

10

Responding to Normativity

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To many it seems obvious that normativity or justification depends upon desire. Few answers to the question, ‘Why should I?’ seem more natural than ‘Because I want to,’ and if we are told, ‘You should do this,’ there is something natural about the objection, ‘But I don’t want to, so why?’ I believe that the very nature of normativity can be comprehensively explained in terms of desire: the mysterious ‘force’ of value, reasons, and obligation are explicable by appeal to the ‘force’ of our motivating psychological states. This *desire-based normativity* (DBN) thesis faces serious difficulties, however, that seem insuperable to most sophisticated minds who contemplate them. I remain convinced that DBN is correct, although as yet unvindicated. This paper seeks to lay the cornerstone of what could prove a successful strategy, sketching an Argument from Voluntary Response that is based on the autonomous character of our experience of normative authority and the voluntary character of our responses to it.

In the first section, I consider the fortunes of its ancestor, the rickety standard Argument(s) from Motivation. The second section sketches an account of what it is to desire, the third explores the character of experience and response to normativity, and the fourth examines the necessary conditions for voluntary behaviour. The fifth section explores what implications the argument contained in sections 2–4 have for the plausibility of the DBN and anti-DBN models of response to normativity, and the final section provides some reflections on the question of how to bridge the gap

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between DBN and the argument's more modest conclusion, that *response* to normativity is based on desire.

1. ARGUING FROM MOTIVATION

Why even suppose that normativity depends on desire? Desires, it is objected, are merely motivating psychological states. How could it follow from the fact that somebody is motivated to make it the case that p that he has a reason or *ought* to make it the case that p ? Hume's own 'Law' of no-ought-from-is can be utilized here against the 'Humean' desire-based view of normativity. The case for DBN is standardly presented by various forms of argument from motivation.¹ (In this paper I focus on practical reasons rather than value or ought-facts.) These arguments have two main premisses: the first is some form of *motivational internalism* (MI): having, judging that one has, or judging that something is a normative reason to act has some especially close connection to being motivated to act. The second premiss, sometimes known as 'motivational Humeanism' (MH), holds that being motivated requires desire. The arguments conclude that normative reasons are based on desires.

These arguments differ considerably from one another, but it is now widely recognized that they all seem to fail somehow. First, strong forms of MI appear simply implausible. Some agents' normative judgments (particularly moral judgments), for example, seem not to provide them with any motivation whatsoever, even overridden motivation. Normative judgments seem only *sometimes* to motivate us. But plausibly weak forms of MI are insufficiently strong to support the inference to the conclusion, DBN. A weaker motivational connection might be explained by a contingent combination of normative judgment and independent desire (e.g. to act on one's best reasons), in which case the reason itself need not be based on a desire in order to have the requisite connection with motivation.

Opponents of DBN however mostly accept some form of MI, and are more interested in pointing out the flaws in MH. Motivation of action is a causal process,² and it is a contingent and a posteriori matter as to what

¹ Such arguments are presented in Hume (1778: 457) and Williams (1981), and discussed in Cohon (1988), Wallace (1990), Wedgwood (2002), Heuer (2004). This is not the only argument around, however: see for example Mark Schroeder's contribution to this volume.

² Some philosophers disagree, but I shall not explore this controversy here, and instead direct the reader to the discussion in Mele (2003: ch. 2).

causes what. Then what are the grounds for the claim that beliefs are never sufficient and desires always necessary for motivation of action? We do not have satisfactory empirical evidence to justify the claim, and indeed the premiss is generally regarded by supporters of DBN as an a priori truth in no need of empirical support. But surely, it is objected, a claim about causal conditions cannot rightly be thought a priori.³ MH is therefore accused of being a mere dogma.

The only solution, it seems, is to define 'desire' such that MH has to be true. *Motivational* and *dispositional* analyses of the concept of desire do precisely this. According to motivational accounts, to 'desire' that p just is to be motivated towards making it the case that p .⁴ Some version of MH does then acquire the status of an a priori principle, but at the cost of triviality, and the Argument from Motivation is rendered obviously invalid. Indeed this is the aim of many proponents of motivational accounts, which support a version of MH that requires desire only as a *logical consequence* of motivation and therefore not as a possible cause or metaphysical condition of it. One is motivated to action if and only if one has some desire, but not *because* one has that desire; rather it is one's being motivated to action that makes it the case that one has the desire. This version of MH undermines rather than supports DBN; the claim that normativity is *based* on desire clearly invokes some kind of metaphysical dependence of normativity on desire.

According to dispositional accounts, to 'desire' that p is just to be disposed under certain circumstances to act in certain ways: in particular to try to make it the case that p .⁵ While dispositions can be causes rather than mere 'logical shadows', these accounts also succeed only at the cost of triviality: they rule out no coherent account of the causation of action.⁶ Like motivational accounts, therefore, they open the way for cognitivist accounts of motivation: certain (normative) beliefs or their contents themselves directly motivate action, thereby entailing the existence of any requisite desires. This cognitivist strategy is classically illustrated by Stephen Darwall's story about Roberta, who learns of the suffering of textile workers in the southern United States and is motivated to act by her recognition that their

³ It might be suggested that although not a priori, MH is confirmed by the empirical observation that even paradigms of normative beliefs (e.g. that ϕ -ing is what I ought to do all things considered) sometimes fail to motivate. We could therefore infer that something besides normative belief is needed. But (a) it is unclear why this must be a desire, and (b) such cases may be due to the presence of an inhibitor rather than the absence of an enabler; see Cohon (1988); Dancy (2000).

⁴ Nagel (1970: 29); Darwall (1983); Schueler (1995); Dancy (2000).

⁵ Smith (1994); Stalnaker (1984); Heuer (2004).

⁶ Darwall (1983: 42); Platts (1979: 256); Heuer (2004: 57); see also Ross (2002: 205).

plight is a reason for her to assist in the efforts to force labour reform, without having any preceding desire that explains her motivation (1983: 39–41). Arguments from Motivation for any interesting form of DBN need MH to claim something less anemic.

Can the Argument from Motivation be made to work? I remain convinced of the truth of DBN not because normative beliefs are causes of behaviour, but because of the character of our experience of and response to normativity. We experience normativity as autonomous authority, and we respond to it with voluntary activity. I shall now attempt to sketch such an Argument from Voluntary Response, which can be seen as a revision rather than a replacement for the Argument from Motivation provided that the concept of motivation is understood as I shall suggest.⁷ I believe DBN is true not because normativity or normative belief merely *causes behaviour*, but rather because we *respond voluntarily* to it (i.e. it *motivates action*). Motivation is a form of causation and action a form of behaviour, but they are special kinds of causation and behaviour. While I have no objections to the possibility of a belief causing behaviour unassisted by any desire, I shall argue that no behaviour can be voluntary (or ‘motivated’) if its causes do not include in the appropriate way some desire. I conclude that desire is necessarily a cause of any response to normativity. The argument has the following general form:

VB-RN: Necessarily, all responses to normativity are voluntary behaviours;

DB-VB: Necessarily, all voluntary behaviours are caused by desire;

Therefore,

DB-RN: Necessarily, all responses to normativity are caused by desire.

Two concessions are needed: (i) it will not yet be clear how **DB-RN** presents a difficulty for anti-DBN models of normative motivation. To this end I shall address Roberta’s case in detail in section 4. (ii) There is a significant gap between **DB-RN** and DBN, the desire-dependence of our *response* to normativity and the desire-dependence of normativity itself; this is addressed programmatically in section 6. But first in the order of business is an investigation of the concept of desire.

2. WHAT IS DESIRING?

Against dispositional accounts we must observe the difference between ‘dispositional’ and ‘occurrent’ desires (or ‘wants’). There are all sorts of

⁷ Hume (1978: 457) and those following his treatment (e.g. Cohon 1988) do not make it clear that this is their conception, writing rather of normative beliefs merely ‘moving’ or ‘influencing’ us.

things I can be said to want of which there are no traces in my current psychological activity. But actively desiring something is different, and involves some form of mental activity or process. ‘Dispositional desires’ are just a kind of disposition to desire occurrently.⁸ I shall therefore switch from the noun to the verb: what is it *to desire* something?⁹ The correct analysis of occurrent desiring, I believe, is *teleological* and *intrinsic*: to desire that *p* is for one’s mental activity to aim at the goal that *p* ‘for its own sake’.¹⁰

Unlike motivational and dispositional accounts, this account does not falsely claim that whatever we aim at we desire, since all genuine desiring is intrinsic: I am only (genuinely) desiring that *p* if I am aiming at its being the case that *p* ‘for its own sake,’ i.e. not in virtue of my aiming at any further end.¹¹ I mean here to deny the existence of ‘motivated’ or ‘derivative’ desiring altogether; i.e. to claim that all desiring is ‘basic’ or ‘brute’. It is commonly thought that desire can be ‘motivated’ in two different ways: (a) by other desires—hence ‘derivative’ desires—and (b) by reasons (or value, norms, etc.)—hence ‘rational’ desires. In rejecting motivated desires I do not deny that desires are caused,¹² or even that they can be caused by other desires or normative beliefs, but merely that such causation is ever an instance of motivation. The case against (b) rational desires requires the entire argument of this paper, and so must here be set aside. I defend the rejection of (a) derivative desires on the grounds of (i) their incompatibility with our considered desire-ascriptions, and (ii) their redundancy.

(i) Ordinary wisdom tells us that we can perform actions that we don’t desire to perform and pursue states of affairs that we don’t desire to obtain. While this is sometimes thought to deliver a decisive blow to MH, against this account it has no force at all. It is, I submit, precisely the things that we do or pursue merely as means (e.g. visiting the dentist, rising at the crack of dawn, inserting coins in a vending machine) that we are disposed to

⁸ There is a common intuition that we don’t attribute agents’ desires on the basis of dispositions that have never been activated.

⁹ There are numerous theories of desire which I cannot discuss here, including the phenomenological theory, the judgment theory, the directed attention theory (Scanlon 1998), and the reward theory (Schroeder 2004). To borrow a joke, for every five moral psychologists there are seven theories of desire.

¹⁰ Smith (1994); Lenman (1996); Ross (2002) also offer teleological accounts. Smith presents his dispositional account as an elucidation of his teleological account, but I doubt their compatibility: aiming at something is not the same as being disposed to act in certain ways.

¹¹ See also Chan (2004).

¹² Some are concerned that this Humean view of desire is committed to the implausible denial of the possibility of acquiring new desires beyond those we have innately at birth (e.g. Cohon 1988). I see no grounds for this concern: we are psychologically disposed to develop new desires through association, transference and other contingent mechanisms.

concede, at least on close questioning, that we don't *really* desire or want.¹³ (ii) Since desires are individuated by their ends, rather than by the actions that they motivate, we can explain pursuit of means by appeal to the desire for the end without having to invoke any desire for the means.¹⁴ Derivative desires are therefore redundant:¹⁵ given desire for an end, we have reason to pursue the means, not any reason to acquire in addition a new desire.

The two most pressing objections can be met by a single response. First, it may seem implausible that desiring that *p* entails aiming at making it the case that *p*, for we have many desires that we do not act on and desire many ends that do not become objects of our pursuits.¹⁶ Second, this account may appear to share the failing of dispositional and motivational analyses with respect to its support for DBN: if desiring an end is identical with the activity of aiming at that end, then we cannot coherently maintain that desiring the end *causes* or motivates us to aim at the end: rather the desiring and the aiming both must have some other cause and explanation.

The solution to both problems is to resist an excessively simple-minded view of action or activity. Desiring is a mental and not a physical, bodily, or *overt* activity, and by 'aiming' I mean to refer to mental rather than overt behaviour or action.¹⁷ The thought activity that precedes overt pursuit of ends is also a form of 'aiming'. Suppose I desire that I drink a soda. The overt action of making it the case that I drink a soda may be constituted by leaving my office, going to the vending machine, inserting coins, etc. None of this activity is desiring. But before I can perform these actions I must direct my practical thought,¹⁸ plotting a path to the end. This involves

¹³ Our frequent ascriptions of such desires may be thought to show that this analysis fails to capture the ordinary concept. I think they can be accounted for by appeal to the difficulty of identifying the true objects of our desires and the low precision required for ordinary communication, and that they can be discounted by appeal to our disposition to withdraw them under cross-examination.

¹⁴ I defend this view against Korsgaard and Nagel in my (forthcoming). Mele (2003: 93) rejects such views on the ground that force doesn't 'flow out of' (i.e. diminish the strength of) motivation toward the end when we derive motivation towards the means. But this seems to assume that motivational force resembles the flow of water rather than the flow of electricity.

¹⁵ Don't we need derivative desires to enable pursuit of long-range goals without having to keep them constantly in mind? The evolutionary fitness of such desires suffices to explain our disposition to be *caused* to form desires for the means to our desired ends (de re); there is no need for a *motivational* link.

¹⁶ My use of 'ends' may cause confusion: it has a connotation of *intention* which I do not intend. As I mean it, an 'end' is simply a conceivable state of affairs.

¹⁷ This is perhaps a non-standard use of 'action', and it therefore ought to be flagged that this paper employs the term in this broader way.

¹⁸ These processes may be fleeting. The period of cogitation involved in an instance of desiring may be relevant to its degree of phenomenological presence. We are especially conscious of desirings that occupy considerable amounts of our time.

thinking my way around not merely physical obstacles (identifying means), but also mental ones: desiring must contend with other desires, and takes the form of seeking a path to the end around the constraints posed both by the world and by conflicting desires. This includes, minimally, looking for ways of preserving the prospects for the end while pursuing other more pressing ends.

It may be objected that since desiring can occur without intending it need not involve any aiming at ends. But to have an intention, in my view, is approximately to have found a path to one's desired end that is not blocked by any of one's other desirings; (occurently) intending that p therefore entails desiring something (p or some projected consequence), but differs from mere desiring simply in involving being *settled* on making it the case that p . To reach intention, desiring must first survive some hazards. Many desirings are stunted by recognition that there are no available means to their ends and, if not immediately abandoned, are diminished to activities of surveying the scene for emergence of a route.¹⁹ Other desirings awaken slumbering beasts that devour them: stronger desires. For example it is arguable that in becoming mature deliberators we acquire through negative reinforcement a prudential disposition to desire that we not bring suffering upon ourselves, activated upon the contemplation of action.

These mental activities are often causal antecedents of physical actions and of further desiring activity. We can therefore say that desiring causes action. Indeed (I shall argue) behaviour not preceded by such mental activities²⁰ is not 'action,' as it does not stem from any agency, and therefore desiring is a conceptually *necessary* cause of acting, just as intending to kill is a necessary cause of murder, provided that intentional killing is in its definition.²¹ However, explanation of a particular action by appeal to a

¹⁹ A problem arises from desires for states of affairs obviously out of our control: Dancy (2000: 87–8); Mele (2003: 22–7); Schroeder (2004: 16). If I desire that the Chicago Cubs win the World Series, whatever I am thereby doing surely it is not seeking to make it the case. Three responses: (i) this may be a case of misdescribing the content of desire, which may be rather that I savour such victory—the means to which are partially within my control. (ii) If the impossibility of advancing the end is to inhibit our behaviour, there must be a primitive stage of mental activity at which we encounter it. Perhaps such desires are stopped short by such recognitions. Typical fan behaviour supports this: shouting at the TV, muttering prayers, egging the team on, and rehearsing advice to coach or players. (iii) I am skeptical that theories immune to this problem can individuate desires by their content. If (per Mele) such a desire might manifest itself in seeking to learn whether the team wins, what differentiates it from the desire to learn whether the team wins?

²⁰ We must include aversion, the negative form of desire, but for simplicity's sake I will not differentiate.

²¹ Mele's example: the US Treasury is a necessary cause of a US dollar bill (2003: 53).

particular desire is non-trivial, because it is contingent *which* desire causes any action.²²

I maintain that the concept of desiring an end is the concept of engaging in practical thought or mental activity aiming at promotion of that end for its own sake. This account plays an important role in the argument that follows. I acknowledge, however, that closer scrutiny is needed. In particular, I am relying on an unanalyzed notion of *aiming at an end* (which I cannot, and would not, attempt to explain by appeal to desire). Notwithstanding the difficult philosophical problems in explaining teleology, I trust that it has sufficient intuitive clarity to legitimize my doing so. Those unpersuaded by my analysis of the concept of desire may therefore read me as arguing for a kind of *teleology*-based normativity. I argue for the further link to desire nonetheless because of its central role in this debate.

We can reach another significant result when we combine this analysis with the following reasonable claim: necessarily, all mental activity of aiming at some end performed by finite creatures is either intrinsically directed at that end, or an instance of mental activity of aiming at some further end intrinsically. This rules out the possibility of infinite (linear or circular) regresses of ends, and yields the conclusion that all end-directed mental activity must constitute desiring some end or other.

To establish the promised link to the Argument from Motivation, consider the question of what kind of causation of behaviour we mean by 'motivation'. The word itself gives us the crucial clue: to motivate behaviour (in the 'success' sense)²³ is, I suggest, to cause it by way of providing a *motive* for it—i.e. an end or goal at which the agent aims. Motivation is therefore an essentially teleological form of mental causation,²⁴ and as such necessarily involves causation by desire, given the account of desire defended above. This is so despite the fact that mental states can 'provide' motives for actions in different ways. While desires constitute or contain motives, beliefs can 'motivate' an action either by stimulating (i.e. causing us to commence) desiring that produces the action, or by instructing us that the action promotes some already desired end. This is not to say that there is more than one kind of process by which action is produced, but rather

²² It is even non-trivial to explain a particular thought process that constitutes some desire by appeal to that very desire, just as it is non-trivial to explain a murder as a knifing, shooting, or poisoning.

²³ There is also a non-success sense on which one can be motivated towards some action without attempting it. This is easily accommodated: motives can be provided for actions that nonetheless fail to eventuate.

²⁴ See also Smith (1987–8: 251). Here 'teleological causation' means merely non-deviant causation by end-directed psychological states, and should not be confused with causation effected by the future.

that beliefs can be said to motivate on the basis of two different relations to desire: as cause/stimulus, and as channel/navigator.²⁵ Motivation of behaviour is therefore teleological or non-deviant causation of behaviour by desire.

My case for this account of motivation has been hasty, I concede, but as nothing significant will ride on it in this paper, the unpersuaded may take it as stipulative. This may seem to beg the question in favour of DBN, since the easiest path onwards to that conclusion would be to claim next that normative judgments do indeed *motivate* us, and hence that they must depend on desires. But I will not argue this way; instead I shall take seriously as an idea needing refutation that there may be agential or voluntary forms of causation other than motivation. (R. Jay Wallace (1990) and Michael Smith (1987–8: 252), for example, propose that inferences between mental states may vindicate a non-DBN model of normativity.) No significant questions will therefore be begged. Indeed this account of motivation may seem to concede DBN's opponents everything they want: beliefs like Roberta's *can* motivate us by causing us to desire something. However the question is whether this kind of motivation by belief can constitute motivation or causation by normativity, and I will argue that only the other kind—in which beliefs motivate an action by revealing its relation to an occurrent desire—can constitute a response to normativity, because of the voluntariness of such responses.

3. RESPONDING TO NORMATIVITY

I have conceded to DBN's opponents that beliefs can stimulate desiring without the contribution of any occurrent desiring. This is not sufficient to establish that response to normativity is possible without contribution from occurrent desiring, however, because mere causation of desire by belief is not sufficient for a response to normativity. Two further conditions must be met: (i) the 'response' must have the right sort of causal antecedent, and (ii) which must causally operate in the right sort of way (non-deviantly).

What do I mean by a 'response to normativity'? First, for behaviour to count as a response to normativity in the sense I intend, it must be caused by *cognition* of the normativity of some consideration. Roberta's desire to aid the workers is a response to normativity only if it is caused by her awareness of their plight as being a *reason* for her to act. It is not sufficient

²⁵ Hume (1978: 459). Mele (2003: 19) distinguishes similarly between 'motivation-encompassing' and (merely) 'motivation-providing' attitudes.

that the behaviour merely be caused by a belief or perception. Suppose that I come to believe that there are no custard squares in the kitchen (you've just announced it to me), and that this thought causes me to desire to eat a custard square. We here have a desire caused by a belief, but presumably in coming to my desire I do not see the fact that there are no custard squares in the kitchen as a *reason* for me to eat or to desire to eat one, and my reaction is not a response to the content of my belief as a normative reason.²⁶ Neither is it sufficient that the behaviour is caused by a belief whose content is in fact a reason, nor even that it be caused by a belief whose content one judges to be a reason, since that judgment itself might not be causally responsible for the behaviour. (I am not claiming that responding to normativity is a condition of behaving as we ought: it usually suffices that we act merely in accordance with our reasons, as we commonly do.)

A response to normativity must be caused by something more like a perception than a judgment or belief. I may *believe* that p is a normative reason for me to ϕ simply because you told me so and I accept your authority. In doing so, I lack something important: an appreciation of the normative character of p . If I then ϕ , this cannot be a response to the normativity of p , but rather to the normativity of the general proposition that one acts on normative reasons, or something of that kind. In order to be able to respond to the normativity of a proposition, one needs to perceive or grasp that proposition as normative. To understand what it is to respond to normativity, therefore, we need to understand the experience of normativity.

We can agree with the contemporary consensus that experiencing the consideration that p as normative, or as a reason to ϕ , is to experience it as 'counting in favour' of ϕ -ing. But the vital feature here is that the experience of normativity is essentially an experience of autonomous authority. 'Autonomy' can mean a lot of different things; here I mean only that normative authority is not alien to the thinking self or self-determining agent. Experiencing something as normative for you forestalls sincere declarations of indifference or skepticism about its practical relevance, of challenging 'So what? What does that matter?'²⁷ In order to forestall practical challenges like this, the experience of normativity must be an experience of understanding that the counted-in-favour-of action matters, an experience of having the importance of this action explained or made transparent to oneself. (This is not to deny that any particular normative

²⁶ Arguably the desire is a response to a value I perceive custard squares to have. Ultimately I'll argue against non-DBN versions of this suggestion, but all I need from the example here is that beliefs can cause desires without being seen as reasons for them.

²⁷ Korsgaard (1996: 9); Joyce (2001: 81).

consideration may be overridden by considerations that seem to matter *more*.) These observations on the character of normative experience are familiar from Kantians' arguments, and seem obvious enough that I shall not argue for them further.

Since the experience of normativity is that of autonomous authority, of behaviour being required of us as self-determining agents, the proper character of response to normativity must be that of voluntary behaviour (or 'action'), as premiss VB-RN claims. When we respond to normativity we voluntarily initiate our behaviour because we recognize that our behaving thus matters. The relevant response to normativity is therefore voluntarily to initiate or choose some course of action for that reason.²⁸ This is implicit in the platitude that normativity is a *guide*: that is, it provides counsel that we are psychologically free either to heed or flout.

To qualify as a response to normativity, behaviour therefore must be voluntary, and it must be appropriately caused by the experience of normativity. However there is potential tension between these requirements;²⁹ in order for behaviour to be voluntary, it must be caused in the right way (non-deviantly). Much behaviour is not voluntary: salivating at the prospect of food, wincing at pain, etc. We must address the conditions for voluntary action; the difference between what we do by willing it, and what we do without willing it (or what merely happens to us).³⁰

4. THE CONDITIONS FOR VOLUNTARINESS

Voluntary behaviour is 'self-initiated' behaviour. So what exactly is this 'self' whose activity is suitably voluntary? The experience of normativity provides the answer: in order for authority to be autonomous it must come from the same entity or faculty that poses the 'So what?' challenge to demands—hence the thinking self or our thought processes themselves. Kantians have typically rejected DBN on this basis: the operation of the will consists in the free exercise of practical *reason*, while desiring is not a free action of thought. But if my claims about the concept of desire are correct,

²⁸ See also Audi (2002).

²⁹ This is Kant's problem of how there can be a law of freedom. Kant and other libertarians maintain that free actions must be without causes, but I shall assume without argument here that this anticausalist view of freedom is a non-starter.

³⁰ This way of drawing the contrast may be infelicitous. We are usually content to describe many of our non-voluntary behaviours as things that we 'do'. (See Hieronymi 2006; Hieronymi unpublished) for an argument that we have non-voluntary control over our beliefs and intentions.) We don't generally find our behaviour alien unless it is *involuntary*, or *contrary* to our will, but this is not what is at issue here.

this objection to DBN is mistaken. Desiring is an activity constituted by thought and so not thereby disqualified. ‘Passion’ without ‘reason’ is not merely blind—it is oxymoronic.

Causation by mental processes or events is a necessary condition for voluntary behaviour, but it is not a sufficient condition—the nature of the causal link from thought to behaviour is also crucial. It is not enough for voluntariness that some behaviour is caused by the experience of normativity. Suppose that whenever you saw that you had a reason to scratch, this directly or without identifiable intermediary volitions caused you to blink. This reaction would not be voluntary or self-activated any more than is the reflex to kick when your knee is tapped. We should not suppose matters to be any different if the causal effect was rather to make you scratch.³¹ To be voluntary, your behaviour must constitute an activity you effect as an agent, and we need to identify the other conditions necessary for this. Indeed the point even extends to our thought behaviour. Not all of it is thinking that we actively do; some of it consists in thoughts that just ‘strike’ us.

Premiss **DB-VB** claims that all voluntary behaviour is caused non-deviantly by desire (i.e. it is motivated). Given my account of desire, this is just to say that all voluntary behaviour is teleologically caused, the intentional result of mentally aiming at some end. But why should anyone accept this premiss? I submit that intuitively this just is the essential difference between the behaviour, both physical and mental, that comes upon us (or that we do without volition), and that which we actively and voluntarily perform. If some behaviour *B* is not an intentional result of my aiming at it (or of my *trying* to produce it)³²—directing my motions and thoughts in the ways I think will or may lead to *B*—then I cannot recognize it as something that I do voluntarily.

Some philosophers are skeptical that intellectual activity and epistemic responses to normativity, at least, require desire, and point to inferential processes as instances of agential responses to normativity that do not depend on desire.³³ Presented with a valid deductive argument, for example, with premisses that I accept, I am presented with a (subjective) reason to believe the conclusion. If I am rational I will respond to this reason by forming this belief (or by reconsidering my acceptance of the premisses). But no *desire*

³¹ Nagel (1970: 34); Davidson (1980b: 78–9).

³² McCann (1974) argues in a similar vein that the essential mental component of action is *trying*. Trying to ϕ entails aiming to ϕ . I disagree, however, with McCann’s claim that trying is a *spontaneous* mental action.

³³ Wallace (1990) and Smith (1987–8) advance this possibility as the chink in the Humean’s armor. I thank Michael Smith for pushing these concerns against me in discussion.

is required to explain my recognition of a reason to believe the conclusion or my forming that belief. Therefore we might justifiably suspect that there could similarly be *practical* inferences, with actions as conclusions, that do not depend on desires.

In response, it is first important to distinguish evidence or ‘reasons for belief’ from reasons to *form* beliefs. A justified belief always constitutes evidence for its logical consequences but does not always provide a reason (i.e. normative pressure) to form such beliefs, simply because many of the logical consequences of our beliefs are utterly trivial.³⁴ If (A) Los Angeles is in California, then (B) either Los Angeles is in California or the moon is made of blue cheese. But my believing proposition *A* gives me no reason by itself to *form* the belief that B. So the existence of normative reasons to form certain beliefs is conditional on more than simply logical or evidentiary relations. My perceiving myself to have such a reason, and my being motivated to form the belief, I argue, depends upon my intellection being motivated by some desire such as the desire to know about subject *X*, or (more accurately) to settle whether something is the case.³⁵

It will be objected that my drawing the inference does not depend on any such desire. I (qualifiedly) concede this. But (i) we typically ‘draw’ inferences automatically. We are disposed to form beliefs non-voluntarily on the basis of evidence. There is no need to think that this belief formation is a response to normativity in the relevant sense. We might note, further, that epistemically we are unresponsive to at least some kinds of normativity: the perception that we have good practical reasons to form some beliefs is notoriously impotent in producing them. Furthermore, (ii) there is a difference between voluntarily *drawing* an inference, and an inference just striking you.³⁶ Only the former case is a voluntary action of thought and a response to normativity. I maintain that the difference between voluntarily and non-voluntarily forming an inferentially derived belief is precisely that in the former but not in the latter case one is *aiming* at drawing the correct inference—hence that one draws the inference as a result of desiring some (typically epistemic) end. If this is correct, then inference does not constitute a form of voluntary action or response to normativity that rivals motivation or causation by desire.

³⁴ I owe this point to Aaron James.

³⁵ As Pamela Hieronymi points out to me, we typically form beliefs without attending to our own mental states.

³⁶ Again, I have to acknowledge that some inferences (especially those that come with expertise) are non-passive, despite being non-voluntary. I also maintain that they are not responses to normativity in the privileged sense.

5. SQUARING OFF OVER ROBERTA

The significance of the argument so far for anti-DBN, cognitivist theories of motivation will not be immediately obvious, and therefore it is time to square off over Roberta. We can grant (i) that there is nothing that she (henceforth R) desires prior to or concurrent with forming her belief about the plight of the textile workers that is relevant to explaining her motivation (her pre-existing dispositions being causally irrelevant or trivial), (ii) that she perceives the fact that p (the workers are exploited) to be a reason for her to A (assist in the reform efforts), and (iii) that she is motivated to A by that perception of a reason. There remain at least two rival models of the causal process. On the anti-DBN model, R's perception of the consideration that p as a reason for her to A causes all her relevant desires and motivations. On the DBN model, R's belief that p causes a desire (an episode of desiring), under the influence or from the perspective of which R experiences the consideration that p as a reason to A , and by which she is then motivated accordingly.

The anti-DBN model fails because it portrays the response to normativity as passive and non-voluntary.³⁷ This will not be obvious. If R responds to her perception that the consideration that p is a reason by attempting to A , her attempting to A is teleologically caused by her desiring (let us suppose) to A , which I have conceded to be sufficient for volition and agency. However my concern lies elsewhere in the causal story. R's *immediate* response to her perception of a reason, on this model, is not to A but to form a desire (commence end-directed practical thought). The desire indeed produces voluntary action, but this action is only a voluntary *response to the reason* if its volitional and agential causation reaches back beyond the desire to the perception of the reason. That is to say, R voluntarily *As for the reason* that p only if R's motivation to A arises voluntarily from that perception of normativity. The formation of R's desire, therefore, must be a voluntarily chosen activity: R must voluntarily set herself to aim at A -ing.

This spells trouble for the anti-DBN model. It follows from my argument that the formation of desire (adoption of a new end) can only be voluntary if it is motivated by some further desire. In order to maintain an agential or volitional link to the perception of the reason, it would have to be the case that R was desiring something concurrently with her recognition of the consideration that p as a reason that motivated her to form her desire

³⁷ I also think that it has no plausible account to give of the perception that something is a reason, although this calls for a different argument.

that motivates her to act (overtly). But this is to concede to DB-RN, my conclusion. In order for a new end to be generated voluntarily from the perception of a reason, it must be motivated by a desire that is not itself generated from that perception.

I adduce two further problems that arise here for the anti-DBN model. First, it is independently implausible that we voluntarily initiate our desires (i.e. we are unable to 'desire at will'), as has been widely observed,³⁸ and hence it is implausible that R voluntarily comes to desire to *A*. This result is accommodated by my argument: voluntary actions all proceed from desiring some end, but the causal processes by which desires themselves are initiated are merely causal and not teleological. Even when desires are stimulated by thought, the process of their generation from those thoughts occurs below the level of even unconscious thought.

The other problem emerges from consideration of which desires play a role in the process. There are two versions of the anti-DBN model, corresponding to the two desires we might reasonably expect Roberta to acquire. R's perception of her reason to *A* might cause her (a) to desire to *A* (an action desire), or (b) to desire that not-*p* (that it's not the case that the workers are exploited; a state desire).³⁹ Note that given my account of desire, to say that the effect is simply motivation to *A* for its own sake is just option (a) again. Which of these desires does she possess, and which constitutes her immediate response to normativity? Suppose first that her response to normativity is constituted by her coming (a) to desire to *A*. It seems implausible (i) that she would come to desire to *A* (assist the reform efforts) without also coming to desire that not-*p* (the workers not be exploited), and (ii) that her desiring to assist the reform efforts would not then be derived somehow from her desiring that the workers not be exploited.⁴⁰ Suppose instead, therefore, that her direct response to normativity is to come to desire that not-*p*, which motivates her to *A*. The

³⁸ Hutcheson (1969: 139); Stampe (1987: 370); Millgram (1997: 11). Might the intrinsic-teleological account of desire favoured here provide an explanation of this inability? We might reason that if desiring an end is aiming at it for no further end, and if initiating some behaviour voluntarily is to initiate it by aiming at some end, then to initiate desiring at will would be to initiate aiming at an end for no further end for some end, which we might think to be self-contradictory and hence impossible. In this form, however, the argument doesn't work: what is done for some further end is the action of *initiating* behaviour (of aiming at an end for no further end), not the action of aiming at an end for no further end.

³⁹ I am assuming that Roberta's motivation is altruistic rather than dutiful: an alternative scenario has her belief stimulating rather the desire that she not shirk her moral duty. A similar objection would still apply.

⁴⁰ Here I'm granting the possibility of derived desires, for the sake of argument. My preferred interpretation of the scenario is rather that R's desiring that not-*p* itself motivates her to *A*, obviating any need for a desire to *A*.

problem here is that this does not seem to be the appropriate response to the reason she perceives herself to have. Intuitively and as the case has so far been described, R perceives p to be a reason in the first instance to A ; she sees the fact of the textile workers' exploitation as a reason for her to assist in reform efforts, and not as a reason to form a desire that the textile workers are not exploited. Forming the desire that not- p would thus appear an inappropriate response to her perception of her reason. Neither horn of the dilemma facing the anti-DBN model looks comfortable, because the model fails to find a satisfactory fit between the reason and the desires it allegedly causes.⁴¹

The DBN model fares much better under close scrutiny. According to this, R's belief that p causes her (being a sympathetic soul) to desire that not- p ; awareness of exploitation—but not any perception of a reason—prompts a desire that it be eliminated. From this motivated point of view she now experiences the fact that p as normative for her; it requires action of her in virtue of her desired end. She thus recognizes the exploitation of the workers to matter from her own point of view, and her immediate response is voluntarily to choose⁴² the course of action (A -ing) that she judges the reason to count in favour of, motivated by her desire that not- p . A *reason* (with normative authority for R) for R to A , on this model, is roughly a fact that indicates that A -ing might promote some end that R cares about, and its counting in favour of A is just its so indicating.⁴³ As opposed to the rival model, (i) the response to normativity is voluntary, (ii) the relevant desires and motivations are all in place playing appropriate roles in the story, and (iii) the reason counts in favour of what intuitively is the relevant behaviour.

The basic reason the anti-DBN model fails is this: we engage voluntarily and actively in the exercise of our desires but not in their formation, because the activity of our desires though not their formation occurs through teleological thought. The anti-DBN model fails because it identifies response to normativity with the non-voluntary and passive formation of desires, whereas the DBN model succeeds because it identifies response to normativity with the voluntary and active exercise of desires. Ironically, it is the respect in which desiring is non-voluntary that shows us that the voluntary character of response to normativity entails that it is desire-based.

⁴¹ A further option for the anti-DBN model is that the recognition of a reason stimulates something like a desire to act for reasons. This seems unattractively indirect, however.

⁴² I assume here that choice is fully compatible with being non-deviantly caused by desiring. Choice, as I see it, is constituted by the interplay of our desires, rather than an act of external arbitration upon them.

⁴³ Finlay (2006).

6. EXTENDING THE ARGUMENT

The Argument from Voluntary Response provides only qualified support for DBN. Its conclusion, **DB-RN**, maintains only that *response* to normativity is desire-based. This is compatible with the possibility that normativity itself is not desire-based. This would be true, for example, on the popular view of desires as cognitive states that essentially involve representation of their objects as having some ‘desirability characteristic’ or normative quality;⁴⁴ on this view desires rather are normativity-based. However, this reversed dependency is not compatible with the *argument* I have given for **DB-RN**, on which to desire is by definition to engage in intrinsic teleological activity. Regardless of whether my hypothesis about the concept of desire is correct, the point of the argument is that the motivation constitutive of a response to normativity cannot be caused by a normative belief or perception alone, but must derive from antecedent motivation that does not depend upon that belief or perception.

However, there may also be normative beliefs by which we are not motivated, and which therefore need owe nothing to our desires. I concede that we can and do recognize practical reasons that lack even the power to motivate us and that are not connected to our desires. But I maintain and have argued elsewhere (2006) that these are reasons that we do not experience as normative (i.e. as having autonomous authority) for us. I concede, therefore, that there can be reasons for agents to act in certain ways (as well as value and ought-facts) that are not based on those agents’ desires, but I maintain that the normative force or authority, or *importance*, of these reasons for any agent is based on that agent’s desires. As I construe it, therefore, DBN is a doctrine concerned with importance rather than with practical reasons (or value or ‘oughts’) per se.

The opponent of DBN could concede that experiencing and responding to considerations as normative depends upon desires, but maintain that this merely has to do with the *appearance* of importance, which is oftentimes an illusory appearance. Importance can outstrip our awareness of it, after all, so arguably *it* is an objective desirability characteristic tracked by our desires. The reason why this objection fails, and why **DB-RN** does support DBN, I would argue, is that the experience of normative authority (‘finding something important’) does not even purport to represent some

⁴⁴ Anscombe (1957); Davidson (1980a); Stampe (1987); Millgram (1997); Scanlon (1998); Raz (1999); Hurley (2001); Darwall (2001).

independent facts about (*intrinsic*⁴⁵) importance; rather it involves having something matter to you. (The perception involved in the experience of normativity is the perception that something is a *reason*: experiencing that reason as important rather involves its mattering to you.) What is important for you—as opposed to what is important *to* you—outstrips both your awareness and your occurrent desires, it is true. But I would argue that this is a consequence of the fact that the concept of a person is the concept of a temporally (and even counterfactually) extended being; ‘You’ are more than your present mental activities, and it is because of this that what is important for ‘you’ outstrips what you desire and what is important *to* you at any moment. This complexity in the ontology of persons would yield objectivity in the concept of importance for persons that remains grounded in (actual, future, and counterfactual) desires.

There remains much work yet to do before I can claim that my Argument from Voluntary Response proves that DBN is true and normativity depends upon desire. The presentation of the argument itself here is unavoidably sketchy in many places, requiring in particular a much more scrupulous investigation of the nature of the voluntary than I have provided. And my closing suggestions on how the gap between DB-RN and DBN might be closed provide only a promissory note in need of redemption. But I hope to have introduced a new argument supporting DBN that deserves further development and consideration.

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⁴⁵ Finding something derivatively or instrumentally important does, however, have a cognitive element. It involves the representation that something stands in a promotive relation with something else that matters intrinsically to you.

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