

# Clearing conceptual space for cognitivist motivational internalism

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**Abstract** Cognitivist motivational internalism is the thesis that, if one believes that 'It is right to  $\phi$ ', then one will be motivated to  $\phi$ . This thesis—which captures the practical nature of morality—is in tension with a Humean constraint on belief: belief cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. When defending cognitivist motivational internalism it is tempting to either argue that the Humean constraint only applies to non-moral beliefs or that moral beliefs only motivate *ceteris paribus*. But succumbing to the first temptation places one under a burden to justify what is motivationally exceptional about moral beliefs and succumbing to the second temptation saddles one with a thesis that fails to do justice to the practicality intuition that cognitivist motivational internalism is supposed to capture. In this paper, I offer a way of defending cognitivist motivational internalism, which does not require accepting that there is anything motivationally unusual about moral beliefs. I argue that no belief satisfies the Humean constraint: all beliefs are capable of motivating without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire.

**Keywords** Cognitivist motivational internalism · Humean theory of motivation · Belief · Desire · Moral motivation

## 1 Introduction

Cognitivist motivational internalism is the thesis that, if one believes that 'It is right to  $\phi$ ', then one will be motivated to  $\phi$ . This thesis—which captures the practical nature of morality—is in tension with a Humean constraint on belief. The Humean

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theory of motivation is the thesis that belief cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire.<sup>1</sup>

Cognitivist motivational internalism is objectionable, then, because it is the thesis that moral belief can motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. In defence of this thesis it is tempting to either argue that the Humean constraint only applies to *non*-normative beliefs or that moral beliefs only motivate *ceteris paribus*. But succumbing to the first temptation places one under a burden to justify what is motivationally exceptional about moral beliefs<sup>2</sup> and succumbing to the second temptation saddles one with a thesis that fails to do justice to the practicality intuition that cognitivist motivational internalism is suppose to capture.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I argue that, since we do not have good reason to accept the Humean theory of motivation, we can avoid the temptation to defend cognitivist motivational internalism in either of these flawed ways. I first argue that Michael Smith's (1987 and 1994) argument for the Humean theory of motivation establishes neither that it is conceptually incoherent nor that it is implausible for belief to be a motivationally efficacious state. I then argue that we have good reason to think that *all* beliefs can motivate a particular action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. I conclude that, since an objection based on the nature of belief reveals nothing objectionable about cognitivist motivational internalism, there is good reason to think that a version of this thesis, which is neither defeasible nor makes a motivational exception for moral beliefs, can be successfully defended.

## 2 Problems with Smith's defence of the Humean theory of motivation

Michael Smith (1987 and 1994) is the chief exponent of the Humean theory of motivation. According to Smith, the constitutive claim of the Humean theory of motivation is P1:

R at t constitutes a motivating reason of agent A to  $\phi$  iff there is some  $\psi$  such that R at t consists of an appropriately related desire of A to  $\psi$  and a belief that were she to  $\phi$  she would  $\psi$ . (1994, p. 92)

<sup>1</sup> As Mark Van Roojen points out, the desire in question 'must be neither entailed by the presence of, nor be partially constitutive of, any belief.' (Van Roojen 1995, p. 37).

<sup>2</sup> After all, one can justifiably ask: what is it about the content of *moral* belief that makes it motivationally distinct from non-moral belief? The burden is to justify how a change in content makes for such a radical change in the state of belief. That is, to explain how a change in content converts a state, which is generally thought to be motivationally inert—and perhaps even incapable of motivation—into a state that is motivationally efficacious.

<sup>3</sup> The practicality intuition is the intuition that there is a necessary conceptual connection between a cognitive moral judgement and motivation—motivation is, that is, is *internal* or built in to the moral belief in question. The general concern with defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism is that once the *ceteris paribus* clause is inserted between moral belief and motivation it is no longer clear that motivation is *internal* to moral belief. Factors *external* to the moral belief are necessary for motivation.

Every motivating reason for action,<sup>4</sup> in short, is composed of a belief *and* a desire.

Smith appeals to the ‘direction of fit’ metaphor to support P1. Beliefs and desires are distinct because they have different directions of fit: beliefs fit the world whereas the world fits our desires. Understood non-metaphorically, the difference between the states,

...comes down to a difference between the counterfactual dependence of a belief and a desire that  $p$ , on a perception that *not*  $p$ : roughly, a belief that  $p$  is a state that tends to go [out] of existence in the presence of a perception that *not*  $p$ , whereas a desire that  $p$  is a state that tends to endure, disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that  $p$ . (Smith 1987, p. 54; Smith 1994, p. 115)

This elucidated metaphor explains why belief alone cannot constitute a motivating reason. To have a motivating reason, according to Smith, is to have a goal, and a goal is a state that the world must fit. The elucidated metaphor informs us that desire is the only state with which the world must fit. Thus a motivating reason must be constituted in part by desire. And so we have Smith’s argument for the Humean theory of motivation:

- P1. Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal.
- P2. Having a goal *is* being in a state with which the world must fit.
- C. Therefore, being in a state with which the world must fit *is* desiring. (Smith 1994, p. 116; Smith 1987, p. 55)

Even if we grant that a motivating reason is, among other things, a goal and a goal is a state the world must fit, why must we accept that the only such state is a desire? The metaphor, Smith will respond, rules out the possibility of a state with a two-way direction of fit: it rules out the possibility that belief could have desire’s direction of fit in addition to its own. Such a state would be ‘plain incoherent’ (Smith 1987, p. 56; also Smith 1994, p. 118), since it would both tend to go out of existence on the perception that *not*  $p$  and tend to endure on the perception that *not*  $p$ .

Smith is right that a state with both directions of fit with respect to the *same content* would be incoherent, but one need not be committed to this incoherent proposal. A belief that  $p$  could be a state that tends to go out of existence on the perception that *not*- $p$  and yet be a state that tends to dispose the subject to bring it about that  $q$ , where  $q$  is not the same content as  $p$ . If I believe that ‘Adultery is wrong’, I would give this belief up if I came across a decisive reason to think that it is false. I would give this belief up on the perception that *not*  $p$ . But notice, in the absence of such a reason, my belief does not dispose me to bring it about that  $p$ : it does not dispose me to bring it about that adultery is wrong. For a moral sentence  $p$

<sup>4</sup> ‘The distinctive feature of a motivating reason to  $\phi$  is that, in virtue of having such a reason, an agent is in a state that is *explanatory* of her  $\phi$ -ing, at least other things being equal—other things must be equal because an agent may have a motivating reason to  $\phi$  with that reason being overriding.’ (Smith 1994, p. 96).

of the form ‘ $q$  is right’, my belief disposes me to  $q$ , when I believe that  $p$ : it disposes me to be faithful, endorse faithful relationships, condemn adulterers, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Smith will argue that, while it may be coherent for belief to be a state with a two-way direction of fit, it is not very plausible. If one holds that belief *is* a state with a two-way direction of fit, then, first, one must hold that first-person cognitive moral judgements motivate *simpliciter* and not *ceteris paribus* and, second, one must hold that the belief-part and the desire-part of such a state cannot be pulled apart. Smith contends that the two claims are implausible. He claims, then, that since all non-defeasible versions of cognitivist motivational internalism are constituted in part by these two claims<sup>6</sup> it should be clear that this motivational thesis is ‘on shaky ground’. (Smith 1994, p. 120)

Before examining the purported problem, it is worth noticing that Smith puts the second point in terms of ‘besire’—that is, a unified state, which is composed of a belief-like state and a desire-like state. He claims, that is, that non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalists

...must claim that it is *impossible* for agents who are in a belief-like state to the effect that their  $\phi$ -ing is right not be in a desire-like state to the effect that they  $\phi$ : that the two cannot be pulled apart, not even modally. (Smith 1994, pp. 119–120)

It is not clear, however, that non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalists *must* postulate some further mental state in order to make sense of the practicality intuition. That is, while the term ‘besire’ might be new, this term does not necessarily refer to some new mysterious mental state. After all, if non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalists are right, then ‘besires’ are just plain old moral beliefs.<sup>7</sup> But, Smith will argue, these ‘besires’ or ‘plain old moral beliefs’ *are* mysterious in that these beliefs, unlike ordinary humdrum beliefs, can purportedly motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. But, since non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalists need not maintain that *only* moral beliefs are motivationally efficacious, it is not clear why this is a problem. I argue that once one embraces a *dispositional* conception of belief one sees that *all* beliefs are practical. The correct conception of belief, then, is not one in which a desire-like direction of fit is simply tacked on to some beliefs given their content; the correct conception of belief is, rather, a dispositional conception in which *all* beliefs have a desire-like direction of fit.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This understanding does more than render the idea of a concept with a two-way direction of fit coherent; it reveals that Smith is *only* able to demonstrate the conceptual incoherence of a state with a two-way direction of fit by giving a very unnatural account of the state. The competing account, which I offer in the next section, rectifies this: it gives both a natural account and one that demonstrates the conceptual coherence of a state with two-way direction of fit.

<sup>6</sup> In virtue, that is, of being committed to belief being a state with a two-way direction of fit.

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous referee for suggesting that I add this point.

<sup>8</sup> But, while all beliefs have a desire like direction of fit, it is important to note that beliefs dispose like beliefs and not like desires: a belief disposes a subject to act as if the content of her belief is the case; a belief does not dispose a subject to bring about the content of her belief.

The problem, Smith tells us, is that these two aforementioned claims are in tension with the commonsense possibility that certain psychological conditions quash an individual's moral motivation.

It is commonplace, a *fact* of ordinary moral experience, that practical irrationalities of various kinds—various sorts of ‘depressions’ as Stocker calls them—can leave someone's evaluative outlook intact while removing their motivations altogether. (Smith 1994, pp. 120–121; my emphasis)

Cognitivist motivational internalism, in virtue of being constituted in part by these two claims, cannot accommodate this ‘fact of ordinary moral experience’. After all, if first-person cognitive moral judgements motivate *simpliciter*,<sup>9</sup> then it is not possible for one to make a genuine first-person cognitive moral judgement and yet not be motivated; and it is not possible *even if* one is practically irrational or clinically depressed.

It is important to notice, in response, that Smith does not *argue* for the claim that ‘depressions’ *only* impair one's motivation as opposed to one's cognition; he simply *asserts* that it is a ‘fact of ordinary moral experience’ that such ‘depressions’ *only* impair one's motivation as opposed to one's cognition. But, notice, it is only a ‘fact of ordinary moral experience’ that depressives (or even amoralists<sup>10</sup>) assert or purport to fully believe and fully understand moral sentences of the form ‘I ought to  $\phi$ ’ without being motivated to  $\phi$ . This ‘fact of ordinary moral experience’, then, fails to settle the question: *why* do depressives (or even amoralists) fail to have the

<sup>9</sup> Now an anonymous referee has pointed out that a cognitivist motivational internalist could accept that the conceptual connection between (moral) belief and motivation is a defeasible one without accepting that (moral) beliefs can only motivate action with the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. And, if this is right, then Smith is wrong in thinking that a cognitivist motivational internalist *must* maintain that all moral judgements motivate *simpliciter*.

Let me illustrate this possibility with reference to a dispositional conception of belief. All beliefs have dispositional properties—properties like behavioural dispositions, cognitive dispositions, phenomenal dispositions and expectative dispositions. Now, while one might accept that these dispositions are constitutive of the state of belief, one might also hold that these dispositions are themselves defeasible. The absence of one or more of these dispositions might well be consistent with the continued existence of the mental state itself. A belief might continue to exist, that is, just in case enough of its constitutive dispositional properties also continue to exist.

It is not clear, however, why a cognitivist motivational internalist would seek to embrace a defeasible conceptual connection between (moral) belief and motivation because this weaker position fails to clearly capture the practicality intuition. Cognitivist motivational internalism is supposed to capture the intuition that motivation is *internal* to the moral belief in question. But, once one makes the conceptual connection between moral belief and motivation defeasible in this way, it is no longer clear that motivation *is* internal to moral belief. It is not clear, moreover, why one would be tempted to weaken the thesis in this way when Smith fails to demonstrate his contention that depression removes one's motivation while leaving one's evaluative outlook intact.

<sup>10</sup> The possibility of amorality, just like the possibility of depression, is a commonsense feature of moral experience. But, unlike depression, amorality is a problem for Smith's defeasible version of cognitivist motivational internalism because such agents are *prima facie* adept at making first-person cognitive moral judgements and yet are unmoved by such judgements even though they are *prima facie* practically rational.

appropriate motivation? Is it because such agents are cognitively impaired? Or is it because such agents are motivationally impaired? What Smith has to show is that it is a fact that these depressives are *actually* adept at making moral judgements when in a depressed mood state—that is, he has to show that their depression does not aversively effect either their ability to make genuine first-person cognitive moral judgements or their ability to understand the contents of such judgements. If Smith can demonstrate that such agents are adept at making and understanding first-person cognitive moral judgements when in a depressed mood state, then he can conclude that such agents are *only* motivationally impaired, as opposed to cognitively impaired. But, until such an argument is forthcoming, it is unclear whether such ‘depressions’ only impair one’s motivation or whether such ‘depressions’ also impair one’s cognition.

Notice that, if Smith insists on ruling out cognitivist motivational internalism on the grounds that it is incompatible with his scientifically uninformed suspicion that depressives are motivationally impaired but cognitively unimpaired when in a depressed mood state, then Smith is just guilty of begging the question against the proponent of this otherwise reasonable thesis about moral motivation.<sup>11</sup> The problem for Smith is that the scientific literature on clinical depression reveals that he will have trouble making the required argument. Many studies reveal that depressives *are* cognitively impaired<sup>12</sup>: their depressive episodes are accompanied by irrational thoughts and a tendency to perceive themselves, their surroundings and their future in an unwarrantedly negative light.

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<sup>11</sup> Smith considers a different kind of response: he contends that the non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalist will insist that only if one holds that there is a unified state with a two-way direction of fit can one give a plausible account of moral perfection. The virtuous person, after all, is morally perfect *because* she is reliably motivated to act in accordance with her first-person cognitive moral judgements. Smith claims that the cognitivist motivational internalist will argue that the best explanation of this reliable motivation involves holding that the virtuous person is in a unified state with two-way direction of fit. But, as Smith correctly points out, the Humean can explain the virtuous person’s reliable moral motivation *without* mention of a unified state with two-way direction of fit. The virtuous person is necessarily motivated because she is a virtuous person and, because she is virtuous, she has certain desires. Moral perfection can be explained, then, in plain old belief and desire terms; the postulation of a unified state with a two-way direction of fit is unnecessary.

Smith, in fact, claims that the Humean can give a ‘knockdown’ argument for the claim that the virtuous person is ‘a regular believer and desirer after all.’ (1994, p. 123) If the virtuous person were really in a unified state with a double direction of fit, then it would be impossible for the virtuous person to retain her moral knowledge and not be motivated by that knowledge, and Smith claims that this ‘surely quite incredible’ (Smith 1994, p. 123) To support this conclusion Smith cites Stocker (1979) once again:

Stocker’s observations about the effects of ‘depression’ are once again all too appropriate. It is commonplace, a fact of ordinary moral experience, that when agents suffer from weakness of will they may stare the facts that use to move them square in the face, appreciate them in all their glory, and yet still not be moved by them. (Smith 1994, p. 123)

But, once again, Smith simply *asserts* that this is the case; he does not argue for it. Moreover, he cites Stocker’s scientifically uninformed observations about depression, which actually contradict the scientific findings on clinical depression which reveal that depressives are plagued by irrational cognition that does affect the way in which they appreciate emotional and affective information.

<sup>12</sup> See, Ellis (1987); Beck (1963, 1987); Miranda and Persons (1988); Miranda et al. (1990); Roberts and Kassel (1996); McDermut et al. (1997); Soloman et al. (1998).

### 3 Dispositionalism about belief

There is another reason to think that, while it may be coherent to claim that moral beliefs are states with a two-way direction of fit, it is not very plausible. Non-moral beliefs appear to be states that fit the world and yet not states that the world must fit. Non-moral beliefs, in other words, appear to be motivationally inert. So, if one maintains that moral beliefs are motivationally efficacious because such states have a two-way direction of fit, then one faces a burden to justify the motivational exceptionality of such beliefs. I avoid this justificatory burden by arguing that all beliefs—not just moral beliefs—have a two-way direction of fit. I argue, in other words, that all beliefs—not just moral beliefs—are motivationally efficacious.

I begin with a weak version of dispositionalism:

*Weak dispositionalism:* All beliefs have dispositional properties.<sup>13</sup>

Weak dispositionalism is widely accepted<sup>14</sup> due to the fact that it is hard to make sense of an agent believing that *p* but failing to act, think, feel or expect as if it is the case that *p*, at least when all other things are equal.<sup>15</sup> Consider the following example. Margot is researching threatened species with a colleague. She believes that ‘Flatback turtles are an endangered species of marine turtle’. But, when her co-worker says, ‘Did you know that the Flatback is endangered?’ Margot shakes her head. Margot has no desire to be dishonest or submissive. And, given this, her answer is odd. As their research continues, Margot says, ‘I didn’t realize that any marine turtles were becoming extinct’. This is also odd. If Margot believes that ‘Flatback turtles are endangered’ and if Margot believes that ‘Flatback turtles are a species of marine turtle’, then we would expect her to believe that ‘At least some marine turtles are at risk of extinction’. Margot then reads an article on Flatbacks. She does not expect it to state that they are endangered—in fact, she has no expectations concerning this matter at all—and she feels no surprise when her belief is confirmed to be false by this reputable source. Given Margot’s complete lack of behavioural, cognitive, expectative and phenomenal dispositions, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that she believes that ‘Flatback turtles are an endangered species of marine turtle’. For in what sense is Margot committed to this proposition?<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Notice that the claim here is *not* that belief disposes *ceteris paribus*. The claim is that belief is disposes *simpliciter*.

<sup>14</sup> The following accept weak dispositionalism: H-H. Price (1969), Willard V-O. Quine (1960), Gilbert Ryle (1949), R. B. Braithwaite (1932–1933), Ruth Barcan Marcus (1990), L. Jonathan Cohen (1992), Eric Schwitzgebel (2001, 2002), Robert Stalnaker (1984), Frank Ramsey (1931), Daniel Dennett (1978), Charles Travis (2003), Robert Audi (1994) and Lyn Rudder-Baker (1995)

<sup>15</sup> Belief’s dispositions only manifest themselves *ceteris paribus* and so are defeasible.

<sup>16</sup> Notice that when a belief’s disposition(s) fails to manifest itself, it is not necessarily because belief fails to be dispositional; it may just be that the *ceteris paribus* clause has been violated. And just as we would not conclude that the glass is not fragile, because it failed to break when dropped on a foamy surface, so we should not conclude that belief is not dispositional when a subject does not act in accordance with her belief.

One might object that, if we could imagine a case where all Margot’s dispositions fail to manifest, then we would be forced to say that she has a belief without any dispositions. And, if so, then the first dispositional constraint on belief is false.

Consider the above example, but this time suppose that while Margot is disposed by her belief, all these dispositions fail to manifest themselves due to a violation of the *ceteris paribus* clause. It is easy to

Weak dispositionalism is, however, inclusive enough to capture dispositional accounts of belief that are compatible with the Humean theory of motivation.<sup>17</sup> Weak dispositionalism tells us that a belief that *p* disposes a believer to act (think, feel and expect) as if it is the case that *p*. But notice that the behavioural disposition—to act as if it is the case that *p*—may be predicated on desire. Functionalist dispositionalists claim that belief's behavioural dispositional properties are necessarily predicated on desire. And so, functionalist dispositionalism is not only *compatible* with the Humean theory of motivation, it implies it. The Humean holds that belief cannot motivate action unless assisted by a conceptually independent desire. And, by predicating the behavioural dispositional properties of belief on such a desire, the functionalist dispositionalist advocates this Humean thesis. After all, if belief's behavioural dispositions are predicated on a conceptually independent desire, then belief can only motivate with the assistance of such a desire. The Humean and the cognitive motivational internalist, then, do not disagree about whether belief has behavioural dispositional properties; the Humean and the cognitive motivational internalist disagree about whether belief has behavioural dispositional properties that are not predicated on a conceptually independent desire.

The following example illustrates how weak dispositionalism fails to rule out the Humean theory of motivation. Mary believes that 'There is a fire in the kitchen'. This belief disposes Mary to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen. Mary could satisfy this general disposition in many ways: she could call the fire brigade, she could smother the flames with a damp tea towel, she could jump up and down screaming 'Fire! Fire!'<sup>18</sup> But what explains Mary's *general* behavioural

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Footnote 16 continued

imagine Margot still having the belief, being disposed to act as if the belief is true, but having this disposition defeated by another state. Perhaps, for whatever reason, Margot does not want to reveal her belief by asserting it or otherwise acting in accordance with it. Desires or other beliefs can prevent a subject from acting on a disposition. The private dispositions, however, are harder to defeat. Perhaps, in the case of the cognitive dispositions, Margot can simply forget to make the inference. But, if Margot believes that 'Flatback turtles are an endangered species of marine turtle', how is it that she cannot expect that Flatback turtles are an endangered species of marine turtle? Perhaps a lack of understanding explains the lack of expectation. But, if she fails to understand her belief, can she really be said to believe it? The same problem seems to go for the phenomenal dispositions. If Margot believes, how can she not be surprised when she discovers that her belief is false? This surprise does not need to be great, but simply a phenomenal recognition of a commitment challenged. It is difficult to explain how the private dispositions—especially the expectative and phenomenal propensities—can be defeated and yet the commitment to the proposition remain in tact.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Stalnaker's account is a case in point.

Belief and desire...are correlative dispositional states of a potentially rational agent. To desire that *P* is to be disposed to act in ways that would tend to bring it about that *P* in a world in which one's beliefs, whatever they are, were true. To believe that *P* is to be disposed to act in ways that would tend to satisfy one's desires, whatever they are, in a world in which *P* (together with one's other beliefs) were true. (1984, p. 15)

Belief and desire are separate but correlative behavioural dispositions.

<sup>18</sup> Notice that, on both cognitivist motivational internalist and Humean accounts, Mary's belief only disposes her to perform a *general* action. This belief disposes Mary to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen. But the disposition to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen fails to prescribe any *particular* course of action. Additional beliefs or desires are required, then, in order to determine the particular way in which Mary is disposed to act.

disposition to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen? The cognitive motivational internalist maintains that Mary is disposed to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen because she *believes* that there is a fire in the kitchen. Mary's *general* behavioural disposition is explained by belief alone. The Humean maintains that Mary is disposed to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen because she both *believes* that there is a fire in the kitchen and *desires* to act as if it is the case that there is a fire in the kitchen. Mary's *general* behavioural disposition is explained by belief and a conceptually independent desire.

The Humean theory of motivation, however, is incompatible with any dispositional account of belief that maintains that belief has behavioural dispositional properties that are not predicated on a conceptually independent desire. I argue that all dispositional accounts of belief should be committed to the following thesis:

*The minimal thesis:* A subject S believes that p only if, if S were asked if it is the case that p, S would respond in the affirmative, all other things being equal.

The minimal thesis is incompatible with the Humean theory of motivation: not only does belief have behavioural dispositional properties, which are not predicated on a conceptually independent desire, but these propensities can motivate a particular action without the assistance of such a desire.

#### 4 The tie

Why think that the minimal thesis is true? The answer is that it is hard to make sense of an agent believing that p but failing to answer the question 'Is it the case that p?' in the affirmative if all else is equal. Consider David. He believes that 'The knives and forks are on the table' and so when Carole asks him 'Are the knives and forks on the table?' he replies 'Yes'. Now imagine that David has this belief, is asked the same question by Carole, but does not answer at all. Can we make sense of David having the belief in question? Only, I think, in a situation where things are not otherwise equal. David may want, for instance, to give Carole the 'silent treatment'. His belief disposes him to answer 'Yes' but this disposition is defeated by a competing disposition arising from his desire. But, if all things are equal, and Carole asks him 'Are the knives and forks on the table?' what could prevent David from answering this question in the affirmative?

We can think of the minimal thesis as the minimal test of one's commitment to the content of one's belief. If one believes that p, then at minimum one would assent to that belief—let us call this the 'minimal action'— if all else were equal; if one believes that p, then at minimum one would answer Carole's question—let us call this the 'minimal question'— in the affirmative, if all else were equal. And, if one fails to perform the minimal action when asked the minimal question when all else is equal, then it is hard to attribute a belief that p to the subject in question.

But, one might object, the Humean can also explain David's answering the minimal question in the affirmative when all other things are equal and David's not answering the question in the affirmative when all other things are equal.

Consider David's affirmative answer. The Humean argues that the belief in question plus a relevant desire explains David's action. The minimal theorist, on the

other hand, argues that the belief alone explains the action. Now consider David's failure to answer. The Humean argues that although David has the belief in question, David also has a desire that directs him not to answer the question in the affirmative; a desire, say, to give Carole the 'silent treatment'. The minimal theorist can agree—but, the minimal theorist will argue, David's belief still disposes him to answer the question in the affirmative; David just fails to act on this disposition because it is defeated by the desire.

The Humean may object that if a desire to deceive can prevent one from answering in the affirmative, then when David answers in the affirmative, it is because he has a desire to be honest or a relevantly similar desire. If this is right, then the minimal thesis is false: belief is not sufficient to motivate; the subject also needs a desire to answer the question honestly.

The Humean may be right that a desire to deceive can prevent David from answering in the affirmative; the Humean is not clearly right, however, in assuming that when David is motivated all the way to action it is because he has a desire to be honest. Perhaps David answers in the affirmative because he does not have a desire to deceive. It is useful to think about this in the following way: if there is a desire to do otherwise, then the disposition—to answer the question 'Is it the case that p?' in the affirmative—may be blocked and thereby fail to motivate the subject all the way to action. However, if there is no desire to do otherwise, then the disposition may be free to motivate the subject all the way to action. In the absence of a desire, blocking the motivational transmission of belief's disposition, the disposition may be free to motivate the subject all the way to action.

The minimal thesis and the Humean theory of motivation, then, appear to be tied: both are conceptually coherent and both can explain David's response or failure to provide a response to Carole's question.

The tie itself is significant. The Humean tells us that moral beliefs cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire because *no* belief could motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. This Humean constraint on belief is influential: many cognitivist motivational internalists are tempted to accept this constraint and, in doing so, either defend a defeasible version of this thesis or make a motivational exception for moral beliefs. I have established *both* that there is nothing conceptually incoherent about belief motivating action without the assistance of desire *and* that a motivationally efficacious conception of belief is as plausible as a motivationally inert conception of belief. Moreover, the conceptual tie between the minimal thesis and the Humean theory of motivation is made without mention of a *moral* belief, which is the kind of belief that we may already think is motivationally special in virtue of its content. And, since the tie is established without reference to a moral belief, I escape the burden to justify the motivational exceptionality of such beliefs.

## 5 Conceptual and empirical tiebreakers?

There is both a conceptual and an empirical reason to favour the minimal thesis over the Humean theory of motivation. And so, while the conceptual tie is significant,

there is good reason to think that the tie can be broken in favour of the minimal thesis. But, before I outline these reasons, I first argue against a *prima facie* reason to think that the tie can be broken in favour of the Humean theory of motivation.

### 5.1 A conceptual reason to favour the Humean theory of motivation?

There is an interpretation of David's answering Carole's question in the affirmative that seems to break the tie in the Humean's favour. Suppose that, after David answers Carole's question in the affirmative, we ask him: 'Did you *want* to tell Carole the truth?' It seems perfectly natural for him to *either* answer this further question in the affirmative *or* say something like, 'I just answered the question. I had no *special* desire to tell the truth'. The latter sounds more natural to my ear. But it is possible that David could answer this further question in the affirmative. And, if so, this seems to be bad news for the minimal theorist and good news for the Humean. After all, both would admit that David *may* respond to this question in the affirmative, but by admitting this the minimal theorist also admits that a desire may be present at the time of motivation.

Notice, however, that this interpretation only breaks the tie in the Humean's favour if one falsely assumes the presence of a desire at the time of motivation demonstrates that *that* desire played an independent causal role in motivating the action in question. But, as Thomas Nagel tells us, in his discussion of 'motivated desires'

...when we examine the logical reason why desire must always be present, we see that it may often be motivated by precisely what motivates the action. (Nagel 1970, p. 31)

The mere presence of a desire at the time of motivation is not sufficient to demonstrate that *that* desire played a motivating role in action. David may be motivated by his belief alone but, in virtue of being motivated, we crediting him and—in this case he credits himself—with a desire to answer the question in the affirmative or a desire to answer the question honestly. The desire in question may be no more than a consequence of the fact that the belief in question moved him. Nagel is, again, clear on this point:

That I have the appropriate desire simply *follows* from the fact that these considerations motivate me... But nothing follows about the role of the desire as a condition contributing to the motivational efficacy of those considerations. It is a necessary condition of their efficacy to be sure, but only a logically necessary condition. It is not necessary either as a contributing influence, or as a causal condition. (Nagel 1970, pp. 29–30)

Nagel's discussion of motivated desires reveals, then, that the aforementioned tiebreaker is not decisive: it trades on the illegitimate assumption that the mere presence of a desire to answer in the affirmative or to answer honestly demonstrates that his affirmative answer is caused, at least in part, by the desire in question. Nagel's discussion reveals that we consequentially ascribe this desire to David in virtue of being motivated by the belief in question.

This brief discussion of motivated desires reveals exactly what the Humean has to establish in order to break the tie in her favour. The Humean needs to show that David's affirmative answer is motivated by a conceptually independent desire that is neither entailed by the presence of, nor partially constitutive of, any belief.

## 5.2 A conceptual reason to favour the minimal thesis?

There is a conceptual reason in favour of the minimal thesis. The minimal thesis and the Humean theory of motivation appear to be tied because both *seem* to explain David's affirmative answer to the minimal question and David's failure to answer the minimal question equally well. But consider David's failure to answer the minimal question once again.

The Humean and the minimal theorist might agree on a number of plausible explanations: perhaps David does not hear the question or is distracted in some way; perhaps David has a desire not to respond to the question<sup>19</sup>; perhaps David does not believe that 'The knives and forks are on the table'.

I argue, above, that the Humean would explain David's failure to answer the minimal question by citing a desire *not* to answer the question in the affirmative. Notice, however, that the Humean already has an explanation that does not cite a desire *not* to answer the question in the affirmative: David has the belief in question but no relevant desire, no desire, say, to answer Carole honestly or dishonestly. And, without a relevant desire, David would be unmoved to answer the question. For the Humean, the absence of desire suffices to explain David's behaviour. This is an odd explanation. The nature of David's inaction seems to require that a plausible explanation provide a *positive* motive rather than the *absence* of a motive. Imagine asking: 'Why didn't David respond to Carole? He clearly believed that the knives and forks were on the table and he clearly heard Carole ask him the question'. It does not seem appropriate to reply, as the Humean would, 'Well, because David only had the belief but no relevant desire and so he could not respond to the question'. This kind of answer is likely to prompt the following response: 'You mean David *did* have a desire. David had a desire *not* to respond to Carole'. Now, while the Humean can explain David's inaction by citing a positive motive such as a desire not to respond, this is not their default explanation of David's inaction. And it is the default explanation that seems implausible.

Perhaps this is the independent reason to favour the minimal thesis over the Humean theory of motivation. This may not, however, decisively break the tie in favour of the minimal thesis because the Humean could argue that David has a standing desire—a desire, say, to be a cooperative conversational partner—that would kick in and motivate him to respond to Carole's question.

What reason do we have to think that David has such a standing desire? The Humean might argue that it is rare, if ever, the case that a subject will fail to respond to a question that she is aware of being asked in a situation in which all else is equal. Given this, the Humean might argue, we are licensed to make an assumption about human nature: we have grounds to assume that human beings have a background

<sup>19</sup> The minimal theorist can accept that a desire can defeat belief's behavioural disposition.

desire to be cooperative conversational partners. When communicating with others, that is, human beings essentially have a background desire to communicate honestly or sincerely. This assumption gives us reason, then, to think that David would have such a standing desire. And, if David has this desire, then he would be disposed to answer the minimal question if asked and if all else were equal; he would not, that is, fail to answer the question unless he had a desire *not* to answer the question which would, of course, violate the *ceteris paribus* clause.

But notice, however, that the Humean can only legitimately make this assumption about human psychology if this assumption is clearly true of *all* human beings. But, notice, this assumption is not clearly true of all human beings; it is not, for instance, clearly true of children. It seems implausible to assume that children have a standing desire to be cooperative conversational partners. Imagine chatting with a three year old. Perhaps you ask the child ‘Is that jam on your hands?’ and the child in question responds in the affirmative. Is it plausible to assume that this three year old has a standing desire to be a cooperative conversational partner or even a standing desire to play a cooperative conversational game? Clearly not—it is psychologically implausible to suppose that a three year old could have desires with such sophisticated content. And, notice, even if the content is simpler—say, a desire to be honest—it is not clear that very young children have yet fully grasped concepts such as honesty. It is far from clear, then, that we can attribute such standing desires to all human beings.

So, while I admit that the above case of inaction is atypical, it is not impossible to imagine. And, moreover, it is not clearly plausible to assume that *all* human beings have the kind of standing desire that the Humean would need them to have in order to avoid such a case. So, given that it is not impossible to imagine such a case and given that it is not plausible to postulate a standing desire of the sort that would enable the Humean to circumvent this case, this case is still a problem for the Humean.

### 5.3 An empirical reason to favour the minimal thesis?

The literature on cognitive dissonance gives us an empirical reason to favour the minimal thesis over the Humean theory of motivation.

In 1957, Leon Festinger published his seminal manuscript, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.<sup>20</sup> On the basis of many empirical observations,<sup>21</sup> Festinger claims that:

<sup>20</sup> Cognitive dissonance theory dominated social psychology from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. Between the late 1970s to the late 1980s interest in this theory waned (for explanation, see Aronson 1992). But, since the early 1990s, there has been renewed interest in this theory and in research on the relationship between cognition and motivation more generally. For more on the history of cognitive dissonance, see Aronson (1992); Joule and Beauvies (1998); and Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007).

<sup>21</sup> The most famous of which involved observing the reactions of a UFO cult when their prophecies failed. In 1956, Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter conducted a study on a UFO cult, known as the ‘Seekers.’ Mrs. Marion Keech, the group’s leader, predicted that the United States would be destroyed by a flood and that extraterrestrials would arrive, on spaceships, to save her and her disciples. Keech, in fact, predicted specific dates for this apocalypse but each date past without incident. Festinger and colleagues famously found that, instead of abandoning their beliefs in the face of evidence

[i]f a person held two cognitions that were psychologically inconsistent, he or she would experience dissonance and would attempt to reduce dissonance as much as one would attempt to reduce hunger or thirst. (Quoted in Aronson 1992, p. 304)

According to Festinger, then, cognitive dissonance arises when a subject holds<sup>22</sup> two inconsistent cognitions. There are, more precisely, three constitutive claims of Festinger's theory. The first is that cognitive dissonance produces negative affect; the second is that this negative affect motivates dissonance reduction; and the third is that dissonance reduction eliminates negative affect. Now, while advances in social psychology have prompted revisions to this theory (see, Aronson 1992 and Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007), the first two constitutive claims are empirically robust.<sup>23</sup>

Festinger and Carlsmith conducted an experiment on forced compliance in 1959. The results of this experiment, not only serve to illustrate the constitutive claims of cognitive dissonance theory, but they also allow us to see what would, in all probability, happen to David's belief that p if he acted as if it is the case that not p when all else is equal.<sup>24</sup>

Festinger and Carlsmith asked:

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Footnote 21 continued

that disconfirmed the prophecy, Keech's belief and her disciples' belief intensified. Festinger and colleagues argued that Keech and her followers experienced cognitive dissonance and that their intensification of this belief and their continued work to convert were attempts to reduce dissonance and regain cognitive consonance.

<sup>22</sup> And, presumably is aware of holding two inconsistent attitudes.

<sup>23</sup> Burris et al. (1997) note, for instance, that with regards to the three constitutive claims

[r]esearch spanning four decades has yielded substantial support for the first two assumptions: Cognitive dissonance indeed appears to cause an arousing and negative affect state, as evidenced by research using self-report measures (e.g. Elliott and Devine 1994; Zanna and Cooper 1974), the misattribution paradigm (e.g. Losch and Cacioppo 1990; Zanna and Cooper 1974), and the psychophysiological measures (e.g. Gerard 1967, Harmon-Jones et al. 1996). Moreover, negative affect evoked by dissonance motivates dissonance reduction, as evidenced by research using the misattribution paradigm (e.g. Losch and Cacioppo 1990; Zanna and Cooper 1974), and the paradigms in which independent dissonance reduction (e.g. Rhodewalt and Comer 1979, Worchel and Arnold 1974; for reviews, see Fazio and Cooper 1983; Harmon-Jones 1996, Kiesler and Pallak 1976). Convincing evidence relevant to the third assumption—that dissonance reduction attenuates to the psychological discomfort associated with the experience of dissonance—is so wanting, however, that Elliott and Devine (1994) describe it as “uncharted territory”. (Burris et al. 1997, p. 18)

Ten years after Burris and colleagues briefly outline the support for this theory, and fifty years after the theory was first developed, Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007) also note its empirical robustness:

...subsequent research confirmed that dissonance is a motivational process (for review see Harmon-Jones 2000a, b). That is, research revealed that during the state of dissonance, individuals evidence heightened electrodermal activity (which is associated with the activation of sympathetic nervous system; Elkin and Leippe 1986, Harmon-Jones et al. 1996) and reported increase negative affect (Elliott and Devine 1994; Harmon-Jones 2000c; Russell and Jones 1980; Shaffer 1975; Zanna and Cooper 1974). However, electrodermal activity does not decrease at that this point (Harmon-Jones 1996) unless individuals are distracted from the cognitive discrepancy (Elkin and Leippe 1986). It is possible that the arousal following attitude change is the result of a motivation to follow through with the commitment. (Harmon-Jones et al. 2007, p. 9).

<sup>24</sup> Notice that *both* answering the minimal question in the affirmative when all else is equal *and* completely failing to answer the minimal question when all else is equal qualify as instances of acting as if it is the case that not p when one believes that p.

What happens to a person's private opinion if he is forced to do or say something contrary to that opinion? (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, p. 203)

Festinger and Carlsmith hypothesized that, since this subject would experience cognitive dissonance if forced to act contrary to his belief and since 'dissonance is a motivating factor in its own right' (Festinger 1957, p. 3), this subject would be motivated to regain cognitive consonance by changing his belief to accord with his behaviour thereby relieving himself of psychological inconsistency.<sup>25</sup>

Festinger and Carlsmith tested their hypothesis by constructing a four-step experiment. First, they asked their subjects to perform repetitive and tedious tasks—tasks, such as, putting spools on a tray, emptying the tray and then refilling the tray, before starting the process all over again. Second, they asked their subjects to honestly rate how enjoyable these tasks were to perform.

...the tasks were purposefully arranged to be rather boring and monotonous. And, indeed,...the average rating was  $-.45$ , somewhat on the negative side of the neutral point. (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, p. 207)

Third, after completing and rating the tasks, Festinger and Carlsmith divided their subjects up into two groups: the *one-dollar* group and the *twenty-dollar* group.<sup>26</sup> These subjects were hired—either for one dollar or twenty dollars—to tell another participant, who had not yet performed the tasks but was about to do so, that these tasks were indeed interesting and engaging.

The girl, an undergraduate hired for this role, said little until the *S* made some positive remarks about the experiment and then she said that she was surprised because a friend of hers had taken the experiment the week before and had told her that it was boring and that she ought to try to get out of it. Most *Ss* responded by saying something like "Oh, no, it's really very interesting. I'm sure you'll enjoy it". (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, p. 206)

Finally, after telling this participant the tasks were interesting and enjoyable, the subjects were again asked to rate how enjoyable these tasks were to perform. Festinger and Carlsmith predicted that *only* subjects in the one-dollar group would revise their original negative assessment of the tasks to fit with the positive

<sup>25</sup> 'One way in which the dissonance can be reduced is for the person to change his private opinion so as to bring it into correspondence with what he has said. One would consequently expect to observe such opinion change after the person has been forced or induced to say something contrary to his private opinion...The present experiment was designed to test this.' (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, p. 204)

As I note below, changing one's attitude to accord with one's behaviour is not the only way to retain cognitive consonance, but it is the most popular route taken to reduce cognitive dissonance.

<sup>26</sup> To be more precise, there were three groups in this experiment, but one was simply a control group. None of the subjects, in the control group, were asked to participate in the third part of the experiment:

1. *Control condition*. These *Ss* were treated identically in all respects to the *Ss* in the experimental conditions, except that they were never asked to, and never did, tell the waiting girl that the experimental tasks were enjoyable and lots of fun. 2. *One dollar condition*. The *Ss* were hired for one dollar to tell a waiting *S* that the tasks, which were really rather dull and boring, were interesting, enjoyable and lots of fun. 3. *Twenty dollar condition*. These *Ss* were hired for twenty dollars to do the same thing. (Festinger and Carlsmith 1959, p. 207).

assessment that they had been forced to give in the third part of the experiment.<sup>27</sup> As predicted, the one-dollar group rated the tasks more positively than they had done so previously, while the twenty-dollar group rated the tasks as negatively as they had done so previously.

Notice that Festinger's and Carlsmith's results can be interpreted in terms of whether the *ceteris paribus* clause is clearly violated or not. The twenty dollar condition clearly violates the *ceteris paribus* clause. Twenty dollars is sufficient to provide most, if not all, subjects with a way of resolving why they believe that 'The tasks are boring' but are acting as if it is the case that the tasks are *not* boring. The twenty dollar condition is a condition in which all else is *not* equal because, while these subjects may be motivated to behave as if it is the case that the tasks are boring—which would involve answering the question 'Is it the case that the tasks are boring?' in the affirmative if asked—being paid twenty dollars to behave as if the tasks are *not* boring—which would involve answering this minimal question in the negative if asked—provides sufficient motivation to *override* the original disposition to behave as if it is the case that the tasks are boring. The one-dollar condition only just violates the *ceteris paribus* clause. One dollar does not provide most, if any, subjects with a way of resolving why they believe that 'The tasks are boring' but are acting as if it is the case that the tasks are *not* boring. The one dollar condition is a condition in which all else is as close to equal as possible<sup>28</sup> because these subjects are motivated to behave as if it is the case that the tasks are boring—which involves answering the question 'Is it the case that the tasks are boring?' in the affirmative if asked—and being paid one dollar to behave as if the tasks are not boring only just provides enough motivation to override the original disposition to behave as if the tasks are boring.

Interpreting these results in terms of whether the *ceteris paribus* clause is clearly violated or not is instructive. When applied to the case of the minimal action it suggests that, if David believes that *p* but answers the minimal question in the negative when all else is as close to equal as possible or purposefully fails to answer the minimal question when all else is as close to equal as possible, then David would experience cognitive dissonance and this dissonance would motivate David to retain cognitive consonance. The most common way to reduce cognitive dissonance is to change one's attitude to fit with one's behaviour: Stone et al. (1997) found that subjects chose to relieve dissonance directly, by changing their attitudes, *even* when other methods of dissonance reduction were available.<sup>29</sup> And, as Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007) point out,

<sup>27</sup> Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007) explain why proponents of cognitive dissonance theory would expect such a result:

According to dissonance theory, lying for a payment for \$20 should not arouse much dissonance, because \$20 provides sufficient justification for the counterattitudinal behaviour...However, being paid \$1 for performing the same behaviour should arouse much dissonance, because \$1 was just enough justification for the behaviour. (Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007, p. 8).

<sup>28</sup> That is, as close to equal as the experimenters can get, while still inducing compliance.

<sup>29</sup> One might object that even if the empirical evidence suggests that changing one's attitude to accord with one's behaviour is the most common dissonance reduction strategy it is not the only strategy. One could attempt to regain consonance by: (i) adding consonant attitudes; (ii) subtracting dissonant attitudes; (iii) increasing the importance of key consonant attitudes; (iv) decreasing the importance of key dissonant

...the knowledge about recent behavior is usually most resistant to change, because if a person behaved in a certain way, it is often very difficult to undo that behavior. Thus attitude change would be consistent with the recent behavior. (Harmon-Jones et al. 2007, p. 8)

The evidence suggests, then, that David would most likely revise his belief that *p* to fit with this behaviour that not-*p*. And, if David would revise his belief in this way on acting contrary to his belief when all else is as close to equal as possible, then it is not at all clear that he does—or, indeed, could—believe that *p* and act as if it is the case that not *p* if all other things are equal. When all other things are equal, then, David will *either* answer the minimal question in the affirmative *or* revise his belief to fit with his behaviour when he fails to answer the minimal question or when he answers the minimal question in the negative.

One might notice that social psychologists have proposed revisions to Festinger's original theory and that these revisions seem to be in tension with the minimal thesis. Elliot Aronson (1968, 1999) claims that cognitive dissonance contravenes our sense of a consistent self. According to Aronson, then, the motivation to regain cognitive consonance is not motivated by inconsistent cognitions; it is motivated by the drive to regain a consistent self-image. Claude Steele (1988) claims that all humans have a motive to preserve a self-image of being moral and adaptive. According to Steele, then, the motivation to regain cognitive consonance is not motivated by inconsistent cognitions; it is motivated by the desire to regain a moral self-image. Finally, Cooper and Fazio (1984) claim that we feel personally responsible for the aversive affect and consequences that cognitive dissonance brings. According to Cooper and Fazio, then, the motivation to regain cognitive consonance is not motivated by inconsistent cognitions; it is motivated by the drive to eliminate negative affect and aversive consequences. Clearly all these revisions to Festinger's original theory favour the Humean theory of motivation over the minimal thesis. These theorists deny Festinger's claim that it is the inconsistency between cognitions that motivates dissonance reduction in favour of a motivational explanation that cites the desire to rid oneself of an unwanted self image or unwanted consequences.

However, these revisions to Festinger's original theory are not only controversial from the point of view of cognitive dissonance,<sup>30</sup> but they are also empirically

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Footnote 29 continued

attitudes. Some of these strategies, notice, might allow David to believe that *p* but act as if it is the case that not *p*. But, notice, all these strategies seem to violate the *ceteris paribus* clause. That is, one could only believe that *p* and act as if it is the case that not *p*, if one can achieve consonance by employing one of these strategies. Without one of these strategies—that is, when all other things are equal—one will experience cognitive dissonance.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, as Beauvois and Joule (1996) point out, these revisions no longer focus on psychological inconsistency. It is not clear, then, that these revisions preserve what is distinctive about cognitive dissonance:

To summarize, we can see that, from revision to revision Festinger's dissonance theory has been transformed gradually into a theory of the ego which is accorded an increasingly large role in the process of self-attribution. The very least that can be said is that the revisions proposed by Festinger's successors borrow extensively from the dominant explanatory models (self-theory, attribution theory) and are, in the final analysis, fundamentally different from Festinger's original statement. (Beauvois and Joule 1996: xxiii)

For further criticism see: Burris et al. (1997) and Elliott and Devine (1994).

inadequate. Aronson's 'self-consistency' theory has produced mixed results and it is inconsistent with the findings of Beauvois and Joule (1996, 1999).<sup>31</sup> Steele's 'self-affirmation' theory is not only empirically problematic<sup>32</sup> but Simon et al. (1995) have shown that Festinger's original theory can explain Steele's findings adequately. Cooper and Fazio's revision is, perhaps, the most problematic since social psychologists have found that cognitive dissonance, and a motivation to rid dissonance, occurs *even* in the absence of aversive consequences.<sup>33</sup> After reviewing these revisions and the empirical problems that beset them, Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007) note that,

[t]he results obtained in these and other experiments demonstrate that dissonance affect and dissonance related attitude change can occur in situations in which a cognitive inconsistency is present but the production of aversive consequences is not present. They also demonstrate that the experience of cognitive dissonance evokes an unpleasant motivational state that motivates dissonance reduction. These experiments have supported the original conception of dissonance theory over the revisions. (Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007, p. 11)

So while these revisions to Festinger's original theory might be problematic for the minimal theorist, in that they all suggest that a desire is required to motivate dissonance reduction, these revisions are themselves empirically problematic.

The literature on cognitive dissonance gives us reason to favour the minimal thesis over the Humean theory of motivation: the literature *both* reveals the empirical robustness of Festinger's original theory *and* the empirical inadequacy of the revised theories. The robustness of Festinger's original theory suggests that *even* in the absence of a relevant desire, it is not at all clear that David *could* continue to believe that p on acting as if it is the case that not p, when all else is equal. Now, while the minimal theorist can explain cognitive dissonance in accordance with Festinger's theory, the Humean has to offer an explanation along the lines of one of these empirically controversial revisions. That is, the minimal theorist can claim that acting contrary to one's belief causes cognitive dissonance because to believe that p is to be disposed to act as if it is the case that p, but the Humean has to claim that acting contrary to one's belief causes cognitive dissonance because all human beings have a desire to have consistent cognitions that is derived from a desire for a consistent self-image or a desire to avoid aversive consequences.

## 6 Objections and replies

The argument thus far establishes that it is conceptually coherent and plausible for belief to be a motivationally efficacious state. And, moreover, I have shown that a motivationally efficacious conception of belief is as, if not more, plausible than the

<sup>31</sup> For more details, see Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007).

<sup>32</sup> For more details, see Aronson et al. (1999) and Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007).

<sup>33</sup> For more details, see Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007).

Humean's motivationally inert conception of belief. After all, the motivationally inert conception of belief offers us an odd account of David's inaction when asked the minimal question, and is incompatible with Leon Festinger's empirically robust findings concerning cognitive dissonance. Before concluding, then, I deal with four objections to the account offered in this paper.

### 6.1 Is the disagreement merely terminological?

One might argue that, if belief is a motivationally efficacious state, then the disagreement between the Humean and the minimal theorist is merely terminological. The substantive difference between belief and desire vanishes once one notices that the states share a direction of fit: both are states with which the world must fit.

This objection comes a little clearer into focus when one considers a concession Michael Smith makes in *The Moral Problem*. Smith claims that, if 'desire' is not broad enough to capture all states with which the world must fit, then the Humean can simply define a state with which the world must fit as a 'pro-attitude' (Smith 1994, p. 117). Now, if all states with which the world must fit are pro-attitudes, then *both* the minimal theorist's conception of 'belief' *and* the Humean's conception of 'desire' are simply pro-attitudes. And, if this is right, then the minimal thesis poses no problem at all for the Humean theory of motivation. A belief is simply a 'pro-attitude'.

This objection misses a vital aspect of a motivationally efficacious conception of belief, which once taken into consideration, reveals the substantive difference between the states. Belief is not *just* a state with which the world must fit; belief is also a state that fits the world. The minimal thesis, in other words, tells us that belief is a unified state with a two-way direction of fit. And, since this is the very state the Humean must rule out, the disagreement between the minimal theorist and the Humean is far from merely terminological.

Moreover, if all beliefs were pro-attitudes, then the Humean theory of motivation would be completely vacuous. While the Humean tells us that belief can only motivate action with the assistance of a desire or a pro-attitude, if the Humean were to accept that all beliefs are pro-attitudes, then it would follow that all beliefs would motivate action on the Humean theory of motivation.

### 6.2 What is the difference between belief and desire?

One might ask: how does—or, indeed, can—the minimal theorist distinguish between belief and desire? One of the virtues of Smith's argument for the Humean theory of motivation, one might add, is that the elucidated direction of fit metaphor allows us to cleanly distinguish between belief and desire.

The cognitive motivational internalist can account for the substantive difference between belief and desire in terms of the state's respective behavioural dispositions. Belief disposes a subject to *act as if it is the case that p*. So, if a subject believes that 'The knives and forks are on the table', the subject will be disposed to act, think, expect and feel as if it is the case that there are knives and forks be on the table. Desire, on the other hand, disposes the subject to *bring it about that p*. So, if a subject desires that 'The knives and forks be on the table' the subject would be

disposed to act in ways so as to bring it about that knives and forks be on the table. The behavioural dispositions of belief and desire are distinct enough to reveal the difference between the states. Moreover, belief has dispositional properties other than behavioural ones, which also serve to distinguish the state from desire.

One might refine this original criticism and object that the minimal thesis does not exclude the possibility that a belief that *p* is just a desire that *q*.<sup>34</sup> A belief like ‘giving to charity is good’, for instance, may just be a desire to give to charity. How can the cognitive motivational internalist rule out this possibility? The behavioural dispositions of believing that charity is good and desiring to give to charity appear to be the same. That is, both states will dispose the subject in that state to give to charity.

The cognitivist motivational internalist can use Smith’s counterfactual distinction between belief and desire to escape this problem. Belief is a state that tends to go out of existence on the perception that not *p*, whereas desire is a state that tends to endure disposing the subject in that state to bring it about that *p*. If this is the case, then the belief that ‘giving to charity is good’ is not the same as a desire to give to charity. The belief that ‘giving to charity is good’ would cease to exist if the subject, with that belief, came across reason to think that giving to charity is bad *ceteris paribus*; a desire to give to charity, on the other hand, continues to exist *ceteris paribus*<sup>35</sup> and thereby disposes the subject to give to charity even if the subject comes across reason to think that giving to charity is bad.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.3 How is assent an intentional action on the cognitive motivational internalist’s account?

Now, one might ask, how is this minimal action of assent an intentional action on the cognitive motivational internalist’s account? Some dispositions, after all, are activated non-intentionally on the cognitive motivational internalist’s account. Consider, for instance, the cognitive disposition to form further beliefs. Suppose that Margot both believes that ‘Flatback turtles are endangered’ and that ‘Flatback turtles are a species of marine turtle’ but suppose that, this time, she *is* cognitively disposed to infer that ‘At least some marine turtles are at risk of extinction’ and, in doing so, she forms a new belief. It seems clear that Margot does not voluntarily choose to make that inference and, in doing so, form a new belief; rather it seems that making that inference and forming that new belief is just something that happens to her. Why not think, then, that belief’s behavioural dispositions are non-intentionally activated in the same way as these cognitive dispositions are? How can the cognitive motivational internalist distinguish the dispositions that are intentionally activated from the dispositions that are not? One might add that the Humean can easily distinguish dispositions that are intentionally activated from dispositions

<sup>34</sup> Or, indeed, that a desire that *q* is a belief that *p*.

<sup>35</sup> The desire would be extinguished in the psyche of the virtuous person. But, notice, that would be a violation of the *ceteris paribus* clause.

<sup>36</sup> Accepting Smith’s counterfactual distinction between belief and desire does not entail conceding ground to the Humean. After all, even if belief is extinguished on the perception that not *p* in absence of this perception the cognitivist motivational internalist holds that it is a state a two-way direction of fit, and this is problematic for the Humean.

that are not: intentional action is the product of belief and desire; non-intentional action is not the product of desire.

Notice, however, that this Humean explanation does not guarantee that the subsequent action is intentional. After all, as Alfred Mele and Paul Moser point out,

Whatever psychological causes are deemed both necessary and sufficient for a resultant action's being intentional, cases can be described where, owing to a deviant causal connection between the favoured psychological antecedents and pertinent resultant action, that action is not intentional. (Mele and Moser 1994, p. 47)

Davidson's rock climbing example nicely illustrates this point that even if action is caused by a belief and a desire the action that results is not necessarily intentional:

A climber might want to rid himself of the weight and danger of holding another man on a rope, he might know that by loosening his hold on the rope he could rid himself of the weight and danger. This belief and want might so unnerve him to loosen his hold, and yet it might be the case that he never *chose* to loosen his hold, nor did he do it intentionally. (Davidson 1980, p. 79)

In order to avoid these kinds of cases the Humean must claim that belief and desire motivate intentional action insofar as belief and desire motivate in the proper and non-deviant way. And the Humean must, of course, specify what constitutes the 'proper and non-deviant' way.

The cognitive motivational internalist can also claim, then, that belief motivates intentional action insofar as belief motivates in the proper and non-deviant way. The cognitive motivational internalist tells us that belief's behavioural dispositions only manifest themselves in action if all other things are equal. The *ceteris paribus* clause suggests, then, that answering the minimal question in the affirmative is under one's voluntary control. After all, if one had a desire not to answer in the affirmative, then this desire could defeat the disposition one would have to do so. David, in other words, could always do otherwise and not answer Carole's question in the affirmative. The cognitive motivational internalist, then, can also distinguish the dispositions that are intentionally activated from the dispositions that are not: intentional action is performed *even* though one could do otherwise; non-intentional action is performed because one could not do otherwise. And, in order to avoid the aforementioned kinds of cases, the cognitive motivational internalist can qualify this explanation in the way in which the Humean does. That is, just as the Humean claims that belief and desire motivate intentional action insofar as belief and desire motivate in the proper and non-deviant way, so the cognitive motivational internalist can claim that belief motivates intentional action insofar as belief motivates in the proper and non-deviant way. The cognitive motivational internalist, then, has no *special* problem in accounting for how the minimal action can be an intentional action.

#### 6.4 Can the behavioural dispositional properties come apart from belief?

One might now object that it is possible for belief's *non-behavioural* dispositions to be pulled apart from belief's *behavioural* dispositions. One might object, that is, that

it is possible for a subject to be disposed expectatively, phenomenally and cognitively in accordance with her belief that *p* and yet not disposed behaviourally in accordance with her belief that *p*—not be disposed, that is, to perform the minimal action of assent when asked the minimal question and when all else is equal. And, if this is possible, then belief is not a unified state with a two-way of direction fit.<sup>37</sup> After all, one could believe that *p* and yet not be disposed to act as if it is the case that *p*, even when all other things are equal.

This objection amounts to questioning the minimal thesis again. Notice, however, that this objection lacks force because we now know that it is implausible to deny the minimal thesis. The objector claims that it is possible for a subject, like David, to believe that ‘The knives and forks are on the table’ and yet not be behaviourally disposed in accordance with this belief even though he is non-behaviourally disposed in accordance with this belief. But notice that, first of all, this would mean that, if David lacked a relevant desire, then he would not be disposed to answer Carole’s question, ‘Are the knives and forks on the table’, in the affirmative, even if all other things were equal. But, as I have already argued, this is conceptually implausible. Consider this purported possibility from the first person point of view: how can you believe that ‘The knives and forks are on the table’, understand the question you have just been asked, be disposed non-behaviourally in accordance with this belief, and have no desire that would be defeated by answering this question in the affirmative, and yet not be moved *at all* to answer this question? Notice that, second of all, this would mean that, if David failed to be disposed to answer the minimal question in the affirmative when all other things were equal, then David would still believe that ‘The knives and forks are on the table’. After all, the objector claims that it is possible to believe that *p*, but not be motivated to act as if it is the case that *p* even when all other things are equal. But, as I have already argued, this is empirically implausible. The results of over fifty years of research on cognitive dissonance reveal that, in all probability, David would revise his belief that ‘The knives and forks are on the table’ on coming to act as if the knives and forks are not on the table when all other things are equal. Failing to be disposed to answer the minimal question in the affirmative when all other things are equal would amount to acting as if it is the case that the knives and forks are *not* on the table.

The point, then, is just this: given the arguments I have offered in favour of the minimal thesis, it is *now* the Humean who is under a burden to justify the conceptual and empirical plausibility of a conception of belief in which the non-behavioural

<sup>37</sup> Notice that a *defeasible* cognitivist motivational internalist might accept that, while it is possible for belief’s dispositional properties to come apart from belief, this does not by itself reveal that belief could not be a unified state with a two-way direction of fit. In footnote nine, I acknowledged that a cognitivist motivational internalist might defend a defeasible conceptual connection between belief and motivation, without thereby holding a Humean theory of motivation. A *defeasible* cognitivist motivational internalist might argue, then, that while belief has necessary dispositional properties it is not the case that all of these properties need to be present in order for the state itself to exist. And, if this is right, then a *defeasible* cognitivist motivational internalist might hold that while belief and belief’s dispositional properties can come apart this does by itself reveal that belief fails to be a unified state with a two-way direction of fit. But, as I note in footnote nine, is not clear that this weaker version of cognitivist motivational internalism captures the practicality intuition.

dispositional properties of belief can be pulled apart from the behavioural dispositional properties of belief.

## 7 Conclusion

I have cleared conceptual space for a non-defeasible version of cognitivist motivational internalism which does not make a motivational exception for moral beliefs. First, I have argued that it is conceptually coherent for belief to be a motivationally efficacious state. Second, I have argued that the Humean fails to establish that such a state is implausible. Third, I have argued that a motivationally efficacious conception of belief is as plausible as a motivationally inert conception of belief. The conceptual tie, between these conceptions of belief, is significant; especially so, in this case, because the tie is established that without mention of a *moral* belief—the kind of belief, that is, that we may already think is motivationally special in virtue of its content. And, finally, I have argued that there is more reason to favour the motivationally efficacious conception of belief over the motivationally inert conception of belief. After all, if one holds a motivationally inert conception of belief, then one is *both* forced to accept an odd explanation of inaction when a subject fails to answer the minimal question *and* one's account of belief is in tension with Leon Festinger's empirically robust findings regarding cognitive dissonance.

Moral motivation is, of course, very different from the kind of motivation found in the minimal thesis. But moral motivation is not really the issue here: what is supposed to be objectionable about cognitivist motivational internalism is its conception of a moral belief as motivationally efficacious and not the kind of motivation that such beliefs provide. But, if the minimal thesis is right, then this concern about cognitivist motivational internalism is based on a misconception of the nature of belief.

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