular efficacy, in virtue of that view's account of how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments. I shall argue that the shallow problem of self-absorption does not amount to a conclusive refutation of the self-ascriptive theory; but it gives us good reason to be sceptical about that view.

4.1 Selfishness

The self-ascriptive theory claims that every practical argument contains a desire self-ascription, which explains the subject's intentional action properly. Besides problems relating to the way in which the self-ascriptive practical syllogism is supposed to work, and how desire self-ascriptions are supposed to license inferences to normative conclusions, the self-ascriptive view has two problematic implications. First, one might think that a subject whose every action is explained by their desires is condemned to exemplify one of a number of character defects that could

be lumped together under the heading "selfishness". Secondly, the self-ascriptive view entails that every instance of good, explicit practical deliberation includes the subject thinking to themselves, "I want to…", or something closely analogous; it appears that this is not the case, and so the self-ascriptive view is committed to a false account of the psychology of practical reasoning and intentional action.

Most of us have been unfortunate enough to encounter individuals who are always principally concerned with their own pleasure, benefit or satisfaction; persons who approach almost every situation with the implicit question, "how can this state of affairs be used to my advantage?". Such individuals are guilty of making value judgements and performing actions which the rest of us regard as selfish, unkind, uncharitable, perhaps cold, insensitive, or manipulative. If a theory predicts that all practical reasoning or all practical arguments involve desire self-ascriptions, then it also predicts that all subjects necessarily suffer from a character flaw. That is, in the world described by such a theory, all people are selfish. The very fact that we can, in principle if not always in practice, tell the difference between people who are selfish and those who are not (or at least, between instances of selfishness and instances of impartiality) shows that such a theory does not describe reality. It is plainly false that subjects are necessarily selfish, so any candidate theory of practical reasoning had better not have this implication.

4.2 Desire and Selfishness

Does the self-ascriptive theory portray subjects as necessarily selfish? It represents subjects as always acting from their own desires in the sense that whenever a subject acts, the practical argument which underlies and explains their action will have as its major premise a desire self-ascription; the question is whether or not it is fair to understand this

feature of the view as equivalent to the claim that subjects are necessarily selfish. In order to show that this is not a fair interpretation of the view, the self-ascriptivist would need to show that the subject's desires having a prominent role in practical reasoning is distinct from the subject being fixated with those desires, and instances of selfishness and desire-based reasoning are not strongly correlated. Commonplace examples can be found of subjects who reason from their desires in the way that a Humean theory of practical reasoning claims they must, but who are not selfish, and vice versa (subjects who are selfish, but whose reasoning makes no mention of their desires). These examples are evidence that Humean theories of practical reasoning are not committed to the psychologically implausible claim that subjects are, always and necessarily, selfish.

Being self-consciously concerned with the satisfaction of one's own desires is a way of being blatantly and unequivocally selfish; but it would be surprising if it turned out to be the one and only way. Even if reasoning is primarily concerned with factors that do not easily reduce to the subject's own desires, such as what purport to be objective values, like prudence and kindness, that still leaves plenty of room for self-centredness. We can imagine a subject who always frames their deliberation in terms of values, never their own desires, but whose evaluations betray an unmistakeably egocentric streak. They might employ standards of evaluation inconsistently according to whether or not they or their own interests are under scrutiny; or they might apply standards of evaluation which benefit or flatter themselves or their own interests, but apply this already-skewed standard impartially. For example, with regards the first possibility, they might take themselves always to be concerned with prudence, but weigh considerations that promote their own future well-being disproportionately heavily compared to those that promise equivalent benefits for others. This would be an example of their applying an inconsistent standard; they claim to value prudence as such, prudence itself, but they are more interested in

actions that are prudent from their own point of view than those that would be considered prudent for others.

Alternatively, they might, unbeknown to them, regard the virtues or interests which they possess in noticeable degrees as superior to those which they lack, even in cases where the two are related, or where the latter is reasonably agreed to outweigh the former. A naturally intelligent person might regard intelligence as a remarkable virtue, equally in themselves and in others, and this evaluation might lead them to reason their way to courses of action which unfairly underestimate and disparage those who lack intelligence but possess other virtues. A subject deeply concerned with social justice might regard it as of the most profound importance, and this evaluation might lead them (through reasoning) to ride roughshod over the equally noble interests of others.

These examples show that there are ways of being selfish which do not amount to the subject giving their desires a prominent position in their practical reasoning. If it can also be shown that subjects whose desires are key parts of their practical reasoning do not necessarily reason selfishly, then there will be good grounds for thinking that the Humean theory of practical reasons does not entail that subjects are necessarily selfish, since selfishness and reasoning from ones desires are distinct ideas that do not entail one another. In order to defend this second claim, it is only necessary to assert that a theory of the nature of reasons and reasoning should not place substantive restrictions on what there could, in principle, be a reason to do. If this is so, then since the Humean theory holds that every intentional action is properly explained by a desire, it follows that any Humean theory of practical reasoning must not claim that there are some things which the subject cannot desire, since that would make a difference to what there could possibly be a reason to do. Therefore the theory does not entail that subjects necessarily have desires for things which benefit them at the expense of others; it is, in principle, possible for a Humean

subject to desire to perform altruistic, self-sacrificing actions, since it is possible, in principle, for them to desire to perform any action at all. So the objector who wishes to claim that the self-ascriptive view renders subjects necessarily selfish cannot simply point to the fact that, according to the view in question, every sound practical argument contains a desire self-ascription among its premises. They must argue either that the self-ascriptive view in fact contravenes the impartiality principle; or else that although it does not contravene the impartiality principle, the subjects it portrays would so strongly tend towards selfishness that the view is still committed to an implausible psychology of reasoning and action. The former seems very implausible; the self-ascriptive view is simply a set of claims about how desires feature among the premises of practical arguments. It seems highly unlikely that there is any putative intentional object of desire which cannot be built into a desire self-ascription; what could one want such that a phrase which refers to it could not complete the sentence "I want…"? The latter alternative appears to be an empirical, psychological claim, so is unlikely to find an adequate defence or a convincing rebuttal through theoretical reasoning alone.

4.3 The Shallow Self-Absorption Problem

It appears, therefore, that the self-ascriptive view does not portray reasoning subjects as necessarily selfish; there is another way, however, in which the view might turn out to be committed to false claims about the psychology of reasoning and action. The self-ascriptive view claims that every sound practical argument has a premise which includes a desire self-ascription in it; more specifically, the view holds that every sound practical argument is a practical syllogism in which the major premise is a desire self-ascription. This seems to entail that whenever a subject practically deliberates well (that is, whenever a subject conducts practical reasoning

through consciously or explicitly entertaining the premises of a sound practical argument) they must have a thought of the form "I want to...". Schueler argues that this is manifestly false:

> [I]t seems obviously inaccurate psychologically to think that all [intentional] actions are like this. Many cases, by far the majority I would say, start from facts, or perhaps evaluations of facts, about things other than the agent's own desires, needs, cares and preferences. That is, the first premise in the agent's practical reasoning, if made explicit, would not refer to something the agent wants but to something he or she holds to have some positive or negative value, or to be a requirement of some sort or the like. (Schueler 2003, p,118)

This is what I shall call the shallow problem of self-absorption, here tailored for the self-ascriptive view. In general terms, the problem is that whatever claims a proponent of the Humean theory makes about how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments, they commit themselves to the further claim that a premise of that kind is employed whenever a subject reasons well; and furthermore, that the subject explicitly entertains that premise whenever they deliberate well, which is an even more problematic claim since it is much more clearly open to counter-examples.

The shallow problem of self-absorption appears to be particularly problematic for the self-ascriptive theory, since the theory makes quite a demanding claim about how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments. There are only so many ways to self-ascribe a desire, in any given language; even allowing ascriptive phrases relating to non-cognitive attitudes which are not genuine desires to count for the purposes of action explanation (such as "I wish", "I hope", "I like" etc.), it seems that English

only furnishes us with a handful of different options. The self-ascriptive view is committed to the claim that one of a very limited selection of turns of phrase must crop up in the subject's practical deliberation, when their deliberation is guided by a sound practical argument. This is a very tight restriction on what subjects' practical deliberations must be like, which seems unlikely to be met. It appears that the only way to loosen the restriction would be to weaken the distinctive claim of the self-ascriptive view (i.e., that desires feature in practical arguments just when a desire self-ascription is among the premises), which seems to be really just a way of rejecting the view.

The self-ascriptivist could reject the claim that the best and most explicit practical deliberation is constituted by the subject's consciously running through the premises of the relevant practical argument, and hence that Schueler is wrong to think that the self-ascriptive view is committed to the claim that correct practical deliberation begins with a desire self-ascription. Actual episodes of deliberation conducted by real subjects are susceptible to all sorts of minor errors, unclarities and obfuscations, so a faithful characterisation of the subject's deliberative process would not match the practical argument perfectly; but this in no way detracts from the idea that the explanatory power of the subject's deliberation is captured by the premises and inferences of the practical argument. The practical argument records the considerations and inferences which explain the subject's intentional action properly; when they deliberate well, a faithful characterisation of the subject's deliberation would be in agreement with the practical argument regarding what states of affairs and relations between them explain the subject's intentional action in the right way. But they need not refer to these states of affairs in precisely the same way, using the very same words, in order for the practical argument to be the one which structures the subject's reasoning, and hence for the argument and the deliberation to give the "same

explanation" of the same action. Such a demand would be unreasonable. It would seem to entail, for instance, that the same explanation cannot be given in the third person as in the first person, or in the past tense as in the present tense; since in each case, the explanation will have to be phrased differently.

This is all true, but it does not help the self-ascriptivist much. This line of response relies on the hidden assumption that there is some non-self-ascriptive way in which a desire can feature in a faithful characterisation of a subject's deliberation which would put it in agreement with a practical argument in which the desire features through self-ascription. If there is not, then the above response is not available, since if the deliberation and practical argument did not both contain desire self-ascriptions then they would not be in agreement about how the subject's intentional action is to be explained. And if there is a way in which the two can be in agreement without a desire self-ascription appearing in the deliberation, then we would have to ask why it is that the practical argument necessarily includes a desire self-ascription when there are other ways in which a desire might feature in the argument.

For example, suppose the major premise in Alan's practical argument is "I want to get to the cinema on time"; the self-ascriptivist could argue that Alan's deliberation need not perfectly match the practical argument; so long as what Alan takes to count in favour of his running for the bus is his wanting to get to the cinema on time, then Alan's deliberation and the practical argument in question will be in agreement regarding the reason for which Alan runs for the bus. What explains Alan's action is his wanting to get to the cinema on time (and the bus's being about to leave); this state of affairs can be referred to either self-ascriptively, as it is in the practical argument, or non-self-ascriptively, as it is in Alan's deliberation. The problem now is, why should we accept the self-ascriptivist claim that sound practical arguments must include desire self-ascriptions if (for

example) Alan's deliberation can be in agreement with the relevant sound practical argument without including a desire self-ascription? The answer cannot be that there is some special role which can only be played by self-ascription, because then the Alan's deliberation would not be in agreement with the practical argument (since his deliberation does not include anything which plays the special role of a self-ascription). Rather, the answer would have to be that desire self-ascriptions play an irreplaceable role in practical arguments, but that very same role can be played by having desires feature in deliberation in a variety of different ways (and it must be the very same role, or else the argument and the deliberation would not be in agreement). If "deliberating" is the process of constructing an argument in favour of some conclusion, which I take it to be, then there can be no role which is unique to desire ascriptions in practical arguments, but can be fulfilled by something else in deliberation.

Chapter 3

The Strict-Backgrounding View

This chapter deals with one way of responding to the failure of the self-ascriptive view, which is to provide an account of how desires properly explain intentional actions that does not appeal to practical reasoning. The aims of this chapter are to make the deep self-absorption problem clear, and to show that it cannot be circumvented by trying to explain intentional action properly without appealing to practical reasoning.

1. Introduction

The self-ascriptive view is committed to a false account of the psychology of reasoning and acting; that is, it falls foul of the shallow problem of self-absorption. That problem is generated by accepting two claims: first, that in episodes of correct practical deliberation, the subject runs through the practical argument to which their reasoning corresponds; and secondly, that desires feature in the premises of practical arguments in some way which is reflected in the contents of those premises. Together, these two claims entail commitments about the exact way the reasoning subject must frame their thoughts when they deliberate correctly and as explicitly as possible.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the first claim should be rejected in favour of a less demanding correctness condition for practical reasoning. This might be one way to avoid the shallow problem, if some account can be given of the featuring relation such that there are many and

varied enough ways being in agreement with a premise which features a desire to piece together a plausible picture of the psychology of reasoning.

Alternatively, one might refuse to give any account at all of how desires feature in practical reasoning, and so avoid making any claims of the second sort. That is, a Humean might seek to avoid commitment to a false account of the psychology of practical reasoning by showing that desires explain intentional actions properly without necessarily featuring in practical reasoning at all. The core Humean claim is that desires have a special role to play in explaining intentional actions properly; a Humean might argue that desires play this role without necessarily featuring in the subject's practical reasoning. This sort of Humean advances a theory of intentional action, but no theory of practical reasoning. I'll call these Humeans "backgrounders", for reasons that will become obvious shortly.

The backgrounders aim to get around the shallow problem of self-absorption by refusing to make any claims regarding how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments. By not making these claims, they shirk any commitment to what the premises of practical arguments must be like, and are therefore under no obligation to say anything about episodes of practical reasoning which are structured by these arguments. As such, they claim that desires need not take part in practical reasoning at all; desires explain intentional actions properly, but in some other way.

In a sense, this sort of view seems very natural. For one thing, it is closer to Hume's own view, on most readings; Hume argued for a role for desire in explaining actions in a causal sense, not in justifying them.[12] Likewise, opponents of the Humean theory of practical reasoning often

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12 For a well-known example of this reading of Hume's view of action, see (Milgram 1995): " Hume is not an instrumentalist. An instrumentalist holds that there is one (but only one) kind of practical reasoning, viz., means-end reasoning. Hume holds the rather more minimalist view that there are *no* legitimate forms of practical reasoning; he is, to adapt a phrase of Christine Korsgaard's, a skeptic about practical reasoning." (p.78)

characterise desires as little more than psychological drives or urges; so it might seem natural to them that desires, while ill equipped to take part in proper explanations of intentional action, could find a home in a more basic, causal-psychological form of explanation.

It is important to notice, however, that the backgrounders will not want to adopt this deflationary way of understanding the role of desire in explaining action; the backgrounders do think that desires explain intentional actions properly, just not by appeal to practical reasoning. Making sense of this idea is the unique explanatory challenge facing the backgrounding view. Schueler, for example, argues that acts of practical reasoning are explanatorily prior to the kind of explanation the backgrounders have in mind, so the backgrounders do not succeed in presenting a proper explanation of intentional action which is independent of practical reasoning (section 3). I will argue that Schueler's argument is mistaken, since performances of the "mental acts" that are required for the backgrounders' explanations to be available do not amount to episodes of practical reasoning, even by Schueler's own standards (section 4).

On the other hand, I will argue that the backgrounding explanations themselves do constitute episodes of practical reasoning, because those explanations can only be understood as proper explanations of intentional action by reference to a practical argument (section 5). Briefly: backgrounding explanations can only be understood as revealing the positive light in which the subject sees their action because the mental states that feature in those explanations are related to one another in a particular way, such that they can be seen to favour some action over another; these relations between the contents of mental states are precisely what is represented in practical arguments. So the backgrounding explanation only works because those explanations are structured by practical arguments. Backgrounding explanations, therefore, are instances of an intentional action being properly explained by the subject's mental states being

appropriately related such that they favour that action; which is to say, they are instances of practical reasoning, as I have defined it.

This argument exposes a more serious problem with the strict backgrounding view. Backgrounding subjects are not subject to the shallow self-absorption that affected self-ascriptivist subjects, but they are self-absorbed in a deeper way. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider what threat this deep self-absorption poses, and how the Humean theory of practical reasoning can be adjusted to mitigate it.

2. The Strict Backgrounding View

A proponent of a Humean theory of practical reasoning might seek to evade the shallow self-absorption problem by putting forward an account of the role of desire in explaining intentional actions which does not appeal to practical reasoning at all, but rather to another kind of explanation. Rationalising explanations, for example, explain intentional actions by showing what the subject took to count in favour of acting in a certain way, and by causally explaining the subject's action. Rationalising explanations differ from merely causal or psychologising explanations, in that rationalising explanations portray their subjects as seeing their actions "in a positive light", as taking it that there is "something to be said for" (Davidson 1980, p.17) so acting, and so on. In rationalising explanations, beliefs and desires in the background explain intentional action "causally...in virtue of rationalizing it: [they] causally explain it in the "right" way." (Pettit & Smith 1990, p.566).

If rationalisation provides a way to explain intentional actions properly which does not involve any practical reasoning, then it might be possible to make good on the core Humean claims that intentional actions are properly explained by desires without having to provide an account of how desires feature in practical reasoning, or confront the problems

attendant on giving such an account. One might claim instead that desires play a special role in rationalising explanations, but that they need not appear in practical reasoning. Then, there would be no inherent threat from the shallow problem of self-absorption, since the view would have no commitments regarding the contents of practical reasoning (since it would not make the second claim listed on page 66). The fact that desires are necessary for a subject to act intentionally would therefore not entail that the subject is necessarily self-absorbed or necessarily selfish, since the Humean claim would have no bearing on how practical reasoning is conducted.

This is what I will call the "backgrounding strategy", or the "backgrounding move". Pettit and Smith propose adopting the backgrounding strategy in (Pettit and Smith 1990)[13]; I will set out their view in sections 2.1 and 2.2, before discussing Schueler's criticism of it in sections 3 and 4, and my own objection to the backgrounding strategy in section 5.

2.1 The Foreground/Background Distinction

In (Pettit & Smith 1990), Pettit and Smith consider two different ways of explaining intentional action. On the one hand, there are rationalising explanations[14], which seek to explain intentional actions by pointing to the subject's beliefs and desires; on the other, there is the "deliberative conception", which appeals to reasoning conducted by the subject. Pettit and

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13 Mark Schroeder's hypotheticalism is another kind of backgrounding view. See (Schroeder 2005, chapter 2), Philosophers who argue that desires play an important role in explaining why a subject has the reasons they have, but are not themselves reasons, can plausibly be read as proponents of the backgrounding strategy. This sort of position is more prolific in moral psychology and philosophy of action generally than in philosophy of practical reasoning. Examples include (Railton 1986) and (Frankfurt 1969).

14 Pettit and Smith sometimes call these "intentional explanations"; I will stick to "rationalising explanations", for clarity.

Smith argue that these two ways of explaining intentional action are not in competition, but ought to be thought of as occupying different 'explanatory spaces'; the intentional background and the deliberative foreground. Since practical reasoning is only relevant to the deliberative conception, if desires play their explanatory role as part of the intentional conception, then there need be no interesting and substantive account of how desires figure in practical reasoning. Desire might, in some sense or other, occasionally appear in the premises of practical reasoning; for instance, there is nothing obviously wrong with the idea that desire self-ascriptions might be among the factors taken into consideration in specific cases, such as those where what one wants is relevant or explicitly at issue. But in these minority cases, desires will be accommodated in the same way as any other consideration, like the refreshing taste of lemonade or the garish colour of a hat; they will not play a special role. If desires do their explanatory work in the background, then there is no pressing need to fully characterise desires in practical reasoning, since whatever desires necessarily do, they needn't do it by featuring in practical reasoning.

2.2 The Strict Backgrounding View

Hence, Pettit and Smith can maintain the Humean commitment that desires are necessary for action by making the further claim that desires are necessary only for rationalising explanations, i.e., those that are given in terms of beliefs and desires in the background. This is what Pettit and Smith call the "strict backgrounding view", and does not follow immediately from the foreground/background distinction itself; the distinction is a division between two explanatory spaces, which are the demarcated realms of two different kinds of explanation. The strict backgrounding view is required in order to get any sort of reply to the charge of shallow self-absorption out of the foreground/background distinction; in fact, the conjunction of the

foreground/background distinction and the shallow self-absorption objection (along with the commitment to desires as necessary for action) entails the strict backgrounding view. The foreground/background distinction opens up the possibility that desires might explain actions without appearing in practical reasoning; and the shallow self-absorption objection says that desire self-ascriptions cannot be necessary premises for practical reasoning. If desires are necessary for action but cannot be necessary features of practical reasoning, then they must appear always in the background and only contingently in the foreground; which is just what the strict backgrounding view says.[15] So the strict backgrounding view is an attempt to take anti-Humean concerns about the self-absorption problem into account, by giving up claims about practical reasoning.

The strict backgrounding view, then, maintains that desires do not feature in practical reasoning. Given the intuitive ease of the move from this claim to simple, causal-psychological model of action explanation according to which desires do explain intentional actions but not properly, it is probably worth making sure first that Pettit and Smith regard rationalising explanations as proper explanations of intentional action; and secondly that there is sufficient reason to. That is, that there is a reason to prefer the more ambitious, more vulnerable backgrounding view over the simpler, more defensible causal-psychological model.

It seems clear from (Pettit and Smith 1990) that Pettit and Smith intend their background explanations to account for intentional actions properly; as they put it, beliefs and desires in the background explain intentional action "causally...in virtue of rationalizing it: [they] causally explain it in the "right" way." (Pettit & Smith 1990, p.566). They also refer the reader to (Davidson 1980) for an account of the sense in which desires

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15 There is another possibility: necessarily, desires appear either in the background or in the foreground, but it is a contingent matter where a particular desire appears. I know of no-one who holds this view, and it makes little difference to the argument in this chapter

and beliefs in the background provide reasons for action. That answers the first question. Whether or not backgrounders ought to regard backgrounding explanations as proper explanations will of course depend on whether or not the backgrounding view is defensible. For now, though, it is enough to see that if backgrounding explanations are intended to account for actions in a more basic sense, then the backgrounding strategy would not be a useful resource for the proponent of the Humean theory of practical reasoning.

If, in response to the shallow self-absorption problem (by denying that desires necessarily feature in the premises of practical reasoning), the strict backgrounding view gives up not just the possibility of a truly Humean account of practical reasoning, but the possibility of a Humean account of intentional action as such, then it is difficult to understand the strict backgrounding view as a response to that problem. At best, this could be seen as an indication that, according to the backgrounders, it is a mistake to think that Humeans ought to be interested in intentional action in the first place. But if the only viable option open to a Humean confronted with the shallow self-absorption problem is to adopt the strict backgrounding view, and adopting the strict backgrounding view means, essentially, running away from the problem, then this doesn't speak very well of the Humean family of views. Surely there must be some way in which the Humeans can try to meet the problem head on, even if the attempt is ultimately fruitless.

I suggest, then, that it would be more charitable to read the strict backgrounding view as an attempt to properly explain intentional action along Humean lines. A "proper explanation" of intentional action, you will recall, is one which accounts for intentional actions as intentional; one which explains an intentional action by revealing the positive light in which it is seen by the subject. Otherwise, we should regard adopting the strict backgrounding view as inadvisable for anyone who holds Humean

intuitions, as doing so represents making an exorbitant concession to their opponents. Let's suppose therefore that desires and beliefs in the background are supposed to provide Davidsonian explanations of intentional actions; that is, they should explain intentional actions by showing what the subject saw in favour of acting in a certain way, and by causally explaining the subject's action. Rationalising explanations differ from merely causal or psychologising explanations, in that rationalising explanations portray their subjects as seeing their actions "in a positive light", as taking it that there is "something to be said for" (Davidson 1980, p.17) so acting, and so on.

3. Schueler's Objection

The backgrounding move only helps if the foreground/background distinction can be maintained. Schueler presents an argument which purports to show that the distinction cannot be maintained, since the occurrence of an episode of practical reasoning (albeit a simple, implicit, minimally-demanding one) is a necessary condition on the kinds of explanation that are given in terms of background beliefs and desires.

The argument goes as follows: we can easily imagine (in fact, have probably experienced) a situation in which a subject has a desire and a belief about how to fulfil it, and simply fails to act on them. We might say, they do not notice that there is a way to fulfil their desire; or that it does not occur to them; or that they do not realise. Perhaps they end up pursuing a different course of action, instead; in that case, we will be unable to point to the desire and belief on which they acted to explain their action, since the very same sort of explanation would apply to the desire and belief which they did not act on. So the mere presence of a desire and the relevant instrumental belief is not enough to explain intentional action.

Schueler claims that what is missing from the rationalising explanation is as follows:

(1) The desire and the belief must be "brought together" as a pair.

(2) This requires that the subject be aware of the belief and of the desire,

(3) and that the subject bring the belief and desire together through "mental activity" (Schueler 2009, p.108-9).

Finally,

(4) This mental activity (bringing together a belief and a desire of which one is aware, in such a way that a conclusion can be drawn from them) constitutes reasoning practically.

Schueler argues that this poses the following problem for Pettit and Smith: if background explanations require that the belief and the desire be brought together, and bringing together beliefs and desires constitutes practical reasoning, then background explanations require practical reasoning. That is, desire-belief explanations, which operate in the background, cannot properly account for intentional action without the beliefs and desires they make use of appearing in the subject's (actually occurrent) practical reasoning.

Taken together, the shallow self-absorption problem and the putting-together point make the strict backgrounding view, and indeed the foreground/background distinction, inadvisable for any Humean to adopt. If beliefs and desires in the background do not explain intentional actions properly, adopting the strict backgrounding view means giving up on the possibility of a proper explanation of intentional action that does justice to Humean intuitions. If they do provide proper explanations of intentional

actions, then either they require the putting together point in order to do so, or they do not. If they do, then either practical reasoning takes place in the background, in which case the foreground/background distinction collapses; or else desires are necessarily present in the foreground as well as the background, in which case Pettit and Smith's strict background view is as susceptible to the threat of shallow self-absorption as the self-ascriptive view (it could even be regarded as an elaboration of that view, not a rejection), and the foreground/background distinction does nothing to overcome self-absorption or Schueler's criticisms. Worse still, arguing that background beliefs and desires provide proper explanations of intentional action without requiring the putting together point means committing oneself to the claim that practical reasoning is not required for proper explanations of intentional action. None of these are attractive options.

4. Response to Schueler

(3) is a remarkably strong claim; even if we rule out cases where a belief and a desire are brought together but no action ensues (perhaps because the desire is overruled by a stronger one) it still entails that whenever a desire-belief pair can be used to explain an action, the subject brought that pair together by a prior mental action. Plausibly, "realising" (Schueler 2009, p.109), "noticing" (*ibid* p.107) or "having it occur to one" (*ibid* p.108) that the belief and desire pair up are not always mental actions, and these are terms which Schueler himself uses to describe what happens when a belief and a desire come together. We might want to add "seeing", "having it dawn on one" or "it becoming apparent to one" that the belief and desire go together. None of the above sound obviously or emphatically like mental actions. Conversely, we have a set of expressions which quite decisively convey the idea that some mental action was involved: "she worked it out",

"he figured out that…", "I reasoned that…", "she deduced that…", "he thought it through and…", "I came to the conclusion that…", and so on.

For instance, Schueler describes a case in which his car has broken down and he needs to get to campus to give a lecture. It would be best for him to take the bus to campus, and he knows that there is a bus he could take which stops nearby; unfortunately, this fact does not occur to him, and he ends up taking the bus in the opposite direction, to his sister's office, to borrow her car. Schueler describes this as a case in which he has the relevant desire (to get to campus) and belief (that he could take the bus) but fails to make the connection between them, and so does not act in the way that those mental states seem to favour. We can imagine Schueler's frustration if, while sat on the bus on the way to his sister's office, he became aware that he could have taken the bus to campus. We might imagine him saying afterwards, "and then it dawned on me – I should have just got the other bus!". Contrast this with a case in which he reports, "at that point I worked out that I could have taken the bus, but by then it was too late to turn around." The latter seems to describe an episode of mental activity, while the former does not. Either way, had Schueler had this realisation before he got on the bus, then it seems clear that he would have acted on it and taken the bus to campus, whether he arrived at that realisation through mental activity or not.

It is worth wondering why Schueler thinks pairing up beliefs and desires is necessarily a mental action, since it seems so implausible that it must be. He claims that putting together beliefs and desires cannot be reducible to the formation or adoption of a further mental representation about how the belief and desire fit together, or else we would run into something like Lewis Carroll's paradox (Carroll 1895); if a third representation is required to relate the belief and the desire to each other, then why not a fourth to unite the first three, and so on *ad nauseam*. From this, he concludes that we have to regard the putting together of beliefs and desires as a mental action, in order to avoid the regress. This explains why,

when he entertains the possibility of a Humean rejecting (1), he provides the following description of the resultant picture of reasoning:

> [D]enying the putting-together point would be tantamount to holding that beliefs and desires simply interact on their own to produce actions, independently of whether the agent is aware of them or not, rather in the way two different chemicals might interact whether or not anyone is aware of them.
>
> (Schueler 2009, p.119)

But Schueler does not suggest that in this scenario the beliefs and desires do not pair up, or that the subject is in fact unaware of them; merely that they do not come to be paired up as the result of a mental action. The Humean might plausibly contend that the coming together of a belief and a desire of which the subject is aware is, at least sometimes, a non-agential mental event, not a mental action. This seems like a good fit for the sort of commonplace descriptions canvassed above ("it dawned on me", "I realised", "it became clear that...").

If the Humean rejects (3), then, according to the standards laid out in (4), the pairing up of beliefs and desires of which the subject is aware would not constitute practical reasoning. By accepting (1) and (2), the Humean puts themselves in a position to concede to Schueler that explanations that proceed from background beliefs and desires do require that the beliefs and desires be paired up, and that "pairing up" is a type of mental "happening" (i.e., something that really occurs; not simply a relational property that holds between the belief and the desire, or their contents, etc.). This means that the Humean can utilise background explanations which do not involve practical reasoning; the foreground/background distinction stands.

5. My Objection to the Backgrounding Strategy

Although Schueler's objections are not decisive reasons for rejecting the strict backgrounding view, there is such a reason; the view fails to gain the advantages for its proponent that it is supposed to. The main motivation for adopting the backgrounding view is that backgrounders do not have to explain how desires feature in practical reasoning, which makes it easier to defend the claim that desires are necessary for intentional action. It turns out, however, that the backgrounding view does not have this advantage at all; backgrounders carry just the same explanatory burdens as everyone else. In essence, this is because rationalising explanations and explanations in terms of practical reasoning are both proper explanations of intentional action; they are both supposed to explain the very same phenomenon (intentional action) in the very same way (in terms of the subject's reasons for acting), and by appeal to the same resources (mental states and mental happenings). It would be more surprising if it turned out to be possible to give one sort of explanation wholly independently of the possibility of giving the other.

The backgrounding view fails to have its advertised advantage because rationalising explanations explain intentional actions in terms of the positive light in which the subject sees them, and to see an action in a positive light is just to be committed to a practical argument in its favour.

So rationalising explanations are to be understood by appeal to a practical argument, in just the same way that explanations in terms of practical reasoning are. The mental states that are involved in a rationalising explanation are able to explain intentional actions properly precisely because their contents are related to each other in such a way that a practical conclusion follows from them. Claims about what mental states have to be involved in rationalising explanations therefore entail matching claims about what the contents of practical arguments must be. When Pettit and

Smith claim that desires are necessary for background, rationalising explanations, they commit themselves to the claim that desires necessarily feature in the premises of practical arguments.

Rationalising explanations explain intentional actions by showing the positive light in which the subject sees the action; they accomplish this by appeal to the subject's mental states. In Pettit and Smith's case, these mental states are beliefs and desires. The subject who acts intentionally is not propelled into action by an inscrutable inner drive or urge, any more than they are moved by strings attached to their arms and legs; they act deliberately, in virtue of seeing their action in a positive light. Appealing to the light in which the subject sees their action explains intentional actions properly (or rather, if it does not, then there is really no point talking about rationalising explanations at all, and this whole discussion is moot). Therefore, to explain an action in terms of the light in which the subject sees their action must be to show that the subject sees the action as properly supported by reasons. One might object that the point in making use of rationalising explanations is to avoid talk of reasons and reasoning; this presents no problem, since we can instead use a less loaded phrase. To explain to an action in terms of the light in which the subject sees their action must be to show that the subject sees the action as the thing to do. The point is that if rationalising explanations are proper explanations of intentional action, then they must portray the subject as finding something to be said for acting in that way.

In case this argument seems unconvincing, the explanation can be run in the opposite direction, as it were. Given a particular intentional action, which mental states would rationalise it? It seems that this question can only be answered by answering a different question: which propositions can this action be practically inferred from? The way to find out which mental states jointly constitute the subject's seeing some action in a positive light is to work out what propositions support the performance of that action

in the right way, i.e., by forming the premises of a practical argument with that action as the conclusion.

So making claims about rationalising explanations entails commitments about practical arguments. Strict backgrounders claim that rationalising explanations necessarily feature desires; which is to say, seeing some action in a positive light necessarily involves having some desire which supports that action in the right way. Since supporting that action in the right way means being a premise in a practical argument which counts in its favour, strict backgrounders are committed to the claim that, in some sense or other, desires feature in practical arguments. They are not, however, committed to any particular account of how they do so.

It could be objected that the point in the foreground/background distinction is to clearly separate rationalisation from explanation in terms of practical reasoning; by arguing that claims about rationalisation entail commitments about practical reasoning, I have ignored one of the main aims of the backgrounding view. Backgrounders like Pettit and Smith might accept that both rationalising explanations and episodes of reasoning are to be understood in terms of practical arguments, but deny that in the case of any particular subject, the argument which structures their reasoning need be the same as that which makes sense of the mental states which rationalise their action. After all, they argue that rationalising explanations and explanations in terms of practical reasoning are two different "levels" of explanation; why would they share the same argument?

The answer is that they do not necessarily share the same argument, but they ought to; where a subject's action has to be explained by appeal to two different arguments depending on whether the explanation proceeds through reasoning or rationalisation, the subject is committed to two different evaluative perspectives on the same action, and is more than likely acting in some sort of error or ignorance. When subjects act well, the practical argument which underlies their action will be the same whether

we put forward a rationalising explanation of their action, or try to explain it in terms of practical reasoning. Therefore if we focus on those cases where the subject is not in error, claims about the practical arguments which underlie rationalising explanations do entail commitments about the contents of practical reasoning. With regard to the whole range of cases, therefore, the following is true: making a claim about some feature of the practical arguments which structure rationalising explanations commits one to the claim that that feature is reflected in the subject's practical reasoning, or else the subject is making some sort of mistake. An example should help to make this clear.

Alan has won a modest amount of money betting on the football, and is deciding what to do with it. Alan considers that he has been lucky, and that he did not count on having this money to spend, so it would be right to share his good fortune with those who are less well off; he decides to donate some of his winnings to a homeless shelter. Bert, who is very wealthy, as you may recall, sees Alan do this. Bert reasons that he has more money than he needs, and the homeless shelter is a good cause, so he decides to make a contribution of his own; deep down, though, Bert is moved to act by his desire to avoid the acute guilt he would experience if he found himself giving less to good causes than his poorer neighbour. Alan, meanwhile, has no further motive than his reasoning discloses.

Here, Alan exemplifies what it would mean for a subject's reasoning and rationalising explanations to be structured by a single practical argument (or rather, for the arguments which structure their reasoning and rationalisations to be in agreement with each other). Although his action can be accounted for in different ways, he has a unified attitude towards his action. If we were to consider the rationalising explanation and the explanation in terms of his reasoning side by side, we would see that what Alan regards as counting in favour of giving money to charity is the same in either case. If we were to give a rationalising explanation of his action,

the mental states which it referred to would have as their contents the propositions which would be the premises in his reasoning.

This would not be true in Bert's case; the rationalising explanation of his action would cite his desire to avoid the unpleasant feeling of guilt and his belief about how to do so, neither of which are mentioned in his reasoning. Bert does not have a unified attitude towards his action. At one level, his action is explained by what he takes to count in favour of donating to charity; but at another, his action is explained by his desire to avoid discomfort, which, so far as his reasoning goes, he does not take to count in favour of action.

Pettit and Smith are committed to the claim that when the subject acts on the basis of a unified evaluative perspective (like Alan's) rather than a fractured one (like Bert's), their reasoning must feature the desire which properly explains their action at the level of rationalisation. This is because the subject only acts without problematic ignorance of their own motivations when the practical argument which structures the rationalising explanation is in agreement with that which structures their practical reasoning, and the former always features one of the subject's desires. If it is better to act from a unified evaluative standpoint than a fractured one, and if in setting out a theory of practical reasoning we are primarily concerned with explaining those cases in which the subject gets it right, then this commitment is enough to show that the backgrounding view is no better off with regard to shallow self-absorption than the self-ascriptive view before it.

6. Deep Self-Absorption

In this section, I will discuss a more general issue which arises for any version of the Humean theory of practical reasoning, to a greater or lesser extent: deep self-absorption. Humeans are all committed to the claim

that every intentional action is properly explained by a desire. As a result, it could be argued that Humean subjects are necessarily concerned with themselves and their own attitudes towards the world, whereas we normally think of reasoning subjects as directing their attention outwards, towards objective, external, publicly-shared reality. Deep self-absorption is not a problem in need of a solution.; rather, it is a concern which needs to be responded to. What I refer to below as the "problem of deep self-absorption" is the threat posed by deep self-absorption. In much the same way that some versions of the Humean theory are more afflicted by "shallow" self-absorption than others, some versions of the Humean view are more susceptible to deep self-absorption than others. For instance, the self-ascriptive view is so badly afflicted by shallow self-absorption as to make the view untenable; self-ascriptive subjects are not psychologically plausible characterisations of real people. With regard to deep self-absorption, it may be that some Humean views are committed to portraying subjects as implausibly inward-looking.

Before I begin to explain the deep problem of self-absorption in more detail, I shall distinguish it from other problems that I have raised so far. In the list below, (a) is a simple anti-Humean argument, (b) is the normativity problem, (c) the shallow problem of self-absorption, and (d) is the deep problem of self-absorption. Humeans are committed to the claim that every intentional action is explained by a desire, but we can tell that this is not the case because...

(a) ...there are plenty of cases where it seems that the subject has no desire to perform the action in question, and yet they do.

(b) ...desires are fickle and capricious, whereas reasons are not.

(c) ...desires do not necessarily feature in even the most explicitly worked out and sound deliberation.

(d) ...reasoning subjects do not always and necessarily act on the basis of highly subjective considerations (and desires are highly subjective).

The next section will (of course) be concerned with explaining what it means for a consideration to be "highly subjective", and why this is a problem for a theory of practical reasoning. In section 6.2 I will make clear why it is that the deep problem of self-absorption applies to the backgrounding view even if the shallow one does not (that is, even if my argument in section 5 is unsound); and why, in fact, every Humean theory of practical reasoning is susceptible to the deep problem. In section 7, the conclusion, I will sketch a plan for finding measures to solve, or mitigate the threat posed by, the deep problem; that plan will be enacted in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

6.1 The Deep Self-Absorption Problem

Even supposing that the backgrounders were able to avoid making any claims regarding practical reasoning, they would still face another potential problem which they share in common with every other Humean theory of practical reasoning. According to the backgrounding view, what explains a subject's action in the right way is their desiring something that they take to be delivered by acting. What makes acting in one way preferable to any alternative action, according to the background view, is to be found within the subject themselves; it is part of the subject, not part of the "objective" world (i.e., not part of the world of non-subject objects).

There are a number of ways to spell out this problem, but for now I want to stick with the most general (so this paragraph is bound to sound a bit vague). Deep self-absorption might be regarded as a relative of the idea that is at the heart of the anti-Humean views. Many anti-Humeans have

claimed that having a reason to do something is simply not a matter of wanting to do it, since we are all familiar with cases where we want to do things we have reason to refrain from doing, and where there are compelling reasons for adopting courses of action for which we have absolutely no desire. What we have reason to do is not "up to us" in the sense that what we desire might be. Even those desires which are often described as "assailing" the subject, as simply imposing themselves on the subject without cultivation or endorsement, are still desires; as such, they are the sorts of things which usually fall within the scope of the subject's control, even when in specific cases they do not. Reasons belong to a different category entirely; they are not merely dissidents within the subject's mental realm, they are external to the subject.

In fact, what matters is not really whether or not reasons and desires are within the subject's control, but whether they are part of the subject at all. Desires, of course, necessarily belong to subjects. Reasons, considerations which count in favour of or make sense of actions, are not necessarily parts of subjects; at least, it is not in the concept of a reason, as a consideration which favours an action, that it must involve or concern a subject. Reasons are, in that sense, "objective"; when a reason involves a subject, it is so only in virtue of being the particular consideration it is, not in virtue of being a reason. If it turned out that only desires are reasons, i.e., that the only considerations which count in favour of action are desires, then this would represent a severe narrowing of the metaphysical scope of reasons.

The problem really bares its teeth when we consider what sorts of entities desires are. They are mental states; specifically, mental attitudes. There are other things towards which desires are attitudes. One might expect that it would be the objects of desire which count in favour of action; then at least the range of possibilities for what might be an object of desire might be as wide as the range of possibilities regarding what could

conceivably be a reason to act. The Humeans do not claim that the object of desire makes sense of action, however, but rather that desiring does (I sketched some of the reasons why they must make this claim in chapter 1, and will explore it in more detail in the next chapter). The Humeans claim that what makes sense of an action is not some part of objective reality, but rather the subject's attitude towards it. When, in reasoning practically, the Humean subject is concerned with what favours an action over its rivals, they are necessarily concerned not with objective reality, but with their own attitudes towards it. The issue here is not that the reasoning subject must be somehow actively concerned with, or fixated with, their desires; that was the shallow self-absorption problem. Rather, the issue here is that however desires feature in practical arguments and practical reasoning, the Humean is committed to portraying subjects as looking for (and finding!) reasons in what many would consider the wrong place.

Deeply self-absorbed subjects find that all reasons are subjective; all reasons are attitudes of subjects towards objective reality. What counts in favour of action is not the way things are in the objective world, but one's engagement with it; specifically, one's wanting certain states of affairs over others. If we recall some of the less felicitous characteristics of desires and desire-like states (chiefly capriciousness and fickleness; see chapter 1) then it becomes easy to see how a deeply self-absorbed, Humean subject might appear to be entirely out of touch with objective reality. The actions of a Humean subject are properly explained by mental states which come and go without that subject's consent or control; not by objective considerations, or even by cognitive attitudes towards them. There is, the anti-Humeans will argue, a fundamental mismatch between the subject portrayed above and the way we think of ourselves as practical reasoners and performers of intentional actions.

6.2 Deep Self-Absorption in the Backgrounding View

The Humean theory of practical reasoning (in any of its guises) is committed to the claim that what really makes sense of an intentional action is the subject's desiring something which might be gained by performing it. This is different from the shallow problem of self-absorption, which is that the Humean theory portrays subjects as fixated with their own desires. The deep problem remains even if the shallow problem is solved.

We can see this by considering again Pettit and Smith's backgrounding strategy. Supposing that my argument in the previous section is mistaken, and Pettit and Smith really can give a Humean, proper explanation of intentional action without committing themselves to any claims about practical reasoning; it would still follow that, at the level of rationalisation, every intentional action is properly explained by a desire. Every action is susceptible to a rationalising explanation, so every intentional action is properly explained by a desire.

7. Conclusion

The problems of normativity and self-absorption, and the way in which the anti-Humean conception of desire exacerbates these problems, together expose a rough outline of what desires would have to be like were the Humean theory of practical reasoning true. The normativity problem states that desires cannot take part in normative explanations because (and this is where the anti-Humean conception comes in) they are too fickle. The problems of self-absorption state that desires cannot play an ineliminable role in the explanation of intentional action because subjects are not in fact as they would be were that the case; specifically, they are neither fixated with their own desires nor necessarily introverted in their reasoning. To overcome these problems, one would need to make it plausible that desires are significantly less fickle than the anti-Humeans suggest, an account of

the featuring relation according to which desires need not be the focus of a premise in an argument in order to be featured there, and a characterisation of desires which plays down their subjectivity.

All of these aims can be achieved by an account of the connection between desires and their objects. The defining feature of the anti-Humean account of desire is that there is no relationship between a desire and its object, beyond the bare fact that the latter is the intentional object of the former. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that from the anti-Humean perspective, there is no explaining why desires arrive and depart as and when they do, and no accounting for the often antagonistic relationship between the subject's desires and their overall evaluative stance (i.e., the perspective on the world espoused by all of their evaluative attitudes taken together). Since desires are individuated by their objects, a change in object is the same as a change in the particular desire. If we have no explanation for how or why desires come to have the objects they do, then it is highly likely that we will have no explanation for how and why the objects of desires can change, either; and hence the arrival of new desires and departure of old ones (which is to say, changes in what the subject desires) will be wholly mysterious to us. Likewise, if we lack any understanding of why a subject has the particular desires they do (that is, why their desires have the objects they do), then we will be unable to analyse conflicts between what the subject desires and what they judge to be worth having. Given the enormous range of what one can desire, if we really have no account of how desires come to have their objects, we should probably be more surprised when a subject's desires and non-desire evaluations line up than when they do not.

I have, of course, run together the idea that we have no grasp of the rules or mechanisms that govern the objects of desire, and the idea that there are no such rules or mechanisms. It could have been the case that desires were perfectly predictable and orderly, and we still lacked any

understanding of their comings and goings; but they are not. They can be, as the anti-Humeans claim, invasive, unruly, dissonant and transient (though whether they in fact possess these qualities to the extent that many anti-Humeans seem to think, is another matter); but in focussing primarily on those desires which have these properties and largely ignoring desires which are long-standing and faithful reflections of the subject's other evaluations, the anti-Humeans draw together the two ideas that I deliberately mingled in the paragraph above. To regard the fickle desires as exemplifying the concept of desire is to court the illegitimate inference from our ignorance of any mechanism that governs the objects of desire to the absence of any such mechanism.

The task ahead, therefore, is to use examples of more stable desires to elucidate and explain the connections between desires and their objects in such a way as to make it plausible that these sorts of desires are better representations of desires generally than the erratic ones with which anti-Humeans tend to be concerned.

By making the connections between desires and their objects clear, it will be possible to show that desires can explain intentional actions properly (solving the normativity problem), and that combining such a conception of desire with the core Humean claim does not produce an implausible portrayal of reasoning subjects (solving the self-absorption problems). The next chapter is concerned with finding the connection between desires and their objects in virtue of which they are able to explain intentional actions properly, which I will call the "normative dimension" of desire. Chapters 5 and 6 set out the way in which the representational characteristics of desire make the normative dimension available for use in reasoning, and explain how desires feature in the premises of practical arguments.

Chapter 4

Reason-Providing Desires

This chapter asks and begins to answer the question, How or in virtue if what, do desires have the ability to explain intentional actions properly? In line with the conclusions of the previous chapters, I consider what sort of connections desires might possess which would explain this ability. A number of relatively simple options are examined and rejected, culminating in Schiffer's account of reason-providing desires.

1. Introduction

If desires have the ability to explain intentional actions properly, then in virtue of what features do they have this ability? At the end of the previous chapter I argued that, since the heart of the anti-Humean opposition to the idea that desires play a role in practical reasoning is to be found in the characterisation of desires as fickle and transient, Humeans would be well-advised to account for the ability of desires to explain intentional actions properly by appealing to some connection between desires and something else more stable and predictable. Perhaps there are important connections between desires and their objects (i.e., not objects in the everyday sense, but rather the intentional objects of desires; what they are desires for) which anti-Humeans have overlooked. There are other alternatives. Desires are certainly closely related to pleasure and frustration; getting what one wants is pleasurable, and being denied it is grating and uncomfortable. Perhaps there is some important connection between desire and these sensations which could explain the normative significance of desires. Or, perhaps it is

simply the possibility of satisfying a desire which accounts for their ability to explain intentional actions properly.

In each case, one question is whether equipping desire with connections of that sort would account for desires having just the explanatory powers that they seem to have. For instance, the desire to have a cup of coffee has the potential to explain a limited range of intentional actions; I might go to the café or put the kettle on because I want a cup of coffee, but that desire would not make sense of my walking around in circles or going for a bike ride. Furthermore, one must ask whether and how the proposed connections account for desire's explanatory powers. If it were argued that satisfying a desire is pleasurable, the it would be reasonable to think that the subject of a desire would view actions which promise to satisfy that desire in a favourable light. If it were argued that the desires a subject has are predictably governed by the direction of the wind, on the other hand, then it would be hard to see how this connection could allow desires to explain intentional actions properly.

2. Rational Authority

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are some normative reasons which depend on the desires the subject has, and some which do not. Consider a case where a subject is faced with two mutually exclusive, alternative courses of action, such that all and only the reasons in favour of one course of action are reasons against the other, and vice versa (that is, imagine that the subject is bound to take one option or the other, cannot take both, and there are no outlying considerations that weigh for or against just one option and are irrelevant with respect to the other). Suppose now that all putatively non-desire-related reasons seem to the subject to be perfectly balanced between the two. The alternatives, and the reasons themselves, need not be identical, or even similar; what's important is that

consideration of what reasons there are which does not take the subject's desires into account will reveal the reasons in favour of one option to have precisely the same weight as those in favour of the other. Finally, imagine that the subject has a single, quite ordinary desire, which would be satisfied by selecting one option but not the other. I will call these sorts of situations "indifference cases"[16].

Now that the form of the example is clear, let me provide a concrete instance: Bert needs to buy a new bicycle; after shopping around for a while, Bert has identified the two best options, but is having a hard time choosing between them. The Alphacycle benefits from enclosed gears, which are much more durable than exposed ones, and so much less likely to break down and require expensive maintenance. The Betabike, on the other hand, features an innovative new dérailleur, which provides for smoother gear changes, less chain slippage and an overall more comfortable ride. All in all, judges Bert, the advantages are equally weighted. From (what Bert thinks of as) an objective standpoint, there is nothing to choose between the two bikes. But Bert finds himself drawn to the Alphacycle; he likes the clean lines and bright, primary colours. He can easily picture himself riding happily through the neighbouring countryside; he visualises himself wheeling it out of the shop, and riding away down the highstreet. Bert wants the Alphacycle,

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16 Stampe presents an example which is similar to the indifference cases as I have described them, and also intended to evoke the intuition that, in the example, the subject's desire makes sense of their action. In Stampe's example, two subjects with identical beliefs spend the weekend learning German (p.344). Neither of them has any belief that would explain their doing this; in fact, the only difference between them is that one of them wants to learn German, whereas the other does not. Stampe says that the subject who lacks the desire "has absolutely no reason" to act as they do, and so their action is "utterly irrational"; whereas the subject with the desire "does at least have *a* reason – *something* of a reason, surely" to act as they do, and so their action is "not *utterly* irrational". I have provided what I hope is a clearer and more evocative example.

and does not take himself to have any other reason to choose it over the Betabike.

In the example, it seems intuitively plausible first that Bert would, in fact, choose the Alphacycle; and secondly, that it makes more sense for him to choose the Alphacycle, given his assessment of the situation. (I intend "makes more sense" to be as non-committal a statement of how things are as possible; precisely why it is that it makes more sense (or at least seems to) for Bert to act in this way, is part of what is at issue in this chapter.) I take it that this result can be generalised; any subject who has two options supported by equally-weighted non-desire-involving reasons, and a desire-based reason that counts in favour of one option over the other, will act in accordance with their desires, and it will make sense that they do.

The power to make sense of actions, seemingly exemplified by the subject's desire in the indifference cases, is what Stampe calls "rational authority". A consideration with rational authority does not merely cause actions, and thereby explain them; it explains them properly, by making sense of them. What might it mean to say that an action makes sense (compared to a relevant alternative)? Presumably that there is comparative explanation on offer; something which explains why the subject selected one option over the other. Intentional actions in general are properly explained by reference to the reasons the subject took themselves to have for acting; so if there is a comparative explanation available, then it must be that there is something which the subject takes to count in favour of one action over the other. So we can conclude that whatever makes sense of an action (whatever has rational authority) does so by introducing the reason for which the subject acts into the explanation. At this point, it would be unwarranted to say that whatever has rational authority just is the subject's reason for acting; there are several possible accounts of rational authority on offer in the case of desire alone (as we will see in a moment), and the mere concept of rational authority does not tie us to any one in particular.

All we can say with justification, at this stage, is that if something has rational authority, then it has what we might call a "normative dimension"; that is, it might not itself be a reason, but it will serve to bring one into the explanation of action. In order to account for the rational authority of some factor (a mental state, for instance), we must characterise its normative dimension.

There are a number of other possible explanations of the rational authority of desire which do not involve appealing to desires as counting in favour of action. For example, it could be that since the subject has the desire, they are confronted with the prospect of its satisfaction, and the promise of future pleasure or relief to be had therein. It might be this which counts in favour of acting, not the desire itself. Or perhaps the desire does not itself count in favour of action, but the subject comes to have other reasons for action in virtue of having the desire; perhaps, having a desire, a subject has a reason to perform actions which promise to satisfy the desire. That is, the desire acts as an "enabling condition" for other considerations to be viewed as reasons. Or perhaps it is the object of the desire, that which is desired, which counts in favour of action.

In the indifference cases, the only (relevant) difference between the two options, from the subject's point of view, is that one would promise to satisfy a desire, while the other would not. This is not enough for us to conclude that the subject takes their desire to count in favour of acting; but, if this reading of the indifference case is correct (and it is not uncontentious, by any means) then it is enough to show that desire has a normative dimension, and that is a significant result, in itself.

Nevertheless, if the possibility that desires are reasons to act is on the table, consideration of the indifference cases provides that possibility with some *prima facie* credibility – albeit no more so than some other, competing possibilities. The question, then, is how well the authority of desire can be accounted for by each of these competing views. Stampe's favoured view is

that desires themselves count in favour of action. The account he gives of the authority of desire, set out below, also contains a powerful objection to the "future relief" and "desired object" views.

How are we to explain the normative dimension of desire? In virtue of what features do desires have rational authority? In virtue of what features do they make sense of actions? Anti-Humean philosophers put forward accounts of intentional action that make use of mental states; if those explanations are at all credible, those mental states must be thought to have some rational authority. Perhaps the rational authority of desire is similar to the authority of other mental states; or at any rate, perhaps the project of figuring out what the authority of desire is, and where it comes from, could benefit from consideration of other examples. It will be worth paying particular attention to whether the rational authority of other mental states fits one (or more) of the models mentioned above (enabling conditions, future relief, object, or reason-in-itself), as this will give us an interesting point of comparison; do desires have rational authority in the same sense, or in virtue of the same features, that other mental states do? Stampe begins his investigation into rational authority, with the rational authority of belief.

2.1 The Rational Authority of Belief: Authority *per objectum*

When we see someone engaged in some activity, we can make sense of what they are doing as an intentional action by appealing to their beliefs (specifically, by ascribing a belief to them; probably by an exercise of the principle of charity). Why did she give money to the cold callers? She believes disaster relief is a good cause. Why did he throw the banana away? He believes it has gone bad. Why is she painting that room? She believes it looks shabby and run down. These are the sorts of things we say about other people; explanations given in the third-person, as it were. First-personal

explanations do not have the same form: Why did you give money to the cold caller? Because disaster relief is a good cause. Why did you throw away the banana? It had gone bad. Why are you painting the room? Because it looks shabby and run down. When we utilise our own beliefs to explain our behaviour, we appeal first and foremost to what we believe, not to our believing of those things. This is just the by-now-familiar claim that, when a mental state is used in a reasons-based explanation, it is the content of the mental state that is important, not the mere existence of that state; what the subject takes to count in favour of acting is what they believe, not, ordinarily, that they believe it. (Some exceptions to this rule comprise important evidence in favour of Stampe's account, so they will be discussed below.) This strongly suggests that the rational authority of belief is not derived from the beliefs themselves counting in favour of actions, which was one of the possible sources of rational authority considered above.

It has already been stated that intentional actions are those which are performed because the subject takes themselves to have a reason to perform them; and that they are properly explained by appeal to what the subject takes to count in favour of so acting. A little earlier, I claimed that the rational authority of a mental state is accounted for by characterising its normative dimension; the feature that relates the authoritative mental state to the subject's reason for action. In the above example, the subject's reason for painting the room is the room's shabby appearance; i.e., what the subject takes to count in favour of painting the room is the shabbiness of the room. The proposition, that the room looks shabby, is the content of the belief referred to in the third-personal explanation of the subject's painting the room. What the subject takes to count in favour of acting is specified by the propositional content of one of their beliefs (I shall follow Stampe in using "specifies" to describe what a proposition does to the state of affairs which obtains when and only when that proposition is true; and I will use "entertains" to refer to what a mental state with propositional content does

to the proposition that is its content). Furthermore, if the object of belief is what is believed, and what is believed is that things are such that the propositional content of the belief is true, then the object of the belief is the state of affairs specified by its propositional content. What the subject takes to count in favour of acting is some feature of how things are; so the rational authority of belief is derived from its object. Stampe calls this sort of rational authority "*per objectum*".

The beliefs which make sense of the subject's actions are those which have as their objects the considerations the subject takes to count in favour of acting; and they make sense of those actions in virtue of having the objects they do. This is a somewhat convoluted way of saying that beliefs make sense of actions by being the subject's beliefs about what reasons there are for them to act ("about" in the sense that they have those reasons as their objects, not that they are "concerned with" what reasons there are). So the normative dimension of belief (the feature in virtue of which beliefs have the rational authority to make sense of actions) is that the objects of relevant beliefs are what the subject takes to be normative reasons. Above, I suggested that this very feature might account for the rational authority of desire; might not desires, like beliefs, make sense of actions by having as their objects considerations which the subject takes to count in favour of acting?

2.2 Do desires have *per objectum* authority?

Stampe argues not. He claims that genuine normative reasons, considerations which really do count in favour of particular actions, are necessarily facts; so whatever the subject takes to count in favour of acting, they must take to be a fact; and the objects of desire are necessarily taken not to be facts, by the subject. Hence the subject cannot take the objects of their desires to count in favour of action. This argument is deceptively

simple, and very important to Stampe's positive view, so I will go over the premises individually.

Stampe's first premise is that normative reasons are facts (p.336). He has very little to say in defence of this premise; it is not hard to see why, as there is something very natural about the suggestion that reasons there really are must be part of reality. Normative (practical) reasons are those considerations which actually count in favour of actions, so they must be grounded in reality, in two directions. First, the consideration itself must be a feature of reality in the requisite sense, not an illusion or a mistake; secondly, since it is a normative reason, it must actually count in favour of something. That is, for some consideration to be a normative reason to perform a particular action, the consideration itself must not fail to exist, and it must not fail to count in favour of that action.

Stampe's second premise follows from the first, and the condition that subjects must, in principle, be capable of reasoning correctly (which was argued for in the chapter of this thesis concerned with the self-ascriptive view); all other things being equal, it must be possible for a given subject to be right about what reasons there are for them to act in a particular way. If normative reasons are necessarily facts, then for a subject to have any hope of reasoning correctly, they must regard whatever it is they take to count in favour of acting, as a fact. Take some feature of reality, F, which counts in favour of our subject performing a particular action, and which (to avoid complication) cannot be correctly overlooked in reasoning about whether to perform that action; if normative reasons are necessarily facts, then F must be a fact. If the subject takes F to count in favour of action, then what they take to count in favour of acting, if they are reasoning correctly, is F, which is some feature of reality which counts in favour of acting. If they did not regard F as a fact, then what they would be taking to count in favour of acting, would not be F; it might be the possibility that F, or the hope that F, or something along those lines. But it would not be F itself, because F itself

is a fact. So whenever the subject takes *F* to count in favour of action, they must regard *F* as a fact; if they do not, then they cannot take *F* to count in favour of action. If the subject does not take *F* to count in favour of action, and if *F* is a normative reason, then the subject cannot be reasoning correctly with regard to *F*. Given that *F* could, for all that can be said at this stage, be replaced with any object, property or state of affairs, if the subject cannot reason correctly with respect to *F*, then they cannot reason correctly.

The third premise is more ambitious. Stampe, accordingly, supports it with more explicit argument. He claims that the objects of desires (i.e., what's desired) are states of affairs that are specified by propositions such as, in the case of a desire for a hat, "*that I have a hat*, or *that it should be the case that I do*" (p.336). These propositions are presented in the subjunctive mood, not the assertoric. They are not put forward as things the subject takes to be so; rather, these propositions are raised for consideration, or made available for reasoning. This indicates that the states of affairs specified by these propositions are not taken by the subject to be facts (insofar as they are the objects only of desires). Facts are the right sorts of things to be asserted, not merely raised; assertion is the indicator of the subject's regarding some proposition as specifying a fact.

The reader may be concerned for Stampe's argument at this stage, if they think that the objects of desires are not states of affairs at all, but that they are objects, or that they are actions. That is, that when one has a desire, what one wants is some object; or that what one wants is to do something. For instance, it might be thought that what one wants when one wants a cup of coffee, is not that some state of affairs in which one has the coffee should obtain; what one wants is, precisely, the coffee. Alternatively, it could be claimed that what one wants, when one wants a cup of coffee, is to drink the coffee. Or, perhaps most plausibly, it could be claimed that although some desires are as Stampe describes, there is no perfectly uniform specification of what the object of a desire must be; perhaps some desires are for objects,

some to perform actions, and some that states of affairs obtain. In claiming that all desires are desires that states of affairs obtain, Stampe may be trying to impose order where there is none to be found.

What is at stake here? The current question is whether the normative dimension of desire is the same as that of belief; that is, whether desires bring reasons into the picture by having as their objects considerations which the subject takes to count in favour of acting. Stampe argues not, on the basis that what the subject takes to count in favour of an action, they must take to be a fact, and the objects of desires are not taken by the subject to be facts. Even if some desires take actions or objects as their objects, it would seem that the subjects who have those desires do not regard the objects of those desires as facts. It is not at all clear what it would mean for the subject who desires to do something, or desires such-and-such an object, to regard what they want as a fact. If I desire to drink a cup of coffee, then I do not regard that action as a fact; if what I want is the coffee itself, then I do not regard the coffee as I fact (I might regard it as a fact that there is coffee, but what I want is not (the fact) that there is coffee; that could be reread as the Stampe-style desire that there be coffee. Either way, it is not a desire for the object, the coffee itself).

So it would seem that precisely what the objects of desires are is not the important question for Stampe, so much as what the objects of desires are not; or even, what they are not represented as being, by the desiring subject. If it can be shown that the subject who has a desire does not regard what they want as a fact, then Stampe's argument will be a good one, even if we do not all agree on why it is that the third premise is true. The discussion of the last few paragraphs seems to show exactly this: several plausible possible answers to the question, what are the objects of desires?, have been examined, and it has in each instance been clear that the subject who has such a desire does not regard the object of their desire as a fact.

It follows from this (as Stampe argues) that desires do not inherit their rational authority from their objects; the normative dimension of desire is not that desires have as their objects considerations which the subject takes to count in favour of acting. The three other possibilities mentioned in 2.1 all share the common assumption that desires do not merely enjoy rational authority, but that they are the source of it; nevertheless, they disagree about how the normative dimension of desire is to be characterised.

3. The Rational Authority of Desire

If desires do not have authority *per objectum*, where does their authority come from? Two alternatives were mentioned in 2.1: the future relief view, which holds that desires are unpleasant sensations which count in favour of actions which would relieve them, and the simple satisfaction view, which maintains that satisfaction is simply a good thing, so desires count in favour of actions which promise to satisfy them. Additionally, there is Stephen Schiffer's view, which Stampe regards as a composite of the future relief and simple satisfaction views.

Stampe rejects the future relief view on the grounds that it does not make use of the representational character of desire, and hence cannot account for the fact that a subject who has a desire seems to have a reason to act so as to satisfy their desire, which different to the reason they have to act so as to no longer have the desire. Against the simple satisfaction view, Stampe claims that it is implausible to think that there is something intrinsically good about satisfying desires, and the view is structured in such a way that it cannot appeal to anything else for credibility; so the view is faced with explaining the unexplainable. Finally, Stampe claims that Schiffer's account results in an unwarranted proliferation of desires and reasons. I argue that Stampe's objection to Schiffer does not give us

sufficient reason to reject his account. After considering a further objection from Schueler, I abandon Schiffer's account on the basis that it is too simplistic to work as a characterisation of rationally authoritative desires.

3.1 The Future Relief View

Proponents of the future relief view, as set out by Stampe (p.348), identify desires with feelings of uneasiness or discomfort, and claim that this is what counts in favour of satisfying a desire; "any discomfiture is itself a reason to do what will relieve that discomfiture...Therefore, a desire is a *per se* reason to act." So whenever one has a desire, one has a reason to act so as to rid oneself of that desire; and that reason is a fact about that desire itself, namely that its continued presence is uncomfortable. On this view, the normative dimension of desire is characterised like so: desires introduce reasons into action explanations by bringing in facts, facts about those desires themselves, which count in favour of acting. These desires have *per se* rational authority, in that what counts in favour of acting is the desire itself; or rather, a certain aspect of it: that it is partially constituted by a feeling of uneasiness or discomfort. On the future relief view, desires have *per se* rational authority because they feel unpleasant, and unpleasant feelings give the subjects who have them some reason to act so as to rid themselves of the discomfort.

3.2 Stampe's Objection to the Future Relief View

Stampe aims to show that even if pleasure and relief were predictably and reliably associated with desire satisfaction (and discomfort with frustration), these feelings would not be enough to explain the rational authority of desire. The future relief view purports to explain that rational authority by characterizing the normative dimension of desire by appeal to

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unpleasant feelings associated with the frustration of desires; on the future relief view, desires have rational authority because it makes sense to relieve uncomfortable feelings, and it is uncomfortable to have unsatisfied desires. This is a reductive explanation; the authority of desire is subsumed under the authority of discomfort. Desires have rational authority because uncomfortable feelings do, and unsatisfied desires are uncomfortable feelings. Even if they are uncomfortable feelings, desires are not just any uncomfortable feelings; and the authority of desire differs from that of mere discomfort in at least one significant way.

Suppose that every desire which has rational authority has it because the desire is unpleasant to endure unsatisfied, and unpleasant feelings count in favour of acting so as to make them stop; one way to end the unpleasantness of an unsatisfied desire is, of course, to satisfy it. So it is natural to think that every desire which has rational authority would, then, count in favour of acting towards its own satisfaction. Indeed they would, but only because unpleasant feelings count in favour of a broader class of actions which includes satisfying one's desire; plausibly, any unpleasant feeling counts in favour of any action which would reduce or relieve it. Having an unsatisfied desire is an unpleasant feeling, and one way to be rid of the feeling is to satisfy the desire. But it is not the only way; one could simply stop desiring, and be done with the discomfort that way. Of course, ceasing to desire is never exactly simple, but there are a number of commonplace strategies. The subject of an unsatisfied desire could try to take their mind off it, and so reduce the discomfort; or overwhelm it with other pleasant (or intoxicating) sensations; or try to put the object of desire out of sight, and so reduce its hold over them; or, if they are particularly strong-willed, resolve to stop desiring the unobtainable; or take even more drastic action to rid themselves of the desire, such as seeking psychiatric help.

Insofar as unsatisfied desires are unpleasant feelings, it makes sense for a subject with an unsatisfied desire to act either so as to satisfy the desire or so as to cease to have it. That is, the discomfort of a frustrated desire is a reason for the subject to act so as to relieve the discomfort; this can be achieved either by satisfying the desire or by eradicating it. Ordinary discomfort itself does not count in favour of one type of action or the other, but rather it counts in favour of its own relief; the disjunction of the two options. Stampe objects that desires are not quite like this (p.350); although a subject with an unsatisfied desire may have reason to get rid of the desire in some unsatisfying way, they also have a reason to satisfy the desire.

Discomfort gives the subject a reason to do away with the unpleasant feeling by any means. If unsatisfied desires are uncomfortable feelings, then the discomfort of an unsatisfied desire gives the subject a reason to act so as to do away with the feeling by any means necessary. One way to get rid of the feeling is to satisfy the desire; so an unsatisfied desire counts in favour of its own satisfaction, but only because satisfying the desire is a means to relieve the discomfort. Satisfying the desire is in no way privileged above the other means of getting rid of it. Stampe objects that we take it to be true of desires that having a desire gives the subject a reason to satisfy it, even if it also gives them a reason to get rid of the uncomfortable sensation in some other way, too.

For example, imagine a subject afflicted by a strong and recurrent desire for chocolate; this subject has, first and foremost, a reason to eat chocolate, whenever the feeling takes them. But chocolate, sadly, is not the healthiest of foods to gorge oneself on, so it might be that the subject has other reasons not to eat piles and piles of it whenever they feel like it. If so, then it seems plausible that their desire to eat chocolate (the unpleasant sensation that periodically accompanies the absence of chocolate in this subject's life) gives them a reason to take action so as to relieve the

discomfort, without eating more chocolate (i.e., without satisfying the desire); perhaps by eating something else instead.

Stampe says nothing explicit about why one should think that a desire is a reason to act so as to satisfy the desire (even when it is also a reason to act so as to eradicate the desire), but an adaptation of his example (Stampe 1987, p.350) might shed some light on the matter. Suppose, next time you are hungry and have the opportunity to eat, that rather than eating, you had the option to simply stop being hungry, instead. While it is difficult to predict how others might feel about the situation, it seems to me that the option to stop being hungry without eating is not at all attractive. Being hungry, insofar as hunger is a desire, counts in favour of eating; only under special circumstances does it count in favour of not being hungry any more, and even then, it does so not as a desire, but merely as a discomfort. The prospect of merely ceasing to be hungry, without eating, sounds unsatisfying.

We can extend the argument into the chocolate example. Suppose the subject decides that, all in all, it would be better if they did not eat mountains of chocolate, and better still if they could be rid of the irritating desire for it (perhaps because the discomfort of the desire is liable to lead them to break their resolution, or perhaps just because it is unpleasant to put up with). If they follow this line, they are treating their desire for chocolate not as a desire to be satisfied, but as a mere discomfort, to be eliminated as swiftly and effectively as possible. Regarding the desire in this light evokes the ordinary use of the word "craving". A craving exhibits most of the hallmarks of desire, but the subject regards it as a hindrance, a burden, an unwelcome intruder[17]. Typically, a craving does not cohere with the subject's other desires and beliefs, and is not a part of how the subject sees

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17 The literature on unwanted or alienated desires is extensive and important, and I do not wish to delve into it here What I say about desires and cravings in this paragraph, therefore, is mostly stipulation rather than argument.

themselves. Depending on the object craved, craving can be a disturbing, undermining experience; we employ complex strategies to resist and ultimately rid ourselves of them. Cravings, as such, are to be eradicated; they differ from desires with respect to their rational authority in that desires, as such, are to be satisfied. Occasionally, desires must be eradicated, too; but those are minority cases, and do not reflect the nature of desire, and the connection between desires and reasons. Desires are "properly" reasons to act so as to satisfy them, and only "deviantly" or "improperly" reasons to act so as to eliminate them.

Hopefully, the above examples have made clear that satisfying a desire is not the same as merely ceasing to have it any more. The future relief view is insensitive to that difference, since it aims to explain the rational authority of desire in terms of the rational authority of discomfort, and discomforts cannot be satisfied, only relieved. Thus, the future relief view fails to capture the rational authority of desire; desires do not make sense of actions in virtue of being uncomfortable to endure unsatisfied. This raises two questions: first, what role does satisfiability play in explaining the rational authority of desire? We have seen that there is a difference between the authority of desire and that of discomfort, in that desires can be satisfied, but that leaves open the question of how satisfiability is supposed to explain the authority of desire; what exactly would it mean to say that satisfiability is the normative dimension of desire, i.e., that it is the feature of desire which brings normative reasons into the picture? Secondly, one might want to ask what features of desires explain their satisfiability, or what features of particular desires explain their satisfaction conditions. These issues are important for Stampe's view, so answers to these questions will be discussed in chapter 6.

3.3 The Simple Satisfaction View

The third possible account of the normative dimension of desire (after the *per objectum* account and the future relief view) holds that there is something intrinsically good about the satisfaction of desires. On the plausible assumption that, all other things being equal, there are reasons for subjects to act so as to promote good things, it follows that if a subject has a desire, then they have a reason to act so as to satisfy it. That is how, according to the simple satisfaction view, desires bring normative reasons into the explanation of action.

One might ask whether, according to the simple satisfaction account, what counts in favour of performing a particular action is the desire that the action promises to satisfy, or a property of the action itself, namely, that it promises to satisfy the desire. For example, if Bert's desire to own the Alphacycle works as the simple satisfaction account says it does, then what exactly counts in favour of Bert's buying the bicycle: is it his desire to do so (which the action promises to satisfy), or is it something about the action (that it promises to satisfy his desire)? In so far as the simple satisfaction account is intended to show how desires come to be features of practical reasoning, it seems likely that the first reading must be the one to adopt; if what counts in favour of the action is a property of the action itself, even one it has in virtue of its relation to a desire, then it is less than obvious that the desire itself would have to appear in the subject's practical reasoning.

Stampe dismisses the simple satisfaction account in very short order. He objects that, in making the ultimate source of desire's rational authority (i.e., what counts in favour of acting so as to satisfy one's desires) an intrinsic property of the desire itself, the simple satisfaction view makes it mysterious what this goodness could amount to. By locating what counts in favour of satisfying one's desires in the satisfaction of those desires (as an intrinsic property), the simple satisfaction view leaves itself unable to answer the question, what is good about satisfying one's desires? According to the satisfaction view, desire satisfaction isn't good because it promises relief or

pleasure, or because the objects of desire are good things to have or bring about; desire satisfaction is just good, in and of itself. Compare this to a very basic anti-Humean challenge: just because you want to do something doesn't mean you ought to do it. The simple satisfaction view has no way to respond.

Stampe seems right to claim that the simple satisfaction view is hobbled by its inability to explain why there are reasons to satisfy one's desires, but it should also be noted that there is a tension between the need to provide some sort of explanation, and the threat of "explaining away" the rational authority of desire, by locating its source in something outside of desire. For example, Stampe rejects the *per objectum* view on the grounds that the objects of desires are of the wrong sort to count in favour of anything; there is a pragmatic value to this rejection, since if it were claimed that the normative dimension of desire is its object, that desires introduce reasons into action explanation because the objects of desire count in favour of action, then it may well be possible to give proper explanations of intentional action in terms of those objects, without referring to desires at all. The need to give an explanatory characterisation of the normative dimension of desire without locating reasons outside of desires, causes problems for Stampe's view, discussed in section 5. First, however, comes a view which makes use of elements of the simple satisfaction and future relief views.

3.4 Schiffer's Reason-Providing Desires

Schiffer's view combines what I have called the simple satisfaction view with the basic motivations behind the future relief view. Schiffer claims that not all of the phenomena we might group together under the heading "desire" actually have a normative dimension. Those which do, called

"reason-providing desires", operate according to the simple satisfaction account; but in answer to that difficult question, what is good about satisfying desires?, Schiffer points to the connection between desire and pleasant or unpleasant sensory states. According to Schiffer, what counts in favour of performing a particular action is the desire which it promises to satisfy; and it does so because satisfying a desire tends to produce pleasure or reduce discomfort. So practical reasons, on Schiffer's view, have a layered structure; as well as the action supported by the reason, there is the reason itself, which is always a desire, and some further facts which explain why the desire counts in favour of the action.

3.5 Schueler's Objection to Schiffer

Schiffer writes that a reason-providing desire "is a...desire for its own gratification; [a desire] to phi is a desire to phi to relieve the discomfort of that desire, a desire to phi for the pleasure of its own relief". Schueler objects that this "at best describes only the clearest or most dramatic cases" (p.87) of the relevant sort of desires, since a great many of these desires (including some of Schiffer's own examples) will, according to Schueler, lack the relevant phenomenology. In fact, Schueler thinks some desires which Schiffer would want to claim provide reasons for the subjects who have them, indeed even some of the desires which Schiffer puts forward as examples of this type, lack any phenomenological presence at all. Schueler contends that "[i]t doesn't seem plausible, for instance, to hold that a craving throughout dinner to have chocolate mousse for dessert need actually be uncomfortable" and that "[f]or most people, the mild thirst they experience at least a few times every day, of the sort that leads them to the water cooler or soft drink machine, has practically no phenomenological character at all, certainly nothing that could be called "discomfort."" (p.87-8) Even if it should turn out that extremes of hunger and thirst do provide reasons for those

subject to them, Schueler argues, the problem would still remain that Schiffer's account only correctly characterises a small minority of desires, and is only applicable in a small range of quite unusual cases.

Schueler takes Schiffer to be in broad agreement with him on this point, and to favour a conception of reason-providing desires on which such desires are not necessarily uncomfortable to endure unsatisfied. That is, Schueler takes Schiffer's view to diverge from the future relief view, in that Schiffer does not take the unpleasant sensations we associate with some unsatisfied desires to be essential properties of those desires (whereas the future relief view goes even further, and identifies the desires with the feelings). But, Schueler continues, if this is the case, then it is hard to see the difference between the reason's being provided by a reason-providing desire, and its being provided by a future pleasure. In the former case, what counts in favour of the subject performing a particular action is their desire which that action promises to satisfy – which may result in pleasure or relief. In the latter case, what counts in favour of the subject performing a particular action is the future pleasure or relief that might be gained from performing that action, since it promises to satisfy a desire of the subject's. If it's the former, then there seems to be a good case for thinking that the desire would appear in the subject's practical reasoning, since it is what counts in favour of action. In the latter case, it seems unlikely that the desire need appear in the subject's reasoning, since it is only playing a facilitating role; at best, the desire is part of the explanation of why the subject has the reasons they have.

Schueler proposes a solution, which is to claim that the satisfaction of a reason-providing desire is itself pleasurable, hence satisfying a reason-providing desire is "automatically pleasurable". What counts in favour of action is the pleasure of the satisfaction of the reason-providing desire; so a reason-providing desire counts in favour of acting so as to satisfy it. At least, it would, says Schueler, if we were to accept the further claim that there is a "good reason" to do whatever it would be pleasurable to do. He finds this

implausible, and so rejects even this modified theory (having already rejected Schiffer's own account on the basis that it is phenomenologically inaccurate).

3.6 Response to Schueler's Phenomenological Implausibility Objection

That there is a connection between desire and pleasure and discomfort seems undeniable, elusive as it may be to pin down. It seems highly plausible that a Humean proper explanation of intentional action will have something to say about this connection, and the role of these sensations in practical reasoning (as we have seen in the future relief view and Schiffer's account). Or at any rate, if a complete explanation of action, including both practical reasoning and motivation, can be had along Humean lines, then the relationship between desire and sensation will be an important part of it. This is one reason to be interested in Schueler's objection, and how Schiffer's view might be defended. Another is that Schueler's objection seems very similar to the blunt anti-Humean challenge discussed earlier ("just because you want to, that doesn't mean you have a reason to"), so whatever can be said in Schiffer's defence here might be more broadly applicable. A third reason is that some of Stampe's claims about which desires have rational authority and which do not, according to his preferred account, is vulnerable to an analogue of Schueler's phenomenological inaccuracy objection; so the form of the response in defence of Schiffer may well be applicable there, too.

Schueler aims to show that Schiffer's view does not account for the supposed rational authority of desire, since there are plenty of examples of desires which seem well-placed to explain intentional actions properly, but which do not have the connection to discomfort or pleasure that explains the rational authority of Schiffer's reason-providing desires. Since Schiffer provides some explanation of why it is that reason-providing desires have

rational authority while Schueler does not, it is open to a proponent of Schiffer's view simply to deny that the desires Schueler refers to actually have any rational authority (if indeed they lack any connection to pleasure or discomfort). The intuitive plausibility of Schueler's counterexamples can be easily explained by the proponent of Schiffer's view. Contrary to Schueler's claims, they will argue, most desires actually are either uncomfortable to endure unfulfilled, or pleasurable to satisfy, or both. While it may be true that there are such things as desires which lack any connection to discomfort, it is a mistake to think that they could have any rational authority.

The connection between desire and pleasure seems one of the most obvious, most distinctive features of desire, yet there is no consensus about the nature of that connection. For instance, it seems common sense that satisfying a desire produces pleasure in the subject; if getting what we want is not enjoyable, then what is? This might lead one to think that producing pleasure when satisfied is one of the defining properties of desire. But one must ask, how general is the proposed connection between desire and pleasure? Do desires always produce pleasure when satisfied? Do they do so necessarily? Do they do so typically? Are they abnormal when they do not? etc., etc. There are equally familiar examples of cases where the subject, perhaps after great effort and exertion, finally satisfies their desire – and experiences no pleasure. Or where we might be inclined to describe a subject as doing something they desire to do (especially if we think that desires are necessary for intentional action) but which it would be strange or simply false to say they derive pleasure from doing; filling in tax returns, commuting to work, tying one's shoelaces, returning an impulse purchase under false pretences, etc.

As we have seen already, theories which rely on the connection between desire and sensation (such as Schiffer's) seem vulnerable to objections based on readily-available counter-examples. This is puzzling. On

the one hand, it seems absolutely clear that getting what one wants is pleasurable, and being denied it is unpleasant. Yet as soon as a Humean tries to lean on this piece of common sense as a premise in an argument, it gives way; moreover, in retrospect, it seems completely obvious that it would!

Whenever a Humean makes a sweeping claim about desires in general, it falls to their opponent simply to find a class of counterexamples. The Humean claims that desires are uncomfortable to endure unfulfilled; Schueler puts forward some everyday cases of desires which need not be uncomfortable. The conflict could be resolved in favour of the Humean if a way could be found to restrict the scope of their claim, so that it applied not to all desires, but to some important subset. The means by which this subset is marked out will have to be intuitively plausible, philosophically useful, and must not simply beg the question by labelling the relevant features of the counter-examples as what sets them outside the set of desires covered by the Humean claim.

This may seem like an ambitious enterprise, but the basics are really quite simple. What is required is for parties on both sides of the debate to realize that not everything which might for various purposes be lumped together under the heading "desire" really belongs there, and that there might be further conditions which even genuine desires have to fulfil if they are to count in favour of actions (over and above simply being a desire). There will, of course, be disagreements about how those boundaries are to be marked out, especially between different Humeans; but it seems clear that a Humean theory of practical reasoning has to have an account of which desires are relevant, and which or not – or rather, which desire-like states are genuine desires, and which are not. Failure to distinguish between desires, wishes, disowned cravings and passing fancies, say, puts the Humean in the same position as a cognitivist who fails to mark the difference between rational belief and delusion.

Schiffer draws a distinction between those desires which are held because there is a reason to hold them and those which are not, and claims that only the latter have rational authority. The changes Schueler suggests making to Schiffer's account (i.e., introducing the automatic pleasure property) are interesting in that it seems as if Schueler is recommending further restricting the range of desires which are classed as reason-providing to just those where the connection between desire and sensation is secure.

If anyone were to claim that all remotely desire-like mental states have rational authority in virtue of being unpleasant to endure, then their view could easily be disproven by counter-example. If Schiffer were to claim that all desires and desire-like mental states have rational authority, even under a hefty *ceteris paribus* clause, then his view would be easy to disprove. For it seems clear that not every sort of non-cognitive state makes actions rational and intelligible, even if we allow every assumption that could justifiably be asked for. Not all non-cognitive mental states have any obvious connection with intentional action at all; moods might be an example. Feeling cheerful does not seem to make sense of actions in the way that desires might be thought to; it might make sense of the manner in which actions are performed, but that is a different question. Some philosophers[18] argue that there are non-cognitive states which are involved in mental actions like judging or coming to believe; but it would seem odd to say that these states, which play a largely technical, philosophical role, make sense of actions. Finally, there may be disagreement over how they are best described, but it seems likely that some urges or cravings will fall into this category, too, if the actions the subject is urged to perform do not seem good to them, even insofar as they have those urges. Some manifestations of

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18 See for example (Velleman 2000) and (Bilgrami 2006).

obsessive compulsive disorder seem to fit the bill; some subjects are driven to perform repetitive actions that they see as senseless and detrimental[19].

So clearly it would be wrong to interpret Schiffer as claiming that anything that looks at all like a desire, from a philosophical standpoint, promises pleasure or is unpleasant to endure, and has rational authority; since it is obvious that not everything which looks like a desire really is unpleasant, and that not every desire-like state has any rational authority. But Schueler begins by objecting that not all desire-like states are unpleasant or have rational authority. Schueler goes further, and claims that even those desires which look like they must have rational authority if any do, are not necessarily unpleasant; Schiffer and proponents of the future relief view need only deal with this second set of desires.

Schiffer's view, if it is taken to mean that all likely candidates are reason-providing desires, must be false. The theory should be taken to account for those desires which we might naturally think make sense of actions, since it is the alleged rational authority of those desires that stands in need of explanation. So all Schiffer needs to show, is that the majority of the desires that (seem to) have rational authority either promise pleasure or are unpleasant to endure unsatisfied. He is under no obligation to show that all desires have rational authority, or that all desires are unpleasant; or even that every desire which we might think has rational authority really has any. To the extent that the theory does not cohere with our common sense intuitions, then we can demand that the proponent of Schiffer's view explain why some desire which we think makes sense of our actions in fact does not. And this explanation will have to go further than simply pointing to the fact

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19 Some sufferers of obsessive compulsive disorders feel anxiety if they try to resist the compulsion, and perform the compelled actions precisely for the reason that it will relieve their anxiety; others develop delusive beliefs to the effect that performing the compelled actions is a means of preventing some catastrophe. I have in mind the subjects who perform the actions because they are compelled to do so, who may experience anxiety if they resist, but do not take relief from anxiety to be a reason to perform the actions.

that the desire is not unpleasant to endure, since that is part of what is at issue; they would also have to explain the appearance of rational authority, presumably by finding some pleasure or unpleasantness somewhere in the situation.

To summarise: not everything which looks like it might have rational authority really does; so Schiffer should not be read as claiming that anything which looks at all like a desire with rational authority is a reason-providing desire. If Schiffer's account is correct, then it may well be that some mental states which we ordinarily think make sense of actions in fact do not. But if there are good reasons for thinking that Schiffer's account is correct, then the fact that it throws up some surprising results should not be regarded as sufficient reason to reject it. A counter-example must feature a desire which clearly, non-controversially, has rational authority. Similarly, Schiffer should not be read as claiming that any mental state which looks at all like a desire must promise pleasure or be unpleasant to endure. There might, after all, be mental states which share very much in common with desires, but which differ in that they do not have the same (or perhaps any) phenomenal presence; and it could well be that they lack rational authority precisely in virtue of not having the phenomenal presence of a real desire. Once again, surprises are not counter-examples; a genuine counter-example to Schiffer's account must be a clear case of a desire which makes sense of action and lacks the relevant phenomenal presence. At most, his view should account for the rational authority of all those desires which have strong claims to rational authority, by showing that they are unpleasant to endure or pleasant to satisfy; or else Schiffer must have a good explanation of why such a mental state does not really have the authority it seems to.

With all this in place, let's look at Schueler's phenomenological implausibility objection again; Schueler claims that it is not at all obvious that if, whilst eating their main course, the subject entertains the desire to have chocolate mousse for dessert, this desire must feel uncomfortable to

the subject. This is supposed to constitute a counter-example to Schiffer's view since the subject's desire is one which appears to have some rational authority, but which is neither uncomfortable no pleasurable; so it shows that Schiffer's account of the rational authority of desire is wrong. Faced with an alleged counter-example, the best response available to the proponent of Schiffer's view is to lean on the plausibility and explanatory power of their account against the counter-intuitive strangeness of the example.

Schueler claims that many desires have "practically no" phenomenological presence. "Practically no" is not, of course, the same as "none at all"; but if mild desires are supposed to count against Schiffer's claim that the rational authority of desire is to be found in sensations of discomfort or pleasure, then mild desires must be insufficiently uncomfortable or enjoyable to count in favour of action. Supposing that all relevant discomforts can be placed on a single scale, how intensely uncomfortable must a desire be before it counts in favour of acting to satisfy it?

It seems plausible that any discomfort at all will count in favour of action, to some extent; it is in the nature of discomfort that its subject has a reason not to be subject to it. Schueler's "practically no" must, therefore, be read as meaning that mild desires have absolutely no relevant phenomenological presence; they are not at all uncomfortable or pleasurable. If they were even slightly, then to that extent they would count in favour of action. Now, there are two particularly strange aspects to mild desires; the first is the idea that we should call something a desire when it lacks any trace of the distinctive phenomenal presence associated with desires. The second is that we should think that such a mental state counts in favour of action, even if it is a desire (this is important because, for mild desires to constitute counter-examples to Schiffer, it has to be at least *prima facie* plausible that they are to be thought of as reason-providing desires).

The two desires which Schueler puts forward as counter-examples to Schiffer's view are mild thirst, and the desire for a chocolate mousse that one might experience during dinner. With regard to the former, it seems wholly implausible to me to claim that even mild thirst could have no phenomenal presence; on the contrary, it seems that what sets thirst apart from mere dehydration is that being thirsty involves a particular kind of discomfort. Dehydration is simply the absence of water; a sponge can be dehydrated, but it cannot be thirsty. In fact, one can imagine the sensation without the biological need to drink; that would seem to constitute an instance of thirst. If thirst does, in fact, have an important connection to discomfort, then what Schueler refers to as "mild thirst" is not thirst at all, since it lacks any phenomenal presence. If it is not thirst, then there seems no reason to think it must be a desire at all; in fact, it is not at all clear what it would be, beyond the disposition to drink.

So much for the first example. The second, the desire for chocolate mousse, is trickier. I take it that there is no distinctive sensation involved with the desire for chocolate mousse; there is nothing in particular that it feels like to want a chocolate mousse. It seems only fair to assume, therefore, that Schueler's craving for dessert is in fact a desire; but it remains to be seen whether or not it has any rational authority. On the one hand, it seems like the sort of desire which should; wanting a mousse for dessert seems to make sense of certain intentional actions, like ordering one from the menu. Then again, the last three chapters are littered with examples of desires which initially appear to have rational authority and turn out not to have, and with reasons for thinking that desires do not explain intentional actions properly. Schueler's claim that a desire for dessert explains ordering one should not be simply accepted without question. If this desire has no phenomenal presence, then why would it have rational authority? Schueler understandably offers no explanation. If Schiffer is wrong about the normative dimensions of desire, then it is quite possible that Schueler's

desire is rationally authoritative, since it has some other normative feature. Since Schueler's example offers no indication of what this feature might be (not that it ought to), all the example shows is that Schiffer could be wrong, not that he is.

It appears that in constructing these counter-examples, Schueler brings together the two issues that Schiffer's account is intended to separate. It is conceivable that there could be desires, or at least desire-like states, with no phenomenal presence at all; and there are desires which have the authority to explain intentional actions. Schueler's counterexamples feature desires which fall into both categories; they are phenomenally barren and rationally authoritative. This is a conceptual possibility, but a proponent of Schiffer's view would argue that no existing desire falls into both categories, since the phenomenal presence of a desire explains its rational authority. Schueler offers no reason for thinking otherwise so the example, although thought-provoking, cuts no ice with regard to Schiffer's view.

3.6 Stampe's Proliferation Objection to Schiffer

Stampe objects that Schiffer's view gives rise to an unwarranted proliferation of desires. Given that reason-providing and reason-following desires are of different natural kinds, no desire can be both reason-providing and reason-following. A reason-following desire is held because there is a reason to hold it; so, Stampe argues, Schiffer makes whether or not a desire is held for a reason one of the individuation conditions for desires. This gives rise to the counter-intuitive consequence that, since reason-providing and reason-following desires can share the same objects, it is possible for a subject to have two different desires for the same object, simultaneously:

It is a danger of indulging in the distinction between two kinds of desires, that-since no single thing can be of two contrary natural kinds it enforces a criterion of individuation on desires, and the results, I think, are quite unnatural. One would not have thought that the identity of a mental state, for example, a belief, should turn on the matter of whether one does or does not have reason to hold it; it would seem that one could come to have a reason to hold it, or come to have no reason to hold it, and the belief would be the same. Should it be otherwise with desires?

(Stampe 1987, p.352, n16)

Schiffer does not regard this as a problem, stating that the desires will have different causes and different durations, so there are ways to tell them apart. There is no clear reason why reason-providing and reason-following desires with the same object should have different durations, however; it just happens that in Schiffer's example, they do. Moreover, it is not obvious that a reason-providing and reason-following desire could not share a cause as well as an object. Stampe regards "reason-following" and "reason-providing" as natural kind terms, such that no desire is both reason-providing and reason-following. That is, Stampe treats the matter as if no desire is held for a reason and provides reasons for action. This is not Schiffer's view, since he argues that "r-p-desires also provide the reasons, the justifications, for themselves" (Schiffer 1978, p.198); so every desire which is either reason-providing or reason-following is held for a reason, it's just that reason-providing desires provide the reasons for which they are held, whereas reason-following desires do not. Schiffer uses the distinction between reason-providing and reason-following desires to provide a Humean explanation of certain cases of weakness of will, where the subject acts on a desire that they do not want to have. The desire which explains the action is

reason-providing, but the subject does not take there to be any further reason to act that way, so lacks a reason-following desire to do so. Cases of weakness of the will, though commonplace, are not normal cases of intentional action. Subjects are not usually alienated from the desires they act upon. A reason-providing desire provides a reason to hold that desire; in the usual case, the subject could have a reason-following desire which follows that very reason. In that case, the subject would have two desires with the same cause and the same object, and potentially the same duration.

4. Conclusion

Four characterisations of the normative dimension of desire have been considered and rejected. The *per objectum* view said that mental states enjoy rational authority through having reasons (sources of rational authority) as their objects. This view failed outright on the grounds that the object of a desire cannot be the reason for which the subject acts, since the objects of desires are not taken by their subject to be facts. From the *per objectum* view, we learned that desires must be the sources of rational authority.

This left the three alternatives which take desires to be *per se* reasons for action, hence sources of rational authority. The future relief view, which identified desires with normatively-relevant sensations like pleasure and discomfort, failed since it could not distinguish between the rational authority of desire and that of discomfort. It was unable to do so because it did not take into account the representational character of desire; it conceived of desires as simply afflicting the subject with a certain kind of feeling which the subject ought to either prolong or intensify, or to relieve. Desires, however, are for things in a way that discomforts are not; so the future relief view could not explain why there seems to be a reason for a subject with a desire to act so as to satisfy that desire, rather than just to be

rid of it. From the future relief view, we learned that the normative dimension of desire, the explanation of its rational authority, must appeal to the representational content of desire.

The simple satisfaction view, claiming that there is something intrinsically good about the satisfaction of one's desires, could show that there is such a reason, but could not properly explain why this should be so, since it held the goodness of desire satisfaction to be primitive and unexplainable. From the simple satisfaction view we learned that if it is to be at all plausible that desires really are sources of rational authority, then it has to be possible to offer some explanation of that fact (and without locating the source of rational authority outside of the desire itself).

Lastly, Schiffer's view, which combines the simple satisfaction and future relief views, is the most plausible on offer so far. It has problems of its own, in that it allows for the counter-intuitive possibility that a subject could simultaneously have two desires to perform the same action. Those desires would not share exactly the same properties, since one would be reason-following while the other would be reason-providing; so this alone is not sufficient reason to reject the view.

Schiffer leaves at least one very important question unanswered: he has nothing to say about the generation of reason-providing desires. This is a significant omission. I have suggested that the root of anti-Humean scepticism about the possibility of desires explaining intentional actions is to be found in the characterisation of desires as fickle and transient. Although no Humean view of the role of desire in practical reasoning should be taken to apply to every desire-like state, it is undeniable that there is a large group of mental states which are capricious and unpredictable. The anti-Humeans have been overly impressed by these uncooperative mental states and taken them to be representative of the nature of genuine desire. This is a mistake, but one which the onus is on the Humeans to correct; the Humeans have to find a convincing, interesting way to separate

those mental states which are genuine desires and do have the authority to explain intentional actions, from those which are merely like desires in some respects and unlike them in important others. Schiffer's account promises to do this, but since he says nothing about how or why a subject has the reason-providing desires they do, he gives us no reason to think that reason-providing desires will be any less capricious than whims and urges.

This omission presents us with a compelling reason to augment Schiffer's view; there is a more general problem with the account, however, which presents us with a good reason to reject Schiffer's characterization of rationally authoritative desires. Schiffer claims that a reason-providing desire provides its subject with a reason to act so as to satisfy it "for the pleasure of" so acting; what makes it the case that there is a reason to act as one desires to, is that it is pleasurable to do so. Combined with the core Humean claim that every intentional action is properly explained by a desire, this entails that every reason which a subject can act on is ultimately provided by pleasure; the pleasure of satisfying a reason-providing desire. Even assuming that pleasure always gives the subject some reason to act so as to attain or prolong it, it is implausible to claim that every possible reason to act is grounded in pleasure. That would be a far stronger and stranger claim than the one which motivates the deep self-absorption problem; that problem is driven by the claim that if every sound practical argument features a desire, then there is a danger that whenever a subject reasons or acts, they are concerned with their own desires. The claim at issue here is that only pleasure (or discomfort) counts in favour of acting; so regardless of the perspectives or concerns of reasoning subjects, their actions are only supported by reasons when they act for the sake of pleasure.

Assuming it is not the case that there is no reason to act except for the sake of pleasure (or relief from discomfort), Schiffer's reason-providing desires cannot be the basis for a Humean theory of practical reasoning. The Humean theory requires an account of desires which does not make use of

something so narrow as pleasure to explain their rational authority. If the Humean theory is to be plausible, the normative feature of desire has to be flexible enough to account for all possible motivations. A subject who acts on one of Schiffer's reason-providing desires to help a friend, for example, acts to help their friend for the pleasure there is to be gained by doing so. The Humean theory must allow that there are subjects who help their friends for the sake of their well-being, or because they are friends, or because it seems like a good thing to do. Schiffer's claim that the normative dimension of authoritative desire is its connection to pleasure or discomfort is far too narrow. It does not seem as if every intentional action is performed for the sake of the pleasure of doing so; quite the opposite. It appears likely that the same difficulty would arise for any single property one could choose; it would be false to claim that intentional actions are only performed for the sake of happiness, for example. I suggest, therefore, that Humeans ought to claim that the authority of desire is not always explained by the very same feature. If every intentional action is properly explained by a desire, and if it is possible to reason correctly, then there can be no single property such as pleasure which accounts for the rational authority of every possible desire.

Furthermore, there is another aspect to the stability or instability of desires which Schiffer's account wholly overlooks. Not only are some desire-like states frustrating in that they arrive and disappear unexpectedly, but they can also be frustrating in that they fail to cohere with the subject's other desires and judgements of value. Schiffer's account, which connects authoritative desires only with pleasure, gives us no reason to expect that desires should line up with the subject's overall evaluative stance, and recognises no difference between those which do and those which do not. What is required, then, is not an account of a connection between desire and any particular feature, such as pleasure; but rather, an account of the mechanism or system by which desires can be connected to a whole range

of different features and states both subjective and objective. If there is such a system, then desire is a remarkable mental state. It seems reasonable to suppose that the truly unique features of authoritative desires, which they do not share even with desire-like states such as cravings and urges, may give us some clue as to the nature and workings of this system of connections. In the next chapter, I will try to isolate exactly what it is that makes some mental state a desire rather than a mere urge; then in chapter 6, I will set out a proposal for how this system of connections might explain the rational authority of desire.

Chapter 5

The Evaluative View

This chapter examines the special representational properties of desires, how they set desires apart from other mental states, and the role they play in accounting for the rational authority of desire.

1. Introduction

How could wanting to do something be a reason to do it? Part of the motivation for resisting the Humean claim that desires are the basis for practical reasoning, is that merely "wanting" seems so fickle and arbitrary. It is quite common to want what one judges one should not have, all things considered; or even to want things that, in many ways, do not seem beneficial or even pleasant. Sometimes, one's beginning to want something does not seem to be prompted by any change in the object or the situation; and equally, desires often simply dissipate, for no clear reason, and without ever being satisfied. Reflecting on these aspects of desire is enough to make one suspect that desires may lack any proper connections to their objects, or to the rest of the subject's mental life. It may seems as if desires are merely mental images that crop up from time to time, but which are not normatively significant.

If desires are to be thought of as having the authority to explain intentional actions in the right way, then it cannot be the case that a subject who has a desire can remain wholly ambivalent about whether there is a reason for them to act on it. Having a desire must commit a subject to a

view of what reasons there are for acting; in particular, it must commit the subject to taking there to be reasons to act in a way that we can understand as being promoted by the desire. This does not mean that desires must count in favour of action; quite the opposite. If desires were reasons to act, having a desire would not commit the subject to a view of what reasons there were, any more so than the existence of any other reason to act. If desires were reasons to act, then a subject would be free to overlook or misevaluate their own desires, just as much as any other consideration. If, on the other hand, desiring commits the subject to a certain view of what reasons there are to act, it must be because desiring is an attitude towards what reasons there are to act. That is, desires must be evaluative attitudes, not reasons for action.

It has to be asked whether the characterization of desire as a type of "mental image" is true to actual experiences of desiring, or whether it is a philosophical fiction (perhaps arising from taking scepticism about the role of desire too seriously). If we are to ask questions like "what is the role of desire in practical reasoning?", then the answers we give had better do justice to the subject's own experiences of desiring and reasoning, and how they interpret them (to the extent that the "common sense account" of desiring and reasoning is a distinct, coherent idea). If we put forward philosophical conceptions of desire that are unlike anything anyone takes themselves to experience when they experience desire, then the account of practical reasoning that makes use of that conception will not be an account of human practical reasoning; it will be an account of the practical reasoning of whatever imaginary creatures have those sorts of quasi-desires. With that in mind, it has to be asked whether the mental images characterization of desire, much as there seem to be *prima facie* theoretical reasons to endorse it, is true to the common sense account of desiring. Even if it is not, this is not to suggest that there are no mental phenomena like those the mental images calls desires; rather that reflection on one's own

experiences reveals that these mental images are not desires, and that desires are at least as familiar as these images.

In this chapter, I will pursue the possibility that the mental images view of desire is mistaken; desires, unlike mere mental images, necessarily represent their objects as good, in a distinctive representational mode. To desire to perform a particular action, for example, is for that action to strike you as one which it would be good to perform. One's performing the action would be properly explained by this mental representation, in virtue of its contents. For example, there is a world of difference between the mere thought that it would be nice if one's football team won their next game, and wanting them to; fans want their teams to win.

Clearly, much more needs to be said about this view before it can be evaluated. We would need to have a proper, theoretical understanding of the proposed representational content of these desires (see section 3); and to know how they come to be authoritative in virtue of their representational contents (section 4). Moreover, it might be thought that appealing to the representational contents of desires in order to explain their rational authority would be dangerously close to giving a *per objectum* account of the rational authority of desire (section 5); and there are a number of obstacles to appealing to anything like the phenomenal properties of desire (section 6). First, however, there is a more pressing question: it might be thought that if desires are evaluative attitudes, then what explains the subject's intentional actions will be their taking themselves to have a reason to act, not the desire itself. That is, if desiring somehow involves an evaluation of some considerations, then it will be the evaluation that explains how the subject acts; there may be no need to ask how or why the subject comes to make that evaluation, and so the desire may drop out of the explanation entirely.

2. Scanlonian Desires

There is a good case for thinking that the best move still available to a Humean theorist, having rejected the self-ascriptive view, the strict backgrounding view, and Schiffer's view, is to claim that desires are not themselves reasons, but are a kind of evaluative attitude. That is, to claim that having a desire is a way of taking a stand about what reasons there are for action. One way to understand this possibility, is to think about desires as involving judgements about what reasons there are to act; perhaps a subject who desires something judges that there is a reason to act so as to have what they want. The mental state of desiring is typically partly constituted by one of the subject's evaluative judgements, without being a reason itself; either a reason for having that attitude, or for acting. Then the subject's desires would be part of the explanation of their action in a broader sense; they could take part in purely psychological explanations, and perhaps Davidsonian rationalizing explanations. Lacking normative relevance, however, they could not be part the explanation of the subject's intentional action in terms of the subject's reason for acting.

This seems to be roughly T. M. Scanlon's view of desires, and how they relate to action. Having argued that a Humean theory of reasons must be grounded in a characterization of desires as a distinctive kind of mental state, not something so general as a pro-attitude[20], Scanlon picks thirst as a paradigm case of the sort of desire that could be the basis for a Humean theory. He then analyses the experience of being thirsty, and finds it to consist of three elements:

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20 Scanlon argues that a general term like pro-attitude would cover many states which are held for reasons, rather than being reasons themselves; a theory that claims a special role for desires in the explanation of intentional actions would have to define "desire" in a way that these so-called "motivated desires" are weeded out (p.38).

> First, there is the unpleasant sensation of dryness in my mouth
> and throat. Also, there is the thought that a cool drink would
> relieve this sensation and, in general, feel good. I take this
> consideration, that drinking would feel good, to count in favour
> of drinking, and I am on the lookout for some cool drink.
>
> (Scanlon 1998, p.38)

Abstracting away from thirst, these three elements can be described as:

> a present sensation…the belief that some action would lead to a
> pleasant state in the future, and my taking this future good [i.e.,
> the pleasant state] to be a reason for so acting. (*Ibid*)

Scanlon claims that reflecting on instances of desiring reveals these three distinct elements, and that when a subject acts on their desire (which is how we would naturally describe one who drinks because they are thirsty) their action is properly explained by their taking themselves to have a reason for so acting:

> The motivational work seems to be done by my taking this
> future pleasure to count in favour of drinking. (*Ibid*)

(Scanlon uses "motivation" to refer to the way in which the subject's reasons for action lead to action; so "motivational work", in Scanlon's terms, is the work of providing an explanation of action in terms of the subject's reason for acting – i.e., what I have been calling a proper explanation.)

The "present sensation", which seems to correspond most closely to what we might think of as the desire itself, plays a supporting role in action explanation; it counts in favour of holding a belief about how to achieve

some future pleasure. In the case of thirst, the sensation of having a dry throat is a reason to believe that a drink of water would be pleasant; and that belief goes some way to explaining why the subject acts as they do, if they drink. But neither the belief nor the reason for holding it (the sensation) are reasons for action; they do not take part in proper explanations of the subject's intentional actions.

If Scanlon's characterization of the experience of desiring is the best way to understand the suggestion that desiring could be an evaluative attitude, then it appears that this approach offers no support for a Humean theory of practical reasoning. It must be asked, therefore, whether Scanlon's characterization of occurrent desires is plausible in and of itself; and whether it presents us with the best or only way of understanding the relationship between desires and evaluative attitudes.

With regard to the first issue, we can ask the following question: is it plausible that a subject could have a present sensation of the type Scanlon describes, which leads to a belief about how to achieve a future pleasure, which the subject takes to count in favour of action, and yet that subject fail to have a desire? It seems to me (and to Scanlon, too) that they could. Consider the following example[21]:

Alan has a terrible toothache, which invades his every waking hour. He feels sure that if he went to the dentist then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. He judges that the possibility of relief from the toothache comprises a good reason to go to the dentist.

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21 The strategy I use against Scanlon and Tenenbaum in this chapter would yield a similar objection if applied to Schiffer's view, from the previous chapter; it is conceivable that there could be a subject who feels (pleasure or) discomfort which would be (intensified or) relieved by acting so as to satisfy their Schifferian desire, but who does not actually seem to desire anything. The iterations of Alan which appear on this page could be just such subjects.

This example involves a sensation which leads the subject to believe that some future pleasure can be obtained, and the subject judges that there is a reason to act so as to attain it. It would seem extremely odd, however, to describe Alan as having a desire to go to the dentist, given that Scanlon's description is supposed to apply to a restricted notion of desire that rules out mere pro-attitudes. The oddness can be rendered more explicit:

> Alan has a terrible toothache, which invades his every waking hour. He feels sure that if he went to the dentist then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. He judges that the possibility of relief from the toothache comprises a good reason to go to the dentist. Nevertheless, the prospect of actually going to the dentist fills him with dread.

Scanlon also thinks the three-part description is deficient; he attempts to supply the deficiency with a partial account of the phenomenology of desiring. His claim is that the subject of desire will find themselves preoccupied by the object of their desire; the object in this case being the action which they believe will result in pleasure. They will find their attention drawn to the object of their desire, and the thought of it will occur to them frequently. While it seems plausible that desires do, at least sometimes, capture the subject's attention in the way Scanlon suggests, the reason why Alan seems not to have a desire to go to the dentist is not that his alleged desire does not direct his attention. Observe:

> Alan has a terrible toothache, which invades his every waking hour. He feels sure that if he went to the dentist then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. Knowing this, he is plagued by visions of the horrors he will have to endure in order to be rid of his troublesome tooth. The thought

of the impending dental surgery hangs over him like a shadow, pervading and spoiling every happy moment. He judges, nevertheless, that the possibility of relief from the toothache comprises a good reason to go to the dentist.

Now we can see Alan's attention as directed toward the object of his alleged desire, but it seems even less natural to think of him as having a desire at all. Alan's attention being directed towards some action or eventuality in no way indicates or ensures that he would want to perform that action, or bring about that eventuality. As in this example, it is perfectly possible for a subject to dwell on future possibilities that fill them with dread, and which are in no way what they desire. It seems that Scanlon's attention-directing property is characteristic of at least some desires, but that this property combined with the three elements mentioned above does not amount to a characterization of desire. What is missing?

I suggest that the reason why it seems obvious that Alan does not have a desire to go to the dentist[22] is that the example says next to nothing about how the prospect of going to the dentist seems to Alan. "Seems" not in the sense of what judgements he makes about it, but how it appears or is presented to him. Let's return to Alan once more:

Alan has a terrible toothache, which plagues his every waking hour. He feels sure that if he went to the dentist then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. The idea of going to the dentist strikes him as the answer to his present predicament; it seems to him that it would be good if he could get to the dentist as soon as possible. He judges that the

22 Of course, if Alan does intentionally go to the dentist, then a Humean theory of practical reasoning would have to provide a different explanation of his action; presumably by finding a different desire that explains his action.

possibility of relief from the toothache comprises a good reason to go to the dentist.

In this version of the example (from which I have removed the attention-directing characteristics, for clarity), Alan does seem to want to go to the dentist. Including a description of the way that the object of his putative desire is presented to Alan seems to transform the example from one of a subject who takes themselves to have a reason for action into one of a subject who has a desire to act. In Scanlon's examples, the third element (that the subject judges that they have a reason for action) is taken to be what explains the subject's action in the right way; without it, the mere sensation and its attendant belief do not have the authority to explain action. In this last example, however, it is less clear; there is no obvious reason why Alan's judging that he has a reason to go to the dentist has rational authority which its seeming to him that it would be good to go, lacks. If we can give a proper explanation of Alan's action by appeal to his judgement about what reasons there are, we ought to be able to give a parallel explanation by appeal to its seeming to him that it would be good to act in a particular way (on the assumption, to be considered in section 3, that what is meant by "goodness" here is precisely "that which there is a reason to pursue").

Scanlon's examples seem to lend weight to the thought that evaluative attitudes, such as judgements, explain intentional actions in the right way. Scanlon's four-element characterization of desires provides no support for a Humean view of practical reasoning, because the evaluative attitude (judgement) is put forward as something that can be distinguished from the other elements of desire and considered separately, allowing the desire itself to recede into the background, merely psychological action explanation. Indeed, part of the point in Scanlon characterizing desires in this way is precisely to represent desires as involving a kind of evaluation that also occurs in other contexts, so undermining the Humean claim that

desires present a unique source of motivation[23]. If this separation were impossible, i.e. if desire were presented as an intrinsically evaluative attitude, then it would not be possible for desire to fade into the background; for appealing to the subject's evaluations would mean precisely appealing to their desires.

An account of desire as an evaluative attitude would support a Humean view of practical reasoning if it portrayed desires as intrinsically evaluative. Exactly what this means, and how objects of desire are presented to their subjects, stands in need of much more clarification; and it is not obvious at this point how this aspect of desire might account for its rational authority, despite the analogy with judgement. However, it does seem that the account of the way things seem to the subject is crucial to getting the account of desire right; Alan did not seem to have any desire to go to the dentist until it was made apparent that going to the dentist appeared, to him, to be a good thing to do.

Moreover, if this "seeming" is a distinctive characteristic of desire, then it is reasonable to assume that it will also be important to the account of the rational authority of desire. The Humean theory of practical reasoning claims that only desires have the rational authority to explain intentional actions; it seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that desires have their rational authority in virtue of some characteristic that they do not share with other mental states. The way the objects of desire appear to their subjects seems to fit that description.

3. Representational Contents of Desires

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23 Remembering, once again, that by "motivation" Scanlon means a proper explanation of intentional action.

In the previous section, it was argued that if the idea that desires are evaluative attitudes is supposed to ground a Humean theory of practical reasoning, then the "evaluative component" of a desire cannot be separable from the "desire proper". It must be the case that in so far as the subject has the requisite evaluative attitude, what they have is a desire. Desires cannot merely include evaluations; they have to be essentially evaluative attitudes. If the evaluative component is separable from the desire proper, then the desire can sink into the background, and the explanatory work can be done by the evaluative component alone. Alan did not seem to have any desire to go to the dentist until his situation was described as one in which it seems to him that going to the dentist would be a good thing. This seems like good evidence for thinking that the evaluative nature of desire must be accounted for in terms of the way things appear to the subject.

The next questions, then, must be: what does it mean for the object of a desire to appear to the subject? And is there a distinctive way an object seems, when it is the object of a desire? Whether the evaluative-attitude conception of desire can be the grounds for a Humean theory of practical reasoning depends on the possibility of giving distinctively Humean answers to those questions. In the previous section, Scanlon's view was presented as a representative non-Humean account of the relationship between desires and evaluative attitudes, and used to show that, in order for a Humean account to be in the offing, desires must actually be evaluative attitudes, not just related to them.

In 3.1, I will set out Tenenbaum's view of desires; Tenenbaum claims that a subject desires an object insofar as that object appears good to them, and that "appearing good" is to be understood as conceiving of as good, from a particular perspective. In 3.2, I will argue that Tenenbaum's account, though closer to describing true desires than Scanlon's, still falls short; there are still possible subjects who meet Tenenbaum's criteria for desiring, but seem not to desire anything. In 3.3, I will set out Stampe's account of desire,

according to which desires are mental states which represent their objects as good, in a distinctive representational mode. In 3.4, I will argue that Stampe's account is sufficient to capture real desires; there are no subjects who have desires, by Stampe's lights, but seem not to desire anything. Making this last claim plausible requires me to take a stand on what the representational mode of desire is; that is, what it is like to desire something.

3.1 Desires as Appearances

Sergio Tenenbaum holds a "scholastic view" of desires, according to which a desire is a state in which the object of that desire appears good to the subject. Tenenbaum takes the scholastic view to apply to pro-attitudes, not desires proper, ruling out the possibility of a Humean theory from the outset[24]:

> The sense of desire covered [by Tenenbaum's account] is the weak sense in which whenever I have something as my aim, or would have it as my aim were it not for countervailing considerations, I desire it. "Desire" in this sense need not be passionate, warm, or even felt in any way.
>
> (Tenenbaum 2007 p.26)

As we shall see, Tenenbaum's scholastic view has more in common with cognitivist theories of practical reasoning than Humean ones; indeed, he takes the plausibility of the scholastic view to count against the Humean views. Even so, it will be useful to imagine the view Tenenbaum could have taken had he applied his claims to desires proper rather than pro-attitudes.

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24 Tenenbaum also has a deeper, philosophical objection to Humean views. He understands Humean views as claiming that desires explain intentional actions in a purely psychological sense, and objects that "there are no "brute pushes" in the practical realm" (p.22). I have argued in Chapter 3 that retreating such an explanation of intentional action is not a viable move for a Humean to make.

The important features of the scholastic view, for my purposes, are that it treats a putatively non-cognitive state as an evaluative attitude; and that it claims that the attitude counts as evaluative in virtue of being an appearance of its object. Hereafter, this is the view I will be referring to as "the scholastic view": the pseudo-Tenenbaumian view that desires proper are evaluative attitudes in virtue of being appearances of their objects.

According to the scholastic view, what it means for the object of a desire to appear good to its subject is that, to the extent that the subject desires the object, they conceive of it as good:

> [F]or an agent to desire X is for X to appear to be good to this agent from a certain evaluative perspective...[W]e desire only what we conceive to be good.
>
> (Tenenbaum 2007, p.21)

Tenenbaum does not regard "appearing" as a having a single, simple definition. Rather, being an appearance of an object is a function that can be realized in different ways; that is, there are different senses in which an object can appear to a subject. Presumably, Tenenbaum makes this claim because his scholastic theory is not concerned with desires, but with pro-attitudes, which might not all be appearances for the same reasons.

This raises a more immediate concern, which is particularly pressing for Tenenbaum's view: is it in fact true, or even plausible, that there are multiple modes of appearing which all give rise to the same type of appearance? Tenenbaum claims that the broader uses of appearance illustrated in the table below are the "analogues of desire in the realm of theoretical reason"; but how are we to understand this analogy? What does Tenenbaum mean when he claims that desires are appearances of the good? Furthermore, if the Humean theory of practical reasoning should construe desires as evaluative attitudes in virtue of their being appearances of their

objects, then it matters for that theory whether there is just one sense of appearance or several. Investigating what senses of appearance are available will shed some light on that theory's commitments.

Tenenbaum presents five examples of appearing, which fall into two categories:

Perceptual Appearances	Inclinations to Judge
From far above, the car appears very small.	Looking only at the evidence you gathered, it appears that she is not guilty.
It appears red to me, but you had better ask someone else.	Presented this way, the argument appears to be valid; but when we formalize it, we see that it is not.
The raccoon appears to be dead.	

(The contents of this table are paraphrases closely based on Tenenbaum's examples on (Tenenbaum 2007, p.39)). Perceptual appearances are those where the object appears to the subject through a perceptual mode; it looks, sounds, smells, etc., a certain way. In the first case, the car looks very small; it appears very small by looking very small. I do not intend the use of "by" to signify mediation; the car does not on the one hand look very small, and then appear very small. Its appearing very small consists in its looking very small; it "visually-appears" very small. The other sort of appearance Tenenbaum considers is appearance in the sense of an inclination to judge; I will call these "evidential appearances". In the first case, the evidence appears to the subject in such a way that the subject is inclined to judge that the defendant is not guilty.

Tenenbaum's view raises an interesting question: although it seems natural to use "appears" in the context of evidential appearances, in what

sense is in evidential appearance an appearance? Perceptual appearances seem like paradigm cases of what it means to be an appearance; is there a coherent sense of "appearance" which both perceptual and evidential appearances share? Can it really be the case that when we say "it appears she is innocent", we have in mind the same sense of "appearance" which we use to say "it appears the raccoon is dead"? If so, then that commonality will tell us something about what desires proper must be like if they are appearances of their objects; if there is not, then the whole idea of desires as appearances will be under-specified, at best.

At first glance, it seems very odd to consider perceptual and evidential appearances as members of a single family of appearances. There are many significant differences between them, which may lead one to think that talk of "appearance" in the evidential case is in some sense figurative, and does not refer to an appearance in the way that appearance-talk in the perceptual case does. That is, the differences between perceptual and evidential appearances are so great that one might believe that there is really no single sense of "appearance" which unites them both.

It might be thought that evidential appearance in some way includes perceptual appearance, and so the sense in which evidential objects appear to the subject is to be explained in terms of their perceptual appearances. Then, it would make sense to understand talk of "evidential appearances" as a shorthand for perceptual appearances combined with the subject's inclination to make certain judgements on the basis of those appearances (we might say, the perceptual appearance combined with the subject's taking the content of that appearance to be evidence for some conclusion). There would be no true sense of "evidential appearance".

Perceptual appearances are necessarily presented to the subject in a particular mode (visual, olfactory, auditory, etc.), whereas inclinations to judge do not seem to be presented in any mode in particular. In fact, there is a sense in which they do not seem to be presented to the subject at all. In

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the case of the inconclusive evidence, the items that constitute the evidence (documents, let's say) must, one assumes, be presented to the subject perceptually, and hence in some sensory mode or other; but they are only perceptually presented *qua* objects, not *qua* evidence. What I mean is, the documents must be presented to the subject's senses in order for the subject to be in a position to be inclined to judge, on the basis of the documents; but Tenenbaum clearly does not think that the subject *sees* that the documents are evidence; if so, this would be a case of perceptual appearing. Presumably, that the subject must see the documents is just an enabling condition on their appearing to the subject as evidence, and not constitutive of their appearing to them in that further sense. This suffices to show that Tenenbaum does not think evidential appearances can be reduced to perceptual appearances, but it leaves the burden of proof with him to show in what sense evidential objects appear to the subject, i.e., in what sense evidential appearances are appearances at all.

   According to Tenenbaum, what unites these two very different senses of appearing is the idea that in both cases, understanding what is meant by "an appearance" requires an appeal to the idea of a perspective. In the perceptual case, the car appears very small from a certain perspective (a high vantage point); in the evidential case, the defendant appears innocent from a certain perspective (i.e., in light of only part of the evidence). It may be that other appearances would provide different, even contradictory perspectives on the same objects; this may lead the subject to doubt the veracity of certain appearances, but it makes no difference to the content of those appearances. Tenenbaum claims that we should understand the sense in which the object of a desire appears to its subject because it meets this more abstract definition; a desire affords its subject a perspective on its object. It does so because, in accordance with the old formula of the schools, to desire something is to conceive of it as good; on Tenenbaum's strict

reading of this proposition, a subject desires something to the extent that they conceive of it as good.

3.2 Tenenbaumian Desires

According to Tenenbaum, any appearance (perceptual, evidential, or desiderative) is an appearance in virtue of the fact that it affords the subject a perspective on its object; a viewpoint, in the visual case, or a partial grasp of the argument, in the evidential case. An appearance is perceptual if (let's suppose) it affords the subject a perspective on its object through the exercise of the subject's senses. An appearance is desiderative if it affords its subject a perspective on its object by being a conception of the goodness of its object:

> "To say that desiring is conceiving something to be good is to say
> that a desire represents its object, perhaps implicitly, as good –
> that is, as something that is worth being pursued."
>
> (Tenenbaum 2007, p.21)

Here are two basic differences between Scanlonian and Tenenbaumian desires:

(a) Although both sorts are evaluative attitudes, Scanlonian desires have that status in virtue of being partly composed of a judgement, which would be an evaluative attitude all on its own, independently of the other elements in virtue of which it happens to be part of a desire. In Tenenbaum's account, to desire is to conceive of as good; the evaluative nature of desiring is not explained by any separable, component part, but is an essential feature of the desire itself.

(b) The essential feature of desires in virtue of which they are evaluative attitudes is, on Tenenbaum's account, their representational content. There is a way that the object appears to the subject, insofar as they desire it, and the desire is a conception of the good in that it represents its object as good. On Scanlon's account, if the object of a desire is represented to its subject at all, it seems to be through a belief which partly constitutes the state of desiring; that belief does not represent the object as good, but rather relates it to a future state of pleasure or relief (for example, believing that drinking would alleviate one's thirst).

In light of these differences, Tenenbaum's account of desire seems like a better basis for a Humean theory of practical reasoning that Scanlon's. Subjects with Scanlonian desires do not seem to actually desire anything. Tenenbaum's account appears to be on a better footing in this regard, since it claims that the object of the subject's desire appears to them in a particular way, namely it is represented to them as good. Perhaps even this is not enough, however; after all, desires are not the only mental states with representational content, nor the only ones which can represent their objects as good.

Alan has a terrible toothache, which invades his every waking hour. It seems to Alan that if he went to the dentist, then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. Going to the dentist appears (to Alan) to be the thing to do.

This time, Alan has a Tenenbaumian desire: he has an appearance of some action as good, in the sense of to-be-done, which consists in the representational content of some mental state of his. It certainly seems more

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plausible that Tenenbaumian Alan has a genuine desire than that either of the Scanlonian Alans did. At least the object of this Alan's desire appears to him to be good; the Scanlonian Alans were merely preoccupied by the thought of the objects of their desires. Even so, Tenenbaumian Alan still seems to be a long way from actually desiring to go to the dentist.

> Alan has a terrible toothache, which invades his every waking hour. It seems to Alan that if he went to the dentist, then, after a brief episode of acute unpleasantness, he would feel much better. Going to the dentist appears (to Alan) to be the thing to do, but nevertheless, the prospect leaves him cold.

Here, I have added a phrase to the example which makes it clear that Alan does not have a desire, without removing anything from the Tenenbaumian characterization, stating anything incompatible with it, or making the subject seem incoherent. We could describe this case as one it which Alan has recognized that going to the dentist is a good idea, as opposed to judged that it is.

This formulation seems to capture the difference between going to the dentist appearing (being represented as) good to Alan, and Alan holding a (potentially) non-representational evaluative attitude towards it (as on Scanlon's account). But neither recognizing nor judging that it would be good to perform some action amounts to desiring to perform it.

Tenenbaum's own view, as I have mentioned, is that the role in action explanation that Humeans claim must be played by desire, is played by a pro-attitude, rather than by a mental state of a more particular type. In fact, he takes the philosophical use of "desire" to pick out pro-attitudes, not distinctive mental states; an assertion which Schueler criticizes as a tactical error, and which was discussed in chapter 2. Because of Tenenbaum's view of desires, it should come as no surprise that subjects with Tenenbaumian

desires do not seem to have a desire in the Humean sense. The point of this discussion is to decide whether Tenenbaum's account of appearances of the good can be used as the basis for a successful, Humean characterization of desire as an evaluative attitude. That is, whether it would be useful, from a Humean point of view, to snip Tenenbaum's account of desires as appearances of the good away from his claim that desires are pro-attitudes, and graft it onto a more substantive account of desires as distinctive mental states. So when I claim that Tenenbaumian Alan seems not to desire to go to the dentist, what matters is this: even were we to assert, contra-Tenenbaum, that the appearance of Alan's action as good were constituted by the representational character of a mental state of a particular type, not a pro-attitude, it would still seem implausible to suggest that the mental state in question is a desire.

According to Tenenbaum's definition, it seems likely that Scanlonian desires would count as appearances. The subject of a Scanlonian desire has mental state which affords a perspective on some action; they believe that it would lead to a future state of pleasure or relief, and they judge that there is a reason to perform the action. In fact, Scanlonian desires seem rather like instances of evidential judging. In the same way that certain documents can make it appear to a juror that the defendant is not guilty, certain sensations can make it appear to the subject that they ought to find something to drink. Nonetheless, the pseudo-Tenenbaumian view does seem closer to capturing real desire than Scanlon's account. It claims that desires are appearances of the goodness of their object, where appearances generally are to be understood as mental states which afford a perspective on their object. Then, it claims that desires are appearances of the goodness of their objects because they are representations of their objects as good.

This seems to suggest that whatever improvement over Scanlon's account lies in Tenenbaum's account, is to be found in his explanation of the way in which desires constitute appearances. For the same reason, however,

it seems plausible that the deficiency in the account lies here too. Scanlon's and Tenenbaum's accounts do not contain precisely the same flaw. Scanlonian desires are not genuine desires because the object of a Scanlonian desire is not represented to its subject in any way in particular; whereas Tenenbaumian desires are not genuine desires because their objects could be represented in just the same way by mental states other than desires. Tenenbaum's account does not pick out a distinctive mental state (and nor was it meant to). In order to differentiate desires from other mental states, Humeans must make claims about the way in which desires represent their objects; in particular, they must show that desires represent their objects as good, in a way that no other mental state can.

How do real, familiar desires represent their objects? That is, what is it like to desire something, as opposed to judging, recognizing or even perceiving that it is good?

3.4 Stampe's Account: the Desiderative Mode of Representation

There is no way that the world must seem to me when I believe it would be good if my team won. I do not judge that it would be good if they won, as I might judge that coffee is more expensive than it used to be; nor do I merely recognize that it would be good if they won, as I might recognize that it rained earlier and the pitch is soft. If I desire that they win, then it seems to me as if their winning would be a good thing. That's an understatement. When I desire that my team win, their winning strikes me urgently and forcefully as good, and it seems to elicit, or even demand, a response from me. The prospect of my team's victory is represented to me to me as a fragile possibility that desperately ought to be realized. This unshakeable truth strikes me with a force that far surpasses merely thinking that it would be good if my team won. Stampe writes:

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[I]n desire, one is somehow *struck* by, affected by, the merits of the thing wanted, or the prospect of having it, in a way that one needn't be if one merely knows it would be good; so one may say, "I know it would be best to take that job, but the prospect of doing so simply leaves me cold, does not strike me as something I want to do; it somehow doesn't *seem* to me the good prospect I know it is."…[T]here is something characteristic of desire: if one wants a thing it *seems* to one as if the thing wanted would be good…[O]ne might say, consistently, "Although it doesn't *seem* to me to be so, the President is a great man".

(Stampe 1987, p.357)

The object of a desire *seems* a particular way to its subject, whereas the object of an evaluative belief need not seem any way to its subject.

Stampe accounts for this difference in terms of the representational mode of desiring. Desiring, he claims, is to believing as feeling is to seeing; much, though not all, of what can be felt can be seen, but what is felt is represented, as it were, in a different mode than when it is seen, even if it is represented as having just the same properties. Much, though not all, of what is desired can also be believed (though, admittedly, not at the time it is desired); but what is desired is represented in a different mode than when it is believed, even if it is represented as having just the same properties.

Stampe claims that the fundamental difference between the representational content of desire and that of belief is a modal one (where "modal" is used in the same way in which we talk about "sensory modes"). A difference in representational mode constitutes a difference in representational content; the content of a particular representation is how it represents its object, and representations which differ in mode represent their objects in different ways, even if they share an object. Desires and beliefs use different modes of representation even when they share an

object; so desires and beliefs that share an object necessarily differ in their representational contents.

This is true even where the desire and the belief have the same representational character (i.e., represent their object as having the same properties). The very same property is presented in different modes when it is part of the representational character of a belief or a desire, just as the roundness of a coin can be represented visually or somatically. Likewise, a belief and a desire could share the same propositional contents, and still have different representational content. A belief and a desire can have the same propositional content (for example, I can believe or desire that I have a cup of coffee, though not simultaneously); but if they do, their representational contents will still differ. A desire with the propositional content that I have a cup of coffee necessarily represents the state of affairs of my having a cup of coffee as good, in the desiderative mode; whereas a belief that I have a cup of coffee does not represent that state of affairs as good, at all. A desire with the propositional content that I have a cup of coffee has a different representational mode, and hence different representational contents, to the belief that I have a cup of coffee, even though the two share the same object and the same representational character.

Stampe has very little to say about what it means to desire something in the desiderative mode; that is, what it is really like to desire. This is understandable, given how hard it is to describe sensations, and the extent to which such a project seems to rely on taking one's own experiences to be representative of all analogous experiences. Even so, given that what is at stake in this discussion is precisely how real desires are to be characterized, it is necessary to make the attempt. The charge I have levelled at Scanlon and pseudo-Tenenbaum was that the subjects who have their sorts of "desires" seem not to really desire anything. If a Stampe-style account is to pass the same test, then we have to be clear about what it is like to have a

Stampe-style desire; that is, we have to be clear about what the distinctive mode of representation of desire, actually is. We know what it is like to have a Scanlonian desire: one has an unpleasant sensation which leads to a belief about how it might be relieved, the prospect of relief (or some other related object) preoccupies one's thought or attention, and one judges that there is a reason to act so as to relieve the unpleasantness. And we know what it is like to have a Tenenbaumian desire: there is some object which appears good to one, at least from a certain perspective. What is it like to have a Stampe-style desire?

I think the following three characteristics properly belong to the representational mode of desiring. I do not claim that this list is complete, or that it represents a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for representing in the desiderative mode. Rather, I take it that these three properties characterize typical desires. Some mental states may lack one or two of these, either at times or entirely, while still remaining desires; some desire-like mental states (such as wishes, urges and cravings) may fail to be desires in virtue of lacking one or two of these characteristics. Mental states can have these characteristics in greater or lesser degrees, and the extent to which a mental state has a particular characteristic can vary over time. As I argued in the previous chapter, "desire" is a very specific category of mental state, which bears superficial similarities to a great many others. Whether a particular mental state is a desire may turn out to be an empirical question, in the sense that it may have to be judged on a case-by-case basis. With those caveats in place, here are my suggested characteristics of the representational mode of desiring:

(a) **Risk:** The objects of desire are very often tantalizingly out of reach. The nature of being tantalized is such that what one wants must seem obtainable, or at least very nearly so, and yet uncertain. The objects of desire are represented as goods the

subject could come to have, but also that they might fail to. Remember, this is a characteristic of the representational mode of desiring, not its content; whatever desirable properties the desire represents its object as having, it represents as subject to risk. The refreshing sensation of a cool drink of water is represented by the desire to drink as one which the subject could come to enjoy, but which they might also not be able to have.

(b) **Forcefulness:** The object of one's desire is represented as not merely affording a response (typically an action) but as demanding it; the objects of desire are to be responded to, in the normative sense of "to be". One ought to act so as to get what one wants, and to be pleased when one's desires are satisfied.

(c) **Goodness:** The object of one's desire is necessarily represented as good.

Sigma States

In this chapter, I consider some different views of how desires might be related to other factors such as their objects and the subject's other mental states, and how these relations might help to establish that desires actually do represent their objects as good, and hence that the special representational properties of desire can account for its rational authority.

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I followed Stampe in arguing that desires represent their objects as good, not through their contents, but through a particular representational mode. This chapter is concerned with explaining the rational authority of desire, in light of that characterization of the representational characteristics of desire. This section sets out Scanlon's and Tenenbaum's accounts of the rational authority of desire; partly for the sake of completeness, but mainly in order to draw useful comparisons with the Stampe-style account developed towards the end of this chapter. Section 5 explains Stampe's view of the rational authority of desire, and deals with some problems which are more-or-less internal to the account. In section 6, I put forward a problem for Stampe's account based on Schueler's "putting-together point" (see chapter 2). Solving this problem requires making a substantial addition to the account.

I will argue that Scanlon's and Tenenbaum's higher-order approval accounts are not suitable bases for a Humean theory of practical reasoning, since they make the rational authority of desire derivative, not original.

Stampe's account is more useful from a Humean point of view (which is unsurprising since Stampe sets out to defend a Humean theory of reasons, whereas Tenenbaum and Scanlon do not), but it still requires considerable modification. First, many of Stampe's claims about the relationship between desire and perception should either be understood as metaphorical or dropped entirely. Secondly, I will argue that Stampe's explanation of why the objects of desire are good requires considerable revision to be even plausible by Stampe's own standards. Thirdly, in section 6, I will argue that the rational authority of desire cannot be explained simply by appeal to the existence of a set of mental and bodily states, as Stampe aims to; the explanation must include mental events, as well. The argument here is closely analogous to Schueler's "putting together" point and my response to it, dealt with in chapter 2.

2. Higher-Order Approval Accounts

Scanlon and Tenenbaum offer accounts according to which the rational authority of a desire is explained by the fact that the subject approves of or endorses the desire. Scanlon appeals to the subject's faculty of judgement, while Tenenbaum argues that what matters is the way the desire fits into the subject's considered view of how things are, evaluatively speaking. It will turn out that the two accounts are not very different, particularly in terms of how they stand in respect to the Humean view. Neither regards desire as a source of rational authority, so neither can act as a model for a Humean account of the rational authority of desire. I will extend this conclusion to cover all higher-order approval accounts, i.e., those which explain the rational authority of mental states by appeal to the relationship they stand it to what might be called the subject's considered evaluative perspective.

2.1 Scanlon's Judgement-Based Account

Scanlon argues that desires are composed of three (sometimes four) elements; and that whatever rational authority a desire might seem to enjoy is derived from the evaluative judgement which partially constitutes that desire. When the subject of a Scanlonian desire acts in a way that we are inclined to (properly) explain in terms of what that subject wants, what explains their action in the right way is their judging that there is a reason to act as they do. The fact that we are inclined to appeal to the subject's desires at this point is accounted for by the fact that the desire which explains their action in the right way is one component of a desire. Part of what it means for the subject to desire to act in a certain way, is that they judge that there is some reason for them to do so. So Scanlon offers a judgement-based account of the rational authority of desire (and a "debunking" explanation of the intuitive plausibility of appealing to desires to explain intentional actions).

If the subject did not judge there was a reason to act some way, then they would not desire to, because they would lack one of the essential components of a Scanlonian desire. A subject cannot desire to act in a way that they judge there is no reason to. This feature Scanlon refers to as "judgement sensitivity"; an attitude is judgement sensitive if it is held only if the subject takes there to be a supporting reason. If the subject lacks or loses a certain evaluative judgement then they will not have any desire which that judgement would be a constituent of; so desires are sensitive to the subject's evaluative judgements. In Scanlon's example, a thirsty subject has an unpleasant sensation of dryness in the mouth, believes that having a drink would make them feel better, and judges that it would be good to have a drink of water. If they lacked that judgement, or if they judged that there was no reason for them to drink water, then they would not have a desire to

drink water; they would only have a sensation and a thought about how to relieve it.

So, when a desire seems to explain an intentional action in the right way, the normative force of the explanation is not provided by anything distinctive of or originating in desiring, but in the subject's judgements of what reasons there are to act. Desires can only explain intentional actions when they (the desires) are in harmony with the subject's evaluative judgements. If we consider a desire divorced from any evaluative judgements, then it lacks any rational authority whatsoever.

One might think that the claim that a desire only explains intentional action (in the derivative way it does, on Scanlon's view) if the subject judges that there is a reason to act in that way, is not true to everyday experience. That is, one might think that, in day to day life, it does not seem to be the case that the sorts of intentional actions in which desires are involved are always accompanied by, and indeed are always explained by, judgements. There is a familiar type of situation in which one acts because, as we often say, one "feels like it". These are a subset of the cases Scanlon identifies as "matters of taste", where not only is the subject's prospective pleasure uniquely important to the question of how they ought to act, but nothing terribly important is at stake, either. For example, one's choice of partner is a matter of taste, but an important one; one's choice of tie is equally a matter of taste, but one's future happiness and well-being rarely hangs on one's choice of tie. "Because I felt like it" seems an appropriate explanation of a subject's wearing a red tie rather than a blue one, but not of marrying one person over another.

In these cases, which I will call "matters of fancy", it is not obvious that the subject must take there to be a reason to act in precisely the way they do; though their action may be one of a range of actions that they regard as supported by reasons, there may be no reason for which the subject picks one action over another within that range. If I wear a red tie

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because I feel like it, I may judge that there is a reason to wear a tie, but no reason to wear this tie in particular, or to wear this tie rather than that one. In such a case, it would not seem that in wearing the red tie I had acted unintentionally or irrationally; it would (or at least it may well) seem that my feeling like wearing that tie is the best explanation there is of my doing so.

Ruth Chang suggests amending Scanlon's account to deal with matters of fancy. In (Chang 2004), she argues that Scanlon could allow that, in the case of matters of fancy, the subject's desire properly explains their action when considered independently of the evaluative judgement which normally partly constitutes a desire, but not when considered independently of the subject's whole system of evaluative judgements. In matters of fancy, the subject's desire properly explains their intentional action because the subject has already judged that, in instances such as this, there is a reason to do whatever they feel like doing. So whereas in the usual case a desire derives its rational authority from the judgement which partly constitutes it, in matters of fancy the desire derives its authority from a judgement about the desire itself and the type of situation the subject finds themselves in.

2.2 Tenenbaum's Evaluative Perspectives

Tenenbaum claims that a desire is an appearance of the goodness of its object, and explains intentional actions in the same sense that other sorts of appearances explain the responses with which they are associated. For instance, in whatever sense the raccoon's appearing dead explains believing that it is dead, desiring to phi explains phi-ing.

Tenenbaum understands all appearances, including desires, as partial "takes" on how things are; representations of the world from a particular perspective, which is necessarily incomplete. The raccoon appears dead at

this distance, or from this angle; but it may not appear dead from a different vantage point, or considering different evidence (i.e., in light of further appearances). Whether a particular appearance of the raccoon as dead is a good reason to believe that the raccoon is dead depends on whether that appearance can be corroborated by comparing it to other appearances of the raccoon, or whether considering it in light of other appearances will unmask it as misleading. We say such things as, "certainly the raccoon appears dead from over here; but it was moving around just a moment ago, and from up close you can see it's still breathing. It may appear dead, but that is not a good reason to believe it really is."

All appearances are inconclusive in this way; the rational authority of a particular appearance depends on how it stands in relation to the subject's total stock of appearances, and judgements about them. An appearance is rationally authoritative to the extent that it coheres or harmonises with the subject's overall grasp of how things are, so that it can be assimilated into that collection with minimal disturbance, in the form of contradictions and inconsistencies. In the raccoon example, the appearance of the raccoon as dead has insufficient authority to explain believing it really is dead, because that appearance is contradicted by too large a proportion of the subject's pre-existing stock of appearances. In the case of a desire (an appearance of the goodness of its object), the desire has the authority to explain acting so as to satisfy it, insofar as the subject's pre-existing stock of appearances, their overall evaluative standpoint, is compatible with the goodness of that object. A desire will lack rational authority if, or to the extent that, the representation of its object as good is contradicted by or inconsistent with the subject's overall standpoint.

3. The Normativity Problem: Stampe's Account

Just as a proper explanation of intentional action is one which accounts for intentional actions in terms of what is distinctive about them, a proper explanation of rationally authoritative desires must explain those desires in terms of what is distinctive about them. Proper explanations of intentional action are given in terms of the subject's reasons for acting, since intentional actions are those which are performed because the subject sees there to be a reason to perform them. Rationally authoritative desires are essentially representations of their objects as good. A proper explanation of the creation of rationally authoritative desires must, therefore, show how those desires come to be representations of their objects as good, in the ways they do. That is, the account must explain why, in the case of a particular desire, it has the object and the representational content that it does.

Subjects (human ones, at least) have bodily states and mental states. How things are with the subject (i.e., which bodily and mental states the subject is in) makes certain situations better than others, with regard to that subject. For instance, if that subject is exhausted, then it would be better if they were resting rather than continuing to exert themselves, all other things being equal. Of course, not everything about that subject makes resting a good idea; their memories, for example, probably have no bearing on the case one way or another. Those things which do matter, in this regard, Stampe refers to collectively as a sigma-state. A sigma-state is a functional state realized by some collection of the subject's bodily and mental states; it makes it the case that some state of affairs would be good, while others would not. In the example, the subject's resting would be good, while the subject's going for a run would not.

According to Stampe, human subjects are sensitive to sigma-states. A subject who is in a sigma-state will have a mental representation caused by that state. But the mental representation does not represent the sigma-state; it represents the state of affairs that, because of the sigma-state, would be good. The subject who is exhausted would have a mental representation of

themselves resting (that is, of a state of affairs in which they rest). Moreover, just as the sigma-state makes the state of affairs in question good, the mental representation caused by the sigma-state represents that state of affairs as good.

Stampe claims that these mental representations are desires. They represent states of affairs which do not obtain; in each case, that which is related to the sigma-state which caused the desire. Those states of affairs are the "objects" of desire, in the sense of being what they are desires for (note that this "intentional object" of desire, as I'm going to be calling it, is always a state of affairs, never an object in the everyday sense). A desire represents its intentional object as good, but not in the way that a belief might represent its object as good. Desiring is not a matter of conceiving of a certain state of affairs as a bearer of the property "goodness"; rather, desiring means being struck by the goodness of the state of affairs in question.

3.1 How Desires Get Their Objects

Perception-like states have objects in two different senses; there are the objects which cause those states, and there are the objects which those states are about, or which those states represent. The former Stampe calls "perceptual objects", and the latter I will call "intentional objects". The lynch-pin of Stampe's account is the separation of the intentional and perceptual objects of desire; that is, Stampe rejects the seemingly obvious assumption that desires are caused by what they are desires for. By separating the intentional and perceptual objects, Stampe makes it possible to give a detailed account of why a subject has the desires they have, and how desires are related to other mental and bodily states, without making the rational authority of desire out to be *per objectum* or based on higher-order approval (i.e., without locating the source of rational authority outside of desire). On the other hand, it does give rise to some puzzles and potential

problems. In this section, I will set out the relationship between the perceptual and intentional objects of desire; in the next section, I will explore one of the most obvious objections to the separation of the two objects.

What, then, are the perceptual objects of desires, if not their intentional objects? Stampe's view is that desires are proprioceptions; perceptions of states of the subject. The state which causes the desire, that is, the state "which causes it to seem to [the subject] as if the thing wanted [i.e., the intentional object of the desire] would be good" (p.372), Stampe labels "$\sum$". A sigma-state can be composed of the subject's bodily states, and other perceptual states, including other desires (though not, of course, the desire of which it is the cause), and beliefs.

For example, the bodily state in which the subject is depleted of water might give rise to the desire for something to drink; the state in which the subject is low on water and believes that lemonade is more refreshing than coffee might give rise to the desire for lemonade. More specific, complex, or far-reaching desires must, presumably, be caused by more complicated sigma-states that involve more of the subject's beliefs and desires. Since all sigma-states are composed of states of the subject, the desires they cause are proprioceptive states. Some sigma-states include perceptual states of the subject; the desires they cause are apperceptive (i.e., perceptions of the same subject's other perceptions). So all desires are perceptual states; specifically, they are proprioceptive. Furthermore, some desires are apperceptive.

Desires make indications through their representational content; desires represent their intentional objects as good, so it seems plausible that they are indicators of the goodness of their intentional objects. Analogously, the fuel gauge in a car represents the tank as filled to a certain proportion of its volume (or represents the fuel as filling a certain proportion of the tank, if you prefer), so represents the level to which the tank is full (or the amount of fuel relative to the size of the tank). While it is probably safe to

assume that we all have a pretty good grasp of what fuel is, and what fuel tanks are, it would be reckless to assume that everyone shares a philosophical conception of goodness. So, to understand how desire functions as an indicator, and how its role as indicator solves the Normativity Problem, we shall first need to know what Stampe means by "good" when he claims, for example, that a desire represents its object as good.

On the topic of goodness, Stampe writes:

> Σ is to be a state of the subject such that, ideally, if one is in such a state – a state that makes it seem$_d$ to one as if it would be good if p – then it would be good were one for example to drink, or generally, that it would be good were the objective of the desire to obtain.
>
> <div align="right">(Stampe 1987, p. 373)</div>

One's being in a sigma-state explains why one has a certain desire; that is, it explains how the mental representation comes to exist, and why it has the representational content it does. It also explains why the intentional object of that desire would be good if it came about, if indeed it would be. For example, the state in which the subject is depleted of water could be a sigma-state; it would both bring it about that drinking would strike the subject as a good thing, and it would explain why it would be good for the subject to drink. The goodness of the intentional object of a desire is explained by the perceptual object of that same desire; the perceptual object, the sigma-state, brings it about that the intentional object is represented to the subject as good.

A sigma-state accounts for the goodness of a particular non-obtaining state of affairs, and brings into existence a desire which has that state of affairs as its intentional object. So a desire is connected to the goodness of its object, which is what a desire purports to indicate, through its own cause;

the sigma-state. This explains why a particular desire has the representational content it does; the sigma-state which causes the desire also picks out the state that it is a desire for. When a subject has a desire caused by a particular sigma-state, it seems to them as if it would be good were a certain state of affairs, the one appropriately related to the sigma-state, to obtain.

Desires are proprioceptive states in which the subject is sensitive to their own "condition", as it were, (that is, whatever makes up the sigma-state in question) and thereby comes to know what would be good. Desires come to be indicators in virtue of the fact that what causes a desire also explains the goodness of its object. This is the connection between desires and the goodness that they purport to be indications of; to the extent that the relationships between sigma-states and desires, and sigma-states and the intentional objects of desire, are consistent, desires will be reliable indicators of the goodness of their intentional objects.

So the mechanism that connects the representational content of a desire, its indicative readout, to what it is an indication of, is the two-limbed connection between desires and sigma states, on the one hand, and sigma-states and the intentional objects of desire, on the other. That is, between desires and their perceptual objects, and between the perceptual and intentional objects of desire. In the case of the fuel gauge we can also ask, knowing the nature of the connection between the amount of fuel in the tank and the reading on the dial, what change in the amount of fuel is indicated by which direction of movement of the needle. That is, we can ask how differences in what it is an indication of are reflected in the read-out; if the amount of fuel decreases, how will the read-out change?

Does the corresponding question make sense in the case of desire? It seems to me it does: how are differences in the intentional object, or perhaps, differences between similar but non-identical intentional objects, reflected in the representational character of the relevant desires (i.e., the

desires with which those intentional objects share a sigma-state)? The answer is fairly simple: differences between similar intentional objects are reflected by corresponding differences in the representational character of the desire. The representational character of a desire is the way it represents its object as being. If there are two intentional objects (i.e., non-obtaining states of affairs) that are similar enough to facilitate a comparison, but which differ in some respects, then the desires which they are the objects of will represent them as being different in just the ways that they are different, all other things being equal. A desire for a large cup of coffee will differ from a desire for a small cup of coffee just in that the latter represents its object as one's having a large cup, whereas the latter represents its object as one's having a small cup. This is because the properties of intentional objects, and so the representational character of desires for those objects, are explained by the appropriate sigma-state. What makes it the case that a desire is for a large cup of coffee also makes it the case that the desire represents its object as a large cup. Naturally, these are generalisations that describe the connections between sigma states and desires when everything is functioning perfectly; the existence of aberrant desires does nothing to undermine the descriptions of the mechanisms involved.

3.2 Objection to Separating the Intentional and Perceptual Objects of Desire.

The perceptual object of a perception-like state is whatever object which causes the state to occur; the objects of non-epistemic perceiving. In the case of visual perceptual states, the perceptual and intentional objects are the same; a visual perceptual state is caused by the very same object that it is a way of coming to know about. Seeing a chocolate mousse being brought out of the kitchen causes the perception of a chocolate mousse

being brought out of the kitchen, and is a way of coming to know about that chocolate mousse.

One may be tempted to think the same might be true in the case of desire; that a desire is a non-epistemic perception of what it is a desire for. A desire for chocolate mousse would be a perception of a chocolate mousse; the intentional and perceptual objects of a desire would be the same. This cannot, however, be the case. The intentional object of a desire is not an object in the everyday sense, but rather a state of affairs which does not obtain. If the state of affairs which obtains is the "way things are", then a non-obtaining state of affairs is a "way things are not". On the assumption that the way things are not is not causally efficacious, the intentional objects of desires are not their perceptual objects[25]. Stampe offers much the same argument when he claims that the intentional object of a desire cannot be its perceptual object, since the perceptual object of any perception, desire included, must appear some way or other to the subject; and "what is presumably not (yet) the case cannot be appearing any way" (p.372).

This might be a problem. The proper explanation of the creation of desires must account for desires coming to have the intentional objects they have, but the intentional objects of desires cannot be their causes; perceptual objects, their presumed causes, cannot be identical with their intentional objects. So how desires come to have their intentional objects has to be explained in terms of their perceptual objects. Once the perceptual and intentional objects of desire are separated, there is a danger that the explanation of how the subject comes to have particular desires might turn

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25 Even proposed instances of "negative causation" are not examples of causation by non-obtaining states of affairs. In the famous example, part of what caused the Titanic to hit an iceberg was the fact that there were no binoculars on the bridge. That there were no binoculars on the bridge is a fact; it is how things were, not how they were not.

out to be merely causal, and fail to connect desires to other mental states or to their objects in a way which could account for their rational authority.

While it would be problematic to claim that the intentional objects of desires count in favour of having those desires (since it would be implausible to claim that desires are sources of rational authority if they are themselves had for reasons), one simple way to set desires into a normative framework would be to have the intentional objects of desires be their perceptual objects. Then, desires could be understood as perception-like responses to their objects, perhaps specifically to the goodness of their objects; desiring would be a matter of being sensitive to goodness, in a similar way to that in which visual perceiving is a matter of being responsive to reflectance properties. If desires are not responses to what they are desires for, then it may become difficult to see how they could count in favour of actions directed towards their intentional objects. All the burden of fitting desires into a normative framework falls on the perceptual objects.

Moreover, separating the perceptual and intentional objects of desires gives rise to what may appear to be an absurd consequence. It seems absolutely obvious that, at times, we desire things that we can easily perceive; and furthermore, that part of the reason why we want them is that we can see them, right there in front of us. For example, walking past a bookshop this morning I caught sight of a brand new, cloth-bound, hardback copy of one of my favourite books; immediately, I wanted it. A moment ago, I had not thought that such an object existed, much less want it; and yet now here it was, and I did. It certainly seemed as if what I wanted was the book, and my seeing it played a crucial role in my coming to want it. This cannot, however, be exactly right, if we assume that the book itself was the perceptual object of my desire, because the perceptual object of a desire is never its intentional object. Whatever account Stampe offers of the relationship between the perceptual and intentional objects of a desire must explain the intuition that sometimes subjects desire what they can perceive,

partly because they can perceive it. He is certainly aware of this phenomenon and the need for an explanation. He writes, for example: "[o]f course you do see things sometimes that seem$_d$ as if they would be good to have and you want them." (p.371).

Both of these issues can be resolved by examining the way in which sigma states explain desires. A sigma state makes it the case that it would be good were the world a certain way, and causes the subject to desire that the world be that way. That is, it accounts for both the representational content of the desire, and the goodness of its object. Since perceptual states can be among the constituents of sigma states, the subject's seeing something enticing can be part of the explanation of their coming to desire to have it, and the goodness of having it.

3.3 The Goodness of Desires

Now the connection between desires and the goodness which they indicate has been set out, and the manner in which they indicate it made clear; but it seems we are not much nearer to knowing what is meant by "goodness" in this context. Or perhaps it would be better to say we are no nearer to knowing whether Stampe is justified in claiming that the property which desires indicate is "goodness" understood in the least theoretically loaded, most familiar sense available.

If anything at all counts in favour of performing a particular action, then the goodness of that action surely must do. It could be argued that it does not follow from something's being good that there is a reason to achieve it, all other things being equal. I shall regard Stampe's use of "goodness" as stipulative, picking out that which there is a reason to realise, whatever that may be. So it would be possible, for instance, for a committed hedonist to read all instances of "good" in Stampe's account as "pleasurable", if they think that pleasurability is the property which there is always reason

to pursue. If it is accepted that desires function as indicators, then it can still be asked whether the property they indicate really is goodness; this question will be equivalent to asking whether desires, conceived of in the way Stampe does, really have rational authority at all.

Sigma-states explain why the intentional objects of desire are good, when they are. Sigma-states can include bodily states of the subject, of which Stampe's example is the state of being depleted of water. They can also include perceptual states of the subject; and Stampe suggests (p.373), somewhat tentatively, that they might include other cognitive and conative states of the subject. So the explanation of the goodness of the intentional objects of desire, or the justification for claiming that the property bestowed on those objects by the sigma-state is goodness, must be given in terms of some of these component parts of sigma-states.

Let's take a simple example. Suppose, following Stampe's lead, that the state of being depleted of water comprises a sigma-state for a particular subject; since the subject is depleted of water, the prospect of drinking strikes them as good, and indeed it really would be good if they were to drink. And why would it be good if they were to drink? Because they are depleted of water. The fact that the subject is dehydrated is not supposed to count in favour of acting, but it is supposed to show that the desire to act is an indication of goodness, and therefore a reason to act. Dehydration, the sigma-state, makes it the case that there is a reason to act. It does so in the sense that it causes the desire, which actually is a reason to act. Moreover, it does so in the sense that it explains why desire is a reason to act, since the connection between sigma-states and the intentional objects of desire is what qualifies desires as indicators.

3.4 Desiring and Perceiving

This section will explain Stampe's view of the relationship between desires and perceptions, and why it is better to regard the authority of desire as an instance of the authority of indicators, not of perceptions. Stampe identifies four reasons for thinking that desires have the rational authority of perceptions, listed below. Given the discussion of Tenenbaum's appearances, above, it will probably be quite clear to the reader that (1-4) provide insufficient justification for the claim that desires have the authority of perceptions (though I will explain why this is so in each instance). Most obviously, of the four points below only (4) addresses the claim that desiring is a way of perceiving; (1-3) are all concerned with showing that desires are analogous to perceptual states in certain respects, not that they actually are perceptual states. It seems plausible that Stampe thinks of perception itself as very much like, if not actually a special kind of, indication; but it makes better sense of his position, given more modern philosophical commitments and debates about the nature of perception, to drop the perceptual analogy entirely, and simply think of desires as indicators.

(1) Perceptions represent their objects in a distinct mode, and desires represent their objects in a distinct mode; so desiring fulfils one criterion for being a type of perception. Desiring and perceiving are both ways of representing objects to a subject. Different modes of sensory perception represent their objects in different ways (visually, somatically, aurally, etc.). Desire, too, has a distinctive mode of representation. Desiring something means being struck by its goodness; being affected or moved. The subject does not merely take it to be good, but it seems good to the subject. "Seeming", according to Stampe, is a perceptual quality.

It is false that "seeming" is a perceptual quality; at least in the sense in which it would have to be to support Stampe's argument. Plausibly, what one fears seems a certain way to one; it seems frightful or fearsome. Surely fearing is not a case of perceiving what one is afraid of! Stampe's claim that

seeming is a perceptual quality could be understood as the claim that perception in a particular mode is the paradigm case of things seeming a particular way to the subject; so the appeal to perception is understood as illustrative, not a substantive commitment.

(2) Desires and perceptions have the same sort of rational authority; that is, they make sense of actions in the same way. Conceiving of desire as a way of perceiving allows us to understand the rational authority of desire by comparing it to the rational authority of perception. Seeing rain falling outside, one is struck in a particular way by the state of affairs of its raining: visually. Seeing rain falling makes sense of believing that it is raining; indeed, Stampe asserts that it counts in favour of believing that it is raining. Analogously, in desiring that it rain, one is struck in a particular way by the state of affairs: one wants it to be so. Desiring that it rain makes sense of certain actions, such as checking the weather forecast, or doing a rain dance. Perceiving, moreover, seems to have *per se* rational authority; what counts in favour of believing that it is raining, in the example, is the visual perception that rain is falling. It may be that there are better reasons not to believe that it is raining (if, for instance, one knows this appearance of rain to be a clever optical illusion); but nevertheless, the fact that it visually seems to one that it is raining remains a reason to believe that it is, albeit a defeasible one. Likewise, the fact that it seems, in the desiderative sense, to one that rainfall would be good counts in favour of doing a rain dance, even if there are better reasons not to (suppose one knows that rain dances are very time consuming).

This seems an accurate description of the rational authority of desire, in that it differentiates the authority of desire from that of belief, and gets the "scope" of desire's authority right; a single desire is rarely a conclusive reason to perform an action, and particular desires are often overruled. It does not, however, support the conclusion that desires are perceptions; it

would only do so if it were also the case that kinds of state are individuated by differences in their rational authority.

(3) Desiring is an instance of the subject's being responsive to a certain property, just as perceptions are instances of sensitivity to properties. To desire something is to be responsive to its goodness in a particular way, just as to see something is to be visually sensitive to (let us suppose) its reflectance properties.

It may be true that both perceiving and desiring are instances of the subject's being sensitive to a certain type of property and responding in a particular way; but a whole host of mental states which seem to be neither desires nor perceptual state fit this restriction. For example, to be morally indignant is to respond to the unfairness or injustice in a situation by feeling a particular way; to be sad is to respond to the pathos in a situation in a certain way, and so on.

(4) There is a difference between the perceptual and intentional objects of desire, which is analogous to the difference between epistemic and non-epistemic objects of perception. The non-epistemic object of a perception is what causes it; whatever the perception constitutes an instance of sensitivity to. The epistemic object of a perception is what the subject comes to know through perceiving. Take, for instance, seeing a bowl of red apples. The non-epistemic object of the perception is (let's say) the reflectance properties of the bowl and the apples. The epistemic object of the perception is what the subject comes to know through perceiving; that there is a bowl of red apples on the table.

Drawing a distinction between the perceptual and intentional objects of desire (what causes the desire and what the subject wants, in other words) gives Stampe's account a lot of explanatory power, and a way to understand desires as connected with other mental states and considerations without forfeiting their *per se* rational authority. As we saw in section 4.2, however, the relationship between a desire and its cause cannot be the same as the

relationship between a perceptual state and its non-epistemic object; so this fourth and final observation does little or nothing to support the claim that desires are perceptual states.

3.5 A Possible Objection Undermined

As soon as we introduce goodness into the discussion, the temptation arises to claim that it is the goodness itself that counts in favour of action, not the subject's desires. If the intentional objects of desires are good, then why wouldn't it be that goodness which counts in favour of action, not the desire for it? Why would it be necessary to appeal to desires to explain intentional actions, when we could appeal directly to their intentional objects? To claim that the goodness of what is desired counts in favour of action would be to model the rational authority of desire after that of belief. We have already seen why the intentional objects of desire cannot be the source of desire's rational authority, as they would be if they counted in favour of action, in chapter 4 section 2.2. The intentional object of a desire is not an object in the ordinary sense; it is a state of affairs which does not obtain. All reasons are facts , and non-obtaining states of affairs, ways the world is not, are not facts. The intentional objects of desire, therefore, cannot be reasons for action, because they are not facts, and all reasons are facts.

There is a sense in which it is false to say that the intentional objects of a desire are (or can be) good. They are never really good, because they are never really anything. They are non-obtaining states of affairs; ways the world is not. Saying that the intentional object of a desire is good, is really a shorthand for saying that the actual situation is such that it would be good were things the way the intentional object depicts. What a sigma-state explains is not, strictly speaking, the attribution of a certain property to the intentional object of a desire; what it explains is the fact that it would be good were the intentional object of the desire to be realized.

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3.6 Where the Explanation Has to End

Could a staunch opponent, at this point, appeal once again to the simple anti-Humean challenge ("just because you want to phi doesn't mean there is a reason to do it")? Could they claim that the subject's being in a certain sigma-state does not make it that case that it would be good were the object of their desires to be achieved? That one is dehydrated, they might object, does not make it the case that it would be good were one to drink. If not, then the attempt to explain why desires count in favour of action by appeal to sigma-states fails, since desire would fail to be an indication of goodness. In order for this sort of objection to count against Stampe's view, it must be claimed that the sigma-state does not confer any goodness on the intentional object of the related desire, whatsoever; it would not be enough were this opponent to claim that sigma-states do not necessarily give rise to sufficient reasons to act, since that much is evident and obviously compatible with Stampe's view.

Of course, making this objection against the example in question, dehydration and the desire to drink, seems ridiculous. If anyone were to earnestly claim that a subject's being dehydrated does not, all other things being equal, make it the case that it would be good were they to drink, then it is not at all clear what anyone could say in response. The *ceteris paribus* clause in the last sentence is very important. I do not intend to claim that a subject's being dehydrated makes it the case that, all things considered, it would be good were they to drink. We can imagine circumstances in which there are decisive reasons against the thirsty subject drinking, and still maintain that the Stampe-style account of the rational authority of desire is right about what makes desires indications of the goodness of their objects.

One might claim that, with decisive reasons to the contrary in play, the subject's dehydration does not make it good that they drink, to any extent

at all. But the claim I take to be non-controversial is that, in the absence of competing reasons, dehydration makes it the case that it would be good to drink. Whether dehydration makes it that case that it would be somewhat good to drink, in the face of a decisive reason not to, is immaterial once it is agreed that it would make it good to drink, were it not for the strong reason not to. Those philosophers who think that, in any given situation, an action is either the best available or not good at all, can agree with the substance of the view of the rational authority of desire put forward here; they would simply be committed to the claim that, in any given situation, only one desire correctly indicates goodness in its object.

The anti-Humean challenge can be raised, however, with regard to examples that are a lot less clear cut; in particular, those which involve desires that are not so obviously grounded in bodily states of the subject (like Bert's desire for the Alphacycle). If it is false that all desires are grounded in bodily states of the subject, there will be some Stampe-style desires to which the basic anti-Humean challenge can be put. Having said that, it is by no means settled that there are any desires which are not ultimately grounded in bodily states of the subject. Besides bodily states of the subject, all a sigma-state can comprise are that subject's beliefs, desires, perceptions and other mental states. If all of these other states are themselves grounded in bodily states of the subject – which include, I presume, brain states – then even desires whose sigma-states do not include bodily states directly will ultimately owe their existence to the subject's body.

Regardless of the role of bodily states in grounding the goodness of the intentional objects of desire, it appears that the basic anti-Humean challenge can be raised against at least the more complex Stampe-style desires, in a form that makes sense, and that might reasonably expect a philosophical answer. The anti-Humean can ask why sigma-states make the intentional objects of desires good to achieve; that is, why some aggregate

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of states of the subject makes it the case that it would be good were things a certain way (namely, the way the subject wants them to be).

Considering this objection brings us back to a point I raised when discussing the simple satisfaction view in chapter 4. A Humean account of practical reasoning has to tread a fine line between being able to explain why it is that desires count in favour of action in enough depth to make it plausible that they do, while avoiding locating the source of rational authority outside of desire itself. The authority of desire has to be accounted for, to some extent at least, or else desires will seem too arbitrary, too much like the dictates of the coin-flipping homunculus, to be the basis of practical reasoning. But giving an account of the normativity of desire runs the risk of explaining it away, typically by pointing to some set of considerations that constitute reasons for holding desires; then it can be claimed that it is those considerations that really count in favour of action, and desires are not doing any of the philosophical work.

It is around this point that, I think, the explanation "bottoms out"; there is nothing else substantial or revealing to say in defence of Stampe-style desires. That this is so in the case of dehydration is clear; there is simply nothing that can be said to one who doubts that being dehydrated makes it good to drink, all other things being equal. I think the same is true in a more general sense; if someone truly doubts that being in a state that gives rise to a non-deviant desire makes it such that the intentional object of that desire is good, then it seems likely that they will be unsatisfied with any further argument that proceeds along these lines. After all, the account on offer has already, by this point, provided a detailed explanation of how it is that desires come to be sources of rational authority; the normative dimension of desire, the feature in virtue of which desires make sense of action, has been pursued and characterized exhaustively.

So it can be imagined that the anti-Humean might agree with Stampe's characterization of desires but deny that sigma-states can play the

role set out for them, and so deny that wanting a bicycle or a book or a chocolate mousse counts in favour of action. At this point, it seems that no further argument can be given, without running the risk of locating the source of rational authority outside of desires themselves.

Allow me to try persuasion, instead. Although there may be nothing better to say in defence of Stampe's view once we reach the point at which the explanatory relation between sigma-states and goodness is called into question, that is not to say there is nothing to be said at all. It might be that the idea that sigma-states confer goodness on the intentional objects of desires cannot be made more plausible in the abstract, but consideration of particular sigma-states and the intentional objects they give rise to can make it easier to believe in the relation. I take it that putting forward these sorts of expositions does not amount to philosophical progress towards the goal of understanding how desires come to have rational authority; no changes are being made to the account, it is simply a question of applying it to particular cases.

It is easy to doubt the generalization "sigma-states confer goodness onto the intentional objects of desire", but hard to be sceptical of the idea that dehydration (the label I have used to refer to the particular sigma-state of being depleted of water) makes it the case that it would be good were one to drink (that is, makes it such that the obtaining of a state of affairs in which the subject drinks, the intentional object of a desire to drink, would be good). Perhaps this is because dehydration is a familiar concept, and it is easy to accept that dehydration, as well as being a state of water depletion, is a state in which it would be good were one to drink. As applied to a human subject, dehydration has a clear, normative connection to drinking. Naturally, things other than humans can be "dehydrated"; a sponge, for instance, becomes literally dehydrated when squeezed. But there is nothing particularly good about a sponge being hydrated, or anything really bad about it being dehydrated; which is to say, sponges do not have sigma-states.

Perhaps in any concrete example of a sigma-state and its corresponding intentional object, the details can be filled in in such a way that the connection between the two cannot be reasonably doubted. Given the scope for variation between different constituent parts of sigma-states, the uniqueness and eccentricity of different subjects, and the almost limitless possibilities of the intentional objects of desire, it is not clear how it could be proven that such a move will always be available. It may be that, given the tremendous variety involved, there is very little that is universally true of the relationships between sigma-states and the intentional objects of desire. For instance, is it reasonable to expect that what makes it plausible that there is an explanatory relation between dehydration and the goodness of drinking is the same as what makes it plausible that there is an explanatory connection between the goodness of being an academic philosopher and its sigma-state? Even so, I will put forward one example as a sort of "proof of concept"[26]. Let's return to Bert and the Alphacycle once again. Bert has a desire to own the Alphacycle; that is, owning the Alphacycle strikes him as something worth doing, or bringing about. Specifically, he finds the bike's clean lines and bright colours attractive, and is wont to imagine himself riding it out of the shop and into town (as I wrote earlier). The smooth, aerodynamic shape evokes in Bert a sense of fast and fluid motion, putting him in mind of the pleasant sensation of cycling at speed (though he may not realize that this is going on). Perhaps the bright paintwork is reminiscent of the team colours worn by professional cyclists, whom Bert admires, and would hope to be associated with.

Those factors explain why Bert wants this bicycle; that is, they are part of the sigma-state. Moreover, since the Alphacycle has these

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26 Not to be mistaken for a "conceptual proof"; rather, evidence that there is nothing obviously wrong about the idea that particular examples of sigma-states playing an explanatory role are more persuasive than consideration of the general proposition that that role is always played by a sigma-state.

associations for Bert (speed, proficiency and success), it is plausible that he will be more motivated to use it, gain more satisfaction from doing so, and ultimately become a better cyclist. So the factors which explain why Bert wants the Alphacycle also make it the case that, were he to buy the Alphacycle rather than another bike, he would become a better cyclist. On the assumption that, other things being equal, it would be good were Bert to become a better cyclist (or at least, it would be better than him becoming a less competent cyclist), the same factors which explain his wanting the Alphacycle also explain why his having it would be a good thing. The factors in question are memories and associations, which can probably be thought of as perceptions and beliefs (or if not, Stampe's account can tolerate the minor modification to the effect that memories and associations can comprise sigma-states).

4. The "Missing Desires" Problem

In this section, I will put forward a problem for Stampe's account drawing on Schueler's "putting together" point. Four possible responses come to light, of which two are non-starters, but the other two appear to provide ways to enhance Stampe's core account which go beyond simply solving the problem posed here. I will argue that a subject has the desires they do not merely because they have a collection of other mental and bodily states (a sigma-state), but because of the occurrence of a mental event (occasionally a mental action) involving those states.

4.1 The Problem

Often, subjects simply fail to have desires which we might expect them to have, based on their other preferences, beliefs, experiences, and in particular, their other desires. For example, it is possible to have a burning

desire to see performances of Shakespeare's plays, but be disinterested towards Marlowe. These situations are, I take it, quite commonplace, and they do not seem to entail any inconsistency or incoherence on the part of the subject. Stampe's account aims to explain why subjects have the desires they do by appeal to other states of the subject which jointly make it the case that it would be good were some state of affairs to obtain.

A natural way to characterize cases of missing desires in Stampe's terms would be to think of them as instances where a set of mental and bodily states of the subject makes it the case that it would be good were two non-exclusive states of affairs to obtain, but the subject only comes to desire that one of those states of affairs obtain, and is indifferent towards the other. In that case, why does the same set of states give rise to just one such desire, and not both? Or, why one as opposed to the other? It is not clear that Stampe's account, as it stands, has the resources to answer these questions; in which case, it does not provide a full explanation of the desires that the subject does have.

This is a pressing problem for Stampe's account because of his claims about the representational character of desires. If a desire is a mental state with a certain representational character, then it cannot be claimed that the subject has a desire unless the object of that desire is represented to them, in the appropriate mode.

This situation is comparable to Schueler's "putting together" problem, discussed in chapter 2. There, Schueler objected that it is quite possible for a subject to have a belief and desire (or two beliefs) from which a practical conclusion follows, and simply fail to draw the inference. Schueler argued that, in light of the putting together point, the existence of some mental states the contents of which entail a conclusion is insufficient to explain a subject's actually arriving at that conclusion. He argued that mental actions would be required to make the explanation work, which presented a problem for the strict backgrounding view, since the strict backgrounding

view is, of course, supposed to explain actions. Here, it seems possible for a subject to have the mental and bodily states which make it that case that it would be good were some state of affairs to obtain, and fail to desire that that state of affairs come to pass. The explanation is insufficient, and must be augmented; but by what?

4.2 Two Types of Solution: State-Based and Occurrence-Based

Let us call the set of states which makes it the case that it would be good were a certain state of affairs to obtain, but which fails to give rise to a desire, a "delta state"; now the question is, what is the difference between a delta-state and a sigma-state? There seem to be two types of option; either a delta-state lacks some constituent state which a sigma-state possesses, or some mental occurrence is involved in the explanation of the transition from delta to sigma (i.e., some mental occurrence partly explains the subject's coming to have a desire). The arguments for and against either option are much the same as those for state-based and occurrence-based responses to Schueler's putting-together point, so I will not spend too long on them here. More importantly, the addition that must be made to Stampe's account in order to solve the Missing Desire problem also offers a way to explain a widely-held intuition about desires, or perhaps about rationally authoritative states generally.

It seems very likely that no state will be able to explain the transition from a delta state to a sigma state (i.e., to explain how a subject comes to have a particular desire), because for every sigma state, it is possible to imagine a delta state which shares all of its components. That is, for any given collection of mental and bodily states which gives rise to a desire, it will be possible to imagine a situation in which all of those states are present but no desire results. This is analogous to Schueler's claim that the subject's drawing an inference from two beliefs cannot be explained by the addition

of further beliefs, since one would then be required to explain the subject's bringing the further belief into contact with the original two, and so on.

Discussion of Schueler's putting-together point could be restricted to only including mental states which could be involved in reasoning (i.e., mental states with propositional contents); in responses to the Missing Desire problem, however, the proponent of a state-based solution may appeal to any bodily or mental state. As such, the sort of response put forward in this paragraph cannot be as convincing here as it was for Schueler. It seems clear that no further belief can explain a subject's drawing an inference, since inferences themselves are drawn from beliefs; so the proposed solution appeals to the very same mechanism it was supposed to explain. The point can probably be extended to cover any state with propositional content, but it is hard to see whether or not it can be extended to every bodily or mental state. Perhaps there could be some state which relates to the contents of a delta state in a different way to how those states relate to each other; then the proposed solution would appeal to a different mechanism from the one it is supposed to account for. Given the ambiguity regarding how exactly the components of a sigma-state relate to one another, this possibility cannot be ruled out.

In the absence of any clear indication or evidence of what the mystery state might be, let us consider occurrence-based solutions instead. Supposing that some mental occurrence explains the transition from a delta state to a sigma state (i.e., a subject coming to have a desire), it is important to know whether that mental occurrence is an action or an event. That is, to put it crudely, whether the subject brings it about that they come to desire something, or whether it just happens to them. If it is the former, that could amount to a serious problem for the Humean view. If it is claimed that sigma states explain desires, and desires explain actions, it had better not be claimed that actions explain sigma states. Asserting these three claims would produce the same sorts of problems discussed in chapter 2. In short,

it would severely diminish the explanatory role of played by desire, and it might involve the account in a vicious circularity (if the account is committed to providing an explanation of mental actions in which desires play the same role they do in as its explanation of bodily actions, which it would be if, for example, it were committed to thinking of bodily and mental actions as intentional actions in the very same sense).

On the face of it, the claim that desires are necessarily the results of mental actions seems implausible. It seems pretty clear that in the vast majority of cases, coming to desire something is not preceded by a decision, or consideration of evidence, or explained by any sort of deliberation. But non-Humeans, especially those sympathetic to the higher-order approval model of rational authority, will want to exert pressure in a different direction. At various stages in this thesis, I have argued that characterizing a workable Humean theory of practical reasoning will require its proponent to adopt a strictly defined and limited conception of "desire". Now, that strategy can be made to play against the Humean; the opponent might argue that the mental states which fall in that limited range, i.e., genuine desires, are the results of mental actions. The strong intuition that desires are not generally brought about through action is the product of lumping all desire-like states under one heading. Of course, the non-Humean will contend, coming to fancy or feel like something need not be the result of an action; but those states are not genuine desires. One of the chief features of genuine desires is that they are sources of rational authority, whereas the mental states associated with feeling like doing something, for example, are not (or at least, need not be). Genuine desires, those that have the authority in themselves to make sense of action, are the products of mental actions.

The non-Humean can support this line of objection by arguing that it allows us to account for the rational authority of desire by appeal to higher-order approval; either by claiming that a mental action of a familiar type is required for the transition between a delta state and a sigma state, or

else by claiming that the transition itself is a mental action (i.e., that "coming to desire" is a mental action). By a "familiar type" of mental action, I mean a mental action which occurs in other contexts, and for which there is a well-known name; for example, judging, deciding, observing (in the active sense), or drawing an inference.

The first alternative offers an easy way to understand the account as a higher-order approval one. Any one of a range of familiar kinds of mental action could form the basis for a higher-order approval account; that is, any of these types of mental action could be understood as the mechanism by which the subject approves of the representations. In Scanlon's account, the subject approves certain courses of action by judging that there is a reason to perform them; in Tenenbaum's account, the subject approves the representational content of desires by finding a coherent fit for it in their stock of other appearances. In the hybrid view on offer here, perhaps the subject would judge that it would be good were the world a certain way, or find out that it would be good, given their other bodily and mental states. It is likely that such an account would be non-Humean, since it would put mental actions at the foundation of the explanation of intentional action.

There is a significant problem with this proposal, however; whatever mental action is supposed to explain the transition from a delta state to a sigma state, there is no clear reason why the performance of that mental action would result in the production of a desire. For example, it is not obvious that judging that it would be good were the world a certain way must result in the world's being that way seeming good to the subject, in the manner distinctive of desiring. Or rather, given that this proposal is to be contrasted with the claim that coming to desire is a particular type of mental action, I should say: it is not obvious that judging that it would be good were the world a certain way, is itself an instance of, or an act of, coming to desire that it be that way. After all, most mental actions seem to have corresponding mental states; in judging one arrives at a judgement,

deciding culminates in decision, observing produces observations (which are probably beliefs). Of course, a proponent of the view that a pre-existing type of mental action is required in order to come to desire something could object that they are not committed to Stampe's view of the representational characteristics of desire, and that they are adopting this view on its own merits. But then, if one were to take that line, it would not be clear why desires should form part of the account at all. If the aim here is not to defend Stampe's account of the rational authority of desire, then why not stick with whatever mental state is correlated with whichever mental action is introduced into the account?

The second alternative, that coming to desire is a mental action of a distinctive type, seems more promising in this respect at least; clearly an act of coming to desire results in the subject' having a desire, when successful. That is, if there is such a type of mental action as coming to desire, then plausibly it would be picked out and individuated from other types of mental action precisely by the fact that, when successful, action of that type culminate in desires. The disadvantages are that the account seems very *ad hoc*, and that it is not clear what the mental action "coming to desire" might be. To put it another way, it is not clear why anyone ought to regard coming to desire as a mental action, especially given that everyday life seems to include experiences that are aptly characterized as instances of coming to desire things, and those experiences do not always seem to be experiences of mental action. This point holds true even when we restrict it to apply only to those desires which have rational authority. For example, it is widely accepted that desires properly explain decisions about matters of taste, such as what to have for dinner. Desiring fish and chips for dinner properly explains going to the chip shop; and I take it for granted that anyone who has ever walked past a chip shop while it's open knows what it is like to come to desire chips. That instance of coming to have a familiar, authoritative desire, does not seem to be an instance of the subject's performing a mental

action; so unless chip-based desires are in some way aberrant, it cannot be the case that every instance of coming to have an authoritative desire is a mental action.

The only viable option seems to be to claim that coming to have a desire is a mental event. In that case, we may ask whether coming to desire is a mental event of an already-familiar type, or a distinctive kind in its own right; and whether coming to desire is necessarily a mental event, or whether it might on occasion be a mental action.

Taking the second question first, there is no clear reason for thinking that coming to desire is never a mental action. The arguments above support the conclusion that coming to desire is not necessarily a mental action, and their familiarity suggests that it may be so only rarely; but neither of these factors support the conclusion that coming to desire is never a mental action. In fact, much as examples of the mental event seem commonplace, bringing oneself to desire is not inconceivable either. A significant subset of Missing Desire cases will be those where the subject can see that it would make sense for them to have the desire they conspicuously lack, and judge that it would be good were they to have it. A subject finding themselves in this situation may, for example, deliberately dwell on the putatively desirable aspects of the object they judge it would be good were they to desire; or rehearse the reasons there are for desiring it; or convince themselves that having the desire is a virtue, and pay approving attention to it in others, in the hope of cultivating their own desire for it. It seems plausible that at least some of these strategies will involve the performance of mental actions; whether those mental actions would be the proximal causes of the desires they help to bring about is a further issue, but the balance of evidence seems to suggest that coming to have a desire may be a mental action, though it need not be.

If the arguments of the preceding paragraphs are correct, then coming to desire may be a mental action of a familiar kind, but it is typically

a mental event. Above, I wrote that claiming that coming to desire is a mental action of a distinctive kind would seem *ad hoc*, in light of the fact that everyday experience seems to suggest that coming to desire is not always a mental action at all. The same sorts of examples I appealed to there seem to support the conclusion that coming to desire could be a distinctive kind of mental event. For instance, when walking past a chip shop one comes to desire chips; on seeing an excellent edition of a beloved book, one begins to desire to own it; on feeling the sun on one's face, one desires to go somewhere warm on holiday. What makes these experiences recognizably similar, I suggest, is that they are all experiences of a single, distinctive kind of mental happening; coming to desire.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will summarise the two fundamental problems dealt with in this thesis (section 1), and the extended argument I have used to address them (section 2).

1. Two Fundamental Problems

A large number of the puzzles and problems facing the Humean theory of practical reasoning are rooted in a conflict between a basic requirement of practical reasoning and an apparent feature of the nature of desire. If reasoning practically is a way of arriving at a normative conclusion, then it has to be concerned with the way things are independently (in a certain sense) from the subject. If reasoning practically is supposed to be a way of arriving at reasoned, well-supported conclusion about the way the world ought to be, then it has to be constrained and regulated by the way the world already is; or at least, the subject's best assessment of how it is. Practical reasoning, if it is a way of arriving at a genuinely normative conclusion, cannot be necessarily guided by or pre-occupied with considerations that are isolated, transient or capricious. If the practical inferences a subject may draw were necessarily determined by flipping coins, or the direction of the wind, or phases of the moon, then there could be no true practical reasoning.

Unfortunately, desires seem precisely isolated, transient and capricious; absolutely the wrong sort of considerations to play a decisive or fundamental role in practical reasoning. Why a subject desires the things

they do, or even what they desire in the first place, can remain a complete mystery to them. What a subject desires can change without warning or explanation, and a subject may have desires which run contrary to their deeply-held convictions. Many philosophers have noticed the apparent unsuitability of desires to play any role in practical reasoning, and argued that the two are best regarded as completely unrelated.

Conflict between the "outward-looking" nature of practical reasoning and the apparently "inward-looking" nature of desire gives rise to two central challenges with regard to formulating a Humean theory of practical reasoning. First, if desires are as inward-looking as they may seem, then placing a desire into a piece of practical reasoning will distort the focus or concern of that piece of reasoning. If desires are not connected in any significant way with their objects or with the subject's other mental states, it is hard to see how a piece of practical reasoning which involves a desire can be about anything but that desire; and if it is about the subject desires, then it is hard to see how its conclusion can be about what the subject ought to do, rather than about what they desire, or desire to do.

Secondly, even if it could be proven that desires do not have this troublesome tendency to deform any reasoning they come into contact with, this would not amount to proving that they are the right sort of consideration to feature in practical reasoning at all – let alone to be necessary features of practical reasoning, a claim to which the Humean is committed. Desires could turn out to be much like any other features of the world; pineapples, for instance. There are no peculiar problems surrounding the role played by pineapples in practical reasoning. It is perfectly possible to draw a normative conclusion from premises among which pineapples feature; but nobody in their right mind would claim that pineapples play a special role in practical reasoning, much less that no practical inferences can be drawn without pineapples.

Any proponent of the Humean theory of practical reasoning has, therefore, to show both that desires are not so inward-looking that they distort any reasoning of which they are a part, and that they are outward-looking enough play a special role in practical reasoning (i.e., a more significant role than could be played by pineapples). The former I have referred to as the Self-Absorption Problem, and the latter, the Problem of Normativity. Using these two terms and a distinction between episodes of practical reasoning and the arguments which structure them (see chapter 2), it is possible to classify many of the objections ranged against the Humean theory of practical reasoning as problems of one of four kinds:

	Normativity	Self-Absorption
Episode of Reasoning	Premises in reasoning are mental representations Practical reasoning is a mental action	Psychological inaccuracy Phenomenological implausibility
Argument	Reasoning from desires results in committing the naturalistic fallacy	Nothing that can appear in the premises of an argument is identical with a desire

The problems listed in the table are common-or-garden philosophical conundrums, standing in the way of formulating a convincing Humean Theory of Practical reasoning; but they are grounded in the deeper conflict between the inward-looking nature of desire and the outward-looking nature of practical reasoning. That is to say, they are based on widely-accepted propositions about practical reasoning and desires (though the real extent and nature of desire's self-absorption is, as I have argued,

rather different to caricature I presented above). As such, these problems are potential sources of insight into the relationship between practical reasoning and desire. So although they are to be solved, they ought to be solved by alterations and concessions on the part of the Humean. Or to put it another way, by making substantive claims about the nature of desire and the role it plays in practical reasoning, in a way that is sensitive to the concerns and intuitions of the non-Humeans. That, of course, has been the aim of this thesis; in the next section, I summarise the arguments I have put forward against the problems in the table above.

2. Summary of the Arguments

Chapters 2 and 3 use the self-ascriptive and strict-backgrounding views to make clear what is required of a working Humean theory of practical reasoning. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I attempt to develop a theory which meets these requirements, drawing heavily on Stampe's view in "The Authority of Desire".

3.1 Chapter 2: The Self-Ascriptive View

An obvious way to understand desires in practical reasoning is through the self-ascriptive model; that is, to claim that desires feature in practical arguments when one of the premises is the self-ascription of a desire: "I desire…". Then, practical arguments could take the form of syllogisms, where the self-ascription form the major premise, the minor premise is a proposition about how to satisfy the desire self-ascribed by the major premise, and the conclusion is a judgement about what to do.

It could be argued that the self-ascriptive practical syllogism is not a valid form of inference, since it derives a conclusion about how things ought to be from premises which are solely about how things are. I argued that the

practical syllogism can only be seen in this light if one reads the desire self-ascription in the major premise at face value; that is, as merely stating a fact about the subject's psychology. It is wholly implausible that they should be read this way. Explanations in philosophy and everyday experience are littered with self-ascriptions of other states, particularly belief and knowledge. Desire self-ascriptions are to be understood in a way analogous to knowledge self-ascriptions; they are not to be regarded as shifting the subject of the explanation from the content of the state to the state itself, but the state itself does make a difference to what inferences may be drawn from that content.

Schueler argues that proponents of the self-ascriptive view are committed to a view of the psychology of practical reasoning which is, on reflection, quite obviously false. The self-ascriptive view claims that every valid practical argument includes a premise which ascribes a desire to the subject; but it is quite obvious that not every instance of correct, explicit practical reasoning begins with the subject thinking to themselves, "I desire…", or words to that effect. Schueler is clearly correct about this, but he seems to regard it as a serious problem for the Humean theory of practical reasoning generally; really, it is only a knock-down argument against the self-ascriptive view. What Schueler's objection here shows, is that a successful Humean theory of practical reasoning has to put forward a careful account of how desires feature in practical reasoning; the simple self-ascriptive view is psychologically inaccurate.

3.2 Chapter 3: The Strict Backgrounding View

Given that there are significant obstacles to forming a Humean theory of practical reasoning, it might be thought that Humeans should not appeal to practical reasoning at all, but should aim to properly explain intentional action in some other way. In "Backgrounding Desires", Pettit and

Smith argue that Humean explanations of intentional action ought not to appeal to practical reasoning; rather, they claim, desires feature in Davidsonian rationalising explanations which do not amount to or involve episodes of practical reasoning (section 3.1-2).

Schueler objects that Pettit and Smith's "strict backgrounding view" is not a complete explanation of intentional action. The mere existence of mental states in the mind of the subject does not explain the subject coming to perform some intentional action which the contents of those mental states comprise an argument in support of. This is clear from the existence of those situations where there is good reason for thinking the subject knows a simple way to get themselves out of a predicament, and they choose much more complicated means. Schueler argues that the subject must perform a mental action in order to come to perform the intentional bodily action, and that the mental action is an act of putting together the mental states. This is a problem for the Humean theory for two reasons. First, according to Schueler, if practical reasoning is the mental action of bringing two mental states together, then it must involve the subject's awareness of those mental states. So what in fact gets brought together through the subject's action are not the mental states themselves, but the subject's representations of them; that is, their beliefs about them. So even if we assume that desires are present in the premises of some practical arguments, it turns out that those desires will not be part of the episodes of practical reasoning which that argument structures. Secondly, if practical reasoning is a mental action, then the desires which appear in practical reasoning are not at the basis of the explanation of intentional action; the Humean theory of practical reasoning is false.

As well as highlighting some problems internal to the account, I argue that Schueler is correct to claim that something must happen in the mind of the subject in order to explain intentional actions in the right way; the coming together of the mental states the contents of which appear in

practical reasoning. There is insufficient justification, however, for claiming that the subject must bring these states together through the performance of a mental action. Schueler claims that it must be a mental action, since the bringing together of mental states in order to bring about intentional action *is* practical reasoning; but Schueler's own descriptions of the coming together of these mental states do not sound like descriptions of mental actions. Indeed, there are numerous English phrases which seem to describe the coming together of mental states in the requisite way (i.e., so as to explain intentional an action properly) which do not seem to describe mental actions. I conclude that it is open to a Humean to claim that a mental event has to form part of the explanation of intentional action; and that in specific instances, this event may be a mental action; but that it need not be in every case. If practical reasoning is not necessarily a mental action, then neither of Schueler's objections to the Humean theory are realised. In the first case, since no mental action is required, the subject's awareness of the mental states need not figure in the explanation. In the second case, since no mental action necessarily forms part of the explanation, the Humean theory is unaffected.

The chief advantage of adopting a strict backgrounding view is supposed to be that it relieves the proponent of the Humean view of any obligation to explain how desires feature in practical reasoning. There is no possibility of a strict backgrounder making implausible claims about the psychology of practical reasoning, since they need not make any claims about the psychology of practical reasoning at all. I argue, however, that adopting the strict backgrounding view does not actually have this advantage. On the strict backgrounding view, desires are supposed to participate in rationalising explanations of intentional action; explanations which show the positive light in which the subject saw their action, by appeal to the subject's mental states, but which do not appeal to episodes of practical reasoning. What makes it possible to give these explanations is the

fact that the mental states in question can be seen to jointly constitute the subject's positive evaluation of their action (i.e., the positive light in which the subject sees their action). In order to understand this sort of explanation, we have to understand how the mental states it appeals to relate to one another, i.e., the way in which they jointly constitute the subject's positive evaluation of their action. Given that mental states are individuated by their propositional contents, claiming that a set of the subject's mental states jointly constitute the subject's positive evaluation of their action commits one to the claim that the contents of that set of the subject's mental states form an argument in favour of their action; that is, a practical argument. In particular, the very practical argument which would structure the episode of practical reasoning, by appeal to which the subject's action might otherwise be explained. In short, adopting the strict backgrounding view allows the Humean to avoid saying anything about occurrent episodes of practical reasoning, but they are still committed to explaining how desires come to feature in the premises of practical arguments, and facing all the problems associated with that question. Given that there are episodes of practical reasoning which are perfectly explicit and accurate (i.e., those in which the subject literally runs through the practical argument), adopting the strict backgrounding view offers no advantages at all.

More importantly, discussion of the strict backgrounding view reveals a different and more interesting version of the self-absorption problem. The backgrounders are committed to the claim that intentional actions are necessarily properly explained by desires (and, if my argument above is right, that correct practical arguments necessarily feature desires). This entails that even if desires were not to feature in the subject's reasoning, the subject would still be acting on the basis of a highly subjective consideration; that is, on a consideration which not only belongs to the subject, but which is one of the subject's attitudes towards something external. All Humeans are committed to the claim that when subjects

reason well, act on the basis of their own attitudes towards external considerations, not on the basis of those externalities themselves. According to the anti-Humeans, at least, the claim that practical reasoning necessarily involved highly subjective considerations runs contrary to our understanding of reasoning subjects as concerned with considerations that are relatively objective.

3.3 Chapter 4: The Self-Referential View

What desire seems to lack, which belief seems to have, and the lack of which accounts for the anti-Humean intuition that desires are not normatively significant, is a network of connections to other mental states and to their own objects. Some familiar experiences can certainly make it seem as if desires are laws unto themselves; the subject has little or no control over what they come to desire, or when, or why. Desires can seem peculiarly unresponsive to the subject's considered judgement about what is worth doing or having, up to the point that the subject might experience intense desires for things which they otherwise regard as trivial or repulsive. There may seem to be no clear connection between what is worth desiring, either in fact or by the subject's lights, and what the subject actually desires. What the Humean must do, in order to show that desires are normatively significant and can play a special role in properly explaining intentional action, is show that desires are in fact responsive to something outside themselves; ideally, to their objects and/or the subject's mental states.

Chapter 4 considers how desire might be outfitted with the requisite connections, without abandoning any of the fundamental claims of Humeanism. Four views are discussed in this chapter (and a fifth in chapter 6). First, there is the view that desires are able to explain intentional actions in the right way (that is, they are rationally authoritative) in virtue of their connection to their objects. The resulting picture of practical reasoning is

non-Humean; on this view, desires do not explain intentional actions on their own merits, but only by reference to something which purports to exist independently of the desire, i.e., its object. On this view, desires are not sources of rational authority, they are merely conduits for the rational authority of their objects. That would be reason enough for a Humean to reject the view, but it seems there are reasons why no-one should assent to it. Whatever one thinks a subject desires when they have a desire, be it some object (in the everyday sense), to perform an action, or to bring about some state of affairs, it will be the case that the subject does not take the intentional object of their desire to be a fact. On the plausible assumption that reasons for action are all facts, the objects of desire can never be reasons for action, so no sound practical inference can be drawn from the object of a desire. Hence, the view that desires properly explain intentional actions by being conduits for the rational authority of their objects must be false.

A second possible view (which I labelled the "future relief" view) characterises the rational authority of desire as an instance of the rational authority of discomfort. Desires explain intentional actions in the right way because they are unpleasant to endure unsatisfied (or it is comparatively less pleasant to endure them than to satisfy them), and discomfort by its very nature properly explains any action to relieve or overcome it. But this cannot be right either; the authority of desire is not in fact the same as the authority of discomfort. Discomforts authorise any sort of action to relieve them, whereas desires seem only to properly explain actions which promise to satisfy them. Having a craving for cornflakes makes sense of eating cornflakes, but also of focussing on something else, or substituting another food for cornflakes. Desiring cornflakes does not make sense of focussing on something else instead[27]; it makes sense of eating cornflakes.

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27 At least, it does not when it is considered as a desire, rather than as a generic discomfort or distraction. There are "therapeutic stance" cases where desires are part of the reason-giving explanation of actions the subject takes to rid themselves of the desire without satisfying it, but in those cases the desire does not play a distinctive role.

A third view claims that desires have the authority to explain intentional actions in virtue of the fact that desires are satisfiable, and satisfying a desire is intrinsically good. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this view cannot be adopted, partly because it leaves too many questions unanswered. Why is it intrinsically good to satisfy desires? What does that goodness consist in? Moreover, this "simple satisfaction" view has no way to respond to the most basic anti-Humean challenge; just because you want to phi, that doesn't mean there is a reason to do it. According to the simple satisfaction view, this common intuition is flatly mistaken; but the simple satisfaction view does not, in itself, have the resources to explain why.

Stephen Schiffer's view, including an important modification suggested by Schueler, is rather like the conjunction of the simple satisfaction and future relief views. This view claims that certain desires can explain intentional actions because those desires are pleasurable to satisfy or uncomfortable to endure, and there is always reason to do something that promises to be pleasurable or less uncomfortable. So this view appeals to pleasure (or relief) to explain why it is that there is a reason to satisfy desires. It differs from the simple satisfaction view in giving this explanation as part of the account of the rational authority of desire, rather than appealing to intrinsic goodness; and it differs from the future relief view, in that it claims that what counts in favour of action is the prospect of satisfying a desire, not the possibility of relief or pleasure itself.

Schiffer's view looks like the most credible so far; it makes plausible predictions about which desires explain which actions, and gives at least a partial explanation of why this should be so. Schueler objects that the view is committed to claims about the phenomenology of reasoning that are implausible, if not wholly inaccurate; specifically, he claims that the view is committed to claiming that the phenomenal characteristics associated with

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It is just another consideration, no different from a pineapple. The therapeutic stance is discussed briefly in chapter 4 section 3.2 of this thesis; a more thorough discussion, which informs my use of the term, is in (Moran 2001, chapter 3).

Schifferian desires (pleasure and discomfort) are extremely pervasive, and that this is not the case. Schueler claims that the most familiar, convincing examples of Schifferian desires typically lack any salient phenomenology. Schueler's example is mild thirst. He contends that if any desire explains intentional action properly then mild thirst does; and that the sort of mild thirst that most of us experience on a daily basis has no phenomenal presence. I argue that Schueler's claim here is much less plausible than Schiffer's; it is much harder to believe that a mild thirst has no phenomenology and yet explains intentional actions in the right way (indeed, it is hard even to imagine a mild thirst which has no phenomenology!) than it is to believe that everyday experience is phenomenologically much richer than some philosophers would like to think. Stampe also presents an objection to Schiffer's view, which, though interesting, does not amount to a decisive reason to reject to Schiffer's account.

The real problem with Schiffer's account is that it does not do enough to address anti-Humean scepticism regarding the normative significance of desires. Schiffer's view only connects desire to pleasure, and offers no explanation of how rationally authoritative desires come into being (that is, it does nothing to explain why a subject wants what they want, when they want it). If rationally authoritative desires were merely Schiffer's reason-providing desires, then we would have no reason to ever expect them to be any more stable or significant than passing fancies. Moreover, it is very hard to believe that all practical reasons are ultimately dependent on pleasure alone. In order to address the anti-Humean challenge properly, it must be shown that desires are related to a host of different properties and considerations, including the subject's other mental states and the intentional object of the desire.

3.4 Chapter 5: The Evaluative View

Scanlon puts forward a view according to which desires are able to exercise some rational authority, but according to which they do not have distinctive representational characteristics. Tenenbaum, meanwhile, argues that desires are representations with a particular sort of contents (specifically, they necessarily represent their objects as good). I argue that neither of these views capture what we ordinarily mean by "desire"; there are plenty of counter-examples to either view. That is, it is quite easy to imagine a subject who fits the criteria for having a Scanlonian or Tenenbaumian desire, but who does not seem to actually desire anything; in fact, Scanlonian and Tenenbaumian "desires" could turn out to be attitudes of fear or revulsion. The argument is heavily based on examples so I won't repeat them here (see chapter 5, sections 2 and 3).

The possibility of offering this sort of response to Tenenbaum seems to show that no specification of what representational contents a state must have will suffice to guarantee that that state is a desire. Instead, capturing the everyday notion of desire requires making a distinction between representational content and mode of representation. Desires may have any representational contents (allowing for formal restrictions, such as that the intentional object of any desire must be an action) at all; what sets desires apart from other mental representations is the mode in which they represent their objects. Desire is to belief as feeling is to seeing; both feeling and seeing can represent the same content, but the way in which they represent it is entirely different.

Stampe makes the distinction between representational content and mode of representation, and claims that desires represent their objects in the mode of goodness (to be understood as analogous to the claim that beliefs represent their objects in the mode of truth). Exactly what this goodness consists in is the subject of the next chapter, which is concerned with how the representational view, and in particular Stampe's evaluative

view, can address the Normativity Problem. At the end of this chapter, I suggest that in fact "goodness" is not the only distinctive aspect of the representational mode of desiring; desires also modally represent their objects as subject to risk and demanding a response (typically action).

3.5 Chapter 6: Sigma States

In order to present a response to the Normativity Problem, a proponent of the representational view of desire must show that desires are responsive to other considerations, such as the subject's other mental states, and the objects of desire. This chapter is primarily concerned with the efforts of one particular proponent of the evaluative view, Stampe, to supply the requisite connections. I argue that although many of the details of Stampe's argument may be wrong, the basic strategy is correct.

The account has two key features. First, the separation of the cause of desire from its intentional object. This makes it possible to argue for a connection between desires and a whole variety of different factors, rather than being restricted to only the intentional objects of desire, or well-known features such as pleasure or satisfaction. Secondly, he argues that what makes desires unique as a mental attitude is that they represent their objects as good, but through the a distinctive mode of representation, not as part of their representational contents.

Scanlon and Tenenbaum have their own accounts of the rational authority of desire, and they are quite similar to each other. In essence, both Scanlon and Tenenbaum claim that desires can exercise some rational authority if and when they are approved of by the subject (though, of course, they do not advance the same account of what this approval consists in). I argue that although these "higher approval" accounts are coherent, they do not represent a strategy which Humeans could appeal to, because they make the authority of desire derivative. On the higher approval accounts, desires

are not sources of rational authority; they may, on specific occasions, make sense of intentional actions, contingently on standing in the right sort of relation to the subject's considered judgement.

According to Stampe's representational view, the representational contents of desires are fixed by collections of mental and bodily states called "sigma states". The sigma state makes it the case that it would be good were the world a certain way, and that it seems from the subject's point of view, that it would be good were the world this way. Desiring that the world be some way consists in it seeming to one that it would be good were it that way; thus, desires are evaluative attitudes since they represent their objects as good, and are related to the goodness of their intentional objects. What makes desiring that things be a certain way different from believing that it would be good if they were, is that whereas a belief about the goodness of some non-obtaining state of affairs must ascribe goodness to its object through its content, a desire does it through the mode of representation. So "desiring" is a distinctive way of representing some way the world might be. Desiring is to believing as feeling is to seeing; just as seeing and feeling can convey the same information but in a different mode, so believing and desiring are two different ways of apprehending the goodness of some way the world might be.

Finally, I argue that Stampe's claims that desire is a perceptual state have to be understood as purely metaphorical, and the way in which a sigma state makes it the case that some future state of affairs would be good were it to obtain, has to be set out rather differently from Stampe's account. There is no special need to restrict the possible objects of desire in the way Stampe does, since it is possible for desires to feature in the premises of practical arguments through desire self-ascriptions. Lastly, I argue that, in keeping with Schueler's argument and my response to it detailed in chapter 2, some mental event is required to explain the subject's coming to have a desire, over and above the mere existence of the constituents of a sigma state.

4. Conclusion

The view I have developed in chapters 5 and 6 is just one way of being a representationalist about desire; there could be others. There are two distinguishing features of the view I have put forward which it seems plausible any other Representational View should adopt. The first is the distinction between representational content and mode of representation, and the claim that what's distinctive about desire is its mode of representation, not its content. This makes it possible to avoid the problems of self-absorption by allowing for a plurality of different featuring relations. The second is the separation of the intentional object of desire from its cause, which allows us to give an account of the connectedness of desire in order to respond to the normativity problem, without adopting a *per objectum* account of the rational authority of desire.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the following passage in which Hume himself separates the causes of desires from their intentional objects. The two sets of passions Hume refers to are pride and humility, and love and hatred. It is also interesting to see that Hume remarks on the fact that, although the objects of a passion like pride are relatively uniform (since they are all concerned with the self), its causes are very diverse; this is very close to the reason for which I rejected Schiffer's view. The emphases on "cause" and "object" are Hume's, not mine:

> In these two sets of passions, there is an obvious distinction to
> be made between the *object* of the passion and its *cause*. The object
> of pride and humility is self: The cause of the passion is some
> excellence in the former case; some fault, in the latter. The object
> of love and hatred is some other person: The causes, in like
> manner, are either excellencies or faults.

With regard to all these passions, the causes are what excite the emotion; the object is what the mind directs its view to when the emotion is excited. Our merit, for instance, raises pride; and it is essential to pride to turn our view on ourselves with complacency and satisfaction.

Now, as the causes of these passions are very numerous and various, though their object be uniform and simple; it may be a subject of curiosity to consider, what that circumstance is, in which all these various causes agree; or in other words, what is the real efficient cause of the passion.

<div align="right">(Hume 1997, P 2.3-5)</div>

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