

*Weighting for a Plausible Humean  
Theory of Reasons*

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You're my reason for reason, the step in my groove.

— Carlos Santana

This paper addresses the two extensional objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons—that it allows for *too many* reasons, and that it allows for *too few*. Although I won't argue so here, many of the other objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons turn on assuming that it cannot successfully deal with these two objections.<sup>1</sup> What I *will* argue, is that the force of the *too many* and the *too few* objections to the Humean Theory depend on whether we assume that Humeans are committed to a thesis about the *weight* of reasons—one I call *Proportionalism*. In particular, I'll show how a version of the Humean Theory that rejects Proportionalism can reasonably hope to escape both the *too many* and the *too few* objections. This will constitute my defense of this version of the Humean Theory. But then, separately, I will argue that this defense of the Humean Theory is not *ad hoc*. I'll argue that Humeans have no reason to accept Proportionalism in the first place. Or at least, no weighty one.

There are three parts to the paper. In Part 1 we introduce the Humean Theory and the *too few* reasons objection. I'll first lay out the objection, and then lay out the basis for a response on behalf of my favored version of the Humean Theory. There will be an obvious objection to my defense—but it will turn out to depend on the assumption of Proportionalism. This will constitute my argument that the susceptibility of the Humean Theory to

the *too few* reasons objection turns on whether it is committed to Proportionalism. In Part 2 we turn our attention to the *too many* reasons objection. Humeans about reasons have often not taken this objection seriously enough. I'll lay out the strongest version of the objection, illustrate how it turns on the question of Proportionalism, and then lay out the basis for my response. This will constitute my argument that the susceptibility of the Humean Theory to the *too many* reasons objection turns on whether it is committed to Proportionalism.

In the final part of the paper, I'll consider the reasons why a Humean might be led to accept Proportionalism. The chief of these is that Humeans are typically understood as having a *reductive* view about reasons, and so they also plausibly need a reductive view about reasons' *weight*, and Proportionalism could be such a view. But I'll point out that from plausible criteria about what makes for a good reductive view—criteria that a Humean ought to be able to accept—it follows that Proportionalism *can't* provide us with a reductive view about reasons' weight—or at least, not a very good one. This gives the Humean independent grounds to reject Proportionalism, demonstrating that as a response to the *too few* and *too many* objections, it is not *ad hoc*, and situating this version of the Humean view in the context of a widely accepted theory about the relationship between what there are *reasons* for you to do, and what you *ought* to do.

### 1.1 The Humean Theory of Reasons

Tonight there's going to be a party, and everyone is invited. There will be good food, drinks, friendly chat, music—and dancing. Ronnie and Bradley, like everyone else, have been invited to the party. But while Ronnie loves to dance, Bradley can't stand it. So while the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie to go, it is *not* a reason for Bradley to go. Far from it; the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Bradley to stay away. Ronnie's and Bradley's reasons therefore differ—each has a reason that the other does not. Moreover, it's not hard to see *why* Ronnie's and Bradley's reasons differ—they differ because of what they *care* about, or what they want. Ronnie wants to dance, but Bradley does not; he wants to stay away from where there is dancing going on.

The Humean Theory of Reasons, as I understand it, takes its cue from the case of Ronnie and Bradley. It supposes that at some level, there must be some unified explanation of where reasons come from. But we already know what explains Ronnie's and Bradley's reasons—their desires.<sup>2</sup> So according to the Humean, *all* reasons must be explained, like Ronnie's and Bradley's, by desires. As in Ronnie and Bradley's case, according to the Humean, every reason must be to perform an action that would promote some desire of the agent for whom it is a reason.

Notice that so far we haven't said anything whatsoever about *how* Ronnie's and Bradley's reasons are explained by their desires—and everything turns on this. For one thing, non-Humeans can agree that a desire is necessary in order to explain Ronnie's reason, and agree that at some fundamental level, there must be a unified explanation of where reasons come from, but hold that Ronnie's desire is only a contingent part of the explanation of his reason. For example, many non-Humeans hold that in addition to a desire, the explanation of Ronnie's reason must appeal to a further reason. If *that* is how the explanation works, then not all reasons *could* be explained the way Ronnie's is. So that is clearly a theory about how to explain Ronnie's reason that the Humean can't accept.

So Humeans can agree with non-Humeans that all reasons are ultimately to be explained in the same way as Ronnie's, but disagree about which features of Ronnie's reason—namely, that it depends on a desire—generalize. And this disagreement arises because they disagree about how Ronnie's reason actually gets explained. Likewise, though different Humean views will all agree that all reasons are explained in the way that Ronnie's is—namely, by some desire—they may have very different views about how Ronnie's reason is to be explained. In particular, they may vary greatly with respect to how *many* features of Ronnie's situation they take to actually generalize to the case of all other reasons.

Now allow me to put my cards on the table. I'm sympathetic to a *version* of the Humean Theory that I call *Hypotheticalism*.<sup>3</sup> Hypotheticalism claims ultimately to be able to address all of the serious objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons. Each serious objection to the Humean Theory of Reasons, I claim, turns on one or more substantive assumptions about *how* Ronnie's reason is to be explained by his desire. But Hypotheticalism does not accept the theories about how Ronnie's reason gets explained that lead to these problems. Though there is no space, here, to spell out Hypotheticalism in full, I will draw on the denials of *three* of these assumptions in this paper. But my principal task will be to emphasize one in particular—what I'll call *Proportionalism*—and how it drastically alters the commitments of the Humean Theory.

## 1.2 *Too Few Reasons*

The Humean Theory of Reasons claims that whenever there is a reason for someone to do something, she has some desire which her doing it promotes. So: no desire, no reason. But some reasons, we might intuitively think, are reasons for everyone, no matter what her desires. For example, if torturing children is really wrong, then it would seem that there must be some reason that is a reason for *anyone* not to torture children. If torturing children is really *wrong*, then it doesn't *matter* that Liz doesn't care about morality or being approved of or other people's pain. The mere fact that torturing

children is wrong is a reason for her not to do it. The existence of such reasons seems to be one of the central claims of morality.

This is why the Humean Theory of Reasons is one of the more compelling sources of skepticism about the objectivity of morality. For desires seem to be contingent features of our psychologies. That is why they can distinguish Ronnie from Bradley. So if the Humean Theory is true, then it is hard to see how there could be any reasons that are reasons for absolutely everyone. But we also often assume that moral norms only properly apply to those to whom they provide reasons.<sup>4</sup> And if that is the case, and there are no reasons that are reasons for absolutely everyone, then there must not be any moral norms, making moral discourse systematically false.<sup>5</sup> This is an intelligible reading of J.L. Mackie's argument from queerness.<sup>6</sup> If it is not so constitutive, then some moral claims may be true, but they must be relative to the agents to whom they *apply* and consequently give reasons. This is, essentially, Gilbert Harman's argument for moral relativism.<sup>7</sup> If we want to accept that there really are moral norms, and that they really do apply to everyone, then the Humean Theory seems to force us to accept that moral norms can apply to someone, even if she has no reason to comply with them. And this is the view<sup>8</sup> of Philippa Foot's "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives."

Mackie, Harman, and Foot draw the natural conclusion that if any version of the Humean Theory of Reasons is true, then there are not as many reasons as we think there are. In particular, there are *no* reasons that are *agent-neutral*, or reasons for anyone, no matter what she is like. But we might just as well draw the conclusion that since the Humean Theory of Reasons fails to capture these reasons, that is sufficient cause to conclude that it is simply false. And this is the *too few* reasons objection to the Humean Theory of Reasons that I want to consider.<sup>9</sup>

The *too few* reasons objection is, I think, a conclusive objection to many versions of the Humean Theory of Reasons. But it is not a conclusive objection to the Humean Theory of Reasons *tout court*. And this is because how *good* of an objection it is to any *particular* version of the Humean Theory depends on how that version of the Humean Theory holds that Ronnie's reason is to be explained. In particular, in the next two sections I will explain how two features commonly assumed to accompany the Humean Theory make the *too few* reasons objection insurmountable. I'll propose the alternatives to these features accepted by *Hypotheticalism*, my favored version of the Humean Theory. I'll suggest that these two features of Hypotheticalism can be independently motivated, and I'll show how accepting these alternatives puts Hypotheticalism in good stead to solve the *too few* reasons objection to the Humean Theory. Then, in section 1.5, I'll pose the obvious objection to this solution, and we'll see how that objection turns on yet a third common assumption about the commitments of the Humean Theory—that it must accept *Proportionalism*.

### 1.3 No Background Conditions

In section 1.1 I claimed that intuitively, the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie to go, but not for Bradley to go—it is a reason for him to stay away. But according to one common version of the Humean Theory of Reasons—indeed, according to a view espoused by many non-Humeans, as well, strictly speaking these claims are false. Strictly speaking, on this view, the fact that there will be dancing at the party is not a reason for Ronnie to go there. For strictly speaking, the reason for Ronnie to go is that there will be dancing there *and Ronnie likes to dance*. On this view, the fact that Ronnie likes to dance helps to explain why he has a reason to go to the party by being *part* of the reason for him to go to the party.

This is a very substantive assumption about how it is that Ronnie's reason is to be explained. According to this assumption, there is no reason that is a reason for Ronnie to go to the party, but also the reason for Bradley to stay away. For on this view, the fact that there will be dancing at the party *and Ronnie likes to dance* is Ronnie's reason to go there, and *this* is not the reason for Bradley to stay away<sup>10</sup>—Bradley's reason to stay away is that there will be dancing there *and Bradley can't stand dancing*. I call this view the *no background conditions* view, because it seems to derive from a broader view that whenever some fact helps to explain *why* there is a reason for someone to do something, it must also be *part* of her reason, and cannot merely be part of the background condition necessary in order for the other consideration to be a reason.<sup>11</sup> On this view, there cannot be any *background* conditions on some consideration counting as a reason. If *R* counts as a reason for *X* to do *A* only if condition *C* is fulfilled, then strictly speaking the reason for *X* to do *A* is *R & C*.

This is not the place to offer a complete evaluation of the *no background conditions* view. Suffice it to say that this view has many other interesting consequences, and is widely accepted by Humeans and non-Humeans alike. But the view is a substantive one. There can be conditions that have to be satisfied in order for something to be a carrot, which don't count as part of the carrot. There can be conditions that have to be satisfied in order for someone to count as being president of the United States, which don't count as part of the president of the United States. To reject the *no background conditions* view is simply to say that there can be conditions that have to be satisfied in order for something to be a reason, which don't count as part of the reason—that reasons are in this respect like carrots and like presidents of the United States.

The conjunction of the Humean Theory of Reasons and the *no background conditions* view entails that strictly speaking no reason is a reason for more than one person. So *ipso facto* it entails that no reason is a reason for anyone, no matter what she is like. But agent-neutral reasons are reasons for anyone, no matter what she is like. So it follows from versions of the Humean Theory

which accept the *no background conditions* view that there are no agent-neutral reasons. There may be things that anyone has a reason to do, but there is no agent-neutral reason to do them.

Hypotheticalism rejects the *no background conditions* view. According to Hypotheticalism, we should try to offer an explanation of Ronnie's reason that makes our ordinary talk about his reason come out to be literally true, if we possibly can. On this view, it should come out to be literally true that one reason for Ronnie to go to the party is that there will be dancing there. But the fact that there will be dancing at the party isn't enough to explain why there is a reason for Ronnie to go there. So it follows that there must be *background conditions* on this reason. The background condition is that Ronnie likes to dance. Since Ronnie's desire or liking figures as a background condition in explaining *his* reason, if all reasons are like Ronnie's, then all reasons are explained by desires by having them as part of their *background conditions*. So on Hypotheticalism's view, desires are always part of background conditions, not part of reasons themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Making this move allows Hypotheticalism to say that sometimes, a reason is *overdetermined*, by different desires. Take, for example, the case of Susan. Susan wants a cup of coffee. So the fact that there will be coffee in the lounge is a reason for her to go there. It serves to help explain why going to the lounge is a way for Susan to get some coffee, and getting some coffee is something that she desires. But Susan also wants to talk shop about an idea that she has recently had. And it is also true that philosophers tend to congregate and talk shop where there is coffee. Given this fact, the fact that there is coffee in the lounge serves to help explain why going to the lounge is a way for Susan to talk shop about the idea that she's had. And talking shop about this idea is something that Susan wants to do. So the fact that there is coffee in the lounge is a reason for Susan to go there *twice over*. This reason can be explained by Susan's desire for coffee, or by Susan's desire to talk shop. It serves to help explain why going to the lounge can help promote *each* of these ends. So it is overdetermined by her desires.

If we reject the *no background conditions* view like this, then we can allow that it is possible that a reason might be *massively* overdetermined. It might be a reason for anyone, no matter what she is like, because it would be explained by any possible desire. Call this the *overdetermination hypothesis*. If the overdetermination hypothesis is true, then even if the Humean Theory of Reasons is true, there are still some reasons that are reasons for anyone, no matter what she desires. In fact, something further is true. There is no desire on which such reasons depend. For any desire, if an agent didn't have it, she would still have such a reason.<sup>13</sup>

The possibility of the overdetermination hypothesis shows that, contrary to popular opinion, the Humean Theory of Reasons is not logically inconsistent with the existence of robustly agent-neutral reasons. Such reasons would be reasons for necessarily anyone, no matter what she is like, and moreover

depend on no particular desire. But they are still explained by at least *some* desire in anyone for whom they are reasons. So they are consistent with the Humean Theory. Still, it is one thing to know that it is logically possible for the Humean to account for agent-neutral reasons and thus solve the *too few* reasons problem. It is another thing to see how to make good on the promise of explaining how the overdetermination hypothesis could be true. To see our way around this difficulty, we need to turn our attention to another assumption commonly made about the Humean Theory of Reasons.

#### 1.4 Promotion

I claimed that according to the Humean Theory, to have a reason to do something you must have a desire which your doing it *promotes*. But we can tell different stories about what it takes for an action to *promote* a desire. These theories about *promotion* will place stricter or more relaxed requirements on what it takes for an action to promote a desire. The stricter requirements will make the overdetermination hypothesis untenable, but the more relaxed theories about *promotion* will make it tenable. And the more relaxed versions can be motivated by considering only cases like that of Ronnie and Bradley.

According to one particularly strict view, a reason to do some action is only explained by a desire if the desire is the desire to perform *that very action*. So, for example, Christine Korsgaard<sup>14</sup> endorses a particularly strong form of this view: “the instrumental principle instructs us [according to the Humean] to derive a reason from what we are *going* to do.” This theory of *promotion* entails the falsity of the overdetermination hypothesis. On this view, no reason could be explained by more than one desire. But even putting aside Korsgaard’s assertion that for a Humean, you desire to do something only if you actually do it, this view is too strong even to account for Ronnie’s reason. Ronnie’s reason was a reason to *go to the party*. But it was explained by a desire *to dance*. So this isn’t even a good view about Ronnie’s case.

A somewhat less strict view, also commonly touted in the literature, is that an action *promotes* a desire only if it is *necessary* for the accomplishment of that desire. This view also makes the overdetermination hypothesis look very unlikely to be true. Yet this is a common view about what it takes for a reason to be explained by a desire.

I hold, however, that this common view is motivated not by thinking of reasons at all, but by thinking of what someone *must* do, in the way that Kant was, when he said that hypothetical imperatives enjoin what is *necessary* for the accomplishment of some end. The account does less well when we look at *reasons* in cases like that of Ronnie and Bradley. Suppose that you are driving home from work, want to get home by six, and can take any of routes Timely, Compromise, or Scenic. The three routes differ in the following way: Timely will get you home by six, but goes through an ugly part of town. Compromise and Scenic, however, go through equally eye-friendly environs.

Compromise gives you a fifty-fifty chance of getting home before six, and Scenic is guaranteed not to get you home by six.

According to the Kant-like view of *promotion*, you have a reason to take either Timely or Compromise. But curiously, on this view, there is no reason for you to take Timely, nor any reason for you to take Compromise. But surely that is wrong. Surely there is at least some reason for you to take Timely, even though it is not strictly *necessary* in order to get home by six. And surely you have this reason just by wanting to get home by six. Surely you don't have to also want to maximize your chances of getting home by six.

Indeed, surely there is even some reason for you to take Compromise, even though Timely will do better at getting you home by six. It is not that you have no reason to take Compromise—just that you have no reason, so far as we have said, to choose it over Timely. And that is simply because the *kind* of reason that you have to choose Compromise is also a kind of reason that you have to choose Timely, only not as good. We know that you do have *some* reason to choose Compromise, however, because once we start looking at your other reasons, this reason plays an important role. For example, though you want to get home by six, you may also want to have a pleasant, scenic drive. In that case, it may turn out that the thing for you to do is to take Compromise, rather than Timely. But it won't turn out that you ought to take Scenic. For Scenic has nothing over Compromise when it comes to eye-friendliness, but Compromise *does* have something over Scenic, when it comes to making it home by six. And this is something that Compromise *always* has over Scenic when it comes to making it home by six, whether you care about scenery or not. So there is some reason for you to take Compromise, given your desire to get home by six.

Indeed, we can change the example. Suppose now that the chance of getting home by six if you take Compromise is only one third. Or a quarter. Or even one-percent. Now it will take a greater interest in scenery to warrant actually choosing Compromise over Timely. But the exact same considerations show that there still must be some reason to take Compromise, given your desire to get home by six. Compromise is still a better option (even though by a smaller margin) than Scenic.

Hypotheticalism holds that in order to account for reasons like your reason to take Compromise, even if the chance of your getting home by six that way is very small, we need to have a *very* relaxed conception of the *promotes* relation. On this relaxed conception of the *promotes* relation, it is much more reasonable to suppose that the overdetermination hypothesis holds true. It is not incredibly implausible to suppose that behaving in a morally correct fashion does as much to support any, or nearly any, desire, as taking Compromise does to promote your desire to get home by six, when the odds of actually getting home by six by taking Compromise are minusculely small.

The overdetermination hypothesis would still require a great deal of defense, and considerable explanation would be needed, in order to show how it obtained with respect to the intuitively right actions, yielding the right results about agent-neutral reasons. But this is not the place to evaluate these further commitments of Hypotheticalism. What I'm interested in, for our purposes, is why it is that this natural *proposal* for how the Humean Theory of Reasons might hope to deal with agent-neutral reasons like those of morality has never been taken seriously. To formulate the proposal, it is true, we needed to reject two very widespread assumptions about how Ronnie's reason is to be explained—that there are *no background conditions* on reasons, and that the *promotion* relation is relatively *strict*. But we didn't need to start worrying about the *too few* reasons objection to the Humean Theory in order to find cause to reject these two assumptions. We found independent grounds to reject them, simply in order to adequately capture what is going on in cases like that of Ronnie and Bradley, in which some reason obviously depends on a desire. What I'm now interested in, is why this natural proposal for how the Humean Theory might hope to account for the agent-neutral reasons of morality might not be taken very seriously.

### 1.5 Proportionalism

When we vary our stipulation about how likely route *Compromise* is to get you home by six, our judgments change about how weighty a reason you have to take *Compromise*. These judgments are revealed when we consider whether or not you *ought* to take *Compromise*. If the chances of it getting you home by six are small, we think, then you need to enjoy eye-friendly scenery *more*, in order to justify taking this route. And this reveals a second way in which our judgments about the weight of your reason to take *Compromise* vary. It looks like if your desire to view pleasant scenery is *stronger*, then your reason to take *Compromise* in virtue of *this* desire is *weightier*. And this is why we think that wanting to view pleasant scenery *more* can make it the case that you ought to take *Compromise*, even if it is relatively unlikely to get you home by six.

These judgments about the weight of your reasons reveal two features. When a reason is explained by a desire, it seems to vary in weight with respect to *how well* it promotes that desire, and with respect to *how strong* the desire is. I call the combination of these two assumptions *Proportionalism*. Proportionalism is almost always assumed to be an accompaniment of the Humean Theory of Reasons, and at a first glance, it is not hard to see at least one reason why. Proportionalism seems to correctly describe cases like the reasons of Ronnie and Bradley, on the basis of which the Humean Theory is motivated. If Ronnie's desire to dance is *stronger*, then so is his reason to go to the party. But if there are many other places to dance, then the connection between going there and dancing is weaker. And then, too, we think that his reason to go to the party is weaker.

There are other possible motivations for the Humean to accept Proportionalism, but I want to reserve this question for Part 3. For now, it is enough to observe that whether or not the Humean accepts Proportionalism merely depends on *how much* like Ronnie's case some given version of the Humean Theory of Reasons holds all reasons to be. Accepting Proportionalism makes all reasons *more* like Ronnie's case, and rejecting it makes some reasons *less* like Ronnie's case.

Now, if Proportionalism is true, then even the overdetermination thesis, if established by accepting a weak version of the *promotes* relation, still leaves us far from having captured the most important data about the central agent-neutral reasons of morality. For if murder is wrong, then it is not only that there is *some* reason for anyone not to commit murders, no matter what she is like or what she desires. If murder is really morally *wrong*, then this reason has to be a *pretty good one* for everyone—indeed, equally good for everyone.

But the overdetermination thesis, in the way that I have suggested it might be established, does not make it look like the reasons that it allows for are particularly good. In fact, it seems to allow that in many cases, they will be no better than your reason to take route Compromise, when its odds of getting you home by six are minusculely small. And those reasons, though they carry *some* weight, are hardly worth taking into account. As the odds of route Compromise getting you home by six go to zero, so does the difference between taking Compromise and taking Scenic. At a certain point, though Compromise may be *slightly* better supported by your reasons, the difference may be small enough as not to be worth noticing. If Hypotheticalism is committed to holding that the central agent-neutral reasons of morality often turn out to be like *that*, then it has hardly solved the *too few* reasons problem.

This objection obviously turns on accepting Proportionalism. If we accept Proportionalism, then the strategy that I've outlined makes no net headway in opening up possibilities for Hypotheticalism to solve the *too few* reasons problem that aren't open to other versions of the Humean Theory of Reasons. The difference that we've articulated so far will then not come to much of a difference at all. Predictably, I am eventually going to say that Hypotheticalism rejects Proportionalism, just as it rejects the *no background conditions* view and the *strict* conceptions of the *promotes* relation. *All* of these are assumptions about how Ronnie's reason needs to be explained that lead to unnecessary trouble for the Humean Theory of Reasons. But first, let's see how another objection to the Humean Theory—the *too many* reasons objection—also turns on whether Humeans are committed to Proportionalism.

## 2.1 Too Many Reasons

The Humean Theory of Reasons claims that all reasons *must* be explained by desires. And this commits it to claiming that reasons *can* be explained by desires. But this creates an entirely different problem for Humeans. Just as before we were worried that the conditions that the Humean Theory placed

on the existence of reasons were too *strong*, now we are going to be worried that the conditions that it places are too *weak*. What is more, it is going to turn out that Hypotheticalism is going to be a *particularly* problematic version of the Humean Theory of Reasons, on this score. This is because Hypotheticalism tries to solve the *too few* reasons objection by *lowering* the bar on what it takes for a desire to explain a reason. And the problem is supposed to be that for *any* version of the Humean Theory of Reasons, the bar is already too low.

The problem, again, is eminently simple. The idea is that no matter how we conceive of desires, one of two things will follow. *Either* our conception of *desire* will presuppose the concept of a reason, in which case we can't properly use desires to explain reasons, *or* our conception of *desire* will fail to rule out desires that it is patently immoral or irrational to pursue. In the latter case, we will have clear intuitions that there is no reason to do what promotes these desires. But Humeans will be committed to saying that there are such reasons. And this will be the *too many* reasons objection to the Humean Theory of Reasons.

Let's work with two cases, those of my Cousin Lucille and of my Aunt Margaret. Cousin Lucille wants to be a successful axe-murderer. Staking out victims, whetting her axe, and practicing her swing are all necessary means to this end. But patently, she ought not to do these things. Indeed, it is very natural to think that there is no reason *at all* for her to do them. Unlike Cousin Lucille, Aunt Margaret's desire is not immoral. But it is slightly more extravagant. She desires to replicate the scene depicted on page 78 of the November 2001 Martha Stewart Living catalogue—*on Mars*. Since no one else is likely to give her one, this requires building her own Mars-bound spacecraft. But Aunt Margaret would be patently crazy to go ahead and start building a Mars-bound spacecraft in her own backyard, simply because she wants to replicate this catalogue photo on the red planet. Indeed, this project of Aunt Margaret's seems so crazy that it is very easy to marshal the intuition that there is *no* reason *whatsoever* for her to start building her spacecraft. These are the intuitions at the heart of the *too many* reasons objection to the Humean Theory of Reasons.

If Proportionalism is true, then the *too many* reasons objection looks particularly bad for the Humean Theory. For if Proportionalism is true, then we can infer not only that there is a *reason* for Cousin Lucille to stake out her victims, but that this is something that she has a particularly *weighty* reason to do. Indeed, if we are careful enough in describing her case, then we can make clear that she desires to become a successful axe-murderer above all else. And then it will follow from the Humean Theory together with Proportionalism that Cousin Lucille *ought*, all things considered, to stake out victims for her axe-murdering. Likewise, if Proportionalism is true, then it follows from the Humean Theory that Aunt Margaret, properly described, *ought* all things considered to start building her Mars-bound spacecraft. For

doing so is clearly necessary for her end, and we can stipulate that she desires this end above all else. The intuition that there is no reason for Cousin Lucille to stake out victims or for Aunt Margaret to build her spacecraft is one thing. The intuition that it is not true that they ought all things considered to do these things is much clearer. So given Proportionalism, the Humean Theory of Reasons looks particularly bad.

## 2.2 Two Predictions

Rejecting Proportionalism did not make the *too few* reasons objection to the Humean Theory go away. We also had to reject the *no background conditions* view and the *strict* conception of the *promotes* relation. And even then, Hypotheticalism still owed us a real explanation of why it is that the overdetermination hypothesis holds true for the standard agent-neutral reasons that we intuitively think that there are. And that is a considerable project. Likewise, rejecting Proportionalism does not, all by itself, make the *too many* reasons objection to the Humean Theory go away. That is why I formulated the objection, in the first place, as trading on the intuition that there is *no* reason for Cousin Lucille to stake out victims, and the intuition that there is *no* reason for Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft.

I'm now going to explain why we should expect intuitions of this kind to be prone to unreliability.<sup>15</sup> In particular, I am going to explain why it is that we will have these intuitions even if there *are* reasons for Cousin Lucille to stake out victims and Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft, so long as these reasons are not particularly *weighty*. The Humean Theory of Reasons is committed to saying that Cousin Lucille and Aunt Margaret have these reasons. But absent Proportionalism, it is not committed to saying anything about how weighty they are. So this will give us a way for a version of the Humean Theory that rejects Proportionalism to explain away these intuitions.

I just said that absent Proportionalism, the Humean Theory is not committed to any view about how weighty Cousin Lucille's or Aunt Margaret's reasons are. The same goes, on the face of it, for sentences like, "there is a reason for Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft." On the face of it, this is a different sentence from "there is a particularly weighty reason for Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft," precisely because it does not explicitly tell us anything about how weighty Aunt Margaret's reason is. But there is another thing that the sentence, "there is a reason for Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft" does not tell us. It does not tell us what Aunt Margaret's reason *is*. My account of what is prone to be misleading about sentences like "there is a reason for Aunt Margaret to start building her spacecraft" is built around these two things that this sentence does *not* tell us. The argument is a *pragmatic* one. I am going to argue that each of these features of this sentence leads to a pragmatic presumption to *interpret* this

sentence as telling us that Aunt Margaret's reason is a particularly weighty one. These pragmatic arguments yield testable and well-confirmed predictions. And that, I argue, is reason not to trust our intuitions when framed by sentences like this one.

To say that a reason is *stronger*, or more *compelling*, or *weightier* is not to say that it has a stronger effect on people's deliberations. Nor is it to say that it actually compels anyone to act. Nor is it to say that it carries more weight in people's decision-making. It is to say that it *ought* to carry more weight in deliberations about what to do. If reasons are the kinds of thing to which we are supposed to pay attention in our deliberations about what to do, then stronger reasons are the ones to which we are supposed to pay *more* attention, and which we are supposed to find more *decisive*. So if we are interested in reasons for the purpose of placing weight on them in our deliberations about what to do, then the reasons in which we will be most interested are the ones which are the weightiest.

This yields a simple pragmatic prediction. If I say that *R* is a reason for you to do *A*, you very naturally understand me as asserting that it is at least a weighty enough reason for it to be worth while for you to pay attention to it in your deliberations. Not all reasons need be this weighty, however. A list made by God of all of the pros and cons of your doing *A* might be infinitely long—if so, it will only be worthwhile paying attention to the top of the list. Or it could be that one reason for you not to do *A* is so conclusive that it isn't even worth bothering to investigate the petty small reasons for you to do *A*. In cases like these, you have reasons that are not weighty enough to be worth paying attention to in your deliberations. In ordinary contexts, however, when I say that *R* is a reason for you to do *A*, you will naturally understand me as implying that your reason is not like this. And this is simply because in ordinary contexts we are interested in reasons *in order to* place weight on them in our deliberations.

A second prediction: if I say that *there is* a reason for you to do *A*, what I'm saying will be less informative, if the reason that I have in mind is not a particularly weighty one, but more informative, if I intend to convey that it is a relatively weighty reason. This is because relative to weighty reasons, weak reasons are much more common. Most of the reasons on God's infinite list of pros and cons are ones that aren't weighty enough for you to bother with in your deliberations. Likewise, there are more actions in favor of which there is *some* reason, than actions in favor of which there is a particularly weighty one. The more actions there are in favor of which there is at least *some* reason, the more uninformative it is to *say* that there is at least some reason in favor of them.

Grice's maxim of quantity<sup>16</sup> predicts that if this is the case, then I can convey to you that there is a relatively *weighty* reason for you to do *A*, by telling you that there is a reason for you to do *A*, but not telling you what it is. For if I do not tell you what the reason is, but I mean to convey only that

it is a bad reason, then I should, in order to be informative, have at least told you what the reason *is*. But if I have a relatively *weighty* reason in mind, then what I say is informative, even if I don't tell you what the reason is. Not all actions have relatively weighty reasons in favor of them. So we can predict that if I tell you that you have a reason to do *A* but don't tell you what it is, this will create an extra presumption that I have a relatively weighty reason in mind.

We now have two predictions on the table. If there is some action in favor of which there are only relatively weak or poor reasons, and I tell you that there is a reason to do it, you will find this unintuitive or false. And this is because you will naturally understand me as committed to claiming that it is a relatively weighty reason. If I go on to tell you what the reason is, the *extra* presumption that I must have a relatively weighty reason in mind will go away, and so you should find what I say less unintuitive. But you should still find it unintuitive. And then if I make clear that I don't mean to say that it is a relatively weighty reason at all—but in fact think that it is quite a weak or poor reason—then the unintuitiveness of what I say should go down a second time.

It is easy to bear out these predictions. I think that you have a reason to eat your car.<sup>17</sup> That sounds obviously false. But I haven't told you, yet, what I think it is. I think that it is that your car contains the recommended daily allowance of iron. Now what I say sounds slightly less insane—not uncrazy, to be sure, but slightly less insane. After all, if anything is a reason for you to eat your car, surely this is it. But now I go on. Truth be told, although I believe that this is a reason for you to eat your car, I don't think that it is a particularly weighty one. Indeed, I think that it is particularly poor—about as poor as reasons can get. Not only do I not think that you should place much weight on it in your deliberations, I don't think that you should place any weight on it at all—in fact, I don't even think that you should deliberate about whether to eat your car in the first place. The reasons not to do it are so much better than the reasons to do it that you would be irrational if the question even came up, for you. I take it that my assertion that there is a reason for you to eat your car now sounds at least somewhat more reasonable, confirming our predictions.

These same predictions apply in the case of Aunt Margaret. Suppose that it really is true that Aunt Margaret has a reason to start building her spacecraft, but only a very weak or poor one. Our two predictions show that it would still be particularly odd to say that there is a reason for her to start building her spacecraft. For in saying this, we don't say what her reason *is*. Her reason, according to Hypotheticalism, is that no one *else* is going to help her get her furniture to Mars. It still may not seem like this is a reason for her to build her own Mars-bound spacecraft, but at least it is the kind of thing that *would* be a reason for her to do so, if anything were. And now, if we make clear that Aunt Margaret's reason is only a particularly weak or

poor one, it also becomes much less unintuitive to say that it is a reason for her.

This explains away the *too many* reasons intuitions about Cousin Lucille and Aunt Margaret. But it is contingent on Hypotheticalism being able to reject Proportionalism. If Hypotheticalism is committed to Proportionalism, then it must hold that Cousin Lucille's and Aunt Margaret's reasons are relatively weighty, and our pragmatic predictions won't apply.

### 2.3 The Defense Complete

So far, I've argued that both the *too few* and the *too many* objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons turn on assuming that Humeans are committed to Proportionalism. I haven't argued that the solution to either of these problems is costless; the solution that I offered to the *too few* reasons objection left an explanatory burden, and my response to the *too many* reasons objection involved embracing the unintuitive result, and merely trying to explain away its unintuitiveness. But I have argued that how conclusive we find these two objections to the Humean Theory hinges on whether we think that the Humean Theory is committed to Proportionalism. But Proportionalism is a stronger thesis than the Humean Theory of Reasons. It is accepted by many *versions* of the Humean Theory, but it is not accepted by Hypotheticalism, my favored view. By rejecting Proportionalism, we can get out of these problems, so the problems can't be conclusive objections to the Humean Theory as such.

That concludes my defense of the Humean Theory of Reasons against the *too few* and *too many* reasons objections. The defense consists in pointing out that different versions of the Humean Theory differ with respect to how they think that Ronnie's reason must be explained, and thereby which features of Ronnie's case they hold to generalize. I've *partially* articulated a version of the Humean Theory of Reasons, which I call *Hypotheticalism*, which holds that fewer features of Ronnie's case are needed in order to explain his reason. What explains why Ronnie has a reason, according to Hypotheticalism, is merely *that* he likes to dance. It has nothing to do with *how much* he likes to dance. This explanation need advert to no claims about the weight of his reason, nor any claims about the strength of his desire. So it is not committed to Proportionalism. Indeed, I specifically stipulated that Hypotheticalism rejects Proportionalism. Since a version of the Humean Theory exists which rejects Proportionalism, and the force of the two objections is contingent on the assumption of Proportionalism, that counts as a defense of the Humean Theory against these two objections.

That is the end of my defense of Hypotheticalism, and *ipso facto* the end of my defense of the Humean Theory. In Part 3 I will consider why it is that people have thought that the Humean Theory is committed to Proportionalism. I'll provide a diagnosis of what I think is supposed to be

the strongest pressure for Humeans to adopt Proportionalism, but I'll argue that this pressure is best resisted. And then I'll outline the very basics of an account of the weight of reasons that can be accepted by Hypotheticalism. But these arguments don't constitute part of my defense of Hypotheticalism, for Hypotheticalism does not *owe* us such an account, simply in order to get out of the *too few* and *too many* problems.

It is true that Hypotheticalism owes us *more* than simply the rejection of Proportionalism. For my defenses of Hypotheticalism against the *too many* and *too few* reasons objections to work, Hypotheticalism must be able to get the right results about which reasons are weighty, and which are not. But I hold that it can get this by accepting almost any reasonable view about what makes one reason weightier than another. Whatever view, on independent grounds, we think best captures the right results about which reasons have which weights, ought to be a view that Hypotheticalism can accept. I will try to motivate the basics of such a view in Part 3, but the purpose will merely be illustrative.

### 3.1 Proportionalism Motivated

In section 1.5 we discovered one reason why Humeans might accept Proportionalism: that it seems to apply to the case of Ronnie's reason. Since Humeans claim that all reasons are in some way like Ronnie's, it is natural to generalize this feature of Ronnie's reason. This motivation for accepting Proportionalism is very weak. Any Humean who was serious about accounting for reasons which don't *seem* to depend on desires would immediately notice that even if these reasons *covertly* depend on desires, Proportionalism would still have to fail in their case. And this would lead to the natural thought that Proportionalism is at best an over-generalization.

A more plausible story about why Humeans are thought to be committed to Proportionalism is indicated in the following quotation from Sarah Broadie:

If desire is to carry the burden of explaining practicality, we should expect the degree of the agent's *practical* endorsement to be reflected in the desire: in its degree. If I think something well worth going out of my way for and that something else merits little effort or none, surely I feel *more* strongly about the first and desire it *more*? To deny this is to incur the obligation of explaining what, besides degree of desire, makes the difference between levels of practical commitment.<sup>18</sup>

The problem, it appears, is this: if it is not degrees of desire (together with degrees of promotion) that constitute degrees of the weight of reasons, then in what *does* the weight of reasons consist?

On the face of it, this thought should worry Humeans. For Humeans are often thought to hold that in offering a general account of what *explains*

reasons, they are in effect offering a general *reduction* of reasons in non-normative terms. Is a view like this supposed to be comfortable accepting an unexplained notion of the *strength* of reasons? I take it that this is the real reason why most Humeans accept Proportionalism—not simply by over-generalizing from Ronnie’s case, but because they feel the pressure to offer *some* account of what the strength of reasons consists in. The argument is this: the Humean needs some account of the strength of reasons, and this one is ready to hand. So, the argument goes, she is under pressure to accept it.

### 3.2 Proportionalism Deflated

But I think that this pressure is illusory. For distinguish two senses in which we might understand Proportionalism. It might be merely a claim about which reasons happen to be weighty or strong ones. It might only aspire to be extensionally correct.<sup>19</sup> I’ve been taking it that the *too many* and *too few* cases give us reason to think that if the Humean Theory of Reasons is true, then Proportionalism is not even extensionally correct. But Proportionalism might purport to do *more* than this. It might purport to provide an *analysis* of *what it is* for a reason to be weighty—for it to be closely related to a strong desire. We’ve just been looking at an argument that the Humean Theory should be committed to accepting that Proportionalism is extensionally correct, because it *needs* an analysis of *what it is* for a reason to be weighty, and Proportionalism is ready to hand.

The argument under consideration, that is, would commit the Humean Theory to Proportionalism only by committing it to the much stronger claim that Proportionalism provides an *analysis* of the weight of reasons. But in order for this to be a good argument, we need more than that Proportionalism looks like it might be extensionally correct. We need Proportionalism to look like a good *analysis* of what it is for a reason to be weighty. But we *already know* at least something important about the weight of reasons—even in Ronnie’s case. Ronnie’s weightier reasons are the ones *on which he ought to place more weight* in his deliberations. They are the reasons that are *better*.

If weighty reasons just *are* the ones on which an agent *ought* to place more weight, then their being weighty can’t also consist in the fact that they are closely related to relatively strong desires. For it is plausible that “ought” is unambiguous between its senses in “Ronnie ought to place more weight on the fact that there will be dancing at the party than on the fact that it will keep him out late” and “Ronnie ought to go to the party”. So if we are after an analysis of *ought*, then we should want one that applies equally well to both of these cases. Again, if weighty reasons are *good* ones, then their being weighty can’t also consist in the fact that they are closely related to relatively strong desires. For it is plausible that “good” is unambiguous between its senses in “The fact that there will be dancing at the party is a good reason for him to go there” and “That is a good knife” and “Ronnie is a good

person”. And so if we are after an *analysis* of what it is for something to be good of its kind, then we should want one that applies equally well to all of these cases.

So in my view, Proportionalism looks like the wrong kind of thing to be an *analysis* of what it is for a reason to be strong, because it would commit us to an analysis of certain “ought” claims or “good” claims that we can’t generalize to cover all of the cases in which we want to talk about how someone ought to do something or about how something is good of its kind. But according to Hypotheticalism, there’s also no deep puzzle about where the weight of reasons comes from, or what it consists in. Strong, weighty reasons are simply the ones on which we ought to place more weight. And Hypotheticalism can understand “ought” in this claim in exactly the same way as it understands “ought” everywhere else—in terms of reasons.

### 3.3 Weighting for Reasons

So far, the claim is this: to say that a reason is *weighty* is to say, at least very roughly, that weight *ought* to be placed on it.<sup>20</sup> This is only the sketch of a theory, but it is already inconsistent with Proportionalism understood as an analysis of the weight of reasons. So it is inconsistent with those versions of the Humean Theory that accept Proportionalism in order to *have* an analysis of the weight of reasons. But it is not inconsistent with the Humean Theory full stop, for it is not inconsistent with Hypotheticalism. Hypotheticalism rejects Proportionalism altogether, since it hopes to get the intuitively right results about what reasons there are, and what their weights are.

Indeed, this theory-sketch about reasons’ weight fits in very well with the Humean Theory. If it really is true that the Humean Theory aspires to provide a reductive account of the normative, then this sketchy theory plays into its hands very well. Such a version of the Humean Theory can account for the weight of reasons in terms of what people *ought* to do, and for what people *ought* to do, in terms of their *reasons*. Everything, ultimately, gets explained in terms of reasons, and then the distinctively Humean part of the theory kicks in and reasons are explained by desires. Surely this picture ought to be just as attractive to this kind of reductive Humean as the one which accepts Proportionalism in order to have a reductive account of reasons. Indeed, this is the picture favored by Hypotheticalism, my favored version of the Humean Theory of Reasons.

The theory-sketch is also well supported by independent judgments that we make about the weight of reasons. Suppose that one day you’re walking past the library, and you see Tom Grabit come out, pull a book from beneath his shirt, and cackle gleefully.<sup>21</sup> This gives you a reason to believe that Tom just stole a book—a reasonably good one. But now suppose that Tom has a twin brother Tim, from whom you would not be able to visually discriminate him. This isn’t evidence that Tom didn’t steal the book—having identical

siblings isn't usually much of a hindrance to theft. But it does have an effect on how weighty your reason *to* believe that Tom stole the book is. If Tom has a twin, Tim, then you don't have such a weighty reason to believe that Tom stole the book after all. Of course, it's not that you have no reason to believe that Tom stole the book—suppose that in fact, Tom and Tim have a third identical sibling, Tam, from whom you would be able to visually distinguish neither of them. If that were so, your reason to believe that Tom stole a book would carry even *less* weight. Since your reason could still get worse, it must not have gone away.

It seems, in this case, that the fact that Tom has a twin, Tim, though it is not a reason to believe that Tom did not steal the book, is a reason to place less weight on your visual evidence in favor of thinking that Tom did steal it. Since Tom has a twin brother, your visual evidence should carry less weight than it would otherwise. And that is why it is not as good of a reason. But *how* much less weight you should place on your visual evidence depends on how strong this reason to place less weight on it is. On the face of it, it is a reasonably strong reason, but not as strong as it could be—if Tom had two identical siblings, Tim and Tam, that would be a stronger reason to place less weight on his visual evidence.

But we might change our minds about this. For example, suppose that this morning Mrs. Grabit, the twins' mother, said that Tim will be in Bangkok all of this week. The fact that she said so isn't a reason to think that Tom did steal the book. Nor is it a reason to place more weight on your visual evidence about Tom. What it is, is a reason to place less weight on your reason to place less weight on your visual evidence. And that is why, given that Mrs. Grabit said this about Tim this morning, the fact that you can't distinguish Tim from Tom is not such a good reason to place less weight on your visual evidence after all. And since it is not, your visual evidence is not such a bad reason to believe that Tom stole the book after all.

If things turn out in the right way, then this can go on, *ad nauseum*. Perhaps though Mrs. Grabit said this, she is a notorious liar. Or perhaps Tim had deceived her about being in Bangkok. But perhaps Tim deceived her because he had plans to go to Oconomowoc to visit Mr. Grabit, Mrs. Grabit's estranged ex-husband, and he would rather that she didn't know. But then again, perhaps Tim's plans to go to Oconomowoc were foiled. Each time we introduce a new consideration like this, our judgments about how weighty a reason your original evidence is shifts. How weighty a reason your evidence is *depends* on how weighty the reasons are to place more or less weight on it, and how weighty those are depends on how weighty the reasons are to place more or less weight on them—*reasons for reasons*, as Carlos Santana puts it, though he may have had something else in mind.

Of course, this can't go on forever—there has to be some fact of the matter about how weighty a reason your visual evidence is, and the explanation of how weighty it is can't go off on a regress. But fortunately we eventually run

out of defeating considerations. If Tim is really in town, then it doesn't matter *at all* that Mrs. Grabit said that he is in Bangkok. Likewise, it doesn't matter how many identical siblings Tom has, if you look more carefully and notice lights and movie cameras focused on Tom and hear a director say, "cut!" When the defeating considerations eventually run out, we can ascertain how weighty a reason your visual evidence really is. But in order to ascertain how weighty a reason it is, we *do* have to pay attention to what reasons there might be to place more or less weight on it—to take it more or less seriously in deciding what to think about Tom.

The familiar case of epistemic defeaters is just one example of how our judgments of how weighty some reason is directly correlate with our judgments about the reasons to place more or less weight on it. I take this to be independent corroboratory evidence for our simple theory-sketch about reasons' weight.

### 3.4 Toward a Plausible Humean Theory of Reasons

The theory-sketch in section 3.3 is the beginning of one plausible and attractive story about the weight of reasons. It is plausible and attractive on independent grounds, but it is also the right kind of story to play into the hands of the Humean. Indeed, it is the kind of view about reasons' weight that is accepted by Hypotheticalism, my favored version of the Humean Theory of Reasons. Since Hypotheticalism has such a view about reasons' weight, it is not forced—nor even tempted—to accept Proportionalism in order to have a reductive account of reasons' weight.

And that is a good thing for Hypotheticalism. For as we've seen, Proportionalism lies at the basis of at least the strongest forms of two of the most obvious objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons. And it is in part by rejecting Proportionalism that Hypotheticalism can escape at least most of the force of these objections. Indeed, although I haven't argued so here, many other objections to the Humean Theory turn on assuming that it has no adequate reply to one or the other of these two objections: the *too few* and *too many* reasons objections. If that is right, then Hypotheticalism may be able to escape this broader class of objections, as well.

I haven't attempted a full-on defense of the Humean Theory, in this paper. I haven't even attempted a complete defense of Hypotheticalism, my favored version of that theory. What I've done is to illustrate a sampling of the ways in which some of the simplest, most familiar, and seemingly conclusive objections to the Humean Theory are related to assumptions about how Ronnie's reason is to be explained. But there is a problem with evaluating versions of the Humean Theory of Reasons in the abstract. It is that in the abstract, the Humean Theory makes *no* assumptions about how Ronnie's reason is to be explained, except that the explanation involves his desire. Consistently with the Humean Theory, different versions offer very different stories about *how*

Ronnie's reason is to be explained. My hope, then, is tripartite: 1) that I've done something to illustrate how much more complicated things are than the existing literature would sometimes lead one to believe, 2) that this at least hints at the importance of looking more closely at how we think Ronnie's reason *should* be explained, and 3) that as a result, we may not have so long to wait, for a more plausible Humean Theory of Reasons.<sup>22</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have argued for some of these connections elsewhere. For example, in Schroeder (2004) and (2005). I take up the question more completely in an unpublished book manuscript, *Slaves of the Passions*.

<sup>2</sup> Nothing in this paper turns on how we understand what the word "desire" means, so long as it is some psychological state that can ultimately be explained in non-normative terms. From here on, I'll continue to use "desire" as a dummy word for whatever psychological state it is that some particular Humean view takes to properly explain Ronnie's reason. See also my, "The Humean Theory of Reasons."

<sup>3</sup> This name is not intended to conjure up images of the counterfactual, but rather the kind of view that Kant intended to be refuting, when he argued that morality required a categorical imperative.

<sup>4</sup> This is the assumption that David Brink (1997, 255) calls the "authority thesis."

<sup>5</sup> Notice that this is not the problem for the objectivity of morality which Michael Smith calls "the moral problem." Smith's problem stems from two theses about *motivation* or *motivating reasons*. The problem I'm reminding us of stems from two theses about *normative reasons*.

<sup>6</sup> Mackie (1977). I endorse this reading as one of the things going on in Mackie. There are at least two other ways to read the argument from "queerness," both of which I also think that he had at least somewhat in mind. Joyce (2001) also offers this argument as the best motivation for an error theory.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Harman (1975), (1978), (1985).

<sup>8</sup> Foot (1975). Foot has since changed her view—see her (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Notice that the *too few* reasons objection can take another form. For example, consider the case of Larry. Larry left his wife and infant daughter two years ago, and has never once looked back. He couldn't care less about how either of them are doing. Intuitively, the fact that Anne is Larry's daughter is a reason for him to support her, no matter what Larry himself cares about. But this consideration is not an *agent-neutral* reason to support Anne, for it is not a reason for *you* to support Anne. On the face of it, Larry's reason is a reason that the Humean Theory of Reasons fails to capture, but it is not an agent-neutral reason. So this is another form of the *too few* reasons objection. But it is natural to think that we can subsume Larry's case under that of accounting for agent-neutral reasons. For plausibly, Larry has his reason because there is a *general* reason for *anyone* to ensure that whatever children they bring into the world have a good life. Plausibly Larry's reason is *derivative* from this reason. And this reason is agent-neutral. So agent-neutral reasons are the case worth focusing on, for the Humean Theory. I discuss these kinds of cases carefully in "The Humean Theory of Reasons."

<sup>10</sup> True, it may be that in addition to not being able to stand dancing, Bradley can't stand *Ronnie*. In that case, intuitively the fact that there will be dancing at the party and Ronnie likes to dance may be a reason for Bradley to stay away. But even then, on the view under consideration this is still strictly speaking false. *Strictly* speaking, the reason for Bradley to stay away is that there will be dancing there and Ronnie likes to dance *and* *Bradley can't stand Ronnie*.

<sup>11</sup> See Nagel (1970, 90-95) and Raz (1999, 228) for some explicit articulations of this kind of view. It turns out to be necessary for Nagel's formulation of the distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons, and for his account of what is entailed by *pure* altruism.

<sup>12</sup> This move is also the key to how Hypotheticalism deals with at least six other serious objections to the Humean Theory of Reasons. Pettit and Smith (1990) make a similar-sounding claim. They distinguish between two roles for desires in *motivation*, which they call the *foreground* and the *background*, and insist that desires, at least sometimes, figure in the background of motivation without figuring in the foreground. It is tempting to say that Pettit and Smith are taking the same view about *motivating* reasons that I am taking about *normative* reasons—that a desire explains *why* there are such motivating reasons, without actually being *part* of the motivating reason. But for two reasons that is not exactly right: first, in that paper Pettit and Smith don't commit to the Humean theory that *every* motivating reason has a desire in the background, but only to the view that desires *sometimes* figure in the background. And second, that way of putting it conflicts with Smith's explicit claims elsewhere that motivating reasons *are* belief-desire pairs, as in Smith (1994). Still, the idea is a closely related one, as I explain more completely in *Slaves of the Passions*.

<sup>13</sup> David Velleman has offered the hypothesis that there are some desires or "aims" that are had by any possible agent. This *Velleman hypothesis* would allow that the Humean Theory of Reasons could be true, and there could be reasons that are reasons for anyone, no matter what she is like, so long as she is an agent. But on the Velleman hypothesis, it still turns out that there is some desire such that if an agent didn't have that desire, then she wouldn't have the reason. The overdetermination hypothesis therefore captures an additional modal datum about agent-neutral reasons not captured by the Velleman hypothesis. See especially Velleman (1989), (1996), (2001a), and the introduction to his (2001b). See also Railton (1997).

<sup>14</sup> Korsgaard (1997, 223).

<sup>15</sup> A condensed version of the following pragmatic argument has appeared in Schroeder (2005).

<sup>16</sup> "Make your contribution as informative as is required" Grice (1967, 26).

<sup>17</sup> As Adam Elga pointed out to me.

<sup>18</sup> Broadie (1990, 275). Here Broadie is writing about *judgments* about reasons, rather than about reasons themselves, but the thought is essentially the same.

<sup>19</sup> Or even necessarily extensionally correct. But being necessarily extensionally correct is not the same as constituting an *analysis* of the strength of reasons.

<sup>20</sup> Actually, to be precise, I prefer a view on which this platitude—that the weight of a reason is how much weight you ought to place on it—is not *itself* an analysis, but follows from a slightly more complicated *recursive* analysis of the weight of reasons, and the analysis of *ought* in terms of reasons and their weight. This amendment is necessary to avoid the objection that we will need the notion of reasons' *weight* in order to analyze *ought*, but the details require more attention than serve the purposes of this paper. I spell the account out more completely in *Slaves of the Passions*.

<sup>21</sup> The original example is from Lehrer and Paxson (1969).

<sup>22</sup> Special thanks to Gideon Rosen, Jay Wallace, Mike McGlone, Gillian Russell, Nate Williams, Brett Sherman, Adam Elga, Philip Pettit, Stephen Darwall, Gilbert Harman, Peter Railton, Kieran Setiya, and David Enoch, for fruitful or stimulating discussion of this or closely related topics, and to an anonymous referee for *Noûs*. Portions of this paper have also benefited from an audience at Princeton University.

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