

Mark Schroeder
University of Southern California
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Précis of *Slaves of the Passions*

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The goal of *Slaves of the Passions* is to provide a simultaneous possibility proof of the defensibility of what I call the *Humean Theory of Reasons*, and of reductive metaethical (and meta-normative, more generally) realism. I do this by outlining and defending a particular *version* of the Humean Theory of Reasons which I call *Hypotheticalism*, which itself amounts to a reductive metanormative theory, because it endorses both a reductive account of reasons in non-normative terms and the thesis that all other normative properties and relations can in turn be analyzed in terms of reasons, along with non-normative properties and relations. Because Hypotheticalism is a version of both the Humean Theory of Reasons and of reductive metanormative realism, both the Humean Theory of Reasons and reductive metanormative realism are at least as defensible as Hypotheticalism is.

The book introduces the Humean Theory of Reasons by reference to what I take to be a paradigm case in which two agents' reasons differ, due to a difference in their psychologies – a difference in what they like, enjoy, desire, aim for, or care about. In the example, Ronnie likes to dance, but Bradley can't stand dancing. Both have been invited to a party tonight, and there will be dancing at the party. Intuitively, I claim, the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie to go to the party, but not a reason for Bradley to go to the party. And intuitively, since all I have told you about the difference between Ronnie and Bradley is this difference in what they like or care about, the difference in Ronnie and Bradley's reasons must be due to, or explained by, this difference in their psychologies – or to some further predictable psychological difference with which we expect it to go hand-in-hand. As I understand the Humean Theory of Reasons, it is the view that *all* reasons are explained by the same psychological feature that explains why the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie (in contrast to Bradley), and in the same way.

The primary reason the Humean Theory is of such great philosophical interest, is that it makes it very difficult to understand how there could be any reasons that are reasons for absolutely anyone – no

matter what they are like. After all, the Humean Theory says that whether something is a reason for you *does* depend on what you are like – for its being a reason for you must be explained by your desiderative psychology in exactly the same way that Ronnie’s reason is explained by his. Yet it is widely held that morality is *objective*, in the sense that if something is genuinely wrong, then there is a reason for *anyone* not to do it – no matter what they are like. If no reasons are like that, as the Humean Theory makes hard to deny, then either nothing is genuinely wrong (as Mackie [1977] claimed), or wrongness is relative to the people who actually do have reasons to act accordingly (as Harman [1975] claimed), or there is no necessary connection between wrongness and reasons, after all (as Foot [1973] claimed). But any of these would be a surprising conclusion about the reality, objectivity, or force of moral requirements. It is no wonder, then, that the Humean Theory has come under such intense scrutiny over the past three decades. As if the fact that it leads to scepticism about the reality, objectivity, or force of moral requirements wasn’t indictment enough, the Humean Theory has been roundly criticised from every quarter, and several philosophers – using several distinct arguments – have even claimed the Humean Theory doesn’t even rise to the bar of self-consistency, let alone truth.

Importantly, however, as I emphasize in the book, the Humean Theory is at bottom a *parity* thesis. To accept the Humean Theory, you do not need to have any particular view about just how it is that Ronnie’s reason *is* actually explained by his psychology. *Any* view about how Ronnie’s reason is explained by his psychology leaves us with the same challenge to moral requirements. This is important, because essentially every argument against the Humean Theory builds in substantive assumptions about how it is that Ronnie’s psychology *does* explain his reason. The central project in the book is to show *that* these arguments against the Humean Theory rely on such substantive assumptions about how Ronnie’s reason is explained, to show (by the example of Hypotheticalism) *how* these assumptions can be avoided, and to argue for *why* avoiding these assumptions leads to a better account of how Ronnie’s reason is explained, in the first place.

The book divides broadly into three main sections. In the first of these, in chapters 2-4, I consider broad competing theories about *how* psychological states explain reasons in cases like Ronnie’s. Chapter 2 argues that it is by being a *background* condition on reasons, rather than because our ultimate or complete reasons are really facts about our own psychologies, as claimed by the *No Background Conditions* view. Chapter 3 argues against what I call the *Standard Model Theory* that it is not because there is a more basic reason to fulfill or act on our desires – of the sort that could not itself be explained by a desire without incoherence. And chapter 4 develops and defends a positive picture to fill the place of these alternative views. On my

positive picture, Ronnie's psychology explains his reason because having a psychology with the relevant feature is just *what it is* to have a reason. This is what makes Hypotheticalism amount to an existence proof of the defensibility of reductive normative realism, as well as of the Humean Theory of Reasons.

The second major section, in chapters 5-7, addresses the main *extensional* objections to the Humean Theory – that it allows for Too Many reasons, or for Too Few. The problem of allowing for Too Few reasons is, of course, precisely the problem that makes the Humean Theory so philosophically interesting – it is the problem at the heart of the Humean Theory's challenge to moral requirements. The problem of allowing for Too Many reasons, in contrast, is one of the primary ways in which critics of the Humean Theory have sought to get independent purchase against the Humean Theory. Indeed, as I show in chapter 5, critics have found the problem of Too Many reasons so devastating, that they have often sought to 'charitably' reconstrue the Humean Theory in order to avoid this problem – but in ways that lead to even worse problems.

At the heart of the book and of my answer to both the Too Many and Too Few objections, is the distinction between claims about what there is reason to do, and claims about how weighty the reason is, to do it. In particular, I reject the theory I call *Proportionalism*, according to which the weight of a reason is just proportional to the strength of the desire that explains it, and to how well the action it is a reason to do promotes that desire. The Humean Theory's intuitively overgenerous predictions about what there is reason to do don't look quite so bad if the unintuitive reasons are really of very low weight, and correspondingly, it is easier to explain reasons for agents to do things which they would really rather not, if the desires that they need to promote don't need to be strong desires, and they don't need to promote them particularly well. At any rate, chapter 7 offers a positive account of the weight of reasons which leaves room for Proportionalism to turn out to be false.

Finally, the third major section of the book, in chapters 8 and 9, addresses a large set of remaining issues about motivation, virtue, and normative epistemology. Chapter 8 offers an argument about just what kind of psychological state it is that *does* explain Ronnie's reason, and argues that it is a desire, in something like the ordinary philosophical sense – a motivating state that enables us to act on and respond to reasons. In chapter 9 I use the failure of Proportionalism in order to argue for the importance, in order to be able to be properly motivated by our reasons, of desiring the right things, and to the right degree – that is, of virtue. I also use the account of virtue, together with the results from chapter 8, to offer tentative solutions to what I take to be some of the most pressing problems in normative epistemology. Chapter 10 ties up some unfinished business by evaluating in what sense, if any, Hypotheticalism counts as 'instrumentalist'.

Finally, the concluding chapter tries to put the pieces of the resulting view – Hypotheticalism – together, and to characterize what makes it attractive. But most importantly, it tries to illustrate the generality of both the problems it faces and the tools it uses to solve those problems. At the heart of my interest in the book is the problem of understanding how there could be both reasons that are reasons for only some people – and not others – and also reasons that are reasons for anyone – no matter what she is like. The Humean Theory makes this problem highly visible, because it makes the paradigms of reasons that are reasons for only some people very easy to understand, and leaves the ones that are reasons for anyone mysterious. But every view faces a version of this problem, in one or another way. My main hope for the book, is that by showing how to try to tackle this problem for what looks like the most difficult case, I will both have helped people to see just how general the problem really is, and perhaps to have offered a model for thinking about it, even for those who in the end still find the Humean Theory too much to stomach.