Self-Governance, Reasons and Self-Determination[1]

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Introduction

In this paper I argue that a central variant of the humean view of practical reason – according to which, roughly speaking, some desires are reason giving – is also, and necessarily so, a view about self determination. On this view any desire which is reason giving also gives us reasons for its own retention. Since our desires, in part, constitute our practical identity they also give us reasons to stay who we are, or more exactly, to maintain that part of our practical identity which they constitute.

My defense of this position involves a certain detour. In the first section I briefly describe the humean view with which I am concerned. In the second section I consider an argument suggested independently by Dancy[2] and Parfit[3] against the humean view. I conclude that while the argument is not successful, in order to reject it humeans must see reason-giving desires as normatively self-sustaining. In the third section of the paper I reject arguments against the resulting humean position. In the fourth section I develop the implications of this position into a humean view of self-determination.

[1] Thanks to Michael Bratman, Jonathan Dancy, Steve Laurence, Bob Stern, Sarah Durling and audiences at The Open University and the universities of York and Sheffield, for their helpful comments on, and discussions of, earlier versions of this paper.

[2] Dancy(2000:32).

[3] Parfit (2011:83-91).

The humean view

Following most contemporary humeans the view I discuss here denies that every desire is reason-giving[4]. On this view only an intrinsic, fully informed desire can be reason-giving, and only if it is endorsed by the agent on the basis of rational deliberation[5].Call such a view 'sophisticated humeanism'. The term 'endorsement' is the generic term used in the literature to refer to the process or relation that constitutes identification. Identification, in turn, is the term used in the literature to refer to the relation an agent has to desires that are internal to her and are therefore the grounds for autonomous action. When an agent endorses an intrinsic desire he thereby identifies with it; the desire thus represents or speaks for the agent and action grounded in the desire may be self-governed. Exactly what endorsement consists of is under debate. Some say that the existence of a certain relation between various mental states of the agent constitutes endorsement. Others think endorsement is a process through which an agent makes a desire his own. Frankfurt[6], Bratman[7], Lehrer[8] and Arpaly & Schroeder[9] all offer theories of endorsement that are humean in spirit. I will work here with Bratman's view, but my conclusions generalize to the other views as well.

[4]For other ways of developing a humean view see Williams (1981), Sobel (2001, 2011), Frankfurt (2004), Schroeder (2007).

[5] I provide here only necessary conditions for being a reason.

[6]Frankfurt (1988).Frankfurt (1992: 5-16).

[7]Bratman, (2003: 221-242), (1996: 1-18), (2000: 35-61).

[8]Lehrer(2004: 47-69).

[9]Schroeder &Arpaly (1999: 161–188).

On Bratman's view we endorse a desire when we form a policy of treating it as reason-giving; when this policy does not conflict with other policies about which desire to treat as reason-giving; and when we in fact treat it, or are prepared to treat it, as reason-giving. Despite the normative overtones of the locution 'treat as reason-giving' we can 'treat a desire as reason-giving' whether or not we believe that it is in fact reason-giving. So endorsement, neither presupposes the existence of any previous reasons for endorsing the desire, nor the belief in any reasons for endorsing the desire, in order to succeed.

The arguments I develop in the following sections apply to sophisticated humeanism. While the emphasis on endorsement is unique to this view it is in other respects similar to other central humean views such as those of Williams and Sobel. The central argument of this paper also applies to their views and as I will try to show below to a significantly different variant of the humean view espoused by Mark Schroeder. There are, however, many ways to develop a humean position and there may be, among these, variants that cannot and need not adopt the view about self-determination described here.

Dancy's and Parfit's Argument

If I want to play chess, this desire of mine often gives me a reason to do so. The acknowledgment of this simple truth is behind the attraction of the humean view. Intuitive as it is, the view has come under heavy attack, particularly in the past 40 years. Some of the arguments against it relied on counterexamples[10]. Humeans (and some non-humeans) have

[10]Maybe the most famous of these are Anscombe's example of a person who wants a saucer of mud for no particular reason and Quinn's example of a person who wants to turn radios on simply for the sake of turning them on. Anscombe (2000: 70); Quinn (1995: 181-208).

repeatedly rejected these arguments, in part by maintaining that they have different intuitions about the examples in question. Rawls[11], for example, has claimed not to see the force of these sorts of arguments, when he insisted that there is nothing irrational in a plan of life whose central component is the desire to count blades of grass[12]. Other arguments against the humean view attempt to show that there are alternative ways of explaining the intuition that desires give us reasons[13]. These may weigh against the humean view but they cannot prove that it is incorrect.

There have, however, been attempts to give principled and therefore decisive arguments against the humean view. Dancy, in his *Practical Reality*, offers such an argument. Parfit in *On What Matters* offers a more condensed version of the same argument. In this section I present and criticize their arguments. I start with Dancy's version.

Dancy's argument against the humean view is developed over several pages and has a complex structure. The argument I present below cuts directly to the heart of his position and follows Dancy's own summary:

> Desires are held for reasons, which they can transmit but to which they cannot add. Therefore a desire for which there is no reason cannot create a reason to do what would subserve it[14].

[11] Rawls (1971:432).

[12] Similarly Lenman(2005) is not moved by the intuition of Anscombe that the desire for a saucer of mud could not in principle be part of a coherent set of desires that determine what we have reason to do.

[13]For a survey of some of the standard attempts to explain humean intuitions see Parfit (2011, pp. 65-9).

[14]Dancy, 2000, p.39.

To understand the argument we must distinguish between reasons for retaining a desire and reasons for bringing about the object of the desire (acting on a desire). With that distinction at hand we can display its logical structure.

A. A desire cannot give us full or partial reasons for its own retention.
B. A desire that does not provide reasons for its own retention could not provide reasons to bring about the object of the desire.
C. Therefore no desire gives us reasons to bring about the object of the desire.

The argument's first assumption expresses Dancy's view about the reasons there are for retaining a desire. Consider the possible relations between a desire and the reasons for its retention.

1. The reasons for retaining the desire could be independent of the desire[15].
2. The reasons for retaining the desire could be dependent on the desire.
3. The reasons for retaining the desire could be partly independent of the desire and partly dependent on the desire.
4. There may be no reasons for retaining the desire.

[15]Dancy's way of expressing this relation is not always clear. He says for example "Some desires are based on reasons; such desires stand on, rather than beneath, those reasons." I take it that a desire 'stands on a reason' when the reason for its retention is independent of the desire whereas a desire 'stands beneath a reason' when the desire grounds the reason either for action or for its own retention (Dancy, 2000: 38).

Dancy thinks that there are only desires in categories 1 and 4. That is, he thinks that a desire itself cannot give one a full or partial reason for its own retention. This is his first assumption, A above.

Dancy also assumes that if a desire is fully based on an independent reason – that is, if a desire does not provide reasons for its own retention - then the desire will not give us any additional reasons[16] to bring about its object. This is Dancy's second assumption, B above. He then concludes that desires in categories 1 and 4 cannot give us reasons to bring about the object of the desire. And since there are only desires in these categories he concludes that no desire gives us reasons to bring about its object.

For his second assumption (B) Dancy presents an argument[17].

I. If a desire does not provide a reason for its own retention (and there is no independent reason for its retention) then there is no reason to keep it.

II. But if there is a reason to act on it (to bring about its object) then there is a reason to keep it.

B. A desire that does not provide reasons for its own retention could not provide reasons to bring about its object.

I think that the argument for the second assumption (B) is sound. But the main argument, I believe, is inconclusive.

[16] That is, reasons in addition to those offered by the reason for having the desire.

[17] The argument is borrowed from Brad Hooker. (Dancy, 2000: 39).

Let me first explain why the argument for (B) is sound. The first assumption of this argument (I) is a tautology – if a desire does not give a reason for its own retention and there is no reason independent of the desire to retain it – then there is no reason to retain it.

We can support the second assumption (II) with an argument by contradiction. Assume for contradiction that a desire for x gives a reason for bringing about x without giving a reason for its own retention (and assume that there were no other reasons for its retention). Further assume that there are no other reasons for or against bringing about x. Finally assume that there are no other reasons for losing the desire for x. Consider now the position of a rational agent RA who is deliberating whether to act on the (desire-based) reason for bringing about x. Since by assumption there is no reason for retaining the desire for x, it would not be irrational for RA to will himself to lose the desire for x, if that were possible. If RA lost the desire for x, RA would, again by assumption, lose the reason for bringing about x. But that means that while there is a reason to bring about x, it is not irrational to will yourself to lose this reason. However reasons are supposed to be exactly the kind of thing that (as long as you are aware of them and all else is equal[18]) it is irrational to will away.[19,20]

[18] 'All else is equal' since if RA had an overriding reason to get rid of the desire to bring about x, it would not be irrational for her to get rid of this desire (if that were in her power) and thus to get rid of its associated reasons for action.

[19] Dancy's second assumption (II) is a version of a view that Schroeder (2007: 184) calls the 'trickle-down theory'. The trickle-down theory says that a desire can explain why we have a reason (or, be a reason) only if there is a reason for having this desire. Schroeder rejects the trickle-down theory. He thinks that when a desire explains why a certain fact is a reason this explanation does not presuppose the reason for having that desire. But his rejection of the trickle-down theory is primarily based on what he takes to be the problematic consequences of this theory, and does not address the reasoning behind II. And as far as I can tell Schroeder is bound to accept this reasoning.

One may object that as the following example shows, when our desires are not determined by any prior reasons we may have a reason to act on them even when we have no reason to retain them. Imagine I wish to teach my class how to analyze an argument. In order to do that, I may form the desire to present an analysis of Mill's argument for freedom of speech. There are many other arguments I could have desired to present, and these desires as well, would fit with my prior reasons. However, once I choose this one I have a reason to act on it even though, claims the objector, I have no particular reason to prefer it over another and therefore no particular reason to retain it. This objection, I believe, confuses between pragmatic reasons and non-pragmatic reasons. There are many pragmatic reasons for acting on a desire or an intention

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On Schroeder'sview, desires explain why certain facts are reasons. Schroeder must think that desires could not fulfill this role if we lacked a reason not to abandon them, since then the fact that a certain action would promote the desire would not be a reason to promote it. Imagine that our reason to perform action y is explained by our desire to x and that we have no contrary reasons. Reasons cannot be wished away. If we lack a reason not to abandon our desire to x, there is nothing irrational in abandoning it. Once we abandon it, we have no reason to promote it. And this leads to the absurd conclusion that (if we had the psychological capacity to wish away our desires) we could wish away our reason to y. So Schroeder must accept II and the consequences entailed by II.

[20]You might think, however, that since the reason to act on the desire is conditional on the existence of the desire, a desire is only the basis of a wide scope reason: either treat it as a reason for action or abandon it. And that means that the existence of the desire does not imply that one has a reason to retain it. But on that understanding the desire also does not give one a reason to act on it. It merely gives one a reason not to both retain it and fail to treat it as a reason at the same time. And this understanding fails to give us the required antecedent of the conclusion (B: *if a desire gives you a reason for action*, it also gives you a reason for retaining itself).

As far as I can tell most contemporary subjectivists (Williams, Frankfurt, Sobel and Schroeder) accept the claim that the reasons provided by our desires are not merely wide-scope. While they all think that our reasons would be different if we did not have the desires we do have, they also think that once we have these desires, at least some of them, provide us with narrow scope reasons (or in Schroeder's case, explain why we have such reasons).

once these are formed. And it is certainly true that the existence of these pragmatic reasons does not entail a reason to stick with the desire or intention. Once I desire or intend to teach Mill's argument the cost of reconsideration may give me a reason to act on this desire or intention. But then the normative force of my reason for acting on the desire does not come from the desire itself but rather from the pragmatic considerations. Since Dancy, Parfit and myself are all interested in evaluating the claim that desires can, in themselves, be a source of reasons we can put the case of pragmatic considerations for acting on my desires aside. I do think that sometimes we have non-pragmatic reasons for acting on desires that are not determined by our prior reasons, but as I will argue, those who think that, are committed to the claim that such desires give us reasons for their own retention.

As I said, I believe that Dancy's main argument is inconclusive. Its first assumption (A), namely that desires cannot give (full or partial) reasons for their own retention, is not supported by any argument. The assumption might be intuitively appealing but as I shall show shortly there is no reason to accept it. Before I turn to that task let's look at Parfit's version of the argument.

Like Dancy Parfit thinks that desires could be reason-giving only if we had reasons to have these desires.

> "We can have desire-based reasons to have some desire, and we can have long chains of instrumental desire-based reasons and desires. But at the beginning of any of *these* chains, as we have seen, there must always be some desire or aim that we have no such reasons to have. And as my examples help us to see, we

> cannot defensibly claim that such desires or aims give us reasons.[21]"

What Parfit claims is that desires with no reasons for their own retention cannot give us reasons to bring about their object – this is the crucial second assumption (II) in the supporting argument for assumption B of Dancy's central argument.

But that, thinks Parfit, leaves the humean in a bind when he comes to explain why, for example, our desire to avoid pain is reason-giving, when there is no independent reason to avoid pain. The only way in which the humean could explain how this desire could be reason-giving is if he could argue that desires give us reasons to have these very desires. In other words, if he could argue that desires justify their own retention.

Humeans, says Parfit, must claim that: "(J) When we have some present fully informed desire or aim, this fact gives us a reason to have this desire or aim.[22],[23]" Parfit, rejects J. He claims that no desire can give reasons for its own retention. He thus shares Dancy's first assumption A.

Parfit, as opposed to Dancy, has an argument for his rejection of (J). Parfit thinks that if desires could give us reasons for their own retention then we would have to claim that a fully informed desire to *have* future pain gives us a reason to retain the desire to have future pain. And that is a problem for the humean, because according to Parfit: this claim is "clearly false[24]".

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[21]Parfit (2011:91).

[22]Parfit, (2011:86).

[23] The claim Parfitwishes to reject is stronger than the one Dancy takes to be the target of his own argument. However, later on,Parfit explains that he wishes to reject an even weaker claim, namely, that '*Some* fully informed desires give us reasons for their own retention.'

[24]Parfit (2011: 86).

Parfit treats his own intuition (that our desire for future pain gives us no reason to have this very desire) as the bedrock of his argument. He concludes that the desire to have future pain is a counterexample to the view that fully informed desires provide a justification for their own retention.

But the humean has good reasons for being suspicious of Parfit's intuition. On the sophisticated humean view, the reasons I have and the reasons you have may significantly diverge. Also on that view not all desires are reason-giving. Some desires, for some agents, are reason-giving and some are not. Whether a desire is reason giving for a particular agent or not, depends on whether it would be endorsed by the agent under deliberation and this depends to a large extent on whether the decision to treat it as reason-giving conflicts with the other decisions of the agent about what to treat as reason-giving. On the humean view, for most agents, a desire to have future pain will not be reason-giving. It will not be reason-giving because it conflicts with a prior standing policy many of us have not to treat as reason-giving fleeting desires whose satisfaction will cause us future discomfort. And since for most agents this desire will not be reason-giving it will in particular not give most of us reasons for its own retention.

The fact that the desire for future pain is, for most agents, not reason-giving, leaves open the possibility that under the humean view here advocated, for some agents, this desire will be reason-giving, and this possibility conflicts with Parfit's intuition – since, presumably, he thinks that such desire can never be reason-giving and so in particular cannot give reasons for its own retention. But if it is true that such desire will not be reason-giving for most of us, then we have a very good reason to ignore Parfit's intuition. Intuitions are by their very nature personal and produced on the basis of one's own limited experience. If the desire to have future pain does not give most people a reason for action, it is no wonder that many, and Parfit among them, have the

intuition that this desire cannot give us reasons for action; and it is also no wonder that many, and Parfit among them, have the intuition that this desire cannot give us reasons for its own retention. Such intuitions do not have much to recommend them[25].

Part of my interest in Dancy and Parfit's argument against humeanism derived from the fact that theirs is among the few principled arguments against that view. Many arguments against the humean view consist of purported counterexamples. Since humeans and anti-humeans have opposing intuitions concerning these purported counterexamples they (the counterexamples) do not do much to further the debate. It turns out that while Dancy's version of the argument terminated with an unsupported assumption, Parfit's version takes us back to the trench war of intuitions and counter-intuitions. I have tried to offer a reason to be skeptical of Parfit's intuition. Regardless of whether you are convinced by my doubts, you can now see that Parfit's argument does not give a humean with opposing intuitions a principled reason to abandon the humean position.

My assessment of Dancy and Parfit's argument leaves humeans in the following position: they must either concede that desires cannot be reason giving or accept the claim that reason-giving desires also give us reasons for their own retention. But one may claim that the second alternative is not open to the humean for reasons that are independent of Dancy and Parfit's argument. In the next section I address this claim.

[25]Sobel (2001), who discusses a related argument by Parfit, claims that our future agony gives us current (though not necessarily decisive) reasons to avoid it. I am not sure Sobel is right, but if he is, that would further explain why most of us have no reason to heed our current intrinsic desire to have future pain. The reasons derived from our future agony would explain why we often form policies to ignore current intrinsic desires for future pain in our current reasoning.

Problems for the View that Some Desires Give Us Reasons for their Own Retention

I can see three worries that might lead one to reject a humean view according to which some desires are normatively self sustaining.

First worry: the humean view, an objector might claim, entails that every desire gives us reasons for its own retention. This is implausible since some desires are such that there is no reason to retain them.

Reply: This worry is quite clearly unfounded. We have many desires that we have no reasons to retain. In particular, according to the Humean view, those desires that do not give us reasons to bring about their object also do not give us reasons for their own retention.

Second worry: at least in those cases in which we have reasons to retain our desires we would have the same reasons to acquire these desires if we did not have them. Since the number of desires that would give us reasons to retain them if we had them is huge we also have reason to acquire a huge number of desires that we do not currently have. And, the argument would continue, it seems unreasonable that we have reasons to acquire all these potential desires.

Reply: This worry seems to be the result of overlooking the distinction between reasons for retaining a desire one already has and reasons for acquiring a desire one does not yet have (the ambiguity of the expression 'reasons for having a desire' might explain why we so readily overlook this distinction)[26]. If the reasons we have for retaining a desire we already have are (partially) grounded in the fact that we have this desire then there is no basis for thinking that we would have similar reasons prior to the acquisition of the desire.

One may insist that a milder worry remains. It may be the case that we do not have reasons for acquiring all the potential desires we could have had, but if merely turning them into

[26] Neither Dancy nor Parfit mention this distinction.

actual desires gives us reasons for their retention then the flood gates are open. We may accidentally acquire a large number of desires – that are such that if we had them they would be reason-giving – and we would then have reasons for retaining all of them. We would end up with an overly large set of desires and with reasons to retain the whole set.

This last argument I believe is based on a simple confusion: from the fact that each desire in the set is such that if we had it without the others we would have reasons for retaining it, it does not follow that if we came to have all of them together we would have reasons to retain all of them. On the humean view under consideration a desire is reason-giving, and thus gives reasons for its own retention only if it is endorsed by the agent. Now it is possible that I endorse my desire to eat sweet things – despite my worries about health and weight. But it is much less plausible that I will endorse the desire to eat sweet things, if I am both worried about my health and I have already endorsed many other desires that might harm my health. Which desire I endorse depends among other things on which desires I have already endorsed.

Third worry: one may think that reasons for retaining an attitude must make a reference to the properties of the propositional object of the attitude, or in other words must be Object-based reasons. Object-based reasons for retaining an attitude must be distinguished from attitude-based reasons for retaining an attitude[27]. An object-based reason for retaining an attitude necessarily makes reference to the content of the attitude, that is, to features of its propositional object. An attitude-based reason for retaining an attitude need not make such reference. It is often said, for example, that a reason for retaining a belief must make reference to the content of the belief. A reason that does not make reference to the content of the belief – such as 'that my

[27] Piller (2006: 155-181) argues that the arguments for the claim that attitude-based reasons cannot support belief formation are not applicable in the case of desire formation. I discuss here desire retention and not desire formation but the issues in both cases are similar.

boss wants me to believe it' – cannot be a reason for retaining the belief. Similarly one may think that a reason for retaining a desire must make reference to the content of the desire. The problem with the claim that desires can give us reasons for their own retention, claims the objector, is that these reasons need not make any reference to the properties of the propositional object of the desire. If desires give reasons for their own retention then I have a reason to retain my desires simply because they are my desires, regardless of their content.

Reply: I do not know of a good argument for the claim that reasons for retaining a desire cannot be attitude-based[28]. I have argued in the past for attitude based reasons and so have others. But I think that the easiest way to reply to the current objection is to insist, following Sobel[29], that the reasons for retaining a desire that are given by the fact that we have that desire are after all object-based. If I desire x then one property of x is that it is desired by me. This is a relational property but a property nonetheless. It is in virtue of that property of x that I have a reason to retain the desire for x. So the reason for retaining the desire is object given. It is something about the object of my desire (that it is desired by me) that makes it desirable for me to retain the desire for x.

The objector might insist that this property of x (that it is desired by me) cannot be the basis of a reason for me to retain the desire for x. But thus insisting would beg the question against the humean view. The crucial debate between the humean and the anti-humean is about which features of the situation make the object of a desire desirable. The humean insists that part of what makes the object of a desire desirable is the fact that I desire it (under suitable constraints). Therefore the question of whether being desired by me can give me reasons is

[28]Parfit in an appendix argues that there are no state (attitude) given reasons. A discussion of his argument goes beyond the scope of this paper.Parfit (2011: 420-432).

[29] Sobel, 2011.

precisely the question under discussion and a negative answer cannot be assumed at the outset of the debate[30].

Once these three worries are taken care of,the road is clear for a humean to accept the view that some desires are normatively self sustaining. I therefore conclude that in order to avoid Dancy and Parfit's argument sophisticated humeans can and must see some desires as normatively self sustaining[31,32]. We shouldn't, however, see this conclusion as a bullet that humeans must bite. Rather, as I explain in the next section, we should think of a humean theory according to which some desires are normatively self-sustaining as a richer and better grounded theory of reasons for action.

Reasons, Self-Governance and Self Determination

Another way of stating the conclusion of the previous section is to say that the humean view of practical reason is also, and necessarily so, a view about self-determination. Before I can explain exactly what that means, I need to say more about the role that endorsement plays in the humean view and its relation to self-governance.

[30] As we have seen above desires must also be endorsed by the agent. Endorsement is, in part, grounded in the content of the propositional object of the desire, since endorsement requires coherence with previously endorsed desires, a coherence that refers to the content of these desires. This is another reason for insisting that these are object based reasons.

[31] It is both possible and likely that desires give us reasons for action only against a background of certain conditions, e.g. against the background of some other desires with which they are consistent – what is crucial, is that these background conditions do not give us sufficient reasons to retain these desires or to bring about their object. Our desires add to the reasons for their own retention.

[32] As I said earlier my conclusions apply to the central humean views I discuss above. I am not committed to the claim that it is impossible to develop a humean view that escapes Dancy and Parfit's argument in a different way.

The notion of endorsement first appeared in discussions of Freedom of the Will. Compatibilists used it to distinguish between caused actions that are free and caused actions that are not free. The idea was this: To be free is to govern yourself, to be the one who directs your actions. Desires are the mental states that motivate and guide action, so to govern yourself is to be motivated and guided by your desires. However sometimes we are moved by desires that do not speak for us, desires that we are alienated from and in these cases our actions are not free. This happens, for example, when addiction takes the reins and the desires that it produces control our actions. In other times we are not alienated from the desires that move us, we are identified with them, and on these occasions we can act freely[33]. To be self-governed is, therefore, not only to be motivated and guided by your desires, but to be motivated and guided by desires that are really yours, desires that represent you or speak for you[34].

But what determines whether or not we are identified with our desires? Some Compatibilists provided the following answer: we are identified with our desires when upon reflection we approve of them or endorse them. As I said before, the exact nature of the process (or relation[35]) of endorsement is heavily disputed. Common to most views that employ the concept of endorsement, however, are the following ideas: that we approve of or endorse our

[33] Some other conditions may need to be satisfied for an action to be free – this is not a complete analysis of freedom of action or freedom of the will.

[34] Frankfurt (1988).

[35] On some views endorsement is a relation and not a process. Frankfurt (1992) deliberates between the two ways of understanding the notion of endorsement but ends up accepting a relational view. On this view when we endorse a desire we do not make any decision or form any intention. Rather we endorse a desire, very roughly, when our consistent (and in his later view, inescapable) higher order desires wish the endorsed desire to move us to action. Bratman (1996) whose view of endorsement I follow here, sees endorsement as a process mediated by a decision.

desires from the perspective of mental states that are themselves an integral part of who we are; and that by endorsing a desire we assimilate it or integrate it. On these views, then, an endorsed desire is, by virtue of being endorsed, becoming part of us, part of what makes us who we are. Endorsement is therefore a process (or a relation) which determines our identity.

The sophisticated humean view describes an interesting connection between the story of self-governance and the story about reasons for action[36]. Only desires that have been endorsed can give us reasons for action. An endorsed desire that gives us reasons for action is both the ground for self-governed action and the ground for rational action. I deliberate whether to go to a movie or stay home and work. I really want to go out but think that I ought to work tonight. Upon reflection I (decide to) endorse my desire to go to a movie. Maybe I form a policy to support a limited desire for entertainment as a way to protect myself from my workaholic tendencies. On the basis of this policy I endorse the desire to go to a movie tonight. I proceed to act on that desire. My going to the movie will be both autonomous, since it is motivated by a desire that represents me, and potentially grounded in reason, since my desire to go to the movie is one I have endorsed.

Dancy and Parfit's argument draws our attention to another important connection. The argument teaches us that, at least for the kind of humean view discussed here, a desire cannot be reason-giving unless it gives us reason for its own retention. If this is true then on this type of humean view the ideas of self-governance and reasons for action are intimately linked to the idea of self determination. As a rough formulation we can say that when a desire that is part of one's practical identity grounds autonomous and rational action, that desire also gives the agent a reason (though not an overriding one) to stay as she is, to maintain her practical identity, or more

[36] The author who did more than anyone else to emphasize this connection is Frankfurt in his *The Reasons of Love* (2004).

accurately, this part of her practical identity that is constituted by that desire. The grounds for autonomous and rational action are also the normative grounds for determining who we should be.

But this is just a rough formulation. To see the exact contours of the connection we need to look more carefully at the view of endorsement upon which we rely. As before, I focus here on Bratman's view. On his view a desire is endorsed by the agent if: 1. She forms a policy to treat the desire as reason-giving (or some other attitude that like a policy plays a central role in the constitution of the agent's identity); 2. She in fact treats the desire as reason-giving[37]; 3. Her policy of treating the desire as reason-giving does not conflict with other existing policies about which desire to treat as reason-giving[38]. The link between reason, self-governance and self-determination is therefore as follows: Endorsement is grounded in one's identity. When we decide to treat a desire as reason-giving and in fact treat it as reason-giving, then the desire is the basis for self governed, rational action, and is self determining. Deciding to treat and treating a desire as reason-giving does not merely have its roots in our identity but also forges this identity; not only in that it helps delineate what is included in our identity but also in that it justifies that identity. If I adopt a child on the basis of my endorsed desire to be a father, then I do not only become a father autonomously and for a good reason. I also – by way of making this desire the basis of my action - give myself a reason to be - and to want to be - a father.

[37] An agent might have a policy-based commitment which when put to the test of actual deliberation will be revealed as an apparent commitment. Condition #2 deals with these cases.

[38] I have spoken earlier of 'deliberated endorsement'. We can now see what this deliberation consists of: deliberation is necessary to ensure the consistency of the policy in question with existing policies of the agent. What is crucial is that, on the humean views under discussion, such deliberation, may, but need not, involve weighing reasons for and against the policy. It need not weigh such reasons because endorsement reflects the relation between an attitude and the agent's identity and not the normative authority of the attitude. Thus the view is compatible with the claim that desires may give reasons for their own retention without relying on independent reasons for retaining these desires.

If the possibility of providing justification for one's own identity by way of a decision seems mysterious, an analogy may help. Consider the process by which we add new members to a community. The decision to let a new member join a community as a member with full voting rights is a decision by which a community determines itself. This decision redraws the bounds of the community. Moreover, since presumably any member that is added to the community will support the sustenance of her own membership in any subsequent vote, the addition of a member to the community is a process by which we create normative grounds for the retention of that member. This analogy should, of course, not be taken for more than what it is. But I hope it will help you see that there need not be any mystery in the idea of a process by which a body determines the justification for its own identity[39].

Are other humeans committed to this conclusion? In particular are humeans like Schroeder who think that desires are not reasons but rather that desires *explain* why certain facts provide us with reasons, committed to this conclusion? Since Schroeder does not think that desires are reasons, the conclusion as stated is incompatible with his view. But the conclusion can be restated in Schroeder-friendly terms. We can say that some of our desires explain why we have reasons to retain these very desires and thus explain why we have a reason to retain our identity. We now need to say what these reasons are. The most plausible answer is that all those facts whose reason-giving force is explained by a certain desire, are also reasons to retain that desire. For example: the fact that there is dancing at the party is a reason to retain the desire to dance if that desire is part of the explanation for why the fact that there is dancing at the party is

[39] It would be mysterious and an unacceptable form of bootstrapping if a decision could give normative grounds for itself. But the decisions we are considering are providing the normative grounds only for future decisions of a similar type.

a reason for me to go to the party. Why? According to Schroeder a fact is a reason for action if that fact is part of the explanation for why the action is going to promote a certain desire. The fact that there is dancing at the party is indeed part of the explanation for why maintaining the desire to dance is going to promote that very desire. It is by virtue of the fact that there is dancing at the party that maintaining that desire will help promote it – if there were no opportunities to dance there or elsewhere, then maintaining the desire would not help promote it. Putting things that way sounds odd but there is a familiar way of making the same claim. Given that I like to dance the fact that there are opportunities to dance is a good reason to stay the way I am. If it wouldn't be a good reason to stay the way I am, then my desire would not be able to explain why the dancing at the party is a reason to go there rather than to abandon this desire. So Schroeder is committed to what is fundamentally the same conclusion.[40].

Conclusion

Dancy and Parfit think that desires cannot give us reasons to bring about their satisfaction. Their arguments are inconclusive. They are inconclusive in part because they rely on the view that desires cannot give us normative grounds for their own retention; a view we have found no reason to accept.

There are other arguments against the humean view which I have not considered here and our acceptance of this view is contingent on our success in rejecting these as well. But we can put these other arguments aside for now and see what Dancy's and Parfit's discussions help us reveal about the humean view. The humean view offers us a unified account of self-governance, reasons and self-determination. On this account rational and autonomous decision making is grounded in our contingent desire-based identity. This identity whose contours are partly

[40]Schroeder (2007: 29).

determined by reflective decision making, is causally contingent but normatively grounded since it (sometimes) provides the normative grounds for its own retention.

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