

Motivation in Agents

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The Humean theory of motivation remains the default position in much of the contemporary literature in meta-ethics, moral psychology, and action theory. Yet despite its widespread support, the theory is implausible as a view about what motivates agents to act. More specifically, my reasons for dissatisfaction with the Humean theory stem from its incompatibility with what I take to be a compelling model of the role of motivating reasons in first-person practical deliberation and third-person action explanations. So after first introducing some assumptions about the nature of agency in section one, I will turn to articulating and defending this account of motivating reasons in sections two through four of the paper. Section five then provides some background on the Humean theory before I argue directly against it in section six and critically examine the leading arguments for the view in section seven. Given limitations of space, however, I save the task of developing a positive anti-Humean view for another occasion.

1. Agents and Agency

In this paper, my concern is only with the plausibility of the Humean theory of motivation insofar as it attempts to provide a sufficient account of the motivational lives of *agents*, and thus it will be important in what follows to first have in place some assumptions about the nature of agency. Talk of ‘agents’ and ‘agency’ is rife throughout the contemporary action theory and meta-ethics literatures, and in some cases authors seem to understand ‘agent’ to simply be synonymous with ‘human being.’ As I have argued elsewhere, however, I think that

this is a mistake, although trying to defend such a claim here would leave little space for our main concerns.¹ So let me summarize some of the central conclusions of my other work, while remaining well aware that much more needs to be said.

To begin with, it seems that there can be both non-human agents and non-agential human beings. In the former case, certain highly sophisticated aliens, robots, and supernatural beings might be such that, were they to exist, they would count as agents. On the other hand, not all human beings are agents – newborn infants and those asleep, anesthetized, or comatose are all biologically human but in a state which precludes them from either having or in some cases exercising the capacity for agency. So on this picture agency looks to be a contingent capability that only certain members of species with the requisite cognitive sophistication can come to exercise.

These claims will look more plausible once we note two essential features of agency. The first can be expressed as follows:

(A1) Agents identify with the actions they perform.

‘Identification’ is a technical term that was introduced by Harry Frankfurt, and philosophical reflection on identification has spawned a sizable industry in action theory.² Very roughly, to identify with an action is to align oneself with that action and thereby take responsibility for it as representative of one’s own fundamental outlook on the world. Identification is thus a kind of accomplishment which crucially involves some form of (perhaps inchoate) acceptance³ or endorsement⁴ of whatever it is that is in question, whether it be an action, desire, or norm.⁵

(A1) should be regarded as compelling, I hope, once we note that the two main ways of failing to identify are to be either a wanton or alienated. A wanton is merely caused to behave the way that he does; he takes no interest in evaluating his desires or behavior (and indeed may not even be able to take such an interest), but is controlled by his strongest instinctual or

psychological impulses. Thus the behavior exhibited by animals, infants, and some young children is that of a wanton, not an agent. In cases of alienation, on the other hand, a person has given thought, whether self-consciously or implicitly, to a given desire or action and has rejected it as in some way undesirable or not worthy of pursuing. Yet despite her best efforts, she still continues to have the desire in her mind or finds her body exhibiting the behavior. As such, while her body might be behaving in certain ways, there is a deeper sense in which it is not *her* performing the actions but rather forces beyond her control with which she does not identify.⁶ Thus she might be an adult human being but not exhibit agency when she is forced to behave in this way.

Well-known examples help to illustrate these two failures of identification. Frankfurt's now famous case of alienation involves an addict who unwillingly satisfies his desire for drugs despite having vehemently resisted the control it has over him.⁷ And in David Velleman's interesting example of a subtle form of wantonness, a person is surprised to find his voice rising and his temper flaring during a long-anticipated meeting with an old friend towards whom he has slowly and unknowingly been accumulating grievances in his mind for years.⁸ In neither case, I suggest, is the human being at that moment exhibiting agency in the world.⁹

Thus to reemphasize the point again, (A1) is only intended to be a thesis about agents, and so does not apply to animals, infants, some young children, and even adult human beings who are momentarily wantons or are alienated from their behavior. As will be stressed again in section seven when we look at the arguments that have been given for the Humean view, to exhibit agency in the world is to exhibit a different kind of behavior that needs to be accounted for on its own terms. And my goal in this paper is to see whether the Humean story is plausible

in such cases. Whether it is plausible or not as a view about what motivates non-agential behavior is not my concern here.¹⁰

The second thesis about agency that will be important in what follows is that:

(A2) Agents act for reasons.

The reasons in question are *motivating reasons*, or considerations in the light of which an agent can deliberate, decide, and intentionally act.¹¹ From the first-person perspective, motivating reasons are implicitly taken by an agent to be *good* reasons for action, and by the agent's own lights they can serve to justify not only the performance of an action, but also the formation of the mental states deemed necessary for so acting. In addition, motivating reasons can come into conflict with each other; thus an agent might take there to be powerful reasons in a particular circumstance both for telling the truth as well as for lying. If the agent ends up telling the truth, then not all of his motivating reasons were operative in bringing about the action. In other words, to use Davidson's famous distinction, an agent can knowingly have a number of motivating reasons *for* a given action without those reasons being the motivating reasons *for which* she acted.¹²

A motivating reason is thus supposed to play at least two functional roles. First, it is potentially *explanatory* of an action performed by an agent, and in fact would be explanatory if (i) there were no other opposing motivating reasons which outweighed it and (ii) the agent were able to successfully perform the action in question.¹³ Similarly, motivating reasons are reasons by the agent's own lights, and thus from the agent's perspective serve to implicitly *justify* the action as well as the formation of mental states which bring it about.¹⁴ To take a simple example, what by a wife's lights is the fact of her spouse's infidelity may go a long way towards explaining why filing for divorce would seem to her to be worthwhile, as well as help justify her

desire to do so. And it is natural to think that such a putative fact is a large part of what explains her eventual action.¹⁵

As such, motivating reasons are to be contrasted with normative reasons, or what *as a matter of fact* are good reasons for action. Hopefully many of an agent's motivating reasons are or correspond to her normative reasons for action, but clearly this is not always the case. After all, the wife might have taken the 'fact' of her spouse's infidelity to be a reason for divorce, when in reality her spouse had been faithful all along.¹⁶

(A1) and (A2) are closely related. In fact, on my view it is because agents act for reasons that they identify with their actions. We can see this by considering again the two main alternatives to identifying with an action. Wantons do not act for reasons; they are merely caused by their strongest impulses, whether conscious or unconscious.¹⁷ In Velleman's example, the unconscious anger gets the better of the person merely because of its causal rather than its normative force; at a later time, he might reflect on the anger and not regard it as reason-giving. Similarly, it is because the reasons for action are taken to side against a given action that a person who nonetheless finds her body performing it will be alienated from such behavior. Here Frankfurt's example of the unwilling addict nicely illustrates the point.¹⁸

By way of conclusion, we can now see why on this view human beings and agents are not coextensive. Newborn infants do not act for reasons, and neither do those asleep, anesthetized, or comatose. Similarly if there are sophisticated aliens, robots, or supernatural beings, they might act for what they take to be good reasons, and so identify with at least some of their bodily movements.¹⁹

2. Motivating Reasons and the First-Person Perspective

But what exactly are motivating reasons? While a full discussion would require more space than is available here, the next three sections are devoted to motivating the following theses:

- (1) A thesis about the ontology of motivating reasons from the perspective of first-person deliberation.
- (2) A thesis about the ontology of motivating reasons from the perspective of third-person rationalizing explanations.
- (3) A thesis about the ontology of the *relata* in the causal relations which obtain in practical reasoning.

The relevance of each of the theses to the Humean theory of motivation will become clear in section six.

In the remainder of this section, our concern will be with the first thesis, namely the following:

- (R) From the first-person perspective of an agent S, S's motivating reasons are to be found in the contents of intentional mental states had by S.

Some terminology will be helpful here. By 'mental states' I mean pairs of mental attitudes and contents such as my belief that *p*, your desire that *q*, and her wish that *r*. Believing, desiring, wishing, and the like are mental attitudes directed at intentional mental contents, in this case *p*, *q*, and *r*. So according to (R), an agent's motivating reasons are not his beliefs, desires, wishes, or mental states more generally, but rather the *contents* of at least some of those mental states.

What are mental contents? Loosely speaking, they are that which people believe, desire, wish, and the like. But this might sound as if contents are facts in the world, which would clearly render (R) implausible. For as we have said already, motivating reasons are non-factive – we can accurately be said to have a motivating reason and yet at the same time have it turn out that the world is not as the reason represents it as being.²⁰ So by 'mental contents' I instead mean *intentional mental representations* of putative facts in the world, representations which are

typically propositional in form.²¹ So if I believe that there is widespread starvation in Iceland, my motivating reason for donating to famine relief in Iceland can be the propositional content of that belief, namely *there is widespread starvation in Iceland*, even if the belief is *false* and there is in fact almost no starvation in Iceland.

So according to (R) motivating reasons are mental contents, and mental contents are typically propositions. But as we have just seen, not just any propositions whatsoever serve as such reasons; rather the agent's intentional mental states are relevant to determining what for the agent are his or her motivating reasons, even though at the same time those states play no role themselves in actually *constituting* such reasons. In other words,

- (P) For any proposition *p* and agent *S*, *p* can serve as one of *S*'s motivating reasons only if *S* bears some propositional attitude towards *p*.

Note that *S*'s bearing such an attitude towards *p* is itself a *fact* about *p*, and not a mental state. In addition, it is a fact which is not itself a part of the relevant motivating reason, but rather serves as one of that reason's *enabling conditions*.²² Thus to use our previous example, the proposition *there is widespread starvation in Iceland* would not have served as one of my motivating reasons if I did not believe that there is widespread starvation in Iceland, even though strictly speaking it is the proposition which I believe rather than my belief itself that serves as my motivating reason.

(P) can be refined in such a way as to highlight the fact that motivating reasons are *intensional*.²³ After all, an agent might have formed the belief that Mark Twain is an excellent writer and the belief that Samuel Clemens is an excellent writer based upon independent sources of reliable testimony, without ever having been told that Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain are the same person. And so when shopping in the local bookstore and coming across a work with the name 'Mark Twain' on the cover, he might take the content of his first belief to be a good

reason for buying the book while regarding the second belief-content as simply irrelevant to the matter at hand. Given what I take to be a plausible Fregean view about propositional individuation, the agent in this example is related to two different propositions. Let us call a *Fregean proposition* any proposition whose constituents are senses or modes of presentation of their purported referents. And let us revise (P) accordingly to guarantee the intensionality of motivating reasons:

(P') For any proposition p and agent S , p can serve as one of S 's motivating reasons only if p is a Fregean proposition and S bears some propositional attitude towards p .²⁴

Of course much more could be said about (P'), but this should be enough for our purposes in what follows.

So much by way of clarifying (R). When it comes to actually supporting (R) as a viable alternative to views which appeal to either mental states or facts in the world as the agent's motivating reasons from the first-person perspective, it seems that some evidence for (R) can be found in our ordinary practices of explaining our actions to others. Thus when asked why I performed a particular action rather than some other, my natural response might be:

"I bought the second volume of her series because the first one was so good."

"I made the donation because people are starving in Africa and I can afford to help out."

"I jumped out of the way because the bicyclist was about to crash into me."

As such, these purported explanations seem to be appealing only to our propositional representations of facts in the world, and not to anything about our psychological states themselves. In other words, the reasons that I offer to others typically are concerned with the quality of books, starvation in various countries, or immediate threats to my health, rather than in the first instance with my own mental life.²⁵

Admittedly, we also say things like “I ran because I thought I was late” and “I went to the movie because I wanted to see something by that director.” But these explanations need not conflict with (R) once we disambiguate scope. For of the following:

S’s belief that *p*

that S believes *p*

only the first is precluded by (R) from counting as a motivating *reason* for why the agent arrived at the conclusion she did and ultimately acted. When I make reference to a mental state in giving my action explanation, I could be simply giving expression to the *proposition* that I believe so-and-so. This proposition in turn would have to be the object of at least one of my propositional attitudes if, according to (P), it is true of me that my motivating reason for why I ran was that I thought I was late. Such propositions are, however, by and large rather exceptional in their functioning as motivating reasons, and are usually expressed by an agent in order to signal to others a noticeable failure of confidence or a desire to hedge.²⁶

So one way to argue for the truth of (R) is to consider ordinary examples like the ones we have seen which seem to show that in justifying their actions, agents appeal to what by their own lights are facts about the world rather than facts about their mental lives. But such an appeal to ordinary examples has already been made by others on behalf of claims similar to (R),²⁷ and yet it still seems to remain an unpopular view. Thus it would be nice to have another way of arguing for (R), and so let us consider how *epistemic* reasons work on the plausible assumption that reasons should function in the same manner from the agent’s perspective in both practical and theoretical reasoning. What then is the ontology of what we might call *subjective epistemic reasons* or *SE-reasons* for short?

Well, one thing that seems clear about SE-reasons is that they function in such a way as to show, from the agent’s own perspective, that some proposition is true.²⁸ This should give us a

significant clue as to their ontology. For no cognitive mental state can normally play such a role; my belief that p and my belief that if p then q do not, *qua mental states*, show anything about the truth of q . Similarly, in most cases propositions with attitudinal content like *I believe p* do not serve to bolster my epistemic confidence in the truth of some proposition q since the mere fact that I believe something to be the case is unlikely to be regarded as relevant to its being true.²⁹ Perhaps then SE-reasons are *facts* about the world which can come to be represented in the contents of our cognitive mental states. But this suggestion also will not do; an agent can take herself to have a SE-reason to come to believe a certain proposition even if the fact represented by her reason does not actually exist.

So we naturally arrive at the claim that SE-reasons are propositions which typically make no reference to the attitudes of the agent in question.³⁰ Of course, not just any propositions will do; an agent's SE-reasons must be singled out in virtue of bearing some relation to her cognitive life. In other words, what we need is the epistemic equivalent of (P³):

(E³) For any proposition p and agent S, p can serve as one of S's SE-reasons only if p is a Fregean proposition and S bears some cognitive propositional attitude towards p .

Thus S's beliefs about certain propositions, while not themselves constituents of S's SE-reasons, can serve as their enabling conditions.

To see how this works in practice, consider how epistemic defeaters function in the noetic structures of rational inquirers. Suppose I initially believe an argument whose premises p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n seem to me to jointly entail a conclusion q . What is more, I have come to believe q only on the basis of the perceived soundness of this argument. Yet as time goes on I happen to acquire evidence that premise p_2 of the argument is false, evidence which by my lights is much stronger than the evidence I have on hand to support p_2 .

In this case, what are the subjective epistemic reasons in the light of which I might revise my belief about the truth of q ? Here the natural thing to say is that by my lights the falsity of p_2 shows that the only argument I have for the truth of q is unsound. Since I then no longer have anything available in my noetic structure which could show that q is true and thereby could epistemically justify my believing q , the apparent falsity of p_2 (rather than my *belief* in the falsity of p_2) justifies my abandoning the belief that q .³¹

Much the same is, I think, true of the way defeaters work in our practical lives. Suppose I come to believe that I do not really desire to pursue a certain end which I had previously taken myself to desire. Then the proposition concerning such a purported fact might naturally give me a motivating reason to cease engaging in instrumental practical reasoning designed to satisfy the desire in question. This proposition thereby serves for me as a defeater for my continued participation in this particular project of desire satisfaction. Thus from the first-person perspective, defeaters and reasons more generally seem to be of the same ontological kind in both our practical and our theoretical lives.

Let us conclude this section by briefly noting the two main rivals to the reasons thesis (R) as well as some of their primary difficulties.

Motivating Reasons as Facts. A quite natural thought that we have seen already is to construe motivating reasons not as intentional mental contents but rather as facts.³² Of course, not just any facts in the world will do; for a fact to be able to serve as an agent's motivating reason, she must at the very least be aware of its existence. So what such a view needs is something like the equivalent of our necessary condition (P):

- (F) For any fact f and agent S , f can serve as one of S 's motivating reasons only if S has some propositional attitude towards a representation of f .

So far so good.

But as we noted before, there is an obvious problem with this proposal. For unless we are infallible about what facts there are, there will be plenty of instances in which we invoke motivating reasons in our practical deliberation and yet at the same time are quite mistaken about the existence of the facts to which they make putative reference.³³

In response we could simply modify the account of motivating reasons by rendering it disjunctive in such a way that if the relevant facts exist, then they can serve as our motivating reasons; otherwise in cases of epistemic failure, it is our *beliefs* that such facts exist which can serve as our motivating reasons.³⁴ But such a result seems deeply out of line with our ordinary practices of forming and giving reasons for our actions. As we saw, in offering our reasons for action we typically do not appeal to our *beliefs* about various states of affairs but rather to our propositional representations of those states of affairs themselves. And from the first-person perspective, our motivating reasons do not change from facts to mental states when, unbeknownst to us, the relevant facts in the world suddenly cease to obtain.

Motivating Reasons as First-Person Mental States. We have already seen two reasons for rejecting this view, namely that we usually do not appeal to our mental states in justifying our actions and that cognitive mental states fail to serve as subjective epistemic reasons. Here I will briefly suggest a third such reason, which concerns whether mental states can play the normative roles that motivating reasons are supposed to. More precisely, we noted in section one that the following are commonly held to be true about motivating reasons:

- (i) An agent S's motivating reason serves to portray some course of action as worthwhile, desirable, or in some way attractive by S's own lights.
- (ii) S's motivating reason can be responsible for justifying, by S's own lights, the formation of the desires, intentions, or other mental states needed in order to bring about the action in (i).³⁵

It seems that in order for my mental states to be able to serve these roles from the first-person perspective, I first would have to take it to be the case that the relevant mental states *exist*. Consider, for example, my belief that donating money to charity would be a very good thing for me to do. According to the view in question, it is not the goodness of my donating the money which serves as my motivating reason for action, but rather the belief itself:

(iii) My belief that my donating money is good.

We know from (i) and (ii) that motivating reasons play certain crucial roles in the agent's own first-person deliberation, among them being to justify the formation of other mental states and to portray some course of action as desirable. So in order for me to be cognizant of (iii) and hence allow it to play these roles in my deliberation about what action to perform, it follows that I would first have to acquire a separate belief *that* such a belief exists:

(iv) My belief that I believe that my donating money is good.

In other words, from the first-person perspective mental states could only serve functional roles like (i) and (ii) in virtue of first being represented in the propositional contents of still other mental states. But if this is true, then we have simply abandoned the view that motivating reasons are mental states. For in (iv), *I believe that my donating money is good* is a proposition, *not* a mental state. And as we saw, it is entirely consistent with (R) that an agent's reasons be propositions like *I believe p* or *I desire q*.

3. Motivating Reasons and the Third-Person Perspective

Thus far we have only been concerned with explicating the ontology of motivating reasons from the agent's *first*-person perspective, and so in this section I turn to third-person rationalizing explanations.³⁶ As I understand them, such explanations aim to provide an understanding of the motivating reasons which were operative in leading someone else to act in

the way that he or she did. Fortunately it turns out that the account of the ontology of the motivating reasons which appear in third-person rationalizing explanations is a natural consequence of the story that already has been told about the first-person perspective. In particular, the following thesis will be our focus in what follows:

- (T) From the third-person perspective, the motivating reasons which we ascribe to an agent S when we give a rationalizing explanation of how S deliberates, decides, and acts on those reasons, are to be found in the content of the same intentional mental states in which S's motivating reasons are found from the first-person perspective.³⁷

It follows immediately from (T) that the motivating reasons at work in both first-person deliberation and third-person rationalizing explanations are the same ontological kind of reasons in virtue of their both being intentional mental contents. In fact, the matter is even more straightforward since the reasons in question in both cases are precisely the *very same* motivating reasons. Thus (R) and (T) together have the advantage of not gratuitously multiplying the number and kinds of reasons which we need to appeal to in shifting from the first- to the third-person perspective. We shall make use of this advantage at the end of this section in order to argue against the main rival to (T).

In my view, the positive motivation for accepting (T) derives primarily from whatever plausibility (R) already has. Thus I see my primary task here to be that of defending (T) against objections as well as highlighting the costs associated with rival views. Two objections in particular are worth mentioning.

According to the first objection, the restriction of the motivating reasons in (T) to only those reasons which are salient by the agent's own lights neglects an important class of motivating reasons which are operative whenever the agent's behavior is brought about by unconscious desires and other causally efficacious mental states which are not first-personally accessible to the agent at the time.³⁸ Since these states often have intentional contents, such

contents deserve to be included among the motivating reasons which appear in third-person rationalizing explanations.

My view is that this line of reasoning is mistaken. The non-conscious states in question are such that, when causally determinative of behavior in a way that significantly departs from the agent's own conscious beliefs, desires, or intentions, they can leave the agent devoid of self-understanding. He is then at a loss for the time being as to what he is doing and why he is doing it, a loss which on conceptual grounds results in a failure of identification and hence, given what we said in section one, a failure of agency. Furthermore, such an objection is incompatible with the functional role of motivating reasons – as we saw, such reasons rationalize an agent's actions by providing the normative perspective in virtue of which we can understand what considerations the agent took to cast a favorable light on the actions he performed. To ascribe a 'motivating reason' to an agent when that agent is entirely unaware of the existence of this purported 'reason' in the first place, is in my view to ascribe no such reason at all.³⁹

The second objection is best appreciated in the context of a more general treatment of the main rival proposal to (T). But before we turn to that view, let us first briefly consider a third alternative to (T):

Motivating Reasons as Facts in Third-Person Explanations. Closely related to a position we saw in the previous section is a view according to which facts in the world serve as motivating reasons in third-person rationalizing explanations. Thus we might say that what explained why a person jumped out of the street was the fact that the bus was about to hit him.

Unfortunately, the same problem that arose for the first-person analog of this view also applies equally well when we shift to the third-person perspective. For in many cases agents are mistaken about what the relevant facts really are, and so it would be of little help to appeal to

those facts in a rationalizing explanation for why they acted as they did. One natural response would be to render the account disjunctive. But this ends up sacrificing simplicity while at the same time introducing a fundamental divide into our story about action explanation where we had no initial grounds for thinking such a divide existed in the first place. Furthermore, the agent herself would be rather surprised by such an account of what her reasons for action turn out to be in cases where she is mistaken about the facts. For by her lights she is typically moved in deliberation by the way the world represents itself as being, and not by facts about her beliefs or other mental attitudes concerning that world.⁴⁰

Motivating Reasons as Mental States in Third-Person Explanations. Here we come to what might be called the traditional view in the past fifty years about the ontology of the motivating reasons which we ascribe to an agent when we give a rationalizing explanation of how that agent deliberates, decides, and acts. According to this view, such reasons are mental states.⁴¹

Part of the motivation for this view takes the form of another objection to (T). According to this objection, while most if not all first-person deliberation seems to involve the assessment of the *objects* of our mental attitudes, it is far more common to find third-person explanations of action which appeal solely to the corresponding mental *states*. Thus while an agent might report that it was the desirability of a particular book which influenced her decision to purchase it, from the third-person perspective we might account for her action in terms of her belief that this book is good together with her desire to buy a good book.

But we should be careful here. For we are still in the business of giving *rationalizing* and not causal explanations of action. And one way of understanding our general tendency to appeal to mental states in action explanations is that we thereby are calling attention to the chain of

mental *causes* which led to the action and not necessarily to the motivating reasons which influenced the relevant behavioral outcome.⁴²

Furthermore, there are two independently compelling reasons to doubt that mental states should constitute the motivating reasons which we ascribe in third-person rationalizing explanations.⁴³ The first is that, provided we accept two plausible assumptions, the following is an immediate and in my mind highly implausible consequence of such a view:

(C*) The motivating reasons which rationally explain an agent's actions can never themselves be nor represent any normative reasons for action.

The argument needed to derive this consequence is the following:

- (i) Normative reasons are facts, and in deliberation they can be represented in the contents of the relevant mental states.
- (ii) The view in question alleges that mental states are what constitute motivating reasons in third-person rationalizing explanations.
- (iii) There is a categorical divide between mental states and mental contents.
- (iv) Therefore, the motivating reasons which rationally explain an agent's actions can never themselves be nor represent any normative reasons for action. (C*)

Premise (i) appeals to the widely held view that normative reasons are not mental attitudes or states but rather objective facts.⁴⁴ Premise (iii) makes what seems to be the uncontroversial claim that a mental attitude / content pair such as one's belief that *p* is of a different ontological kind from the mental content itself, namely *p*. But if we accept (i) and (iii), we have what appears to be a *reductio* of (ii). For then it would follow that from the third-person perspective human beings never strictly speaking act for objectively good reasons since those reasons are simply of a different kind from the motivating reasons for action operative in rationalizing explanations. Thus on the view in question here, motivating reasons might have intentional contents which represent normative reasons, but as mental states themselves they can never be nor represent those facts.⁴⁵

The second compelling reason for dissatisfaction with construing motivating reasons as mental states in explanatory contexts takes much the same form as the first. Again, given two plausible assumptions it seems to follow immediately from the view in question that:

(C**) The motivating reasons which rationally explain an agent's actions can never themselves be what are the agent's own motivating reasons from the first-person perspective.

The argument needed to derive this consequence is the following:

- (i) From the first-person perspective, an agent's motivating reasons are to be found in the contents of intentional mental states had by the agent. (R)
- (ii) The view in question alleges that mental states are what constitute motivating reasons in third-person rationalizing explanations.
- (iii) There is a categorical divide between mental states and mental contents.
- (iv) Therefore, the motivating reasons which rationally explain an agent's actions can never themselves be what are the agent's own motivating reasons from the first-person perspective. (C**)

Premise (iii) serves the same role here as it did in the previous argument, while premise (i) is just the view about the ontology of motivating reasons which we argued for in section two. But then together with (iv) they serve as a *reductio* of (ii) – for how can a successful third-person rationalizing explanation of action ascribe motivating reasons to an agent which themselves rarely are what the agent himself regarded as his reasons for action in the chain of deliberation which led to action?

Note that our claim (T) nicely avoids both (C*) and (C**). For if there are normative reasons for action, those facts can be represented in the contents of intentional attitudes and thereby can play a role in both first-person deliberation and third-person rationalizing explanations. This feature of the view alone does much to recommend it over its main rivals.⁴⁶

4. Causation and the Third-Person Perspective

Thus far we have been concerned with the ontology of motivating reasons and the roles that those reasons play in deliberation and rationalizing explanations. But related questions also arise about the ontology of the items in our practical mental lives which enter into *causal* relations. Here we get our third thesis:

- (C) It is the relevant mental states and not their contents which are the *relata* in the causal relations which obtain during the genesis of actions in agents as well as in third-person causal explanations of such actions.

I intend (C) to be committed to the truth of a broadly causal theory of action. This should be a welcome consequence; in my view no rival non-causal theory of action has yet convincingly answered Davidson's challenge of showing how, when an agent has two or more motivating reasons for performing a given action, he correctly can be said to have acted for one of those reasons and not the other.⁴⁷

(C) rejects the claim that the contents of an agent's mental states can be causally efficacious in the performance of actions. And this is for good reason, since such a claim is simply a non-starter. Propositions in particular are abstract objects and hence are precluded from entering into the relevant causal relations in virtue of failing to be spatially-temporally located. The temptation is then to find what Tim Crane calls local causal surrogates for the contents of mental states which (i) are not *abstracta* themselves, (ii) symbolically represent the states' abstract content, and (iii) play the causal role that the content itself was intended to play.⁴⁸ But giving into this temptation has the effect of simply abandoning the claim that it is the mental contents *themselves* which can be causally efficacious.⁴⁹

So according to (C), the contents of mental states, among which are to be found the agent's motivating reasons, are not themselves what can directly cause action. But to make use of a popular distinction in the philosophy of mind, while (C) denies the causal *efficacy* of content, as stated it is neutral on content's causal *relevance*. Nonetheless any plausible theory of

the actions performed by agents had better find a way of securing the causal relevance of the contents of deliberative mental states. For such a theory should be able to specify which states it were that causally issued in a particular action, and furthermore why it was *those* states, as opposed to any of the others that happened to exist in the agent's mind at the time, which functioned as the causal antecedents of that action. Similarly, such a theory should be able to explain how, as certain mental contents, the agent's motivating reasons were causally relevant in leading him to act in a certain way.⁵⁰

5. The Humean Theory of Motivation

While interesting in their own right, the above theses about motivating reasons for action and the causal relations operative in an agent's practical reasoning also have an important bearing on the fate of the Humean theory of motivation. But before we examine this connection, it is worth saying something more about what the Humean theory amounts to.

Unfortunately, it is not immediately obvious whether there even is such a thing as *the* Humean theory of motivation (hereafter 'HTM'), given the wide assortment of proposals that have been made in recent years.⁵¹ Nonetheless, we can make some headway on this taxonomic question by first noting what does seem to constitute an initial piece of common ground among Humeans:

The Desire Thesis:

In order for some agent S to be motivated to perform action A, S must have a desire D to A.⁵²

While perhaps necessary, the desire thesis is clearly not sufficient for being a Humean about motivation. For one thing, it fails to rule out the possibility of *besires*, unitary mental states which have the properties of both beliefs and desires, and in particular have opposite directions of fit towards different propositional contents. Whether there actually are any such states is a matter of quite reasonable doubt, but nonetheless Humeans and anti-Humeans alike are agreed

that a formulation of HTM needs to be able to preclude them from counting as motivating states.⁵³ Thus we get the following:

The Non-Identity Thesis:

The desire D must not be identical to a cognitive mental state or together with a cognitive mental state constitute some third kind of mental state.

Next we need to answer the question of *what it is* that motivates the agent in question to pursue the realization of a certain state of affairs. Note after all that the desire and non-identity theses together only entail that a non-cognitive desire must be *present* in order for the agent to be motivated, not that it *itself* is what does the motivating. Thus we need to be mindful of the following distinction:

- (D) What is required in order for an agent to be motivated to perform an action, as opposed to what it is that motivates the agent to perform that action.⁵⁴

As stated, both the desire and non-identity theses are compatible with the claim that only *beliefs* are what motivate action in agents, which is something that no Humean would be willing to accept.

From here, though, things get confusing. For instead of finding one clear answer by Humeans as to what it is that motivates action, we seem to get at least three nonequivalent proposals. Naturally enough, the first one is just the following:

- (H1) The Humean theory of motivation is true when and only when, and because, the following are all true:
- (i) The Desire Thesis
 - (ii) The Non-Identity Thesis
 - (iii) The desire D by itself is what motivates S to A.⁵⁵

Of course this does not put an end to the expository work that would need to be done by an advocate of such a view, for we also would need a relatively precise specification of how desires are supposed to be distinguished from beliefs and other cognitive mental states. Here what has

become the default option of appealing to considerations of direction of fit continues to face serious obstacles.⁵⁶

(H1) as stated is compatible with a view according to which the desires which motivate an agent at a time are always such that they have been causally generated at some earlier time by one or more purely cognitive mental states. Since it might seem that on this view it is ultimately the cognitive states and not the desires which are what motivate the agent in question, some philosophers have insisted that the relevant desires also be causally independent from the agent's cognitive states.⁵⁷ Thus we get the following:

- (H2) Same as (H1) except:
 - (iii) The desire D by itself is what motivates S to A, and D was not causally generated solely by any of S's prior cognitive states.

The 'solely' qualification is important since advocates of (H2) are willing to countenance the possibility that a belief might have some causal role to play if, for instance, it is a means-end belief which combines with an end-directed desire to causally issue in a means-directed desire.

Finally, some Humeans are willing to concede that the causal generation of the desire D solely by S's prior cognitive states is compatible with their view on empirical grounds. Where the view stands or falls, they allege, is on *conceptual* grounds, and in particular on whether there is modal space between the relevant cognitive and non-cognitive mental states:

- (H3) Same as (H1) except:
 - (iii) The desire D by itself is what motivates S to A, and it is conceptually possible for S to possess D without D's having been entailed solely by any of S's prior cognitive states.⁵⁸

Note that (H3) excludes a possibility that does not come under the scope of the Non-Identify Thesis, namely that rather than being identical with each other or together constituting a third mental state, the belief and desire in question really are distinct mental states which nonetheless are such that on conceptual grounds either the former entails the latter or they are necessarily covariant.

For our purposes here, we do not need to adjudicate these intramural disputes about how best to formulate HTM. The challenge to be developed in the next section applies equally well to (H1) through (H3) as well as to most of the other proposed formulations of HTM in the literature.

6. Against the Humean Theory of Motivation

Before we turn directly to the alleged problem for the Humean theory of motivation, we need one last claim, namely that in agents there is a close connection between what motivate an action and that agent's motivating reasons for the action. More precisely, the connection is the following:

(MR) What motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons.

Later in this section we will examine what might be said on behalf of (MR) and against its main alternative. For now, though, we need only note that Humeans themselves have often been explicit about their acceptance of (MR), at times even asserting that it is simply a 'truism' about action.⁵⁹

With (MR) in place, we can now develop the challenge for the Humean theory of motivation directly. It comes in both a first-person and a third-person version, so let us keep them separate.

First-Person Challenge. From the second section of the paper it seems that the following is true:

(R) From the first-person perspective of an agent S, S's motivating reasons are to be found in the contents of intentional mental states had by S.

Let us now combine this thesis with (MR):

(MR) What motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons.

Together they imply that:

(C1) From the first-person perspective, what motivate an agent to perform an action are considerations found in the contents of intentional mental states had by the agent.

But no Humean about motivation can accept this result if she also accepts our familiar assumption that:

(AS) There is a categorical divide between mental states and mental contents.

For as we saw in the previous section, Humeans are committed to saying that it is mental *states*, and in particular those states with a non-cognitive direction of fit, which are what motivate action, rather than just mental contents. So given the plausibility of (R), the Humean theory of motivation seems to be an inadequate account of what motivates agents to act.

Third-Person Challenge. The other version of our challenge proceeds in much the same way.

From section three it seems that the following is true:

(T) From the third-person perspective, the motivating reasons which we ascribe to an agent S when we give a rationalizing explanation of how S deliberates, decides, and acts on those reasons, are to be found in the content of the same intentional mental states in which S's motivating reasons are found from the first-person perspective.

But given (T) together with (MR):

(MR) What motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons

it follows that:

(C2) From the third-person perspective, what motivate an agent to perform an action are considerations found in the contents of intentional mental states had by the agent.

And if we accept our familiar assumption that:

(AS) There is a categorical divide between mental states and mental contents

then since Humeans are committed to saying that it is non-cognitive mental states which are what motivate action, the Humean theory is incompatible with (C2).

A Humean Response. Assuming the truth of our proposals about the nature of motivating reasons in both the first and third-person cases, how might an advocate of the Humean theory attempt to

respond to the above challenges? I have already defended claims (R) and (T) at length. The assumption (AS) is common ground in this debate and seems to be uncontroversial in the philosophy of mind literature more generally. So that leaves us with (MR):

(MR) What motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons.

As we noted, (MR) is typically accepted by advocates of HTM. Nonetheless, in the remainder of this section we shall consider whether there is a viable alternative that the Humean might want to put in its place.⁶⁰

One such alternative involves the claim that what motivates action in agents is simply what *causes* action. In other words, the Humean might suggest that we accept:

(MR*) What motivate an agent to perform an action are only what serve to cause rather than what serve as the motivating reasons which justify the action.⁶¹

In section four, we said that the following is plausible:

(C) It is the relevant mental states and not their contents which are the *relata* in the causal relations which obtain during the genesis of actions in agents as well as in third-person causal explanations of such actions.

Thus it would follow from (MR*) and (C) that:

(C3) What motivate an agent to perform an action are certain mental states.

And this is a conclusion which a Humean naturally welcomes.

To this response, I want to make four points about (MR) and (MR*). The first is that we know the story about what motivates action in *agents* cannot be a story told merely in terms of what mental states exhibit the most brute causal force. For when certain unconscious mental states cause action, as in Velleman's example from section one of a person's hidden anger suddenly bursting forth, the agent will be at a loss when it comes to understanding why she is behaving in the way that she is. She may exhibit confusion and disassociation from her movements, and might try to stop performing them altogether until she can make sense of

them.⁶² But such confusion and disassociation are not consistent with exhibiting agency in the world, and in particular are not consistent with our thesis (A1) that agents identify with their actions.⁶³

Similarly, the second point is that a view like (MR*) seems to conflict with our ordinary views about agents' motivation in cases of desire alienation. Recall that in Frankfurt's example of the unwilling drug addict, the addict has a very strong inclination to take drugs which he nonetheless repudiates as being an outsider to his will and in conflict with his agency. Yet from time to time the inclination may get the best of him and cause his body to make the injection. A causal story about what motivates action which, like (MR*), is told only in terms of what mental states exhibit the most causal force in leading to behavior, seems to allow for the possibility that in this case the addict *qua agent* was motivated to take the drugs. But that seems false – his motivation in his capacity as an agent was on the side of resisting the casual influence that his body's addiction had on him. So motivation for agents appears to involve something other than what produces behavioral causal pressure.⁶⁴

These first two critical points about (MR*) initially seem compelling, but they can be resisted once we pay careful attention to the conclusion we get from (MR*) and (C):

(C3) What motivate an agent to perform an action are *certain* mental states.

Which mental states would these be? On behalf of the Humean and in light of what we have said in earlier sections of this paper, the best approach to answering this question would be to select only those mental states whose intentional contents serve as motivating reasons. In other words, (C3) could be read as follows:

(C3*) What motivate an agent to perform an action are the mental states whose intentional contents are that agent's motivating reasons.

Provided that the intentional contents of desires serve as motivating reasons, (C3*) is perfectly compatible with all three formulations of HTM in section five. In addition, it would allow the Humean to salvage (MR*) from each of the two previous critical points. Thus in the case of unconscious mental states, since none of their intentional objects serves as a motivating reason in virtue of being unconscious, such states would not motivate the *agent* to act. Similarly in the case of the unwilling addict, what motivates the agent would *not* be the first-order desire to take drugs since taking drugs is not a motivating reason for this particular addict.

While I have my doubts as to how useful this line of response to the first and second concerns raised above would be to the Humean,⁶⁵ even if it is ultimately successful it will not help (MR*) avoid the two remaining points. The third is simply that (MR) seems to be intuitively plausible. Motivating reasons justify the performance of actions and the formation of mental states by the agent's lights. They are considerations which are operative in rationalizing explanations of actions by agents. Why wouldn't they also be what motivate the agent to act? Returning to our examples from section two:

"I bought the second volume of her series because the first one was so good."

"I made the donation because people are starving in Africa and I can afford to help out."

"I jumped out of the way because the bicyclist was about to crash into me."

it seems plausible to say that in these cases the relevant considerations – the putative goodness of the first book, the starvation in Africa, and the threat posed by the bicyclist – are what motivated me to a significant extent to act as I did.

On the alternative view, however, when (MR*) is combined with our causal thesis (C) the picture looks rather different in cases in which agents are mistaken about the relevant facts in the world. To be fair, when an agent has true beliefs formed because of these facts, then the advocate of (MR*) can say that facts about the world *do* motivate that agent in addition to the causal role

played by his or her mental states.⁶⁶ For example, he might make a donation to famine relief in Africa partially in virtue of being caused to do so by his belief that there is famine in Africa, a belief which, if true, might in turn have been brought about in some way by the fact that there is famine in Africa. However, (MR*) is much less plausible in cases where the relevant beliefs are *false*, since then there are no corresponding facts which cause the agent to be motivated; instead he would be motivated primarily by facts about himself and his mental states. And this seems implausible – in most cases the agent is motivated to act by facts in her surroundings as she sees them, regardless of whether, unbeknownst to her, she is mistaken in thinking that those facts obtain. This is especially true in the first-person case, where such putative considerations about the world motivate me to act, rather than introspective considerations about my mental life, *even if* I happen to be mistaken in my assessment of those considerations.⁶⁷ Thus this alternative approach would seem to imply that there is a surprising disconnect between how motivation seems to work from the first-person perspective and how it actually operates.

The fourth and final point is closely related. For note that it follows immediately from (MR*) and (C) that what directly motivates an agent can *never* itself be or represent an objectively good normative reason from either the first or the third-person perspectives. The two theses imply that mental states are what directly motivate action, but normative reasons are facts in the world and not the agent's own mental states. Yet to imply that an agent can never be directly motivated by something that either is or represents a good reason is surely a puzzling and unsatisfactory result.⁶⁸

Thus in light of these last two points in particular, (MR*) does not seem to be a promising alternative to (MR). Before concluding this section, however, let us consider a slightly different alternative to (MR) which is inspired by some brief remarks of R. Jay Wallace's.⁶⁹ The

heart of this proposal involves providing different accounts of what motivate agents depending on whether the first or third-person perspective is in question:

(MR1) From the first-person deliberative perspective, what motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more considerations which are not to be understood as mental states.

(MR2) From the third-person explanatory perspective, what motivate an agent to perform an action are certain mental states.⁷⁰

On this view, the Humean can grant that considerations in the contents of mental states, rather than mental states themselves, are what motivate agents from the first-person perspective. But this can be acknowledged since the Humean theory is allegedly intended to be a theory about motivation only in *third*-person action explanations, and in such explanations (MR2) can allow for desires to be the source of motivation.

What should we make of this proposal? (MR1) is certainly a welcome claim; indeed it resembles our conclusion (C1) from the first challenge. (MR2), on the other hand, seems to face the same difficulties as did (MR*). In particular, it would follow that from the third-person perspective, no agent is ever motivated by what is in fact a good reason for action since such reasons are facts in the world and what motivate action according to (MR2) are the agent's own mental states.⁷¹ Additionally, it would also follow from (MR1) and (MR2) that what motivates an agent from the first-person perspective can *never* be what motivates that same agent from the third-person perspective. In the former case, what do the motivating are intentional mental contents, whereas in the latter case what do the motivating are mental states. Given the categorical divide between mental contents and states, we again get a deeply puzzling result.^{72 73}

Thus in general there seem to be significant costs associated with rejecting (MR). And given the plausibility of the other theses (R), (T), and (AS) which constitute our central challenges to HTM, the Humean view looks to be in serious trouble indeed.⁷⁴

7. Motivating Humeanism

But can the Humean theory of motivation really be dispatched so quickly? What, after all, about the various positive arguments that have been given in recent years on behalf of HTM? If one or more of those arguments is plausible, then perhaps there would be good reason to doubt the viability of the challenges raised against the Humean theory in the previous section.

While there is not adequate space to address all of the arguments that have been raised in the literature in support of HTM, here I hope to evaluate what I take to be the three most important arguments – the argument from continuity, the argument from weakness of will and *accidie*, and the teleological argument.⁷⁵ Let us consider each of these arguments in turn.

The Argument from Continuity. When we observe certain other animals in nature, it seems that they are motivated to perform various actions, and furthermore that their motivation for action stems from various desires that they have – their instincts, impulses, wants, and the like. These desires are mental states, and so it appears that what motivate many non-human animals to act are not intentional mental contents but rather mental states.

Similarly in the human case, many infants seem motivated to behave in various ways by their basic wants and desires when, for example, they cry for food or release bodily waste. Even among adult humans, some actions seem to be the product of passing whims, brief impulses, or instinctive reactions. Surely we want to say that these actions are motivated actions, and yet here too the correct story about motivation seems to be the one told by the Humean.

The argument from continuity takes these observations and adds to them the premise that the story about motivation for agents ought to be continuous with the story about motivation for non-human animals, human infants, and adult humans who act on whims or impulses. Thus on

the grounds of continuity and uniformity, we ought to accept HTM as the best theory about motivation in general.⁷⁶

The most compelling response to this argument, in my view, involves appealing to the central claims about agency that we introduced in section one of this paper. To exhibit agency is to exhibit a fundamentally different *kind* of behavior in the world. It is behavior characterized, not simply by being led to act by various impulses and feelings, but rather by two central features: the agent's identification with his or her behavior and the agent's acting for reasons. In particular, actions performed by agents are actions which are done for what, by the agent's own lights, are good reasons for so acting. In other words, they have their source in the agent's motivating reasons. This, after all, is just our claim (MR) that we spent so much of the previous section defending:

(MR) What motivate an *agent* to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons.

At the same time, it could very well turn out that the following is also true:

(MR[^]) What motivate a *non-agent* to behave are always causally efficacious mental states.

In this way, the anti-Humean can grant that non-human animals, human infants, and adult humans who act on whims or impulses are all motivated to act, but deny that their behaviors are expressions of agency in the world. Thus while continuity and uniformity might be important desiderata in any philosophical theory, they are insufficient by themselves to secure the Humean theory of motivation as a theory about motivation in agents. For as a number of contemporary action theorists have argued, actions performed by agents need to be understood in their own terms.⁷⁷

The previous discussion allows us to not only respond to a leading argument for HTM, but also to clarify the anti-Humean approach to motivation in agents which is being proposed in this paper. We have just seen that the anti-Humean can readily grant the following claim:

(G1) The Humean theory of motivation is the best theory of motivation for the behavior exhibited by non-agents.

In addition, the anti-Humean can note the crucial causal role that desires have to play in non-agents, and agree that desires have a similar role to play in the motivational lives of agents. When we were formulating the Humean theory, we said that all Humeans accept the following thesis:

(G2) *The Desire Thesis*: In order for some agent S to be motivated to perform action A, S must have a desire D to A.

Note, however, that there is no reason why an anti-Humean cannot accept this thesis as well.⁷⁸

For recall from section five that the desire thesis only requires that a desire be *present* in an agent's psychology in order for him or her to be motivated, not that it itself be the *source* of that motivation or be what motivates the action. So the anti-Humean can readily accept that desires make an essential causal contribution to motivation in *both* agents and non-agents alike.⁷⁹

The Argument from Weakness of Will and Accidie. If beliefs (or the intentional contents of beliefs) were what motivated agents to act, then there would never be any cases of weakness of will in which an agent has stronger motivation to act against his belief about what would be best to do. Neither would there be any cases of *accidie* in which depression, listlessness, extreme fatigue, or the like leaves the agent entirely devoid of any motivation whatsoever to act in accordance with his or her beliefs. But clearly weakness of will and *accidie* occur from time to time in our lives, if not regularly. Therefore, beliefs (or the intentional contents of beliefs) cannot be the only things which motivate agents to act, if they do so at all; rather desires are also a source of motivation. Thus the account of motivation offered by anti-Humeans is insufficient, and we should turn instead to the Humean theory in order to understand cases of these kinds.⁸⁰

Whatever force this argument might have against standard anti-Humean theories, it should not pose too much of a threat to the anti-Humean framework developed in this paper. In the case of weakness of will, we can grant that there was motivation for the agent's body to behave which had its source in a desire opposing what the agent believed to be obligatory, good, desirable, or the like. But if this desire gets the best of the agent himself and causes his body to behave in a certain way, then we have a cause of alienation rather than a case of genuine agency in which the agent identifies with his behavior and acts for reasons. Thus we would have a human being who, temporarily at least, is a non-agent, and as we noted when discussing the argument from continuity, the anti-Humean can readily agree that:

(MR[^]) What motivate a *non-agent* to behave are always causally efficacious mental states.

So the anti-Humean can concede that desires are what motivate behavior in genuine cases of weakness of will.

Concerning *accidie*, all that follows from this phenomenon is that a desire must be present in order for an agent to be motivated to act, not that the desire *itself* is what motivates the agent. And as we also just noted, the anti-Humean can accept the desire thesis that in order for some agent to be motivated to perform an action, the agent must have a desire to perform that action. Since one consequence that extreme cases of depression, listlessness, fatigue, and the like can have is to eliminate a desire to do what the agent thinks is in fact best, the agent might find himself knowing what he should do without experiencing any causal pressure to do it.

Despite these responses, the Humean has an important rejoinder which he or she can use to defend the argument, especially as it applies to cases of weakness of will. For we assumed that weakness of will represents a failure of agency, and hence we assumed that the relevant actions are performed by a human being who at that moment is not an agent. While many philosophers

would accept such an assumption, some do not. Here, for instance, is an interesting example offered by Michael Bratman:

Perhaps I think it strictly better to be a person who forgives and turns the other cheek but nevertheless, in a kind of self-indulgence, allow into my life a willingness to express reactive anger. Though this role of my desire to express my anger diverges from my relevant evaluative judgments, it is not a desire I reject or disown.⁸¹

According to Bratman, this is a case in which a person is genuinely exhibiting agency when he acts on his desire to express anger while at the same time being motivated by this desire as opposed to his belief (or the intentional content of his belief) about forgiveness. Such a case thus seems to pose a significant challenge to any rival anti-Humean theory of motivation in agents.

The issues about weakness of will and agency are complex, and indeed require a paper of their own in order to treat properly. Here I will simply note several ways in which an anti-Humean might want to respond to Bratman's example:⁸²

First Response. Note that the person in Bratman's example allows a willingness to express anger into his life. Yet one natural way of understanding the phrase 'allowing into my life' is in terms of a revision of the agent's initial evaluative norms concerning forgiveness in such a way that they now have built into them a special exception clause for certain forms of reactive anger. In this way, the agent's norms *would* end up licensing the desire in question, at least in this one instance, and thus could still be what motivate him to act rather than his desire.

Second Response. Alternatively and perhaps more naturally, it might be that the agent's *moral* norms prescribe forgiveness, but in cases of reactive anger the agent's *egoistic* or self-interested norms have higher priority in his mental life than do his moral norms, and thus as an agent he identifies with his angry desire and the actions which the desire produce in virtue of their being normatively acceptable by this other set of evaluative standards instead. Note that this

response accords nicely with Bratman's claim that the allowance for reactive anger was made as a 'kind of self-indulgence.'

Third Response. Suppose, though, that the agent has arrived at what by his own lights is an *all-things-considered* judgment against reactive anger. Then it could still be true that he cares very little for the norms operative in forming that judgment, and as a result does not align himself with the judgment. This lack of identification with the normative belief could allow the reactive anger to have free reign without being 'disowned' by the agent. In fact, the agent could not only fail to be alienated from the anger; he may even be able to get himself into a position where he believes that he is fully behind it. After all, even if a judgment that the anger is not desirable was formed, the agent can exclude this belief from bearing on his anger by his own lights through various acts of self-deception.⁸³

Fourth Response. Eventually, though, the anti-Humean will have to draw the line somewhere, and the appropriate place seems to be when the following are true:

- (i) The agent forms the all-things-considered judgment that this expression of reactive anger is undesirable.
- (ii) The agent identifies with and hence is aligned with the norms operative in forming that judgment.

If both these conditions obtain, then the anti-Humean will have good reason to deny that there are cases like Bratman's in which a desire to express reactive anger would not be rejected or disowned. Admittedly, if the desire gets the best of the agent, then we would have a case where a desire is what motivates a given behavior. But in that case there would be deep alienation from the behavior and so not an agent who is acting, but rather a human being who is temporarily a non-agent. And as such this would pose no threat to our anti-Humean framework for understanding motivation in agents.

Thus in general the anti-Humean has a number of ways to go in order to explain motivation in cases of weakness of will. Which of these ways ends up being the most promising will ultimately depend upon our first being presented with a more detailed and informative description of the case at issue than the one Bratman has given us above.

The Teleological Argument. In a well-known paper, Michael Smith once claimed to have a knockdown argument for his preferred version of the Humean theory of motivation, and in subsequent years Smith's argument has been regarded as the leading source of support for the view.⁸⁴ According to Smith, the debate between Humeans and anti-Humeans should center on the truth of the following biconditional:

- (P1) R at t constitutes a *motivating reason* of agent S to A iff there is some B such that R at t consists of an appropriately related desire of S to B and a belief that were she to A she would B.⁸⁵

We have already seen several reasons for thinking that (P1) is false. But if Smith's teleological argument is sound, then at the very least we will have to rethink where the balance of considerations lies.

The teleological argument is rather easy to state:

- (a) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal.
- (b) Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit.
- (c) Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.⁸⁶

Smith claims that (P1) is entailed by (a) through (c). But strictly speaking what follows is that:

- (P1*) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, desiring.

Some have criticized Smith for failing to take seriously enough the fact that (P1*) is compatible with the having of a motivating reason also being constituted by one or more cognitive mental states which, for example, are such that they causally generate the relevant desire. Furthermore, since (P1*) only concerns what it is to *have* a motivating reason and not what it is to *be* a

motivating reason, such a result is compatible with construing the ontology of such reasons as intentional contents and not mental states.⁸⁷

However, in what follows I want to briefly develop a different and perhaps more interesting response. My own view is that the teleological argument by itself cannot advance the dispute between Smith's Humean theory and most anti-Humean positions on the issue of what it is to have a motivating reason. We can grant premises (a) and (c), but I want to claim that premise (b) underestimates the available options for understanding the possession conditions for goals. According to this premise:

- (b) Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit.

While being in such a state might be *one* way in which we can have a goal, it does not seem to be the only way. Suppose that a goal I have is to lose weight. Then given premise (c), at least one way in which I can have this goal is for the following to be true of me:

- (W1) I desire that I lose weight.

But another way in which I might have this goal is if I embed this same propositional content in a normative belief:

- (W2) I believe that it is highly desirable that I lose weight.

It seems clear enough that I might take on the goal of losing weight if (W2) were true of me and if I had formed this belief as a result, say, of a process of careful practical reasoning involving considerations which are significant by my own lights, such as the desirability of being healthy enough to take care of my family.

If this is right, then we need to recast Smith's argument as follows:

- (a) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal.
- (b) Having a goal is either (i) being in a state with which the world must fit or (ii) being in a state with which the mind must fit and which concerns the normative desirability of bringing about a putatively non-actual state of affairs.

- (c) Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.
- (d) Being in a state with which the mind must fit and which concerns the normative desirability of bringing about a putatively non-actual state of affairs, is believing in a certain way.
- (e) Therefore, having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, either (i) desiring or (ii) believing in a certain way.

But if this is how the argument should go, then we no longer have a knockdown argument for (P1*), much less (P1). In fact, all we have is a choice between three options:

- (1) Having a motivating reason is always, *inter alia*, desiring.
- (2) Having a motivating reason is always, *inter alia*, believing in a certain way.
- (3) Having a motivating reason is sometimes, *inter alia*, desiring and sometimes, *inter alia*, believing in a certain way.

But these are the options which largely characterize the debate as to what it is to have a motivating reason in the first place. Hence I claim that the teleological argument by itself does not advance this debate.⁸⁸

While there is no doubt that more could be said in regards to each of these three leading arguments for HTM, for now it looks as if they fall well short of establishing the view.

8. Conclusion

The challenges raised in this paper to the Humean theory of motivation are intended to have as their target all the various formulations of the view, given that they each seem to be committed to the claim that non-cognitive mental *states* are what motivate an agent to act. If we grant that these challenges are successful, the important question then becomes what we should put in place of the Humean theory.

Unfortunately, there is not adequate space here with which to develop a detailed alternative account of motivation in agents. But for now we can note that appealing to *beliefs* as

the basis of such an account will not be promising either, since the challenges developed in section six of this paper have as their target the claim that what motivate are mental states, and thus are neutral as to which kinds of mental states are in question.⁸⁹ Instead, the anti-Humean approach that should be the most natural to adopt in light of what has been said in this paper is the following:

- (AH) Considerations found in the intentional mental contents of at least some mental states are what motivate action in agents in both first-person practical deliberation and third-person rationalizing explanations.

Thus on this approach, certain considerations such as *she loves me* or *I ought to keep my promise* could, for instance, be among the kinds of considerations which might motivate me to act if I happened to believe them.⁹⁰

Fully developing this anti-Humean approach to motivation in agents is, however, a task for another day.⁹¹

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¹ See my 2004, 2007b.

² See Frankfurt 1988, 1999.

³ See Frankfurt 2002a: 87, 89, 2002b: 161.

⁴ See Frankfurt 1975: 50, 1987: 163, 168, 170, 175, 1992: 105, 1993: 112-113, Stump 1988: 216, 219-220, 222, Velleman 1992: 139, Bratman 1996: 186, 194, 197, 2000a: 37-39, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54-55, 59, 2000b: 256, 2002: 66, 69, 75, 2005: 44, 49, and Ekstrom 2005: 147-149.

⁵ The discussion in the text passes over a number of difficult issues in the identification literature, such as whether identification involves mere acceptance or actual endorsement, whether in the case of desires it concerns the desire itself or just the content of the desire, and whether it is supposed to be a reflective, intellectual process or not. Fortunately for our purposes we can set these issues to one side.

Acceptance of something like (A1) is widespread in the action theory literature. See for instance Frankfurt 1988, 1999, Stump 1988, 1990, Velleman 1992, Bratman 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, and 2005, and Ekstrom 2005.

⁶ Compare Frankfurt 1971, 1987.

⁷ Frankfurt 1971: 17.

⁸ Velleman 1992: 126. As he goes on to note, “I may conclude that desires of mine caused a decision, which in turn caused the corresponding behavior; and I may acknowledge that these mental states were thereby exerting their normal motivational force, unabated by any strange perturbation or compulsion. But do I necessarily think that I made the decision or that I executed it? Surely, I can believe that the decision, though genuinely motivated by my desires, was thereby induced in me but not formed by me; and I can believe that it was genuinely executed in my behavior but executed, again, without my help...When I participate in an action, I must be adding something to the normal motivational influence of my desires, beliefs, and intentions” (1992: 126-7).

⁹ Again, a proper treatment would need to consider these and other examples in detail, which is something I do in my 2004, 2007b. For additional examples, see in particular Frankfurt 1977: 63, 67 and Bratman 1996: 196.

¹⁰ For formulations of the Humean theory which explicitly appeal to agents, see among others Platts 1980: 73, Price 1989: 119, Smith 1994: 92, and Cuneo 2002: 467.

¹¹ For a similar characterization, see Dancy 2000: 1 and Setiya 2003: 346-347.

¹² See Davidson 1963.

¹³ The kind of explanation here is a reasons or rationalizing explanation, rather than a causal explanation. We will revisit the relationship between these two kinds of explanations in sections two through four of the paper. For similar claims, see Smith 1987: 38-9, 1994: 95-6, 1998: 18, 37, Dancy 2000, Clark 2000: 360, Miller 2003: 271, and Wallace 2003.

¹⁴ According to Clark, a motivating reason “is a state with the potential to provide a ‘reason explanation’ of the action. And a reason explanation is the sort of explanation that reveals the point the agent sees in acting as she does” (2000: 360). Likewise for Smith, motivating and normative reasons are such that “each purports to justify certain behaviour on A’s behalf; for there is an *a priori* connection between citing an agent’s reasons for acting in a certain way and giving a partial justification for his acting in that way . . .” (1987: 38). See also Smith 1987: 38-9, 1994: 95-6, 104, 116, 2003: 460, Dancy 2000, 2003, and Wallace 2003: 429.

¹⁵ For more on (A2), see Velleman 1989, 1992.

¹⁶ For more on the distinction between motivating and normative reasons, see Smith 1994: chapter four, Dancy 2000: chapter one, Setiya 2003: 346-347, and Davis 2005: 51, 54.

To anticipate a potential worry, I intend the expression ‘motivating reason’ to just be a piece of technical terminology, and so not one that can get us any conceptual mileage by trying to analyze in the sections which follow. At the same time, this terminology is intended to capture a phenomenon which I think is very familiar to both philosophers and non-philosophers alike, namely that of the reasons for acting or refrain from acting that each agent has. It seems commonplace that we take ourselves to have good reasons for acting, and that when those reasons do lead us to act, we can appeal to them to rationally explain why we were motivated to do so. So while ‘motivating reason’ is a bit of philosophical jargon, the phenomenon it captures is supposed to be something about which we can profitably philosophize, as I try to do in sections two and three. Indeed, while the terminology of ‘normative’ and ‘motivating’ reasons is recent, the underlying commonsense distinction it is meant to signify goes back at least as far as Hutcheson in the philosophical literature (see Darwall 1983: 30 fn. 5).

I am grateful to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify these issues.

¹⁷ Compare Frankfurt 1971.

¹⁸ Clearly much more would need to be said in order to argue for this connection between reasons and identification, which is something I take up in my 2007b. For our purposes here I will appeal to (A1) and (A2) separately in what

follows, without assuming any explanatory relationship between them. For a similar view of reasons and identification, see Velleman 1992.

¹⁹ But doesn't this lead to an obvious counting problem? If a human being meets the standards for agency, whatever they might be, then isn't it absurd to think we would have *two* beings – the human and the agent – co-located in the same body? Yes, that would be absurd if agency were a *substance* sortal. But it is not – agency is a phase sortal that certain beings can instantiate at various times during their lives. Just as some human beings can come to be students, wives, parents, lawyers, Americans, and the like, so too can they also come to be (or cease to be) agents.

For a similar view about persons as opposed to agents, see Olson 1997: chapter two.

²⁰ See Setiya 2003: 346, 349 and Davis 2005: 53.

²¹ 'Typically' because there may be intentional mental states with non-propositional intentional objects. Searle, for example, thinks that this is true for states of love. See his 1983: 6-7 and 2001: 36. Wayne Davis (2005: 53) has also argued that desires lack propositional content because they are states of the form:

S's desire to ϕ .

The only point about this proposal that matters for my purposes is that desires still would have an intentional content which is non-factive. Nonetheless, as a general matter it seems to me that we can straightforwardly translate any desire of such a form into a desire with propositional content. For example,

S's desire to win the race.

can be given a propositional reading as follows:

S's desire that S (himself) win the race.

For similar remarks, see Dancy 2003: 479.

²² The 'enabling condition' locution is taken from Jonathan Dancy, although I make no claim to accurately capture his usage. See Dancy 2000: 127 as well as Audi 2001: 54-55.

²³ See, e.g., Davis 2005: 56.

²⁴ Much of the above could be told (albeit less plausibly in my view) on a Russellian view of propositions and propositional individuation as well.

²⁵ As an anonymous referee has pointed out, the evidence from ordinary language might cut both ways. For even if in the present we typically explain our actions by citing putative facts in the world rather than our mental attitudes,

when we reflect back on those of our past actions which we now think were inappropriate or in some way mistaken or wrong at the time, we do often cite such beliefs and desires. Thus to use our Iceland example, at a certain point in the past I might have said:

(I1) I am giving money to this charity because there is widespread starvation in Iceland.

But later on I might learn that starvation is not in fact widespread there, and so reflecting back upon my action, say:

(I2) I gave money to that charity because I had believed at the time that there was widespread starvation in Iceland.

Here my belief might look as if it is part of what I now take my motivating reason to have been.

These are indeed interesting cases, but I am not sure that the above is the correct way to think about them. For in the example it seems what I am really saying is that I had mistakenly believed something, namely that there was widespread starvation in Iceland, which was not in fact the case. In other words, what I am saying is that I had taken myself to have a good reason at the time – the putative fact of starvation – but now I realize that this is *not* a good reason. Indeed, I might even say things like this:

(I3) I wish I had not been misled into giving so much money away for what I thought was a good reason at the time, but now I know better and this time have confirmed it myself that there is widespread starvation in Africa, and so am going to donate to a charity devoted to helping those people instead.

So on this way of understanding the example, I hereby acknowledge that I took there to be a good reason, but the belief itself is still not strictly speaking part of my motivating reason, even in retrospect.

Naturally there is much more to be said here, and I do not want to put too much weight either on this response or on the initial argument from ordinary language. As I note in a moment, what I take to be the main argument for (R) is instead a parity argument with the ontology of epistemic reasons.

²⁶ For more, see Darwall 1983: 33 and Dancy 2000: chapter six.

²⁷ See, e.g., Darwall 1983: 31 and Davis 2005: 52.

²⁸ See Foley 2002: 190.

²⁹ Compare the following from Gareth Evans: “If someone asks me ‘Do you think there is going to be a third world war?’, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question, ‘Will there be a third world war?’. I get myself in a position to answer the question whether

I believe that p by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether p .” (1982: 225). See also Foley 1987: 49-50. An exception to the claim made in the text may have to be made for self-justifying beliefs where the perceived fact that I believe p is enough to give me a SE-reason for thinking that p is true. In order for this purported fact to function as a SE-reason, however, it would have to be represented in the propositional content of some other second-order belief about my believing p .

³⁰ SE-reasons are propositions and not just intentional mental representations since they are the contents of cognitive mental states, and all cognitive mental states are attitudes had towards propositions.

³¹ For a similar view of epistemic defeaters as propositions, see Foley 1987: 18, 42-48. And for more on epistemic defeaters in general, see my 2005 and the references cited therein.

³² Stoutland 1998 defends such a view at least for some of our motivating reasons. See also Garrard and McNaughton 1998.

³³ This difficulty is particularly pronounced for views which take facts to be both reasons and causes. On any view of causation, the following is axiomatic:

(CA) Necessarily (For any purported cause C and effect E , C causes E only if C exists and E exists).

See, e.g., Mellor 1995: 12, 106. Given (CA) and our own fallibility, it follows that not all motivating reasons can be both facts and causes.

³⁴ Stoutland 1998: 61 and Garrard and McNaughton 1998: 55-56 employ this strategy.

³⁵ See also Foley 2002: 188-193.

³⁶ In this paper I limit the discussion to the first and third-person perspectives, as is common in the action theory literature. However, I also have a considerable amount of sympathy for those who claim that the second-person perspective is important to action explanation and has been neglected by philosophers (see, e.g., Hutto 2004).

³⁷ For recent advocacy of something like this thesis, see Darwall 1983: 29-33, Audi 1986a: 146-148, 1986b: 234, 1993: 54, 2001: 53-54, Baker 1993: 76, Dancy 1995: 15, Scanlon 1998: chapter one, Setiya 2003: 346-347, Manson 2004, and Davis 2005.

Given that something at least roughly like this claim has already been advanced by others, it might be wondered how novel it and the corresponding claim (R) in the first-person case are supposed to be. I readily admit that similar views have already been advanced in the literature, although typically briefly and without much

argumentative support. Nonetheless, they continue to remain unpopular in comparison to the view that motivating reasons are mental states (see footnote 41 for references to this view). Thus I do not take my task in sections two and three of the paper to be that of advancing an original view, but rather as: (i) clearly and rigorously developing a minority position in the literature on motivating reasons, (ii) providing arguments, some of which are novel, both for that position and against rival views, and (iii) preparing to show in subsequent sections how that position can have a significant bearing on the viability of the Humean theory of motivation.

I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify these issues.

³⁸ Here I assume a result which I argue for in the next section, namely that mental *states* are what cause a person to behave in various ways.

³⁹ Instead of figuring in third-person rationalizing explanations of actions by agents, non-conscious mental states can play a role in *causal* explanations of non-agential behavior. Here I largely agree with Jaegwon Kim:

. . . self-understanding arises out of the context of deliberation, choice, and decision. The context of deliberation is necessarily a first-person context. For when you deliberate, you must call on what you want and believe about the world – your preferences and information – from your internal perspective, and *that's the only thing you can call on*. The basis of your deliberation must be internally accessible, for the simple reason that you can't use what you haven't got. Reasons for action, therefore, are necessarily *internal reasons*, reasons that are cognitively accessible to the agent. That is one crucial respect in which reasons for actions differ from causes of actions: reasons must, but causes need not, be accessible to the agent (Kim 1998: 78, emphasis his).

See also Velleman 1992, 2000b and Dancy 2000: 5-6, 129.

⁴⁰ As Dancy remarks about a related view, "If we said to the agent, 'You can tell us as often as you like what your reason was for doing what you did, but we know in advance that that reason can never be the reason why you did it,' I think he would feel rightly insulted" (2000: 171).

⁴¹ For this assumption in moral psychology, see Smith 1987, 1994: chapter four, 1998: 18, 2003: 460, and Cuneo 2002: 466-7; in the theory of action, see Davidson 1963: 5, Kane 1998: 28, and Mele 2003: chapters two and three; and in the philosophy of mind, see Kim 1996: 127, 1998: 68, Heil 1998: 149, 155, and Lowe 2000: 239, 259, among many others.

⁴² For similar remarks, see Dancy 2000: 5-6 and Smith 2003: 465.

⁴³ The basic idea behind these reasons has already become familiar in the literature on motivating reasons due in large part to Dancy 1995, 2000, although he may not approve of the way the idea is developed here.

⁴⁴ See, among others, Dancy 1995: 13, 2000: chapters two and three, Parfit 1997, forthcoming, and Wallace 2003: 429. Note that normative reasons can still be facts even if the position in the theory of normative reasons known as reasons internalism is true, since then such reasons would be only those facts whose consideration motivates suitably idealized agents. For more on reasons internalism, see Williams 1980, 1995 as well as the helpful taxonomy in Dancy 2000: 15-19.

⁴⁵ It might be claimed that a similar argument could be used against the view that motivating reasons in third-person rationalizing explanations are certain intentional mental contents (what we called (T) in this section). Focusing just on those contents which are propositional in form, the thought might be that there is a categorical divide between propositions and facts, and so (T) will also have the consequence that no motivating reason can be or represent a normative reason.

If such an objection could be developed successfully, we should seriously rethink the argument raised in the corresponding text against the view that motivating reasons are mental states. However, it is not at all clear that there *is* a categorical divide between propositions and facts as there is between mental states and their contents. For part of the nature of propositions is to represent putative facts in the world, and such propositions are true iff the relevant facts obtain. So for now I do not see how an analogous argument could be used successfully against (T).

I am grateful to Jason Baldwin for raising these issues.

⁴⁶ For related discussion, see also Dancy 1995, 2000: chapter five.

⁴⁷ Note as well that Davidson's challenge arises no matter what view of an agent's motivating reasons we happen to take, i.e., regardless of whether they are mental states, propositions, facts, or something else altogether. For Davidson's challenge, see his 1963. For forceful defenses of the causal theory, see in particular Bishop 1989 and Mele 2003: chapter two. Of course many action theorists have explicitly denied the claim made in the text, usually in the context of motivating what they take to be a rival teleological theory of action (Wilson 1989, Ginet 1990, Sehon 1997). Unfortunately attempting to adjudicate such disputes is beyond the scope of this paper.

Note finally that because (C) appeals to mental states as the *relata* in such causal relations, it need only require the resources of event causation in accounting for actions performed by agents, and thereby can avoid appealing to the *agent* as a cause. This should also be a welcome result for those concerned about the naturalistic acceptability of agent causation (such as Velleman 1992: 130 and Bratman 2000a: 39).

⁴⁸ Crane 1992: 197. One such proposal is Fodor's representational theory of mind (Fodor 1976, 1987).

⁴⁹ As Crane writes, "[T]he content *itself* was never supposed to be efficacious. On any theory, contents are abstract objects – Fregean Thoughts, or sets of possible worlds – and as such are causally inert. What is supposed to be efficacious is the intentional *state* – the belief or the desire" (1992: 198, emphasis his).

A related problem arises when such a view tries to explain how mental states with *shared* content can cause each other to exist during practical deliberation. Suppose, for example, that I hope that *p* in virtue of having desired that *p*. Given that these two attitudes share the same content, what is it about the content of my desire *alone* which can explain why I came to hope that *p* rather than, say, wish that *p*, intend that *p*, and so on? Causal regularities that obtain between some pairs of states (desires and hopes, for example) and not between others (intentions and doubts, for instance) would then go unexplained.

Yet another difficulty for the thesis concerns the compatibility of content externalism with the plausible assumption that all causation is locally grounded in the intrinsic properties of the cause. For related discussion, see Jacob 1992.

⁵⁰ For related discussion, see Audi 1993: 57, Baker 1993: 77, and van Gulick 1993: 234. Baker goes so far as to say that the problem of mental causation just *is* answering the question of "how can content-properties of internal events be causally relevant to producing behavioural events?" (1993: 76). There are well-known obstacles to accepting the causal relevance of content and hence to accepting what I take to be the most plausible version of (C). This is not, however, the place to properly enter into debates about, for instance, causal relevance and wide content (Fodor 1986, 1987: chapter two), or the threat of epiphenomenalism from strong supervenience and the causal closure of the physical (Kim 1989, Baker 1993).

Finally, while the natural way to understand (C) is as a claim about *event* causal relations between mental events, it is in principle compatible with fact causation views as well. More precisely, facts in the world could cause the formation of mental states which in turn are the immediate causes of various actions. And even if the advocate of

fact causation wants to tell a story about the mind just in terms of fact causal relations, such a story can still be compatible with (C). We would need to be told how motivating reasons could be causally relevant, since given (R) and (T) they are found in the contents of mental states, and yet those states are supposed to not enter into event causal relations. But surely any theory of mental causation which appeals to fact causation must find a way to explain the causal relevance of mental content. So provided we are able to preserve the two main claims from this section about the causal role of mental states and the causal relevance of mental contents, (C) can in principle allow fact causation to be a viable approach to thinking about mental causation in agents.

For more on fact causation in general, see Bennett 1988: chapters 2-3 and Mellor 1995: chapters 9, 13.

⁵¹ I have benefited most from the discussion of formulational issues in Smith 1994: chapter four and Cuneo 2002. Participants in discussions of the Humean theory make no claim to be accurately representing Hume's own view.

⁵² See Platts 1980: 75, Lewis 1988: 323, Pettit 1987: 531, Pettit and Price 1989: 165, Smith 1987: 36, 1989: 89, 1994: 92, 116, 1998: 18-19, Dancy 1993: 2, Lenman 1996: 291, Svavarsdóttir 1999: 168, van Roojen 2002: 29, and Shafer-Landau 2003: 122. Humeans often understand the sense of 'desire' at issue loosely so as to include a wide variety of conative states such as wants, drives, impulses, likings, and so on. See for example Smith 1987: 55, 1994: 117, Lenman 1996: 292, and especially Schueler 1995: chapter one.

⁵³ See Pettit 1987: 531, Smith 1987: 55-58, 1988: 590-591; 1994: 117-120, 1998: 29, Lewis 1988: 324, Price 1989: 119-120, Pettit and Price 1989: 162, Schueler 1991: 279, van Roojen 1995: 40, 2002: 29 fn. 6, Lenman 1996: 292, Little 1997: 62, Svavarsdóttir 1999: 168, Cuneo 2002: 467, Miller 2003: 270, and Shafer-Landau 2003: 122. And for more on desires in general, see Altham 1986: 284, Price 1989, and Smith 1994: 117-120.

⁵⁴ For helpful discussion of this distinction, see Dancy 1993: 29, 2000: 13-14, 85, Smith 1994: 92-93, Garrard and McNaughton 1998: 53, 55, and Clark 2000: 358-361. Note that the distinction is widely accepted in the literature by both Humeans and anti-Humeans alike.

⁵⁵ See for example Collins 1988: 333 and Svavarsdóttir 1999: 168.

⁵⁶ For important recent objections, see Schueler 1991, Humberstone 1992, Zangwill 1998, and Sobel and Copp 2001.

⁵⁷ See for example the discussion in Parfit 1997: 105-6, and Cuneo 2002: 467.

⁵⁸ For something like condition (iii) as part of a formulation of HTM, see Pettit 1987: 531, Smith 1988: 590-591, 1994: 119, 1998: 19, 30, Lewis 1988: 323-4, 1996: 304-5, 308, van Roojen 1995: 37-8, 2002: 29, Little 1997: 62, 69, Jackson 1998: 155, Shafer-Landau 2000: 270, 2003: 122, and Miller 2003: 271.

⁵⁹ For attributions of something like (MR) to Humean theorists about motivation, see Platts 1980: 73-74, Smith 1987: 36, 1988, 1989: 89, 1994: chapter four, 1998: 18, 37, 2003: 460, Clark 2000: 361, Dancy 1995, 2000, Cuneo 2002: 466-7, and Miller 2003: 271. For the claim that (MR) is a truism, see Smith 2003: 460. And for excellent discussion of theses like (MR), see Clark 2000.

⁶⁰ An anonymous referee has suggested a possible response the Humean could make which does not require rejecting (MR). On this proposal, the Humean can accept that motivating reasons are found in the content of certain intentional mental states, so long as they have the form ‘By doing x I can do y.’ The enabling conditions for such motivating reasons would be an end directed desire, such as a desire to do y, and a means-end belief, such as a belief that he can do y by doing x. The debate between the Humean and the anti-Humean would then be recast as a debate concerning whether desires have to be among the enabling conditions for motivating reasons so understood, or whether only beliefs could be sufficient.

This is an interesting proposal, but not one that, I suspect, Humeans are likely to accept on their behalf. For it explicitly concedes that motivating reasons are *not* mental states like desires. Given our claim (MR) that what motivate agents to act are motivating reasons, it follows from this proposal that what motivate agents are not, and indeed could not be, desires. But as we have just seen in the previous section of the paper, it is constitutive of the Humean view that desires are what motivate action (see in particular the references cited in footnotes 55, 57, and 58).

Such a proposal thus introduces a new debate, but it is an intramural one *among* anti-Humeans. Indeed, I think that it is perhaps more interesting and important to debate about whether beliefs alone could be enabling conditions for motivating reasons (for more on this question, see footnote 65), but that would still be a different debate from the traditional one between Humeans and anti-Humeans. The central issue in the latter debate has always been about what motivates someone to act, with Humeans claiming it is always desires and anti-Humeans typically claiming it can be beliefs too (or, if this paper is on target, alternatively claiming that it can be certain intentional mental contents). We can appreciate this as well when it comes to motivation in non-agents – Humeans

take desires to be what motivate non-human animals to behave, and as we will see in section seven with the argument from continuity, they take their story about motivation to be continuous across all living things, whether they are agents or not. But the proposal would have both sides agreeing with each other from the start in rejecting desires as the only source of motivation by conceding that what motivate agents to act are motivating reasons found in the contents of certain mental states.

Finally, suppose that the above proposal does *not* involve accepting (MR). In other words, motivating reasons are certain intentional mental contents with the above form, but they are *not* what motivate agents to act. Rather, what motivate agents are the mental states which serve to cause that behavior (a thesis we will soon call (MR*) in what follows), in this case the end-directed desire and the means-end belief. I concede that this way of developing the proposal would still be Humean in spirit since a desire would be part of what motivates action. It also takes us directly to the issues that will be considered in the remainder of this section, and should fall prey to the third and fourth points to be raised in what follows.

⁶¹ For related discussion, see Smith 2003: 465, Wallace 2003: 435, and Dancy 2003: 487.

⁶² For very helpful discussion, see Velleman 1989, 1992.

⁶³ For a similar point, see Dancy 2000: 172, 2003: 488-490.

⁶⁴ Another way to put the point would be that (MR*) seems to conflict with the express aim of action theorists in general and most Humeans about motivation in particular to be giving an account of action which also respects the normativity of deliberation and decision. As Dancy writes, “Humean explanation is not presented as brutally causal, but causal and rational at once, since it is supposed to be a sort of causal explanation that is subject to normative rational constraints” (1995: 10). See also Smith 1987: 38-9, 1994: 95-6, 104, 116, 2003: 460, Dancy 2000, 2003, and Wallace 2003: 429. One response is that the relevant mental states can inherit their normativity from that which is enjoyed by their intentional contents. But just as a belief about the blueness of an object is not itself blue, so too is a belief about a normative subject matter not itself automatically normative.

To be fair, as an anonymous referee has pointed out to me, the Humean can secure a minimal kind of normativity associated with being instrumentally rational, whereby the agent acts in such a way as to satisfy his end-directed desires in light of his means-end beliefs. The instrumental rationality of such an agent would thereby

ground the truth of various counterfactuals concerning how the agent would have acted if he had had slightly different end-directed desires or means-end beliefs.

I am happy to grant that the Humean theory of motivation can allow for instrumental normativity, and furthermore that this is all the normativity we can expect when trying to understand the actions of non-human animals, infants, and some children. But we need to be able to account for more than this when it comes to agents. The unwilling addict in our example may be behaving in a way that is perfectly instrumentally rational; if he learned about a new, more feasible way of satisfying his craving, he would pursue that instead, and if his addiction switched from one drug to another, he would seek out means of attaining this new one. But in virtue of being an *unwilling* addict, his body is merely caused to act by his craving, and such behavior has no normative standing in his eyes. (MR*) would say that what motivated him to act was his desire to take drugs since that was what caused him to behave the way he did, but the *agent* in question is *not* motivated to take drugs (although matters will become more complex once we introduce (C3*) in a moment). The framework we have developed involving (MR) and the ontology of motivating reasons as mental contents can explain why the agent is not so motivated, since on this approach what motivate action are motivating reasons, and the agent's motivating reasons are decidedly opposed to his desire to take drugs. So even if the Humean can tell an instrumentalist story about normativity in non-agents, that may not be enough to capture the more sophisticated phenomenon of motivated action in agents.

For similar claims about the insufficiency of instrumental rationality as a story about the normativity of agency, see Velleman 1992, 2000b.

⁶⁵ In order to be of help to the Humean, (C3*) will have to be supplemented with the claim that motivating reasons are only found in the intentional contents of *desires*. Otherwise, if they are found in the contents of beliefs, it would then follow that beliefs can also be what motivate agents, which is something that no Humean can accept. But it seems highly plausible to think that at least some motivating reasons *are* belief contents. To use our same ordinary language examples:

“I bought the second volume of her series because the first one was so good.”

“I made the donation because people are starving in Africa and I can afford to help out.”

“I jumped out of the way because the bicyclist was about to crash into me.”

such intentional contents as *people are starving in Africa* and *the bicyclist was about to crash into me* clearly seem to be the objects of beliefs.

⁶⁶ Although we will raise some important concerns about a related move in footnote 68 below.

⁶⁷ For similar remarks, see Pettit and Smith 1990: 278-279. And even if it turns out that I do appeal to claims about my beliefs and desires, we saw in section two that those claims are serving as the *propositional contents* of beliefs I have formed about my mental states.

I have been helped by an anonymous referee to see that my earlier way of putting the points in this paragraph was too strong.

⁶⁸ The Humean might try to avoid this fourth point by borrowing an idea from the previous paragraph and arguing that normative reasons can be at least part of what motivate agents to act provided they cause the formation of the corresponding mental states which in turn cause the performance of the relevant actions. But there are at least five reasons why a Humean might not want to adopt this proposal, the first two of which are in my view the most significant. The first concern is that it would still be the case that what *directly* motivate the agent are mental states, and so cannot themselves be good reasons. As a result, agents cannot be directly motivated by the very normative reasons which, in themselves, make an action right. Secondly, the proposal still badly distorts how things appear to agents from the first-person perspective, since it claims that what partially motivate action are mental states, and yet to the agent only putative considerations about the world motivate him or her. Thirdly, it would involve a commitment to fact causation, since normative reasons are facts (such as the pain another is experiencing or the amount of starvation in Africa), and these facts are supposed to cause the formation of corresponding mental states. Yet as we noted in section four, fact causation has garnered little support. The fourth concern is that it is not clear whether this is a story that sits well with the spirit of the Humean view. For clearly beliefs rather than desires would be center stage – they would be what are caused by the normative facts, and their contents would be among the agent’s central motivating reasons. As a result, it would not be immediately obvious whether a desire would also be needed as a source of motivation in every action which arises from such facts and beliefs. The fifth concern is the most difficult to pin down, but it arises from an ontological worry that the notion of ‘what motivates’ would be stretched too thin by this proposal. For we would be committed to cases in which a normative, mind-independent fact as well as one or more psychological states in the agent are both components of what motivated an agent’s

action, and such a conception of the source of motivation in those instances may seem rather artificial and gerrymandered (for more on this last point, see Dancy 2000: 105-106).

⁶⁹ See Wallace 2003, 2005.

⁷⁰ More precisely, Wallace's proposal for the third-person perspective seems to be the following (2003: 433):

(MR2*) From the third-person explanatory perspective, what motivate an agent to perform an action are the mental states whose intentional contents render intelligible the agent's action from the first-person perspective.

This amounts to much the same thing as the claim (C3*) we just previously saw, once that claim is restricted to third-person action explanations. In addition, (MR1) and (MR2) are stated in terms of 'what motivate an agent,' which may not be Wallace's preferred terminology (see, e.g., 2003: 435 fn. 5). However, I do not think that much hangs on this choice of terms here; in (MR2), for instance, 'what motivate an agent' could be replaced with 'what lead the agent' or Wallace's own 'what move the agent to act' (433).

⁷¹ Although see footnote 68 for a possible response.

⁷² Wallace's view in his 2003 is, however, only briefly sketched in the context of his critical remarks on Dancy 2000, and no doubt could be developed in more detail in such a way as to try to avoid these worries. An anonymous referee has suggested one such development, namely that perhaps 'what motivates' in (MR1) and (MR2) is ambiguous, so that really Wallace is referring to a first-person sense of motivation (*motivates*₁) in (MR1) and a third-person sense of motivation (*motivates*₃) in (MR2). If this proposal is correct, it presumably would block the second objection I offered to Wallace's view, namely that it follows from (MR1) and (MR2) that what motivates an agent from the first-person perspective can never be what motivates her from the third-person perspective, since such an objection would have equivocated on 'motivates.'

Let me say three things about this proposal. First, it is unclear whether Wallace himself would accept it, since he seems to repeatedly suggest that what moved the agent from the third-person perspective are the mental states whose contents are the considerations which moved her by her own lights, without giving any indication that the notion of being 'moved,' 'led,' or 'motivated' is being treated ambiguously. And this is perhaps for good reason, since such allegedly ambiguous usage does not appear to show up in ordinary language or in any other philosophical discussions of motivation. But second and more importantly, regardless of what Wallace actually intended, it is not clear whether the proposal would undermine the spirit of my second objection. For it would still be the case that the

considerations which the agent herself appealed to in deliberating about how to act, would not be identical to what third parties should appeal to in giving a rationalizing explanation of her action. Regardless of what terminology we use, there is still an ontological difference in kind in the considerations being appealed to from each perspective. Finally, this proposal does not seem to help address the first objection raised in the text against Wallace's view, namely that when explaining someone's action, we could never strictly speaking say from the third-person perspective that what directly moved an agent to act was a good reason, since good reasons are typically non-mental facts. To his credit, these last two consequences are ones Wallace seems to acknowledge (2003: 433), but I regard them as serious costs which, other things being equal, it would be good to avoid. Thus ultimately the disagreement may come down to a difference in cost-benefit assessments, as many philosophical disagreements unfortunately seem to do these days.

⁷³ Similar remarks apply to the framework outlined by Pettit and Smith in their well-known paper "Backgrounding Desire" (1990). I am happy to join Pettit and Smith in accepting what they call the deliberative conception of human beings, according to which "the human agent always chooses among options, at least in part, on the grounds that the option preferred . . . [has] some property such that its presence entails, so the agent thinks, that the action is right or good or permissible or whatever" (1990: 270). Similarly, given what was said both here and in section four I am also happy to accept what they call the intentional conception, whereby "every action is causally explained by the beliefs and desires of the agent" and "desire is always present in the background of decision-making" (1990: 270, 271). Note that there is no conflict between these two conceptions once we treat the deliberative conception as a model for the foreground of practical reasoning and the intentional conception as a model for the background. Finally, I join Pettit and Smith in accepting that desires are in the background of practical reasoning and rarely make an appearance in the foreground.

Where I depart from Pettit and Smith, however, is with their claim that motivating reasons are constituted by mental states like beliefs and desires (1990: 270, 277). After all, once mental states are in the background of practical reasoning and rarely in the foreground, one would naturally expect that it is the *contents* of the causally operative mental states which serve as the considerations motivating and justifying action by the agent's own lights. Indeed, this paper might be viewed as one extended argument for the foreground role of motivating reasons.

⁷⁴ One other proposal is also worth considering here (I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this possibility). Suppose in order for some intentional content of a mental state to be an agent's motivating reason, there must be a certain causal relation between prior mental states and behavior. For example, if *Tylenol will reduce my headache* is my motivating reason, perhaps this is because certain prior mental states (e.g., a desire to reduce my headache and a belief that Tylenol reduces headaches) cause me to take Tylenol. Note that on this view my reason can correspond to the *fact* that Tylenol will reduce my headache, so that it would avoid the problems that arose in earlier sections for the claim that motivating reasons are mental states.

What should we make of this interesting proposal? First of all, it is not obvious whether it can generalize to all, or even most, of an agent's motivating reasons. For many such reasons do *not* causally issue in behavior; they are often outweighed by stronger opposing motivating reasons which themselves lead the agent to act (motivating reasons, recall, are the agent's reasons *for* acting, only some of which need become the reasons *for which* she acted). So tying an account of motivating reasons to behavior might be problematic. But more importantly, it is not clear whether this is a proposal that avoids the concerns that have been raised in this section. Suppose that the proposal also involves accepting (MR), namely that what motivate agents are motivating reasons (in this case, certain mental contents). Then it immediately becomes a view which no Humean can accept, since we have seen that HTM is committed to the claim that mental *states*, not mental contents, are what motivate action (for related discussion, see also footnote 60). Suppose, on the other hand, that the proposal accepts (MR*), namely that what motivate agents are only what serve to cause rather than what serve as the motivating reasons which justify action. Then we are back again with the same problems raised in this section, for instance that such a view would imply that what directly motivate action can never be nor represent objectively good normative reasons, which is highly puzzling. Thus while the proposal can doubtless be refined in various ways, for now it does not appear as if it will be enough to rescue the Humean from our challenges.

Of course, the proposal is well worth considering in its own right as a starting point in developing a positive anti-Humean theory of motivation, but as I noted at the beginning of the paper, my primary concern here is just with evaluating the plausibility of the Humean approach. For a discussion of a closely related proposal which might also be helpful here, see footnote 60.

⁷⁵ For a helpful survey of positive arguments for HTM, see Shafer-Landau 2003: 127-140. Shafer-Landau presents five different arguments, two of which are discussed in this section. The other three arguments are, in my view, much less frequently raised, and are implausible for the reasons Shafer-Landau himself suggests.

⁷⁶ My presentation of the argument from continuity follows Shafer-Landau 2003: 131-132. See also Smith 2003: 463-464, 466.

⁷⁷ For a sampling, see Frankfurt 1971, 1977, 1987, Velleman 1992, 2000b, Bratman 2000a, 2003, and Dancy 2003.

⁷⁸ This has been widely acknowledged by both Humeans and anti-Humeans alike. See, for example, Dancy 1993, 2000: 13-14, 85, 90, 94, Smith 1994: 93, van Roojen 1995: 38, and Clark 2000: 359.

⁷⁹ An important question to clarify here is whether, if it could be shown that desires are enabling conditions of a consideration's being a motivating reason, this would be sufficient to then make the desire the *source* of what motivates the action. Let us approach this from both the first and third-person perspectives. From the first-person perspective, we have argued that motivating reasons are to be found in the contents of intentional mental states, and furthermore that (MR) is true, so that it follows that what motivate are motivating reasons understood in this way. Thus it does not really matter whether it turns out that desires or beliefs (or most likely, both) are enabling conditions on motivating reasons from the first-person perspective, since *neither* of them will be what motivate agents to act. And the same is true in the third-person case. For we argued that (T) is true, namely that motivating reasons are also found in mental contents in third-person rationalizing explanations. Given our same principle (MR), it will follow again that what motivate agents in such explanations are not mental states, whether desires or beliefs, even if those states happen to be the motivating reasons' enabling conditions. This is why the advocate of the anti-Humean approach to motivation developed in this paper can still readily accept the desire thesis, since the required presence of a desire, even in the form of an enabling condition, does not entail that the desire itself is what motivates action in agents.

I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify these issues.

⁸⁰ For various statements of this argument, see Stocker 1979, Smith 1988: 594, 1994: 120-121, van Roojen 1995, Lenman 1996: 300, and Helm 2001.

⁸¹ Bratman 2003: 227. The example derives from Watson 1987: 150. See also Bratman 1996: 189-190. It should be noted that Bratman uses this example, not in order to adjudicate between competing theories of motivation, but

rather in order to adjudicate between competing theories of identification. He takes this and other examples to show the insufficiency of any approach to identification which is centered on normative beliefs rather than hierarchical non-cognitive mental states.

⁸² The next few paragraphs draw from my 2007a.

⁸³ This response points to an important demand that any anti-Humean theory of motivation which appeals to an agent's norms and values must satisfy, namely that of not only explaining how values and norms can motivate action, but also of explaining how the agent first comes to identify himself with these particular values and norms. For similar remarks, see Velleman 1992: 134 and Bratman 2003: 226. I have attempted to provide the beginnings of such an explanation of what might be called 'norm identification' in my 2004, 2007c.

⁸⁴ For the original statement of the argument, see Smith 1987.

⁸⁵ Smith 1994: 92. I have changed some of Smith's notation to bring it in line with my own.

⁸⁶ This version appears in his 1994: 116. See also Smith 1987: 55 and 1988: 589 and Pettit and Smith 1990: 277.

⁸⁷ Indeed, Smith seems to acknowledge both of the above points in Pettit and Smith 1990: 277. For critical discussion of the teleological argument, see among others Dancy 2000: 91, Clark 2000, Miller 2003: 277-279, and Shafer-Landau 2003: 134-140.

⁸⁸ Philip Clark has formulated a different version of Smith's argument which bypasses the problematic appeal to goals:

- (i) Every motivating reason to ϕ is a state with the desire-like direction of fit toward ϕ -ing.
- (ii) Every state with the desire-like direction of fit toward ϕ -ing is a desire to ϕ .
- (iii) So, every motivating reason to ϕ is a desire to ϕ (2000: 368-369).

Admittedly, this version does avoid the problem raised above for Smith's original version of the teleological argument, while still preserving the general spirit of Smith's approach. Unfortunately, however, premise (i) of this new version seems immediately vulnerable. For as I argued at length in sections two and three, motivating reasons are not mental *states* of any kind, but rather are intentional mental contents.

⁸⁹ So if the challenges rule out the Humean theory, then they should do the same for the following standard anti-Humean views:

(AH1) At least some beliefs are what motivate action in agents, and any corresponding desires are merely ‘consequentially ascribed’ or epiphenomenal (This is a common reading of Nagel 1970: 29-30 and McDowell 1978: 20, 1979. See also McNaughton 1988: 50).

(AH2) At least some beliefs are what motivate action in agents, and any corresponding desire or intention brought about by one of these beliefs is independently existent and perhaps necessary for *being* motivated but not part of *what* motivates the action (See Dancy 1993: 13-14 and van Roojen 2002: 38-42).

(AH3) Besires exist and are what motivate action in agents (See, e.g., Price 1989).

⁹⁰ Note that any view of what motivates agents which accepts (AH) can easily avoid our challenges for the Humean theory. For if we start with the familiar principle that:

(MR) What motivate an agent to perform an action are always one or more motivating reasons.

then together with (AH) it follows that:

(M*) Motivating reasons are considerations found in intentional mental contents.

But this result sits nicely both with the account in (R) of the ontology of reasons for action in first-person deliberation as well as with the account in (T) of the ontology of reasons for action in third-person rationalizing explanations. Motivating reasons turn out to be of the same ontological kind as the reasons in question in both (R) and (T).

Focusing on motivating reasons as certain mental contents can help us develop an account of what it is for an agent to identify with his or her actions, but nothing in this paper has yet explored this claim in any detail, which is something that I take up in my 2007b.

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