

Neo-Humean rationality and two types of principles

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Abstract

According to the received view in metaethics, a Neo-Humean theory of rationality entails that there cannot be any objective moral reasons, i.e. moral reasons that are independent of actual desires. In this paper, I argue that there is a version of this theory that is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons. The key is to distinguish between (i) the process of rational deliberation that starts off in an agent's actual desires, and (ii) the rational principle that an agent employs in such a process. I maintain that it is the latter which explains why it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire, not the former. As a result, there might be two types of principles. The second type of principle leaves room for objective moral reasons.

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is an impasse in the debate on moral reasons and practical rationality that has troubled metaethics for quite some time. It is initially thought that a 'Neo-Humean' theory of rationality is plausible, since it rests on few controversial assumptions compared with alternative theories. As this view usually is formulated, it states that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire insofar as she would acquire it were she to go through a process of rational deliberation that takes its starting point in her actual desires. However, the theory seems to mean that there cannot be any objective moral reasons, i.e. moral reasons that are independent of our actual desires.¹ It is therefore presumed that to defend the existence of objective moral reasons, we need to adopt some alternative theory that entails various contentious commitments. Hence the impasse: We need to choose between a credible theory of rationality and the existence of objective moral reasons.

¹The most well-known instance of this argument is Bernard Williams's case against external reasons, but it functions as a background assumption in much theorizing about moral reasons. See references below.

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In this paper, I argue that there is a version of a Neo-Humean theory of rationality that is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons. The key is to distinguish between (i) the process of rational deliberation that starts off in an agent's actual desires, and (ii) the rational principle that an agent employs in such a process. I maintain that it is the principle which explains why it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire, not whether she would acquire it were she to go through the process. As a result, there might be two types of rational principles that both are concerned with an agent having coherent desires. First, a principle which is such that were an agent to employ it in a deliberative process, she is guaranteed to acquire a desire it is rational for her to have. As regards this type of principle, what desires it is rational for an agent to have vary with her actual desires. Instrumental rationality, which is fundamental to the theory, is a principle of this type. Second, a principle which is such that were an agent to employ it in a deliberative process, she is not guaranteed to acquire a desire it is rational for her to have. Yet, the principle supports that it is rational for the agent to have the desire in question. As regards this type of principle, what desires it is rational for an agent to have do not vary with her actual desires. Thus, a Neo-Humean theory that allows for a principle of the second type is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons. In this paper, I am primarily concerned with arguing that this version of the theory is available and worthy of consideration. However, I end by outlining a principle that is a natural extension of the theory in that it builds on instrumental rationality and the notion of coherence.

2 | NEO-HUMEAN VIEW OF RATIONALITY

A statement to effect that an agent is practically rational can refer to at least to things. First, it might refer to the agent having a certain capacity. According to a Neo-Humean theory of rationality, an agent is rational in this sense insofar as she possesses mental abilities to rationally deliberate so as to obtain certain attitudes. Second, it might refer to the agent having certain attitudes. In what follows, I will presume that an agent is rational in the first sense and consider what it means that she is rational in the second sense on this theory.

As a Neo-Humean theory of rationality standardly is understood, it can be characterized as consisting of three claims: 'PROCESS', 'DESIRE', and 'DESIRE-VARIATION'.²

A generic version of the first claim can be formulated thus:

PROCESS: It is rational for an agent to have a certain set of desires insofar as she would acquire it were she to go through a process of rational deliberation.

In the literature, it is not always explicitly stated why it is rational for an agent to have a set of desires that she would acquire in a process of rational deliberation. However, an underlying assumption is that the process involves some rational principle which supports that it is rational for the agent to have a set of desires she would acquire in this manner.³ We get the following picture: In a

²See e.g. Williams (1981, pp. 101–113); Cullity and Gaut (1997, pp. 1–23); Sobel (1999, pp. 137–147); Joyce (2001, Ch. 3–5); Goldman (2009, Ch. 2). See also e.g. Korsgaard (1986, pp. 5–25); Wallace (1990, pp. 355–385); Smith (1995, pp. 109–131); Velleman (1996, pp. 694–726); Lillehammer (2002, pp. 47–62); Wedgwood (2002, pp. 345–358); Tiberius (2002, pp. 147–172); FitzPatrick (2004, pp. 285–318); Svavarsdóttir (2008, pp. 1–33); Finlay (2009, pp. 1–22); Bedke (2010, pp. 39–57), and Ridge (2014, Ch. 8).

³See e.g. Williams (1981, pp. 103–105); Korsgaard (1986, pp. 15–17, 19–23); Wallace (1990, pp. 366–371); Smith (1995, pp. 112–125); Velleman (1996, pp. 694–700); Cullity and Gaut (1997, p. 7, 11–12, 18–21); Sobel (1999, pp. 138–139); Joyce (2001, Ch. 2); Lillehammer (2002, pp. 50–54); Tiberius (2002, pp. 160–167); Svavarsdóttir (2008, pp. 24–30); Finlay (2009, pp. 3–5); Goldman (2009, pp. 57–82); Bedke (2010, pp. 44–47), and Ridge (2014, Ch. 8).

deliberative process, an agent employs a rational principle that supports her having a certain set of desires and thereby explains why it is rational for her to have this set of desires. As a result of going through such a process, she acquires a set of desires it is rational for her to have. In the paper, I use 'acquire' to include both 'new' desires it is rational for her to have and 'old' desires it is rational for her to hold on to. In Section 5, I will argue that PROCESS should be revised in an important respect, but for the time being the generic version is most relevant to the discussion.

PROCESS can be understood as a view of either 'subjective' or 'objective' rationality. In the first case, it concerns an agent's rationality given her actual beliefs; in the latter case, it concerns her rationality on the assumption that she is fully informed of all relevant facts.⁴ In order to evade unnecessary complications, I will be concerned with an agent's objective rationality. The instances of rational deliberation I discuss are consequently carried out under full information. In PROCESS, 'desire' refers to a wide range of motivational pro-attitudes denoted by terms like 'want', 'value', and 'care about'. Moreover, as I use 'desire' in this claim, it does not presume any particular theory of motivation.

A Neo-Humean theory of rationality entails a Humean theory of motivation that introduces a particular understanding of 'desire'. According to this view, cognitive attitudes are unable to motivate by themselves or to cause any motivational attitudes.⁵ In order to be motivated, an agent needs to have desires that constitute a distinct kind of mental attitudes. As a result, a deliberative process must take its starting point in an agent's actual desires, thus understood, in order for her to have any motivational attitudes after she has gone through the process:

DESIRE: A process of rational deliberation takes its starting point in an agent's set of actual desires.

A Neo-Humean theory standardly conceives of rationality in terms of coherence. According to this view, a rational principle supports that it is rational for an agent to have a set of desires because it is coherent with her other desires. The type of principle that is considered as most fundamental on this view is instrumental rationality. A particular instance of it is central to this view: If a fully informed agent has a certain final desire and ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy it, then she is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ .⁶ Thus, if the agent employs this principle in a process of rational deliberation that takes its starting point in her actual final desires, she would acquire a desire to ϕ . Importantly, as Bernard Williams and others have argued, this theory might allow for other types of rational principles regarding coherence among desires.⁷

According to DESIRE, a process of rational deliberation takes its starting point in an agent's actual desires. It is extremely plausible to assume that what desire she would acquire were she to go through such a process is contingent on her actual desires. Thus, DESIRE strongly suggests:

DESIRE-VARIATION: What desires an agent would acquire were she to go through a process of rational deliberation vary depending on what her set of actual desires consists in.

⁴Cf. e.g. Williams (1981, pp. 102–103); Smith (1995, pp. 112–113); Railton (2006, p. 268), and Wedgwood (2002, p. 347).

⁵For different interpretations of the Humean theory of motivation, see e.g. Schueler (1995, Ch. 1) and Arruda (2017, pp. 322–342). For recent criticism, see e.g. Arruda (2019, pp. 157–178) and Leffler (2022).

⁶It is debated whether rational principles should be interpreted as narrow or wide scope claims. I defend a narrow scope interpretation of instrumental rationality in another context, but this issue does not affect the basic arguments in this paper.

⁷See e.g. Williams (1981, pp. 104–105) and Smith (1995, pp. 109–131).

Now, PROCESS in conjunction with DESIRE and DESIRE-VARIATION seems to entail that what desires it would be rational for an agent to have is similarly contingent:

RATIONALITY-VARIATION: What desires it would be rational for an agent to have vary depending on what her set of actual desires consists in.

Thus, it seems that a Neo-Humean theory of rationality is committed to RATIONALITY-VARIATION.

3 | THE RATIONALITY ARGUMENT AGAINST OBJECTIVE MORAL REASONS

RATIONALITY-VARIATION is the key premise in a renowned argument against the existence of objective moral reasons. The argument starts with a platitudinous claim about the connection between normative reasons and practical rationality, inserts RATIONALITY-VARIATION, and concludes that there are no objective moral reasons. A simple way to formulate it is as follows:

1. An agent has a normative reason to ϕ only if it would be rational for her to have a desire to ϕ .
2. RATIONALITY-VARIATION: What desires it would be rational for an agent to have vary depending on what her set of actual desires consists in.
3. Whether an agent has a normative reason to ϕ varies depending on what her set of actual desires consists in. (From (1) and (2).)
4. An agent has an objective moral reason to ϕ only if her reason to ϕ does not vary depending on what her set of actual desires consists in.
5. Therefore, there are no objective moral reasons. (From (3) and (4).)

The first premise (1) is platitudinous and difficult to deny. First, it forges a merely formal connection between the concept of normative reasons and the concept of rationality. It is thus compatible with the view that rationality cannot be understood without employing the concept of reasons, such that rationality consists of responding to reasons. Second, it is compatible with different ways of understanding the exact connection between an agent's reason to ϕ and it being rational for her to have a desire to ϕ .⁸ Third, it is compatible with different ways of understanding the sense in which it is rational for her to have desire to ϕ .⁹ As mentioned, (2) seems to follow from a Neo-Humean theory of rationality. (3) follows from (1) and (2). (4) seems platitudinous and difficult to deny. Hence, (5) seems to follow: There are no objective moral reasons.¹⁰

The conclusion of this argument—that there are not moral reasons—is devastating to our conception of morality. It means that an agent does not have any reason to, say, refrain from making other people's lives miserable, assist them when they need help, or take care of her near and dear, irrespective of whether she wants to or not. It should be a prime task for metaethics to investigate whether this conclusion can be avoided.

⁸It is thus neutral between the 'example model' and the 'advice model' (Smith, 1995, pp. 109–131).

⁹There is a distinction between an agent being rationally required to have a desire to ϕ and it being rational for her to have a desire to ϕ . See e.g. Raz (1999, pp. 99–105); Gert (2004, Ch. 2), and Scanlon (2014, pp. 105–107). As the former entails the latter, but not the other way around, I formulate the relevant claims in terms of the latter.

¹⁰Cf. Williams (1981, pp. 101–113). For interpretations, see e.g. Finlay (2009, pp. 1–22), and Velleman (1996, pp. 694–696).

4 | EARLIER RESPONSES TO THE RATIONALITY ARGUMENT

How might objective reasons be defended against the rationality argument? It is difficult to deny (1) and (4). Moreover, (3) follows from (1) and (2), and (5) follows from (3) and (4). Consequently, it is natural to think that one needs to deny (2): RATIONALITY-VARIATION. It appears that the only way to do so is to reject some of the claims that lead up to it. In the literature, there are accordingly three types of responses to the argument: reject PROCESS, OR DESIRE, OR DESIRE-VARIATION. In this paper, I do not have space to argue at any length against these responses, but will merely mention the principal challenges they face in order to clarify how my preferred view differs from them.

The *first response* is to deny PROCESS by adopting a substantive view of rationality.¹¹ According to this view, there are certain fundamental desires that it is rational for an agent to have irrespective of whether there is any rational principle of coherence which supports them and which she might employ in a process of rational deliberation. For example, on one alternative they amount to final desires to realize intrinsically valuable state of affairs. PROCESS provides an account of why it is rational for an agent to have certain desires that applies to all such states: They are supported by some rational principle of coherence that she might employ in a deliberative process. A substantive view needs to tell a more complex story. It might explain why *some* desires are rational to have by stating that they are supported by such a principle, like instrumental rationality. However, it needs to provide a separate account of why it is rational to have certain fundamental desires that are not supported in this manner. Moreover, it needs to account for the content of these fundamental desires that explains why they are rational for an agent to have, and why this is so irrespective of what her actual desires consist in.

The *second response* is to deny DESIRE, which amounts to rejecting the Humean theory of motivation. According to the main version of this view, a process of rational deliberation involves a 'pure rational principle' the recognition of which is able to motivate in the absence of any antecedent desires.¹² In order to deny DESIRE, it needs to explain how an agent's mere recognition of a rational principle can make her acquire motivational states. More importantly, it needs to provide an account of the content of such a principle that explains how an agent's recognition of it makes her acquire motivational states it is rational for her to have, and why this is the case irrespective of her actual desires.

The *third response* is to accept DESIRE but deny DESIRE-VARIATION. According to this view, there is a process of rational deliberation that takes its point of departure in an agent's actual desires and that would result in her acquiring desires that are not contingent on her actual desires. On the main version of this view, there is at least some rational principle which makes agents that employ it in a deliberative process 'converge' in certain desires.¹³ This view needs to provide an account of the content of such a principle that explains how a deliberative process which involves it can make an agent acquire desires it is rational for her to have, where these desires do not vary with her actual desires. In particular, it needs to explain how this is possible in spite of the fact that the process starts off in the agent's actual desires.

¹¹See e.g. Shafer-Landau (2003, Ch. 7); Enoch (2011, Ch. 2–3), and Parfit (2011, Ch. 2 and 5). Cf. Scanlon (2014, Ch. 1). For criticism, see e.g. Markovits (2011, pp. 255–279).

¹²Korsgaard's view has been understood in accordance with this response (see e.g. Korsgaard, 1986, pp. 19–23), but is open to different interpretations (see e.g. FitzPatrick, 2004, pp. 290–291). For criticism, see e.g. McDowell (1995, pp. 70–72); Shafer-Landau (2003, pp. 172–173), and Lubin (2009, p. 284). For Kantian approaches that address this type of difficulty, see e.g. Markovits (2014, Ch. 4–5) and Bagnoli (2015, pp. 31–45). There are authors that explicitly argue that beliefs with normative content are able to motivate. See e.g. Wallace (1990, pp. 355–385).

¹³Smith (1994, pp. 187–189) and (1995, pp. 109–131). Korsgaard's view has been interpreted also in line with this response; see e.g. Lillehammer (2000, p. 512). For criticism, see e.g. Hubin (1999, pp. 355–361); Sobel (1999, pp. 139–143); Joyce (2001, pp. 74–77); Shafer-Landau (2003, pp. 221–227); Enoch (2007, pp. 99–108), and Setiya (2014, pp. 224–226).

5 | TWO TYPES OF RATIONAL PRINCIPLES

In what follows, I will propose an alternative view in response to the rationality argument against objective moral reasons. The basic idea is that PROCESS needs to be revised. As we shall see, PROCESS is understood to entail what I shall call STRONG PROCESS. However, I will argue that there are reasons to think that this claim is mistaken. When we have seen this, we can formulate a more plausible version of PROCESS in the form of WEAK PROCESS. Importantly, a version of a Neo-Humean theory of rationality that combines WEAK PROCESS with DESIRE and DESIRE-VARIATION does not entail RATIONALITY-VARIATION. In particular, WEAK PROCESS allows for there being two types of rational principles as outlined in the introduction. Thus, there is a version of a Humean theory of rationality that is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons.¹⁴

In Section 2, it was noticed that a process of rational deliberation involves a rational principle which supports that it is rational for an agent to have a desire she would acquire were she to go through the process. In order to make this explicit, we can formulate PROCESS as follows:

It is rational for an agent to have a certain set of desires insofar as (i) there is a rational principle which the agent might employ in a process of rational deliberation and which supports that it is rational for her to have this set of desires, and (ii) she would acquire this set of desires were she to go through such a process.

Furthermore, since PROCESS includes ‘would’ in (ii), it is plausibly understood to mean that an agent who employs the principle is guaranteed to acquire the set of desires. Thus, PROCESS is assumed to entail:

Guarantee Presumption: If an agent were to go through a process of rational deliberation in which she employs a rational principle, she is guaranteed to acquire a set of desires it is rational for her to have.

It should be uncontroversial that PROCESS standardly is conceived in accordance with the *Guarantee Presumption*. First, in the literature claims like PROCESS are regularly characterized in a manner entailing the *Guarantee Presumption*.¹⁵ Second, as we shall see, the rationality argument against objective moral reasons is based on the assumption that PROCESS entails this claim.

¹⁴For other broadly Neo-Human accounts, see e.g. Lenman (2010, pp. 175–193); Driver (2017, pp. 172–188), and Street (2012, pp. 40–59). Mark Schroeder has argued that there is a Humean theory of reasons which allows for the existence of agent-neutral reasons (Schroeder, 2007, Ch. 6). I outline a Neo-Humean view of practical rationality that provides a response to the rationality argument and thereby makes possible the existence of objective moral reasons. By contrast, Schroeder’s account is concerned with reasons rather than rationality and does not directly address the rationality argument. The various Neo-Humean approaches differ in a number of respects, and a comparison between them has to wait for another occasion.

¹⁵See e.g. Williams (1981, pp. 104–106; 109); Cohon (1986, pp. 545–556); Korsgaard (1986, pp. 19–23); Hooker (1987, p. 42); Smith (1995, pp. 112–125); McDowell (1995, pp. 70–72); Millgram (1996, p. 198, 203–204); Cullity and Gaut (1997, pp. 10–12); Sobel (1999, pp. 137–138); Shafer-Landau (2003, pp. 169–176); Hooker and Streumer (2004, pp. 58–59, 63–67); Garcia (2004, p. 242); Lubin (2009, pp. 275–276); Bedke (2010, pp. 39–40), and Parfit (2011, pp. 61–65).

¹⁶The *Guarantee Presumption* lies behind Michael Smith’s suggestion that, if agents were to go through a deliberative process in which they employ a certain rational principle, their desires would ‘converge’ (Smith, 1995, pp. 109–131). Thus, they are *guaranteed* to acquire the same desires about what to do. Smith thinks that this needs to be the case in order for there to be any normative reasons at all; the alternative is error-theory.

These clarifications yield the following understanding of PROCESS:

STRONG PROCESS: It is rational for an agent to have a certain set of desires insofar as (i) there is a rational principle which the agent might employ in a process of rational deliberation and which supports that it is rational for her to have this set of desires, and (ii) she is guaranteed to acquire this set of desires were she to go through such a process.

We can now see that it is STRONG PROCESS which is at work in the rationality argument against objective moral reasons. Let us start with recalling that DESIRE strongly suggests DESIRE-VARIATION: What desires an agent would acquire were she to go through a process of rational deliberation vary depending on what her actual desires consist in. Let us next see that STRONG PROCESS and DESIRE-VARIATION entail RATIONALITY-VARIATION. According to STRONG PROCESS, it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire insofar as there is a rational principle that she might employ in a deliberative process and that supports her having this desire. In particular, STRONG PROCESS entails that if she were to go through this type of process, she is guaranteed to acquire the desire in question. According to DESIRE-VARIATION, what desires she would acquire were she to go through such a process vary depending on her actual desires. Hence, RATIONALITY-VARIATION follows: What desires it would be rational for an agent to have vary depending on her actual desires. As can be seen, it is STRONG PROCESS, in combination with DESIRE and DESIRE-VARIATION, that entails RATIONALITY-VARIATION, which is the key premise in the rationality argument against objective moral reasons. In other words, if STRONG PROCESS were not presumed, the argument would not go through.

In clarifying PROCESS, it was made evident that it refers to two separate aspects: a rational principle and a process of rational deliberation. It is now time to emphasize the following: It is the principle that is employed in a deliberative process which supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire, *not* the fact that she would acquire it were she to go through a process in which she employs the principle.

In order to see this clearer, it is instructive to examine the connection between the notion of a rational principle and the notion of a process of rational deliberation. The notion of a *rational principle* is the notion of a principle that supports it being rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire and thereby explains why it is rational for her to have the desire in question. For example, the principle of instrumental rationality explains why a fully informed agent who has a certain final desire is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ , where ϕ ing is a necessary means to fulfil her final desire. According to the established account, this is because a desire for the necessary means is coherent with her final desire. The notion of a *process of rational deliberation* is the notion of a process in which an agent employs a principle and as a result would acquire a desire it is rational for her to have. For example, a process of rational deliberation in which an agent employs the principle of instrumental rationality is a process in which she would acquire a desire to ϕ , where ϕ ing is a necessary means to fulfil her final desire. In this case, the deliberative process makes her acquire a desire for the necessary means that is coherent with her final desire. A process of rational deliberation is thus basically a vehicle by which she acquires a desire it is rational for her to have by being the process in which she employs a principle so as to acquire such a desire.

As soon as the relation between rational principle and deliberative process has been made explicit, it is difficult to deny that it is the former which fulfils the rationality supporting function rather than the latter. However, I would like to mention two considerations that lend further support to this contention.

First, it is widely accepted that an agent need not *actually* go through a process of rational deliberation in which she acquires a desire in order for it to be rational for her to have it. For example, a

fully informed agent who has a certain final desire is rationally required to desire to ϕ , where ϕ ing is a necessary means to fulfil her final desire, even if she has not acquired a desire to ϕ by going through a deliberative process. However, in that case it is difficult to see why it should be rational for an agent to have a desire *because she would acquire it were she to go through such a process*. First, a case in which an agent actually goes through a deliberative process and as a result acquires a certain desire is an instantiation of a case where she would acquire the desire were she to go through such a process. The former is merely an instance of the latter that happens to come into being. Second, whether an agent actually goes through a deliberative process is a completely arbitrary matter that cannot have any bearing on what it is rational for her to desire. Thus, if an agent need not go through a deliberative process in which she acquires a desire in order for it to be rational for her to have the desire, it is difficult to see why it would be rational for her to have the desire *because she would acquire it were she to go through such a process*. It is much more plausible to maintain that it is rational for her to have the desire because it is supported by a rational principle she employs in the process.

Second, there is a plausible account of why it might *seem* that it is the fact that an agent would acquire a desire were she to go through a process of rational deliberation which explains why it is rational for an agent to have the desire. It is to be found in the thought that what desires it is rational for an agent to have might vary depending on her actual desires. Assume that an agent's deliberative process takes its starting point in her actual desires. Moreover, assume that, after she has gone through a process in which she employs a certain rational principle, she acquires a desire that is rational for her to have. Lastly, assume that what desires it is rational for her to have in this case might vary depending on her actual desires. It may then seem that the explanation why it is rational for an agent to have a desire which is contingent on her actual desires is that she would acquire it were she go through a deliberative process which starts off in her actual desires. Thus, the fact that the 'output' of a deliberative process can vary with the 'input' might lead one to believe that it is rational for an agent to have a desire because she would acquire it were she to go through such a process.

However, the fact that what desires it is rational for an agent to have might vary depending on her actual desires is explained by the nature of the particular rational principle that is employed in a process of rational deliberation. The obvious example is instrumental rationality: If a fully informed agent has a certain final desire and ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy it, she is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ . Assume that an agent employs this principle in a deliberative process. In that case, the fact that it is rational for her to have a desire to ϕ depends on her actual final desire. That is, if her actual final desires had been different, what desire it is rational for her to have would have been different. However, this does not show that it is the fact that she would acquire a desire to ϕ in a deliberative process that explains why it is rational for her to have this desire. It is rather a function of the particular rational principle that she employs in such a process.

Thus, it being rational for an agent to have a certain desire is explained by the fact that it is supported by a rational principle, *not* by the fact that she would acquire the desire were she to go through a deliberative process in which employs the principle.

Importantly, this means that there is space for the following possibility:

There is a type of rational principle which supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire even if she is not guaranteed to acquire it were she to go through a process of rational deliberation in which she employs the principle.

The above reasoning suggests a revised version of PROCESS:

WEAK PROCESS: It is rational for an agent to have a certain set of desires insofar as (i) there is a rational principle which the agent might employ in a process of rational deliberation and which supports that it is rational for her to have this set of desires, (ii) even if she is not guaranteed to acquire this set of desires were she to go through such a process.

According to **WEAK PROCESS**, there might be two kinds of rational principles. First, a type of principle which supports it being rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire *and* which is such that, were she to go through a deliberative process in which she employs the principle, she is guaranteed to acquire the desire in question. Second, a type of principle which supports it being rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire despite the fact that, were she to go through a deliberative process in which she employs the principle, she is *not* guaranteed to acquire the desire in question. The second alternative entails: If an agent were to go through a process of rational deliberation by employing the principle, she would acquire a desire it is rational for her to have only if she fulfils a certain condition C.

We can now see that **WEAK PROCESS** together with **DESIRE** and **DESIRE-VARIATION** does *not* entail **RATIONALITY-VARIATION**. The reason is that the rational principle referred to in **WEAK PROCESS** might belong to the second type of principle. Let us start by recalling that **DESIRE** strongly suggests **DESIRE-VARIATION**: What desires an agent would acquire were she to go through a process of rational deliberation vary depending on what her actual desires consist in. According to **WEAK PROCESS**, it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire insofar as there is a rational principle that she might employ in a deliberative process and that supports her having this desire. However, on **WEAK PROCESS** there might be a principle which supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire even if the following is *not* the case: If she were to go through this type of process, she is guaranteed to acquire the desire in question. According to **DESIRE-VARIATION**, what desires an agent would acquire were she to go through a deliberative process vary depending on her actual desires. From these two claims **RATIONALITY-VARIATION** does not follow: It does not follow that what desires it would be rational for an agent to have vary depending on what her actual desires consist in. Thus, if **WEAK PROCESS** instead of **STRONG PROCESS** is combined with **DESIRE** and **DESIRE-VARIATION**, **RATIONALITY-VARIATION** does not follow. As **RATIONALITY-VARIATION** is the key premise in the rationality argument against objective moral reasons, the argument does not go through on this view.

According to this view, it might be rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire in virtue of it being supported by the second type of principle irrespective of whether she would acquire it were she to go through a deliberative process in which she employs the principle. Thus, whether it is *rational* for her to have this desire is *not* contingent on her actual desires; however, whether she would *acquire* it were she to go through such a process *is* contingent on her actual desires.

As noticed, **WEAK PROCESS** means that if an agent were to go through process of rational deliberation in which she employs the second type of principle, she would acquire a desire it is rational for her to have only if she fulfils a condition C. According to **DESIRE**, a deliberative process takes its starting point in an agent's actual desires, which suggests **DESIRE-VARIATION**. Thus, whether an agent acquires a desire it is rational for her to have depends on her actual desires in which the process starts off. A generic characterization of condition C could then be formulated as follows: 'having actual desires such that she would acquire a desire it is rational for her to have'. It should be emphasized that this understanding of condition C does not render **WEAK PROCESS** trivial. The reason is that the normative burden is carried by a rational principle rather than a deliberative process. As argued above, it is the fact that there is a principle supporting an agent having a certain desire which explains that it is

rational for an agent to have the desire, not whether she would acquire it were she to go through a deliberative process.

6 | AN ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE TO THE RATIONALITY ARGUMENT

We can now see that there is a version of a Neo-Humean theory of rationality that is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons.

As a Neo-Humean theory of rationality standardly is understood, it can be considered as consisting of three claims: *PROCESS*, *DESIRE*, and *DESIRE-VARIATION*. These claims seem to entail *RATIONALITY-VARIATION* which constitutes premise (2) in the rationality argument against the existence of objective moral reasons. In the last section, I argued that the standard conception of *PROCESS* in the form of *STRONG PROCESS* should be replaced with *WEAK PROCESS* while the other claims are kept intact. *WEAK PROCESS* allows that there might be a type of principle such that whether it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire does not vary depending on her actual desires. We will soon see an example of such a principle. As a result, premise (2), *RATIONALITY-VARIATION*, can be denied, which means that the conclusion in (5) does not follow. Accordingly, the proposed view is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons.

It is now possible to see the advantages with this view in comparison with the three traditional responses to the argument.

The proposed view adopts *WEAK PROCESS*. In contrast to the *first response*, it provides a unified account of why it is rational for an agent to have certain desires: They are supported by some rational principle of coherence that she might employ in a deliberative process. Hence, it need not provide two separate accounts: one account of why it is rational to have certain fundamental desires which are not supported in this manner, and another account of why it is rational to have certain other desires which are thus supported. Moreover, it need not provide any account of the content of fundamental desires that would explain why they are rational for an agent to have and why this is the case irrespective of her actual desires.

The proposed view incorporates *DESIRE*. In contrast to the *second response*, it does not state that there is a rational principle such that an agent's recognition of it merely by itself makes her acquire motivational states in the absence of any antecedent desires. Moreover, it entails *WEAK PROCESS* which means that a rational principle of coherence might support that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire even if she is not guaranteed to acquire it were she to go through a deliberative process. Thus, it need not account for the content of any principle which would explain how an agent's mere recognition of it makes her acquire motivational states that are rational for her to have, and why this is so irrespective of her actual desires.

The proposed view accepts that *DESIRE* implies *DESIRE-VARIATION*. In contrast to the *third response*, it need not state that there is a rational principle which is such that an agent who employs it in a deliberative process acquires desires it is rational for her to have that are not contingent on her actual desires, in spite of the fact that the process takes its starting point in them. In other words, it need not account for the content of a principle which would explain that agents that employ it in a deliberative process 'converge' in their desires quite irrespective of what their actual desires consist in.

It is plausible to conceive of the view I propose as a Neo-Humean theory of rationality in spite of the fact that it replaces *STRONG PROCESS* with *WEAK PROCESS*, since it retains the fundamental claims of the original conception. First, the view conceives of rational principles in terms of coherence. In particular, it maintains that instrumental rationality, which is at the core of a Neo-Humean theory, is

the fundamental rational principle. Second, it combines WEAK PROCESS with DESIRE. Thus, a process of rational deliberation takes its starting point in an agent's actual desires. More precisely, it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire insofar as it is supported by a rational principle that she might employ in a deliberative process which starts off in her actual desires. Third, on this view a desire that is rational to have can be acquired by engaging in a deliberative process. This is so even if an agent is not guaranteed to acquire it through such a process but only does so if she fulfils a certain condition C. In other words, the deliberative process plays an important role since it is a vehicle by which an agent can acquire a desire it is rational for her to have, given that she fulfils such a condition. That said, it is not essential to my arguments that the view I propose is called 'Neo-Humean'. What is important is that there is a view that incorporates WEAK PROCESS, DESIRE, and DESIRE-VARIATION, and that can be engaged to defend the existence of objective moral reasons.

7 | FIRST TYPE OF PRINCIPLE: INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY

As we have seen, WEAK PROCESS allows that there might be two types of rational principles. The first type supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire, and she is guaranteed to acquire it were she to go through a process of rational deliberation in which she employs the principle. The second type also supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire, but she is not guaranteed to acquire it in this manner. The two types of principles function differently when combined with WEAK PROCESS, DESIRE and DESIRE-VARIATION: As regards the first type of principle, whether it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire varies depending on her actual desires. As regards the second type of principle, whether it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire is not contingent on her actual desires.

It is now time to be more concrete and consider these principles in more detail. In this section, I consider a principle of the first type, and in the next section I consider a principle of the second type.

Consider¹⁷:

INSTRUMENTAL: For any fully informed agent A, if A has a certain final desire and ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy it, then A is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ .

We may start with noticing two aspects of this principle. First, INSTRUMENTAL does not state that an agent is rationally required to have any specific desire. The principle entails that an agent is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ , where ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy some of her final desires, whatever ϕ ing consists in. Second, INSTRUMENTAL does not presume that an agent needs to have any specific final desires in order to be able to acquire such a desire for a necessary means. The two aspects are closely connected: A desire that an agent is rationally required to have on this principle is a desire to ϕ , whatever ϕ ing consists in, as long as ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of hers, whatever it consists in.

Assume now that an agent employs INSTRUMENTAL in a process of rational deliberation. In that case, she would acquire a desire to ϕ , whatever ϕ ing consist in, as long as it is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of hers, whatever it consists in. This means that, if an agent goes through a deliberative process in which she employs INSTRUMENTAL, she is *guaranteed* to acquire a desire to ϕ insofar as ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire.

¹⁷As mentioned, to simplify the discussion I consider an agent's deliberative process on the assumption that she is fully informed about relevant facts.

Let us now consider how INSTRUMENTAL functions when it is combined with WEAK PROCESS, DESIRE, and DESIRE-VARIATION. This combination of claims does entail RATIONALITY-VARIATION. According to DESIRE, a process of rational deliberation takes its starting point in an agent's actual desires that include her actual final desires. DESIRE strongly suggests an instance of DESIRE-VARIATION. As we have seen, if an agent goes through a deliberative process in which she employs INSTRUMENTAL, she is guaranteed to acquire a desire for a necessary means to satisfy her final desire. Thus, an instance of RATIONALITY-VARIATION follows: What desires for necessary means an agent is rationally required to have vary depending on her actual final desires.

There is no established view about how an agent's process of rational deliberation should be represented, but fortunately this does not affect my arguments.¹⁸ One way to represent an agent's deliberative process in which she employs INSTRUMENTAL is the following:

From:

1. Actual desires. Among them: A certain final desire.
2. Belief: ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy this desire.

Employment of INSTRUMENTAL: If I have a certain final desire and ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy it, I have a desire to ϕ .¹⁹

To:

- 3 A desire to ϕ

In the last section, I argued that STRONG PROCESS is mistaken and should be replaced with WEAK PROCESS. This makes it pertinent to ask why the former claim is so pervasive. As already indicated, it is plausible to hypothesize that one answer is to be found in the unique position of instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality is one of the few rational principles that is almost unanimously accepted in practical philosophy. It therefore tends to function as a template for other putative principles. A process of rational deliberation in which an agent employs a principle of instrumental rationality guarantees that she acquires a desire she is rationally required to have. It has therefore been presumed that *any* deliberative process and rational principle need to function in a similar manner.

In this context, we should also notice a certain feature of INSTRUMENTAL. It supports an agent having a certain desire that she is *rationally required* to have. In the last section, it was argued that there might be a type of principle which supports an agent having a certain desire that it is *rational* for her to have. As the latter is weaker than the former, this might perhaps be thought to limit the significance of my discussion.

First, the argument in the last section is merely intended to demonstrate that there might be a rational principle which complies with WEAK PROCESS but still supports that it is rational for an agent to have a certain kind of desire. This is compatible with two alternatives: the principle supports that an agent is rationally required to have such a desire, or the principle merely supports that it is rational

¹⁸For different accounts of how to represent practical reasoning, see e.g. Audi (2006, Part II); Broome (2013, Ch. 13–15), and Kauppinen (2018, pp. 395–422).

¹⁹A rational principle should not figure as one of the premises in a deliberative process, since it risks leading to a regress problem (Broome, 2013, pp. 229–231). Furthermore, a representation of the consequent should presumably not make use of normative terms, since this would render it psychologically implausible.

for her to have it.²⁰ In this paper, I stay neutral between these two options. Second, it is reasonable to think that INSTRUMENTAL supports *both* desires an agent is rationally required to have *and* desires that are merely rational for her to have. Thus, INSTRUMENTAL cannot be used to argue that the only sort of desires it is rational for an agent to have belongs to the first category.²¹ Third, as far as I see, there are no grounds to think that there could not be a type of rational principle which supports *only* desires it is rational for an agent to have, but not desires she is rationally required to have. One type of principle might constitute a rational requirement, supporting desires an agent is rationally required to have, whereas another type of principle might support desires it is rational for an agent to have, although she is not rationally required to have them.

8 | SECOND TYPE OF PRINCIPLE: 'TREAT SIMILAR CASES ALIKE'

As argued in section 5, WEAK PROCESS is compatible with there being two types of rational principles. In the last section, I considered an instance of the first type of principle, and in this section I consider a simple model of the second type of principle in order to illustrate what it might look like. More precisely, I consider a principle that constitutes a natural part of a Neo-Human theory of rationality in that it builds on INSTRUMENTAL and the notion of coherence. It should be emphasized that I do not provide a full defence of this principle, as it would require a thorough discussion, but merely outline the direction in which it might be developed.

The principle I would like to use as a model can be formulated thus:

TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE: For any fully informed agents A and B, if A is rationally required to desire to ϕ (where ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of A's) and B is rationally required to desire to ψ (where ψ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of B's), then it is rational for A to have a desire to promote ψ , and it is rational for B to have a desire to promote ϕ .²²

A principle like TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE gets support from a particular notion of coherence. Assume that an agent A is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ . More precisely, suppose A is rationally required to have this desire according to INSTRUMENTAL because ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of hers. Assume that another agent B is rationally required to have a desire to ψ according to the same principle: ψ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of B's. Hence, with regard to rationality there is no relevant difference between these desires, since both A and B are rationally required to have the desires in question and these desires are rationally supported by the very same rational principle. It might next be observed that if an agent has a certain desire, she is disposed

²⁰The distinction can be drawn in different manners. However, it being rationally required for an agent to have a desire to ϕ entails that she is irrational if she lacks it, while this is not the case if it is merely rational for her to have a desire to ϕ . See e.g. Raz (1999, pp. 99–105); Gert (2004, Ch. 2), and Scanlon (2014, pp. 105–107). For critical discussion, see Portmore (2012, pp. 24–60).

²¹To illustrate, assume that an agent has a final desire to avoid a certain unpleasant experience (thirst) and that a necessary means to satisfy this desire is to drink something. There are a number of different liquids that would satisfy her desire equally well. The agent is only rationally required to have a desire for one of them. However, it might be rational for her to have a desire for each individual liquid or at least for more than one.

²²As mentioned, I consider an agent's deliberative process on the assumption that she is fully informed. Moreover, it is plausible to assume that it is rational for A to have a desire to promote ψ only if A believes that B is fully informed about the relevant facts with regard to ψ .

to promote actions that serve to realize it. It then seems reasonable to think that it would be rationally coherent for A to have a desire to promote ψ .²³ It would be coherent in the sense that it would be to 'treat similar cases alike' with regard to rationality, since as far as rationality is concerned there is no relevant difference between the desires it is rationally required for A to have and the desires it is rationally required for B to have. More precisely, it would be to 'treat similar cases alike' in the sense that A would treat B's desire to ψ , where this is a desire B is rationally required to have according to INSTRUMENTAL, in the same way as A would treat her own desire to ϕ if she were rational, where this is a desire A is rationally required to have according to the same principle. The same reasoning applies to B.

To illustrate, assume that B is rationally required to desire a certain medical treatment because it is a necessary means to satisfy her final desire to avoid pain. According to the present idea, it would be rationally coherent for A to have a desire to provide the treatment to B. The same reasoning applies to B in case A finds herself in a similar situation. Moreover, the fact that A and B are separate agents cannot be regarded as relevant from the perspective of rationality and coherence as such. Thus, this cannot be used to argue that it would not be rationally coherent for them to desire to help one another in the indicated way.²⁴

In this way, TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE represents a progress from instrumental rationality, which lies at the heart of a Neo-Humean theory, to a principle that is a natural extension of this view. According to INSTRUMENTAL, an agent is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ insofar as ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of hers. According to TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE, it is rational for an agent A to have a desire to promote ψ in case another agent B is rationally required to desire to ψ on INSTRUMENTAL. This principle is warranted by an aspect of coherence that in turn employs INSTRUMENTAL. On this picture, an agent can make a 'rational ascent' from a desire she is rationally required to have, which concerns the promotion of her own rationally required desires, to a desire it is rational for her to have, which concerns the promotion of another agent's rationally required desires. The only steps needed to make this ascent are INSTRUMENTAL and a simple notion of coherence.

It is worth emphasizing that TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE merely states that it is rational for an agent A to have a desire to promote ψ which in turn might be very weak or even silenced. First, assume that A promoting ψ would frustrate the satisfaction of some of A's own fully informed rational desires that are essential to her. In that case, it is plausible to think that it is rational for A to have stronger desires to do something else than to promote ψ . Second, assume that A promoting ψ would frustrate the fulfillment of other people's fully informed rational desires that are essential to them. In view of the fact that all agents' fully informed and rational desires are relevant on this principle, it would be rational for A to have stronger desires to do something else than to promote ψ . Moreover, the principle does not entail any particular normative theory, among other things because it does not involve any claim as regards whether, and if so how, agents' rational desires are to be compared or aggregated. It only provides a very rudimentary basis for morality that is compatible with various normative theories and that can be developed in different directions.

²³It might consist in performing ψ herself or in promoting ψ in other ways, depending on what ψ amounts to.

²⁴As indicated in the last section, there is a distinction between a principle which supports that an agent is rationally required to have a desire to ϕ , and a principle which merely supports that it is rational for her to have a desire to ϕ . In the present paper, I am neutral about to which type TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE belongs. However, there might be reasons to think that it belongs to the latter. On the proposed view, it might be rational for A to have a desire to promote ψ even if she would not acquire it were she to go through a deliberative process in which she employs the principle. In that case, it might seem unjustified to claim that she is irrational in lacking the desire. As a result, it might be argued that she is not rationally required to have a desire to promote ψ . I defend this view in Strandberg (2018, pp. 69–100).

There are in particular two aspects in which TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE differs from INSTRUMENTAL that are relevant in the present context. First, it entails that it is rational for an agent to have a certain specific desire: a desire to promote ψ insofar as another fully informed agent is rationally required to desire to ψ . Second, it is reasonable to think that in order for an agent to be able to acquire this desire, she needs already to have certain particular desires. The two aspects are closely connected. As it is rational for an agent to have a certain specific desire on TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE, it is extremely implausible to assume that her employment of the principle will ensure to take her from her actual desires, whatever they consists in, to this specific desire.

Assume that an agent employs TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE in a process of rational deliberation. It is an open question whether she would acquire a desire to promote ψ . Thus, if an agent goes through a deliberative process in which she employs this principle, she is *not guaranteed* to acquire a desire to promote ψ . Instead, she would acquire such a desire only if she fulfils a certain condition C in the way detailed earlier.²⁵

We may now consider how TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE functions when it is combined with WEAK PROCESS, DESIRE, and DESIRE-VARIATION. The combination of these claims does *not* entail RATIONALITY-VARIATION. As we have seen, DESIRE strongly suggests DESIRE-VARIATION. Assume, in accordance with WEAK PROCESS, that it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire insofar as it is supported by a principle which might be employed in a deliberative process. We have seen that TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE supports it being rational for an agent to have a desire to promote ψ even if the following is *not* the case: If she goes through a deliberative process in which she employs this principle, she is guaranteed to acquire such a desire. According to DESIRE-VARIATION, what desires an agent would acquire were she to go through a deliberative process vary depending on her actual desires. In that case, RATIONALITY-VARIATION does not follow. Whether it would be rational for an agent to have a desire to promote ψ does not vary depending on her actual desires.

An agent's process of rational deliberation in which she employs TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE can tentatively be represented in (1)–(4) below. The basic point is that an agent is not guaranteed to acquire the desire bracketed in 4 by going through a deliberative process in which she employs TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE unless she possesses the desire bracketed in 1. However, it is nonetheless rational for her to have the desire bracketed in 4.

From

1. Actual desires. [A desire to promote actions that other agents, who are fully informed, are rationally required to desire to perform (where these actions are necessary means to satisfy the agents' final desires.)]
2. Belief: I am rationally required to desire to ϕ (where ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of mine).
3. Belief: Another agent B, who is fully informed, is rationally required to desire to ψ (where ψ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of B's).

Employment of TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE: If I am rationally required to desire to ϕ (where ϕ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of mine) and another agent B, who is fully informed, is

²⁵Thus, if a deliberative process involves TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE, condition C amounts to the following: 'having an actual desire to promote actions that other agents, who are fully informed, are rationally required to desire to perform (where these actions are necessary means to satisfy the agents' final desires)'. This does not make WEAK PROCESS trivial, since it is this principle, rather than a deliberative process, that supports an agent having the desire in question.

rationally required to desire to ψ (where ψ ing is a necessary means to satisfy a final desire of B's), I have a desire to promote ψ .

To

4 [A desire to promote ψ]

It might be objected that the argument above displays a flawed understanding of what it means that an agent employs a rational principle in a deliberative process. According to this worry, an agent who employs a principle makes it operate on the contents of the desires and beliefs involved in the deliberation. However, TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE does not operate on the contents of an agent's actual desires in a case where she does not have the desire bracketed in 1 and therefore does not acquire a desire to promote ψ , bracketed in 4.

First, it is worth noticing that the objection rests on a controversial notion of what it means that an agent employs a principle in a process of rational deliberation.²⁶ Second, on the present view an agent makes TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE operate on the contents of her desires and beliefs in a systematic manner explaining whether she acquires a desire to promote ψ . If the agent *has* the relevant actual desire (bracketed in 1) and goes through a deliberative process as represented above, she makes the principle operate on the contents of her actual desire and her beliefs (2, 3). Thus, she will acquire a desire to promote ψ (bracketed in 4). If the agent *lacks* the relevant actual desire (bracketed in 1) and goes through such a process, she still makes the principle operate on the contents of her beliefs (2, 3), although she does not acquire a desire to promote ψ because she lacks the mentioned desire. Third, even if an agent cannot strictly speaking employ TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE when she does not have the relevant actual desire, the main claim of the argument is still valid. That is, it might be rational for an agent to have a desire to promote ψ even if she is not guaranteed to acquire it by going through a deliberative process because she lacks the relevant actual desire.

It might be further be objected that there is no relevant difference between INSTRUMENTAL and TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE as to whether certain actual desires are needed in order for an agent to acquire a given kind of desire. According to this view, if an agent employs either principle correctly, she is guaranteed to acquire a desire that the principle supports. In particular, if an agent employs TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE correctly, she would acquire a desire to promote ψ , irrespective of what her actual desires consist in.

First, it is difficult to see any reason why an agent's correct employment of a rational principle could not result in her having a certain kind of desire only provided she has certain actual desires. It should be possible that a particular type of principle by its nature functions in such a way that an agent's correct employment of it results in her having a certain desire only if she already has certain actual desires. Second, more specifically, it is difficult to see that an agent who employs TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE without acquiring a desire to ψ needs to be employing it incorrectly. An agent who lacks the relevant actual desire (bracketed in 1) but does not acquire a desire to promote ψ (bracketed in 4) by employing TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE need not make any mistake. The explanation why she does not acquire the desire in question is that she does not have the relevant actual desire, not that she employs the principle incorrectly.

²⁶For alternative views, see e.g. Audi (2006, Ch. 4), and Kauppinen (2018, pp. 395–422).

9 | CONCLUSION

A Neo-Humean theory of rationality as standardly understood can be characterized as consisting of three claims: PROCESS, DESIRE, and DESIRE-VARIATION. These claims seem to entail RATIONALITY-VARIATION which constitutes the key premise in a renowned argument against the existence of objective moral reasons. The traditional responses to the argument are subject to various challenges. As an alternative, I argued that PROCESS in the form of STRONG PROCESS should be replaced with WEAK PROCESS. A version of a Neo-Humean theory of rationality that combines WEAK PROCESS with DESIRE and DESIRE-VARIATION is compatible with the rejection of RATIONALITY-VARIATION. It allows that there can be a principle such that whether it is rational for an agent to have a certain desire is not contingent on her actual desires. TREAT-SIMILAR-CASES-ALIKE was used as a model of such a principle. Thus, there is a version of a Neo-Humean theory that is compatible with the existence of objective moral reasons.

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