

Problems for pure probabilism about promotion (and a disjunctive alternative)

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Abstract Humean promotionalists about reasons think that whether there is a reason for an agent to ϕ depends on whether her ϕ -ing promotes the satisfaction of at least one of her desires. Several authors have recently defended probabilistic accounts of promotion, according to which an agent's ϕ -ing promotes the satisfaction of one of her desires just in case her ϕ -ing makes the satisfaction of that desire more probable relative to some baseline. In this paper I do three things. First, I formalize an argument, due to Jeff Behrens and Joshua DiPaolo, to the effect that Mark Schroeder's and Stephen Finlay's probabilistic accounts of promotion cannot be correct. Next, I extend this argument to a recent alternative offered by D. Justin Coates and show how Coates' attempt to avoid the argument by introducing a distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' probability doesn't help. Finally, I suggest an alternative way of understanding promotion in terms of increase in degree of fit between the causal upshot of an action and the content of a desire. I show how this view, disjunctively paired with probabilism about promotion, solves the problems with previous accounts.

Keywords Promotionalism · Reasons · Probabilism · Desire · Direction of fit

1 Introduction

Humean promotionalists about reasons for action think that whether there is a reason for an agent to ϕ depends on whether her ϕ -ing promotes the satisfaction of at least one of her desires. In order for Humean promotionalism to represent an informative account of reasons, we require an account of what it is to promote the

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satisfaction of a desire. Probabilistic accounts of promotion say that an agent's action promotes the satisfaction of her desire just in case the probability of the desire's being satisfied is positively affected by the action relative to some baseline. In separate work, Stephen Finlay and Mark Schroeder each propose different accounts of the baseline relative to which the probability of the desire's being satisfied must go up in order for some action to count as promoting the satisfaction of that desire.¹ In a recent article, Jeff Behrens and Joshua DiPaolo argue by counterexample that Schroeder's and Finlay's accounts of the probabilistic baseline for promotion cannot be correct. They tentatively conclude that this suggests promotion "is best thought of non-probabilistically".² As we will see, I disagree. What Behrens and DiPaolo's cases show is that promotion is best thought of as not *necessarily* probabilistic. In a response to Behrens and DiPaolo, D. Justin Coates highlights a neglected alternative for the probabilistic baseline.³ Coates argues that his alternative baseline is not subject to Behrens' and DiPaolo's counterexamples and, moreover, that his account of the baseline has the intuitive features we want. That is the current state of play.

In this paper, I do three things. First, I formalize Behrens and DiPaolo's argument by defining a Behrens/DiPaolo situation in terms of a set of requirements on an initial probability distribution and argue for a constraint on accounts of promotion defined in terms of this situation (Sect. 2). Formalizing Behrens and DiPaolo's argument reveals precisely what is wrong with Schroeder and Finlay's accounts: they cannot make sense of promoting the satisfaction of a desire when the probability that the desire will be satisfied is 1 (Sect. 3). I then extend the argument to Coates' alternative and argue that although Coates' distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' probability might save his alternative from Behrens/DiPaolo counterexamples, Coates' alternative remains unacceptable (Sect. 4). The conclusion of these sections is that increase in probability is not necessary for promotion; In the final section of the paper I outline an account of promotion in terms of increase in degree of fit between a desire's content and the world that is the causal upshot of an action (Sect. 5). I show how disjoining this account with a probabilistic account results in a view that incorporates the insights of pure probabilistic accounts without inheriting their difficulties.

Before all that, a quick preliminary remark. Above, I characterized the Humean promotionist as holding that there exists a reason for an agent to ϕ just in case ϕ -ing promotes the *satisfaction* of at least one of the agent's desires. But promotionists usually put their view in terms of promoting the *object* of a desire, where the object is taken to be a state of affairs, or a proposition describing a state of affairs. For instance, Schroeder: "...the objective normative reasons for X to do A are things which help explain why X 's doing A promotes P , where P is the object of one of X 's desires."⁴ Obviously, it doesn't make sense to think of P here as a

¹ Finlay (2006, 2010), Schroeder (2007).

² Behrens and DiPaolo (2011, p. 5).

³ Coates (2014).

⁴ Schroeder (2007, p. 29, emphasis in original).

simple object, e.g., “ice cream”, since the idea of promoting an object, e.g., promoting ice cream, is nonsense. Schroeder must be thinking of the relevant *Ps* as propositions, such as the proposition that I have a cone of ice cream, or states of affairs, such as the state of affairs where I have a cone of ice cream. The idea, then, would be that the relevant proposition is promoted when it is made more likely to be true, or that the relevant state of affairs is promoted when it is simply made more likely. But there has been some recent controversy over whether desires are or are not propositional attitudes the objects of which are states of affairs or propositions describing such.⁵

In the present context, I aim to avoid this controversy by focusing simply on the promotion of the satisfaction (rather than the object) of a desire. This move should be uncontroversial. After all, what makes Humean promotionism intuitively plausible is that by promoting the object of a desire (whatever that is), one promotes the satisfaction of that desire. In the first place, then, the Humean promotionist thesis is one that ties the existence of reasons to the satisfaction of desire. So in what follows I will speak of promoting the satisfaction of a desire rather than promoting the object of a desire in order to remain neutral on what the potential objects of desire are. Notice that there is no corresponding possible controversy over whether the state of affairs where a desire is satisfied is something that can be picked out propositionally. The controversy was over whether the actual objects of desire are just those states of affairs (or propositions describing them). But I’ll side-step this issue by simply talking about the state of affairs where a desire is satisfied (or the proposition describing this state of affairs) and ignoring the question of whether desires have such propositions or states-of-affairs as their objects.

2 Behrends/DiPaolo situations and the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint

Behrends and DiPaolo have devised a series of cunning counterexamples to Finlay and Schroeder’s accounts of the probabilistic baseline for promotion.⁶ Rather than simply rehearsing Behrends and DiPaolo’s counterexamples, I will give a formal characterization of such counterexamples in terms of a set of requirements on an initial probability distribution. Cases that conform to these requirements are what I call Behrends/DiPaolo situations. (I will briefly rehearse the reasons for thinking that Behrends/DiPaolo situations represents cases agents can actually find themselves in.) I’ll then argue for a common-sense constraint on accounts of promotion defined in terms of Behrends/DiPaolo situations. This will set the stage: in the next section I’ll show that Finlay and Schroeder’s accounts of promotion each violate this constraint.

Let *A* and *B* denote potential actions by some agent *N*. Let *D* denote the state of affairs where some particular desire *d* of *N*’s is satisfied. Define a Behrends/DiPaolo

⁵ Thagard (2006); Lycan (2012).

⁶ Behrends and DiPaolo (2011).

situation as one in which the initial probability distribution conforms to these requirements:

- [1] $0 < \text{pr}(A) < 1$
- [2] $0 < \text{pr}(B) < 1$
- [3] $\text{pr}(D) > 0$
- [4] $\text{pr}(B \mid \tilde{A}) = 1$
- [5] $\text{pr}(D \mid A) = 1$
- [6] $\text{pr}(D \mid B) = 1$

Here, briefly, is the intuitive reasoning behind [1–6]. [1–2] represent the initial probability that N will perform one of the actions available to her, together with the idea that, between the two live options (A and B), neither is “closed off” by certainty in the other. So there is some chance N will A and some chance she will B.⁷ [3] represents the initial probability that N’s desire will be satisfied. Assuming it is at least possible (i.e., not logically inconsistent) to satisfy the desire is what sets the requirement that the probability be above 0.⁸ [4] says that if N does not A, she will B.⁹ [5–6] say that the relevant desire is certain to be satisfied given that she either A’s or B’s.¹⁰

Now, the result we need from an account of promotion is that in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation N’s A-ing promotes D. This is so because in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation it is supposed to be a matter of common-sense that there is a reason for the agent to A. After all, if she A’s, then her desire is certain to be satisfied [5]. So at the very least there is an instrumental reason for N to A since, if she does, she is certain to satisfy her desire.¹¹ That is common-sense. But since we are here assuming Humean promotionism, which says that there exists a reason for the agent to A just in case her A-ing promotes D, what follows is a common-sense constraint on any account of promotion:

Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint: In a Behrends/DiPaolo situation, A-ing promotes D.

An account of promotion violates the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint if A-ing fails to promote D in any Behrends/DiPaolo situation. If an account of promotion violates the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint, I assume it should be rejected, since it violates common-sense (because it yields the result that in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation there is no reason to A).

⁷ C.f. Behrends and DiPaolo (2011, p. 2).

⁸ See also Sect. 4 below, where I discuss the initial probability of D in more detail.

⁹ C.f. Behrends and DiPaolo (2011, p. 2).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ C.f. Behrends and DiPaolo (2011, p. 3).

3 Finlay and Schroeder

It's easy to see why Finlay's and Schroeder's accounts violate the Behrens/DiPaolo Constraint. Consider Finlay's proposal concerning the baseline for promotion:

Finlay-Promote: A-ing promotes D **iff** $\text{pr}(D \mid A) > \text{pr}(D \mid \tilde{A})$ ¹²

Clearly, this will not do. For, in a Behrens/DiPaolo situation, it is both certain that the desire will be satisfied given that the agent A's and certain that it will be satisfied given that she does not A, since we know if she does not A she will B—and B certifies the satisfaction of the desire too. [$\text{pr}(D \mid A) = \text{pr}(D \mid \tilde{A}) = \text{pr}(D \mid B) = 1$]. But then Finlay-Promote violates the Behrens/DiPaolo Constraint, because, according to Finlay-Promote, A-ing does not promote D.¹³

Alternately, consider Schroeder's proposal:

Schroeder-Promote: A-ing promotes D **iff** $\text{pr}(D \mid A) > \text{pr}(D \mid N \text{ does nothing})$ ¹⁴

Clearly, this will not do either. For all we know, there are Behrens/DiPaolo situations in which the probability that the desire is satisfied given that the agent A's is *exactly the same* as the probability in which the desire is satisfied given that she does nothing; in particular, though not exclusively, this will be in cases in which A-ing *just is* doing nothing. And there is nothing in the characterization of a Behrens/DiPaolo situation that rules out such cases. It's possible, in other words, that [$\text{pr}(D \mid A) = \text{pr}(D \mid N \text{ does nothing})$]. But then Schroeder-Promote violates the Behrens/DiPaolo Constraint, for A-ing does not promote D in all Behrens/DiPaolo situations, e.g., in situations where A-ing is doing nothing.¹⁵

4 Coates

Coates has recently offered an alternative account of the baseline for promotion. Here is Coates' proposal:

Coates-Promote: A-ing promotes D **iff** $\text{pr}(D \mid A) > \text{pr}(D)$ ¹⁶

Coates-Promote appears to fix the problems with Finlay-Promote and Schroeder-Promote. This is because it does not compare the probability of D given A to the probability of D given some possible sequence of events (such as the agent's doing

¹² This is a formal characterization of the view articulated in (Finlay (2006), p. 8).

¹³ C.f. Behrens and DiPaolo (2011, p.1–3).

¹⁴ This is a formal characterization of the view articulated in Schroeder (2007, p. 113).

¹⁵ C.f. Behrens and DiPaolo (2011, p. 3–5).

¹⁶ This is a formal characterization of the view articulated in Coates (2014, p. 5).

\bar{A} or nothing). Instead, it compares the probability of D given A simply to the probability of D: it asks “whether the likelihood of [the desire’s] obtaining is greater *after* the agent acts than it was before she acted.”¹⁷ It’s a little trickier to see how Coates’ proposal violates the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint. Coates-Promote will violate the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint if the probability of D is the same as the probability of D given A, i.e., if $\text{pr}(D \mid A) = \text{pr}(D)$. Here’s the (only somewhat) tricky part: assuming the definition of a Behrends/DiPaolo situation and the axioms of probability, we can prove that all Behrends/DiPaolo situations are ones in which this equality holds.¹⁸ In light of this proof, we can revise our description of Behrends/DiPaolo situations to make this fact explicit, replacing

$$\begin{aligned} [3] \text{ pr}(D) &> 0 \\ &\text{with} \\ [3^*] \text{ pr}(D) &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

Given [3*] it should be obvious how Coates-Promote violates the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint. For a Behrends/DiPaolo situation is always be one in which the inequality identified by Coates-Promote fails to hold, and so one in which A-ing does not promote D.

Coates is aware of this problem with his account. His response is to distinguish between two kinds of initial probability: “intrinsic” and “extrinsic”. According to Coates, the intrinsic probability of some outcome is simply a matter of the intrinsic properties of the outcome itself.¹⁹ For instance, the intrinsic probability of a particular fair six-sided die—Die—being rolled 3 is .16 $\bar{6}$. This is so, according to Coates, even if, as a matter of fact, it is also true that, via some external interference, Die is always guaranteed to come up 3. According to Coates, the existence of such external interference does not affect the intrinsic properties of Die, and so does not affect the intrinsic probability that Die will come up 3, which remains .16 $\bar{6}$. Instead, the external interference only alters Die’s extrinsic properties, and so only alters its extrinsic probability of coming up 3: it moves it to 1.²⁰

In the present context, Coates’ idea is that counterfactual properties, such as the property of D that it *would* be satisfied if the agent doesn’t A (since then she would B), are extrinsic properties, and so are irrelevant to the initial *intrinsic* probability of D. That probability, according to Coates, will always be < 1 , even while the initial *extrinsic* probability of D will, in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation, always be 1 (as we just proved above).

¹⁷ Coates (2014, p. 5, emphasis in original).

¹⁸ Proof:

- (1) $\text{pr}(D) = \text{pr}(D \mid A) * \text{pr}(A) + \text{pr}(D \mid \bar{A}) * \text{pr}(\bar{A})$ [Theorem of total probability]
- (2) $\text{pr}(D \mid A) = 1$ [[5], definition of a Behrends/DiPaolo situation]
- (3) $\text{pr}(D \mid \bar{A}) = \text{pr}(D \mid B) = 1$ [[4], [6], definition of a Behrends/DiPaolo situation]
- (4) $\text{pr}(D) = 1 * \text{pr}(A) + 1 * (1 - \text{pr}(A))$ [(1–3)]
- (5) $\text{pr}(D) = \text{pr}(A) + 1 - \text{pr}(A) = 1$ [(4)]
- (6) $\text{pr}(D) = \text{pr}(D \mid A) = 1$ [(2, 5)].

¹⁹ Coates (2014, p. 6–7).

²⁰ *ibid.*

I now want to raise two problems with Coates' suggestion. The first problem is that there is nothing in the notion of intrinsic probability that rules out the possibility of a desire's intrinsic probability being 1. I'll recommend a way for Coates to handle this problem. The second problem is more serious: not only are there desires with intrinsic probability 1, there are also desires with intrinsic probability 0. And while the first sort of desires do not plausibly generate counterexamples to Coates-Promote, the second sort do. Let me begin by clarifying the notion of the intrinsic probability of a desire's being satisfied.

We can start by stipulating a notion of intrinsic probability in the way Coates suggests. Define the intrinsic probability [pr_I] of some outcome as the probability of that outcome conditional on all and only the intrinsic properties of the outcome. And define the extrinsic probability [pr_E] of an outcome as the probability of that outcome conditional on all the intrinsic *and* extrinsic properties of the outcome. We can evaluate pr_I and pr_E for a range of outcomes, for instance Die's coming up 3. Given what we know about the intrinsic properties of Die, $pr_I(\text{Die comes up 3}) = 1/166$. And given what we also know about the particular situation Die finds itself in, $pr_E(\text{Die comes up 3}) = 1$. How about the intrinsic and extrinsic probability of a desire's being satisfied? In the case of some desire D, we have:

$$\begin{aligned} pr_I(D) &= pr(D \mid \text{intrinsic properties of D}) \\ pr_E(D) &= pr(D \mid \text{intrinsic \& extrinsic properties of D}) \end{aligned}$$

Above, I showed that in all Behrens/DiPaolo situations, $pr_E(D) = 1$. But according to Coates, the facts that yield the result that $pr_E(D) = 1$, in particular counterfactual facts such as "if the agent does not A, then she will B" are irrelevant to determining $pr_I(D)$.²¹ Because $pr_I(D)$ is independent of counterfactual, "extrinsic," properties, Coates claims we can be confident—indeed, certain—that even in Behrens/DiPaolo situations it is always the case that $pr_I(D) < 1$. But can we?

Consider dice again. Imagine instead of fair Die, we have Loaded Die. Loaded Die, like Die, has the extrinsic property of being guaranteed to come up 3. (If it were about to come up other than 3, external interference of some kind would intervene.) Unlike Die, Loaded Die also has intrinsic properties (its shape, weight, and so on) that guarantee it will always come up 3. We can evaluate pr_I and pr_E for Loaded Die's coming up 3. Given what we know about both the intrinsic and extrinsic properties of Loaded Die, $pr_I(\text{Loaded Die comes up 3}) = pr_E(\text{Loaded Die comes up 3}) = 1$. This illustrates something that should be obvious on reflection: there is

²¹ One worry with Coates' proposal is that the notion of the 'intrinsic' properties of desire is seriously unclear. For instance, Coates seems to suggest that the 'strength' of a desire is one of its intrinsic properties. But at least one standard way of understanding the strength of a desire is in terms of the motivational efficacy of the desire; and this, in turn, is usually understood in terms of the truth of certain counterfactual claims such as: if the agent were to be in such-and-such circumstances, then she would be motivated to ϕ by desire d . If this is the right way to understand the strength of a desire, then it seems some counterfactuals must be relevant to a desire's intrinsic properties. In that case, we are owed a principled reason for including these counterfactuals as relevant to the intrinsic properties of desire but excluding others. I won't pursue this worry here. Instead, I'll assume both that Coates can give some principled account of which counterfactuals are relevant to a desire's intrinsic properties and that we have a reasonably firm intuitive grip on the distinction between a desire's intrinsic and extrinsic properties.

nothing in the notion of intrinsic probability that rules out the possibility of a guarantee of probability 1.

Now return to desires. Do we have any reason for thinking that, unlike dice, desires can never have intrinsic properties that guarantee the intrinsic probability of their satisfaction is 1? Coates provides none. And in fact we can think of desires the intrinsic properties of which guarantee that the intrinsic probability of their satisfaction is 1. For instance, consider the desire to have at least one desire. This desire is such that, in virtue of some of its intrinsic properties (e.g., its content) the probability that it will be satisfied, whenever it is present, is 1. That is, $pr_I(\text{Desire to have at least one desire is satisfied}) = 1$.²²

Coates doesn't address this possibility. But I think it is clear how he should respond. Coates should accept the possibility of such desires, i.e., desires the intrinsic probability of which is 1. What he should say is that, with respect to those desires, nothing can *promote* their satisfaction (since they are satisfied when they are realized) and, therefore, that they do not generate reasons to do anything. The idea, then, would be that while it is true that nothing can raise the probability that, e.g., the desire to have at least one desire, is satisfied, nothing can promote that desire, and so, in a Behrends/DiPaolo Situation in particular, some action A cannot promote that desire. So the mere fact that such desires sometimes exist does not show that anything is wrong with Coates-Promote. This is because Coates-Promote yields the intuitively correct result, viz. that no action promotes a desire whose satisfaction is guaranteed simply in virtue of its intrinsic properties.

The more serious problem for Coates-Promote emerges when we consider not desires that are certain to be satisfied, but instead desires that are certain to go *unsatisfied*, i.e., desires where the intrinsic probability of satisfaction is 0. Like desires with intrinsic probability 1, nothing can increase the probability that these desires will be satisfied. Unlike desires with intrinsic probability 1, it is still possible to promote the satisfaction of a desire where the intrinsic probability that it will in fact be satisfied is 0. The problem is that Coates-Promote can't make sense of this fact.

For instance, consider the desire to have no desires at all. In virtue of its intrinsic properties (e.g., its content), the intrinsic probability that this desire will be satisfied is 0. Unlike the desire to have at least one desire, which was self-ratifying in the sense that its mere presence guaranteed its satisfaction, the desire to have no desires is self-undermining: its mere presence guarantees that it will not be satisfied. This desire can dissipate or be removed by surgery or therapy, but it cannot be satisfied. This is so despite the fact that there are of course worlds that satisfy the description "world in which I have no desires". In such worlds, my desire to have no desires is not satisfied: *it is not even present*.²³ Desires are satisfied by, roughly, being

²² Compare the case of self-certifying beliefs, for instance the belief that I have at least one belief. This belief is such that, in virtue of its intrinsic properties (e.g., its content) whenever it is present it is true.

²³ Compare the belief that I have no beliefs. This belief is self-undermining in a symmetrical sense: its mere presence guarantees that it is false. Of course, there are possible worlds that satisfy the description "world in which I have no beliefs". But in such worlds, my belief that I have no beliefs is not true, *it is not even present*.

presented with the state of affairs they pick out. And the desire to have no desires can never be presented with the state of affairs it picks out, since that state of affairs rules out the presence of the desire itself. In other words, $\text{pr}_f(\text{desire to have no desires is satisfied})=0$.

Unlike the case of desires where $\text{pr}_f(D)=1$, desires where $\text{pr}_f(D)=0$ generate genuine counterexamples to Coates-Promote. This is because, intuitively, there are some actions that promote the satisfaction of such desires even though these actions never make the satisfaction of the desire more likely. Consider again the desire to lack any desires at all. Suppose an agent has this desire and is offered the opportunity to undergo extensive Buddhist training, which she has good reason to believe will lead to a reduction in the number of desires she has. Intuitively, there is a reason for the agent to undergo the training. And this is so because undergoing the training promotes her desire to lack any desires at all. But Coates-Promote cannot make sense of this fact. Recall:

Coates-Promote: A-ing promotes D **iff** $\text{pr}(D \mid A) > \text{pr}_f(D)$ ²⁴

No amount of conditionalizing on anything will ever move $\text{pr}_f(\text{Desire to have no desires})$ from 0 to something greater than 0. And so, in particular, conditionalizing on undergoing Buddhist training will not raise the probability from 0 to something greater than 0. Nonetheless, it seems obviously right to say that undergoing the training promotes the agent's desire.

Or consider a desire with infinitary content, such as the desire to live forever. The intrinsic probability that this desire will be satisfied is 0: there is no state of affairs picked out by the desire such that it could obtain and thereby satisfy the desire. (I'm alive today: that's good—but what about tomorrow?) But, again, some actions can promote the satisfaction of this desire even though these actions can never make the satisfaction of the desire more likely. Suppose an agent desires to live forever and is offered a pill that will extend her life by a thousand years. The agent has a reason to take the pill. And this is so because taking the pill promotes her desire to live forever. (If she lacked the desire, she might not have the reason to take the pill. And if she had some other desire, such as the desire to live for only the next 500 years, she might have positive reason *not* to take the pill.) But, again, Coates-Promote cannot make sense of this fact. Conditionalizing on taking a life-extending pill will not raise the probability of the agent's desire to live forever's being satisfied from 0 to something greater than 0. Nonetheless, taking the pill promotes the agent's desire.

Let's recap. The moral of Beherends/DiPaolo situations is that desires that are certain to be satisfied [$\text{pr}(D)=1$] can be promoted. Finlay and Schroeder's accounts of promotion can't account for this fact. Coates' account can. The moral of the argument I just gave is that desires that are certain to go unsatisfied [$\text{pr}(D)=0$] can be promoted. Coates' account of promotion can't account for this fact. The overall lesson, I suggest, is that promotion should not be interpreted in pure probabilistic terms.

²⁴ Here I make explicit the fact that it is the intrinsic probability of D on the right-hand side of the inequality.

5 Promotion as increase in fit

The arguments against Coates-Promote, Finlay-Promote, and Schroeder-Promote are all right-to-left counterexamples: they are all objections to the idea that an action's increasing the probability that a desire is satisfied is necessary in order to promote the desire. This suggests that increase in probability is just one way of promoting a desire. In what follows I want to outline an alternative account of promotion that tries to make sense of this idea. The account is motivated by thinking about the kind of mental state desire is.

Desires are often distinguished from other mental states, such as belief, in terms of their direction of fit: beliefs aim to fit the world, whereas desires aim to make the world fit them.²⁵ Beliefs say the world is a certain way, and a world either is or isn't the way a belief says it is. When the content of the world fits the content of the belief the belief is true. Similarly, desires say how the world should be, and the world either is or isn't the way the desire says it should be. When the content of the world fits the content of a desire the desire is satisfied. Promoting the satisfaction of a desire, I suggest, is best understood in terms of this idea of the world fitting (or not) a desire: roughly, the satisfaction of a desire is promoted by an action when the action increases the degree of fit between the content of the desire and the way the world actually is as a result of the action.

Intuitively, some worlds fit a desire better, and some worse. Suppose Julie desires chocolate (any chocolate whatever). Then the world where Julie has a bar of chocolate fits her desire for chocolate better than the world where she has no chocolate, the world where Julie has a chocolate cake fits her desire for chocolate exactly as well as the world where she has a bar of chocolate, and the bar-world and cake-world both fit better than the world where Julie lacks chocolate altogether.

Fit between a world and a desire isn't all-or-nothing. Suppose Julie desires six bars of chocolate. Then the world where Julie has four bars of chocolate fits her desire better than the world where she has just three bars, the world where she has five bars fits her desire better than the four-world and the three-world, and the world where she has six bars fits just as well as any other possible world.

This example illustrates the idea of *increase* (and decrease) in fit. If Julie moves from a three-bar world to a four-bar world, there is an increase in fit between her desire and the world. Conversely, if Julie moves from a five-bar world to a four-bar world, there is a decrease in fit between her desire and the world.

Here, then, is the idea: an action's promoting the satisfaction of a desire is a matter of the action's increasing the fit between the desire and the world. More

²⁵ The *locus classicus* for this idea is Anscombe (2000). Of course, such talk is largely metaphorical. And there are various ways of trying to cash out the metaphor. See, for instance Smith (2007, 1987), Zangwill (1998), and Humberstone (1992). And there is a growing debate over whether this distinction can help solve any serious philosophical puzzles. See, for instance, Tenenbaum (2006); Sobel and Copp (2001); Milliken (2008). But for present purposes, the metaphor is sufficient, since all I am interested in is the idea that worlds can be evaluated in terms of how well they fit the content of a desire, not in, e.g., whether the direction of fit of desire can generate a norm of desire, whether desires can be shown to be genuine sources of reasons, or whether the idea of direction of fit can tell us anything about the correct theory of agential motivation.

formally: Let W denote the set of possible worlds. The degree of fit between a particular desire d and W is represented by an order \succeq_d on W . For some d , and for any two worlds w_1 and w_2 , we can write $w_1 \succeq_d w_2$ to mean that d weakly fits w_1 over w_2 . And we can say that $w_1 \succ_d w_2$ if $w_1 \succeq_d w_2$ but not $w_2 \succeq_d w_1$ (a strictly better fit for d in w_1 than w_2), and $w_1 \sim_d w_2$ if $w_1 \succeq_d w_2$ and $w_2 \succeq_d w_1$ (the same fit for d in both w_1 and w_2). Let A refer to an agent's action, let $w_{@}$ refer to the member of W that is the actual world prior to the agent's A-ing, and let w_{act} refer to the member of W that is the causal upshot of A-ing. As a first pass at a non-probabilistic analysis of promotion, we get:

Fit-Promote: A-ing promotes D iff $w_{act} \succ_d w_{@}$

In other words, A-ing promotes D just in case the fit between D and the world increases as a causal result of A-ing. For example, in Julie's case: Suppose Julie desires chocolate and has none. Suppose further that the world that is the causal upshot of Julie's buying chocolate is one in which she has chocolate. Then buying chocolate promotes the satisfaction of Julie's desire, since $w_{buying-chocolate} \succ_d w_{@}$. Of course, probabilistic analyses can account for simple cases of promotion like Julie's. But Fit-Promote can handle cases probabilistic analyses cannot.

Recall, the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint requires that an account of promotion yield the result that in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation A-ing promotes D . In a Behrends/DiPaolo situation, the agent's desire does not yet fit the world: in other words, her desire is unsatisfied. However, in a Behrends/DiPaolo situation, whatever the agent does (including A-ing), her desire is certain to be satisfied. This feature of such situations is what caused the problems for Schroeder and Finlay's probabilistic analyses of promotion: since the probability of the agent's desire being satisfied could not increase, those accounts could not capture the idea that A-ing (which was certain to satisfy the desire) promotes the satisfaction of the desire. But Fit-Promote can, since if the desire is satisfied in the world that is the causal upshot of A-ing but not in the actual world, $w_{act} \succ_d w_{@}$. Thus Fit-Promote does not violate the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint. What about the problems facing Coates' probabilistic proposal?

Coates' proposal ran into problems on two fronts. First, there were desires where the intrinsic probability of their being satisfied was 1. As we saw, Coates could respond to this problem by simply acknowledging that, when it comes to desires that are self-satisfying in this way, e.g., the desire to have at least one desire, there is nothing that could promote them, and so they do not generate reasons to do anything. Fit-Promote takes the same tack with respect to self-satisfying desires. For any desire d such that the mere presence of d guarantees that it is satisfied, then for any action A , $w_{act} \sim_d w_{@}$. And so, by Fit-Promote, nothing can promote that desire. And that, as we saw in the discussion of Coates, seems like the right thing to say.

The second, more serious problem for Coates' proposal was the case of desires where the intrinsic probability of their satisfaction was 0. The problem for Coates is that when it comes to such desires, although their satisfaction cannot *ex hypothesi* be made more probable, it is possible to promote their satisfaction. Fit-Promote

explains this fact in terms of an increase in fit between a desire's content and the world. For example, consider again the desire to have no desires. The intrinsic probability that this desire will be satisfied is 0. Nevertheless, it is possible to promote the satisfaction of the desire by, e.g., undergoing Buddhist training to eliminate some of one's desires. Fit-Promote captures this fact nicely: the world where you have, say, 499 desires (as a result of undergoing the training) better fits the world picked out by your desire than the actual world where you have, say, 511 desires. In other words, the world that is the causal upshot of undergoing the training is strictly better, in terms of fit with your desire, than the actual world ($w_{act} \succ_d w_{@}$).

So that is how Fit-Promote improves on its probabilistic competitors. Fit-Promote is a fully non-probabilistic analysis of promotion: an action that increases the probability that a desire will be satisfied does not increase the actual degree of fit between the desire and the world, and so does not constitute an action that promotes the desire. But actions that increase the probability that some desire will be satisfied *do* seem to promote that desire: recall, what was wrong with probabilistic analyses was not that they had the sufficient conditions for promotion wrong, but that they had the necessary conditions wrong. For instance, suppose I desire to attend the State Fair, that the only way to get there is to drive, and that in the actual world my car is out of gas. In such a case, there is a reason for me to fill up the gas tank in my car. This is because filling my car's tank promotes the satisfaction of my desire to attend the State Fair. But how? According to Fit-Promote, in order for filling my car's tank to promote the satisfaction of my desire to attend the State Fair, it would have to be the case that the world in which I fill up my tank is a strictly better fit with the world where I attend the State Fair than the actual world is. But, unlike the case of Julie's desire for chocolate and the world that is the result of her action of buying some chocolate, the world where I have a full gas tank as a result of filling it does not constitute an improvement in terms of fit between my desire to be at the State Fair and the actual world where I don't have any gas. So more needs to be said.

Now, probabilistic analyses of promotion have an easy time with cases like State Fair: filling my car's tank increases the probability that my desire to attend the State Fair will be satisfied and so, according to probabilism about promotion, promotes the satisfaction of that desire. There is something right about this idea: An action that makes it more likely a desire will be satisfied does promote the satisfaction of that desire. So the way to revise the account on offer here is to simply make it disjunctive in the following way: We can write $pr_{w_n}(D)$ to denote the probability of some desire's satisfaction in a world n . Then we can say that:

Fit-Probability-Promote: An action A promotes D iff [$w_{act} \succ_d w_{@}$ or $pr_{w_{act}}(D) > pr_{w_{@}}(D)$]

This will do the trick, essentially adding increase in fit to increase in probability as a sufficient condition for promotion. Fit-Probability-Promote has all the virtues of Fit-Promote plus the virtues of a probabilistic analysis such as Coates-Promote while

avoiding the difficulties that faced that account. Call this the FPP account of promotion.²⁶

One potential problem with FPP is that treats the degree of fit between a desire and the world and the probability that the desire will be satisfied as factors each of which contribute independently to the idea of promotion. Let me explain.

Suppose Julie desires her six bars of chocolate, has five, and has very little prospect of obtaining one more. The degree of fit between her desire and the world is quite high. And the probability that her desire will be satisfied is quite low. Now suppose she is offered the opportunity to buy a bet that slightly increases the probability that she will shortly obtain five new bars of chocolate. The cost of the bet is four bars. Were she to buy the bet, she would radically decrease the degree of fit between her desire and the world, but would also slightly increase the probability that her desire would be satisfied (since if the bet turns out in her favor, she will end up with six bars). Does taking the bet promote her desire? If the disjunctive account given by FPP is correct, then it does. But this verdict might seem puzzling. After all, if Julie takes the bet, she is still very unlikely to obtain the object of her desire, viz. six bars of chocolate—indeed, she is very likely to end up in a world that is worse with respect to her desire than she was had she not taken the bet. And it can appear perverse to say that an action that results in a world like this *promotes* her desire.

One solution to this puzzle would be to identify a single function designed to weigh an action's contribution to the increase (or decrease) of the probability that a desire will be satisfied against its contribution to the increase (or decrease) in fit between the desire and the world. For reasons of space, I will not detail what such a solution might look like. Nor will I argue against the possibility of giving such an account.²⁷ In principle, I am open to the possibility of giving one. If such an account can be made to work, the main argument of this paper still stands: the account would need to incorporate the degree of fit between a desire and the world into its (unified) measure of promotion. But in what follows I will remark briefly on why I do not think this is a useful idea to pursue. These remarks are also aimed at alleviating some of the *prima facie* puzzlement associated with FPP's verdict on the case given above. The net result, I hope, is that FPP's disjunctivism is revealed as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, of the view.

Recall the reason for offering an account of promotion in the first place. Humean promotionalists say that whether there is a reason for an agent to ϕ depends on whether ϕ -ing promotes one of the agent's desires. The idea has intuitive appeal: promoting desires seems like just what actions should be in the business of doing when there are reasons to perform those actions. This leaves us wanting an account of promotion. But I do not see that it leaves us expecting—or even wanting—a non-disjunctive account of promotion. After all, we can promote causes, hirelings,

²⁶ Notice too the following advantage enjoyed by FPP: in order to work, FPP does not need to appeal to Coates' distinction between the 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' probability of a desire's being satisfied, a distinction I said was somewhat suspect. See fn. 21.

²⁷ I will say this: notice that the relevant function cannot simply be a multiplicative function on the probability that the desire is satisfied and the degree of match, since cases of probability 0 will then systematically yield the wrong result.

merchandise, and even pawns in chess. Promotion in each of these cases has to do with moving forward, with advancing. What does it mean to advance—to move forward—a desire? What reflection on cases shows us, I think, is that there are two independent ways of advancing a desire: one way is to increase the probability that it will be satisfied, and another way is to increase the actual degree of fit between the desire and the world. Now, the very same action might advance a desire in one respect and retire it in another. But the same is true of other cases of promotion: the activist calling for stricter pollution controls counts as promoting environmental responsibility even if her pleas fall on hostile ears, i.e., even if her pleas have the perverse result of making environmental responsibility less probable overall. Or anyway, so it seems to me: the world where more people (including herself) call for environmental responsibility is more like the world where her cause is already won than the world where less do, even if the actual world where she calls for such responsibility is one that is less likely to actually exhibit it.

What this means is that when it comes to an action promoting a desire, we can distinguish two independent respects in which it might. An action can make the world *fit* better with the desire. This is the case of Julie's performing an action that results in her having an additional bar of chocolate. Or an action can make the world more *likely* to fit better with the desire. This is the case of Julie's buying the chocolate bar. Both sorts of action promote Julie's desire, only for different reasons: one promotes the desire because it makes it fit better with the world, whereas the other promotes the desire because it makes it more likely to be satisfied. Keeping these two aspects of promotion separate rather than attempting to unify them under a single measure somewhat complicates our promotion-involving thought and talk, but I think these complications redound to our benefit. For example, we can use the two aspects of promotion to drive a distinction between two different sorts of reasons grounded in desire: there are the reasons for action that are grounded in the fact that an action makes the satisfaction of a desire more probable, and there are those grounded in the fact that the causal upshot of the action more closely fits the content of desire. And there should be interesting things to say about how each sort of reason figures in deliberation and about the relationship between the two sorts, e.g., how they should be weighed against one another.

As I said, I am open to the idea that a unified, non-disjunctive account of promotion is available. Such an account would have to exhibit the features FPP does, including conforming to the Behrends/DiPaolo constraint and making sense of promoting desires the intrinsic probability of which is 0. But I do not see any real reason to pursue such an account unless it can be shown that the disjunctive analysis I offer here is somehow deficient. And in any case, pursuing this idea is beyond the scope of this paper.

6 Conclusion

Finlay-Promote, Schroeder-Promote, and Coates-Promote each fail in different ways to account for actions that promote a desire. Finlay-Promote and Schroeder-Promote both fall prey to the Behrends/DiPaolo Constraint. Coates-Promote, even if

it doesn't violate that constraint, fails to account for cases of promotion where the intrinsic probability that a desire will be satisfied is 0. The structure of these problems with probabilistic analyses of promotion suggests that probabilistic increase is not a necessary condition for promotion. The alternative I outline, Fit-Probability-Promote, represents an alternative that can capture what was right about probabilistic analyses while avoiding their difficulties. I'll close by remarking on the idea of 'fit' between a desire and the world, a notion that is central to the alternative offered here.

I've left the notion of 'fit' between a desire's content and the world deliberately vague. Hopefully, the examples I've used give the idea sufficient content. For instance, Julie's desire to have six bars of chocolate. It should be obvious that the four-bar world better fits this desire than the two-bar world. Similarly, the desire to have no desires at all: the world where I have 499 desires better fits this desire than the world where I have 511. It is sometimes equally obvious that two worlds are equal in terms of their fit with a desire. For instance, the world where a Democrat wins the White House and Julie has six bars of chocolate equally fits her desire as does the world where a Republican wins the White House and Julie has six bars of chocolate. But matters are not always so straightforward. This is because the contents of actual desires in the actual world are not always so straightforward. I desire a cup of coffee. Is the world where I get a cup of instant Folgers a better fit than the world where I get a cup of locally roasted arabica? Both are worlds where I have a cup of coffee. Whether one is a better fit will depend on whether my desire discriminates between them. It might, if I am a coffee connoisseur. It might not, even if I am: at this moment I might just want coffee, any coffee at all. And, crucially, I might not know till someone serves me the Folgers that what I really wanted wasn't just any old cup of coffee. The ordering \succ_d will therefore sometimes be epistemically opaque to the agent whose desire is in question, and even to outside observers. This doesn't mean that there is no such ordering. What it means is that is that we don't always know which actions will promote our desires and so don't know what there is reason for us to do. But this is for the familiar reason that we don't always know what we want.

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