



DISCUSSION NOTE

**ON PROMOTING THE DEAD CERTAIN:
A REPLY TO BEHREND, DI PAOLO AND SHARADIN**

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On Promoting the Dead Certain: A Reply to Behrends, DiPaolo and Sharadin

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ACCORDING TO HUMEAN PROMOTIONALISM about practical reasons, the fact that I have a reason to φ holds in virtue of the fact that φ -ing promotes one or more of my desires.¹ The topic of this discussion note is the question of how best to understand the promotion relation.

Finlay (2006) and Schroeder (2007) have developed two similar probabilistic accounts of promotion. According to their views, promoting a desire is increasing its probability of being realized (relative to some baseline).

Behrends and DiPaolo (2011) have formulated an argument against understanding promotion in purely probabilistic terms. The same argument was later taken up (and further elaborated) by Coates (2014) and Sharadin (2015), who both develop their own understandings of promotion based on the criticism the argument delivers. Recently, in more exchange about the issue,² interesting alternative accounts of promotion have been proposed and more problems regarding a purely probabilistic understanding have been brought to the fore. However, here, I would like to turn back the clock a little and call attention to a problem I see with the original argument against probabilistic accounts. More precisely, I am going to argue that the criticism as presented in Behrends and DiPaolo (2011) and in Sharadin (2015) fails. My argument is based on what I am going to call the *Humean Core Idea*.

Humean Core Idea: An agent has a reason to φ because φ -ing *makes a difference* to the satisfaction of her desires.

Since, according to Humean Promotionalism, reason facts are grounded in promotion facts, the Humean Core Idea can be understood as a necessary requirement for promotion relations. In order for an action to promote a desire, it is necessary that it makes a difference regarding the desire's satisfaction.

My investigation concerns the question of exactly *what kind of difference* an action has to make in order to count as promoting a desire. If my considerations are convincing, it turns out that Behrends and DiPaolo's and Sharadin's supposed counterexamples against probabilistic accounts of promotion do not involve cases of promotion in a sense that is relevant for the Humean. Hence, their argument is a non-starter and (purely) probabilistic accounts of promotion remain a reasonable option.

Two preliminary remarks are in order. DiPaolo and Behrends (2015a) have recently repeated their criticism, explicitly challenging proponents of

¹ In the following, *D* stands for the propositional content of desires. Also, throughout the paper, I only talk about *objective* reasons. Objective reasons are considerations that *favor* an agent's action alternatives. I will not talk about subjective or evidence-relative reasons.

² DiPaolo and Behrends (2015a; 2015b); Sharadin (2015; 2016).

probabilistic accounts to answer the *Baseline Question* and the *Interpretation Question*. It might be helpful to say a few words about each before we continue.

The Baseline Question asks *relative to what* an action must increase the probability of desire satisfaction in order for promotion to hold. In their helpful summary of the positions on the market, DiPaolo and Behrens (2015a) mention several alternative baselines. Here are two of them: (1) the baseline relative to which an action φ increases the probability of desire satisfaction is *not- φ -ing*. Alternatively, (2) the baseline is *doing nothing*. Discussing both options, DiPaolo and Behrens conclude that they are implausible because there are counterexamples to them. That is, there are cases of promotion in which the probabilities of desire satisfaction are *not* increased relative to any of these baselines. One of my main points will be that this is false because the presented counterexamples are not really cases of promotion. If my considerations are convincing, we can hold on to a baseline of the above sort, Behrens and DiPaolo's criticism notwithstanding.

The Interpretation Question challenges us to make explicit what we think about the nature of the probabilities at issue. DiPaolo and Behrens (2015a) suggest that this has not been adequately addressed by proponents of probabilistic accounts. In order to fix the content of the respective accounts, more needs to be said about the nature of the involved probabilities (DiPaolo and Behrens (2015a: 1740)).

I agree that the Interpretation Question is important. Behrens and DiPaolo are right in urging us to specify the kind of probability relevant for promotion. So let me nail my probabilistic colors to the mast right away. I think of the probabilities involved as *objective* ones. Since I also believe that we do have reasons for action, I am committed to one of the following claims: (i) either our world is not deterministic, or (ii) determinism and objective probabilities are compatible. It is clear, I think, that these claims cannot be defended any further in this note. Still, my commitment to objective probabilities should fix the content of the account I have in mind sufficiently for readers to understand what I am talking about. And this is, I take it, what DiPaolo and Behrens intended by raising the Interpretation Question. So let us move on.

1. Schroeder-Promote and the Argument from P(1) Desires

Here is Schroeder's account of promotion:

Schroeder-Promote: *A's φ -ing promotes D just in case it increases the probability of D relative to some baseline [doing nothing] (Schroeder (2007: 113)).*

Behrens and DiPaolo (2011) and Sharadin (2015) formulate their worries about Schroeder-Promote by means of counterexamples. These examples are meant to establish that there are cases of promotion in which the probability of D is not raised. The cases they mention involve what I am going to call "P(1) situations." Situations of this kind have the following features: there is an agent, one of her objects of desire D and some action alternative, φ . Additionally, it is certain (the probability is 1) that D will be

realized, independently of whether the agent performs the action under consideration. Here is one such scenario:

Post Box: I am expecting a letter today. The mailman has recently delivered it. I could go and fetch the letter myself (φ). However, if I do not, my wife will open the post box later today and bring me the letter. I *only* desire that I read the letter today (D).

On reflection, Behrens and DiPaolo argue, it seems intuitively clear that doing something that results in the actual satisfaction of D is sufficient for *promoting* D (Behrens and DiPaolo (2011: 2)). If this is so, then Schroeder-Promote faces a problem. Schroeder-Promote tells us that φ -ing does *not* promote the desire. Because, trivially, fetching the letter simply does not increase the desire's probability of being realized, for this probability is 1 already (my wife will bring me the letter anyway).

Sharadin construes the argument against Schroeder-Promote in a slightly different manner. Contrary to Behrens and DiPaolo, he does not claim it to be intuitively clear that φ -ing *promotes* the desire's object in P(1) situations. Instead, he states that it is a matter of common sense that *there is a reason* for the agent to φ (Sharadin (2015: 4)). But promotion directly follows: given that there is only one relevant desire in Post Box, the presence of a reason means that φ -ing promotes D . In a nutshell, here is the *argument from P(1) desires*:³

1. According to Schroeder-Promote, φ -ing does not promote D in P(1) situations.
2. But φ -ing does promote D in P(1) situations.
3. Therefore, Schroeder-Promote is false.

Based on this criticism, Behrens and DiPaolo suggest that we should think about promotion non-probabilistically. Sharadin uses the argument as a starting point for developing his own account of promotion, which ends up being a disjunctive one. The first disjunct is probabilistic and the second one is non-probabilistic. Sharadin calls the latter *Fit-Promote*. Since it will help us carve out the precise problem ascribed to probabilistic accounts, let us take a quick look at Fit-Promote.

Fit-Promote: An action φ promotes a desire that D if the fit between the world and D increases as a causal result of φ -ing⁴ (Sharadin 2015: 11).

Fit-Promote helps solve the supposed problem in Post Box. If I fetch the letter, the causal result of my doing so is that my desire is realized. So the fit between the world and my desire has been increased due to the "causal upshot" of φ -ing. Hence, we have a case of promotion, which is the result Sharadin aims for.

³ Again, "P(1)" represents the fact that the probability of the desire's satisfaction is 1, whether or not the agent φ s.

⁴ There are more technical details regarding what exactly it means to "increase the fit" between the world and a desire, but I will assume that the basic idea is clear enough for our purposes.

2. The Necessity of Making a Difference

I believe the argument from P(1) desires is unsound because the second premise is false. It is not true that φ -ing promotes D in P(1) situations – once we understand promotion in a way that is appropriate in the context of Humean theories of practical reasons. Or so I will argue.

According to Humean accounts of reasons, desires are the grounds of normativity. Actions are normatively important to us in virtue of the fact that we desire stuff. And they have this normative property in virtue of the fact that they stand in some relation – we called it promotion – to desire satisfaction. Our central question is how exactly we should spell out this relation. A first natural answer is expressed in what I have called the Humean Core Idea.

Humean Core Idea: An agent has a reason to φ because φ -ing *makes a difference* to the satisfaction of her desires.

Plausibly, a *Humean* can only grant an action normative significance if it makes a difference to desire satisfaction – as a Humean, you cannot but accept this idea. One consequence is that, whatever promotion turns out to be, it must capture the Humean Core Idea. That is, a *necessary condition* for an action's promoting a desire is that it makes a difference regarding the satisfaction of that desire. Accounts of promotion must live up to this constraint, or else they are not plausible from a Humean perspective.

Let us continue by taking a closer look at how exactly Schroeder-Promote and Fit-Promote make a difference to desire satisfaction.

3. Two Ways of Making a Difference

Here is the rationale for saying that φ promotes D in Post Box (as adherents of Fit-Promote believe): right now, my desire is not satisfied. Assume I step out, fetch the letter and read it. Right after this, my desire is satisfied. So how could we possibly say that my fetching the letter did *not* promote D ? After all, φ -ing *caused* D , so how can we say that it did not promote it?⁵

So Fit-Promote focuses on the causes of desire satisfaction. We could say that the difference appealed to is a difference in *causal routes*. If I φ in Post Box, *I* cause the satisfaction of the desire; the causal route now leads through *me* instead of my wife.⁶ And this, it is thought, surely counts as making a difference to D . Let us call this conception of difference-making *Causal Route Difference*.

⁵ I owe this way of putting things to an anonymous referee. Here is the same thought in the words of Behrens and DiPaolo: "It seems to us that doing something that results in the actual satisfaction of one's desire is sufficient for promoting that desire" (2011: 2). And, of course, Sharadin's talk of an increase in fit as a "causal upshot" of φ -ing captures this idea as well.

⁶ Roughly, a causal route is the "chain of events" leading to the satisfaction of the desire. I take it that this is clear enough for our purposes.

Causal Route Difference: In order for an agent's action φ to make a difference to an object of desire D , it is sufficient that φ -ing is part of the causal route to the realization of D .

This captures Sharadin's description of Fit-Promote from above: the fit between the world and D increases as a result of the "causal upshot" of φ -ing. As long as φ appears in the causal route leading to D , we have a case of promotion. The crucial question we will have to answer is whether this *really* accounts for the Humean Core Idea. But before we get there, let us take a look at Schroeder-Promote's understanding of difference-making.

Interestingly, Schroeder-Promote is not sensitive to the ways that lead to desire satisfaction. It does not consider causal routes at all. Instead, the only difference that matters is a difference regarding the *probability* of D . Probabilities, however, do not "care" about causal routes. Whether the causal route leading to desire satisfaction leads through me or my wife does not matter. Here is the conception of difference-making underlying Schroeder-Promote:

Probability Difference: In order for an agent's action φ to make a difference to an object of desire D , it is necessary (and sufficient) that φ -ing changes the probability of D .⁷

Since my fetching the letter does not make a difference in *this* sense, Schroeder can claim that doing so does *not* promote D , which is why there is no reason to go and fetch the letter (in virtue of the only relevant desire).

Note that Probability Difference gives us a *necessary* condition for difference-making, whereas Causal Route Difference gives us "only" a *sufficient* condition. This captures the dialectic between our opponents: Behrends, DiPaolo and Sharadin argue that an increase in probabilities is *not necessary* for promotion because we can promote desires without changing probabilities. This does not mean that they think that causing desire satisfaction is necessary for promotion. It just means that they think that doing so is *sufficient* for promotion – which is all they need to counter purely probabilistic accounts.⁸

Summing up, we have seen two incompatible accounts of promotion: Fit-Promote and Schroeder-Promote. In order to be plausible, they both need to account for the Humean Core Idea. That is, they must live up to the following constraint: actions can only promote desires if they make a difference regarding desire satisfaction. We have looked at the two underlying understandings of making a difference regarding desire satisfaction. Causal Route Difference underlies Fit-Promote; Probability Difference underlies Schroeder-Promote. I now want to raise the following question about Causal Route Difference: given Post Box – given that D is dead certain – in what way exactly does *causing* D make a difference to D ?

⁷ The term "changes" leaves open whether it is an increase or a decrease in probability. "Difference-making" is neutral in that regard. In the following, however, we will only focus on increases in probability.

⁸ Remember, Sharadin's disjunctive account still involves Schroeder-Promote as one of the disjuncts, albeit in a weakened version: increasing the probability is sufficient for promotion, he says, but not necessary.

4. Sartorio on Causes as Difference-Makers

Let me start with a general observation. Usually, causing something and increasing its probability go together. Quite trivially, if I desire to get rid of my hunger (D) and hence start eating a sandwich, my doing so causes D and *thereby* increases the probability of D . We could also say that it makes a difference to D . And, quite plausibly, my eating the sandwich promotes D . However, since causing something and increasing its probability usually go together, our commonsense intuitions about which of the two pull the weight regarding a *Humean* understanding of promotion may not be very reliable. After all, our commonsense intuitions have been developed in our usual, everyday life. Now, the peculiarity of P(1) situations is, of course, that causing D does *not* increase the probability of D . Cases of this sort are a deviation from how things usually are. They are highly artificial. It is for this reason, I think, that we should not let our everyday life intuitions about promotion decide the matter.

This point is somewhat important, because, as I understand them, Behrends and DiPaolo appeal to our intuitions when claiming that an action leading to the satisfaction of a desire surely seems to *promote* this desire (2011: 2). The problem is, however, that this leaves open the possibility that our common use of “promotion” *really* tracks increases in probability and that, since causing something usually goes together with increasing its probability, we find it intuitively plausible that cases of causation are cases of promotion. There is every reason to expect that *our* intuitions about promotion cannot sufficiently distinguish between the two options at hand (causation vs. probability increasing). I conclude that we should not let *these* common intuitions decide matters in highly artificial scenarios, such as P(1) situations. We need another criterion.

My proposal for such a criterion is the Humean Core Idea. After all, we want to find the sense of promotion that is adequate for a Humean theory of reasons. So we must figure out whether, in P(1) situations, causing D promotes D . And, in order to figure that out, we need to explore whether the fact that φ -ing causes D makes a difference in a sense relevant for the Humean.

Carolina Sartorio has worked on causes as difference-makers (2005; 2013). I believe that her considerations are helpful for our discussion. At one point, she presents an example that has all the features of a P(1) situation.⁹

Switch: Victim is stuck on the railroad tracks. A runaway train is hurtling down the tracks when it approaches a switch. I could flip the switch (φ) to steer the train on a sidetrack where no one will be harmed. If I do not flip the switch, the train will derail and no one will be harmed. My only desire is that no one is harmed (D).

As in Post Box, there is an agent, an action alternative φ and the agent’s object of desire D , and the example is such that D will be realized no matter

⁹ Sartorio (2005). I slightly altered the example to better fit into our context.

whether the agent φ s or not. Now, Sartorio observes the following about the example.

Just as the *flip* doesn't make a difference to $[D]$, the *failure to flip* wouldn't have made a difference ... either. In other words, *whether or not* I flip the switch makes no difference [to D]; it only helps to determine the route that the train takes ... This suggests that what might be missing is some kind of asymmetry between my flipping the switch and my failing to flip the switch. Maybe the reason that my flipping the switch doesn't make a difference is that the contribution that it makes is not more important than the contribution that its absence would have made. Maybe, for something to be a [difference-maker], it must make a contribution that somehow *outweighs* the contribution that its absence would have made (2005: 74-75).

I find this convincing. If A is supposed to be a difference-maker regarding B , then, plausibly, A must contribute *more* to (the onset of) B than its absence (not- A). So here we have a criterion for difference-making.

Applied to our context: φ could only be a difference-maker regarding desire satisfaction if it contributed *more* to D than its absence (not- φ). Consequently, the question we need to ask now is this: can Causal Route Difference live up to this? Does my fetching the letter contribute *more* to my reading the letter today than my not fetching the letter?

In a sense, the answer seems to be "yes." My fetching the letter *causes* my reading the letter today, whereas my refraining from fetching the letter *does not cause* my reading the letter today. If φ causes D and not- φ does not cause D , it surely seems that the contribution of φ outweighs the contribution of not- φ .¹⁰ Therefore, φ -ing *is* a difference-maker after all. Or so it seems.

Let me call attention to something else in Sartorio's quote. She also points out an important distinction: on the one hand, there is (a) making a difference *to* an outcome and, on the other hand, there is (b) making a difference *to the route* to an outcome. Flipping the switch does *not* make a difference in the first sense, because the outcome would have *occurred* even if we had not flipped the switch.¹¹ The same holds in Post Box. Here, φ -ing does not make a difference to the occurrence of my reading the letter today, because my reading the letter today is dead certain.

On the other hand, flipping the switch *does* make a difference in the second sense. It does make a difference *to the route* to the outcome insofar as the outcome "would not have been caused by the absence of their causes."¹² In other words: flipping the switch would cause D , whereas not flipping the switch would not cause D . (If the switch is not flipped, the train's derailing will cause D .) The same holds, again, in Post Box. Here, my fetching the letter makes a difference to the route to D , because it causes D , and not fetching the letter would not cause D . (If I did not fetch the letter, my wife would cause D .)

Sartorio's lesson is this: there is an important distinction between making a difference (a) to an outcome and making a difference (b) to the route

¹⁰ I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me regarding this point.

¹¹ This is the kind of difference-making Sartorio (2013) labels "DM1."

¹² Cf. Sartorio (2013) on the kind of difference-making she labels "DM2."

to the outcome. How does this help us? Well, Causal Route Difference focuses on difference-making in the second sense. It focuses on difference-making regarding *the route* to D . It tells us that φ makes a difference to D insofar as it appears among the causal factors that lead to D . In the following section, I will argue that a difference to the route to D is not enough in the context of Humeanism. What we need here is a difference in Sartorio's first sense: a difference regarding the *occurrence* of D .

5. Why Humeans Cannot Care about Causal Routes

Imagine you are on a hiking trip. Your only goal is to reach the summit of the mountain today. You know from your map that there are several routes you could take. There are, for instance, routes with better and worse views. However, since you only care about reaching the summit today, these differences do not matter to you. As long as some route leads you to the summit today, you are fine. Given what you want, there is no need to prefer one to the other. What matters is – *solely* – that you reach the summit today. In yet other words: once it is certain that you get what you want, all four routes seem to be “normatively on a par” from a Humean perspective – none of them seems more important than the others.

There are, I think, important similarities to our earlier examples. In Post Box, there are two “routes” (φ and not- φ) to your object of desire D . And, since D is your *only* object of desire, why would it matter which route is taken? Why should the Humean grant one of the options more normative significance?

Crucially, proponents of Causal Route Difference have to maintain that it *does* matter which route is taken in Post Box; according to them, the two routes are *not* “normatively on a par.” Remember: proponents of Causal Route Difference argue that φ -ing causes D and that, hence, it makes a difference to D and that, hence, φ -ing promotes D and that, hence, I have a reason to φ . On the other hand, not φ -ing does not cause D ¹³, which is why it does not promote D , which is why there is *no* reason to not- φ . Therefore: proponents of Causal Route Difference are committed to the claim that φ -ing has more normative importance than not φ -ing. According to them, the two routes in Post Box are not “normatively on a par.”

Here is what I think is wrong with this: from a *Humean* perspective, the idea that the difference to the route to D matters is entirely unmotivated. There is no Humean rationale for it. Humeanism simply does not contain the resources to argue that the causal routes matter. Let me explicate.

Take our hiking example again. Other things equal, if four routes will lead you to the summit today and it is dead certain that you choose one of them and thereby reach the summit, then *which route you choose* does not make a difference to your reaching the summit today. It does not make any difference to the occurrence of what you want. Whatever route you take, you reach the summit today. Given what you want, there seems to be no point in preferring one route to the other, precisely because the routes do not

¹³ It seems to me that we should not say that not φ -ing causes D in Post Box. If we made a list of the causal factors leading to D , it would be strange if not φ -ing were on it.

make any difference to the *occurrence* of *D*. Choosing a route, quite trivially, makes a difference to *the way in which* the summit is reached. But this is the only difference it makes.

Now, why should we – as Humeans – care about the way in which the summit is reached? Why should it matter *how* the relevant desires are realized, given that they are realized no matter what? Again, Humeanism is a theory about the normative importance of actions. According to it, our desires are the only sources of normative importance. Action alternatives are normatively important in virtue of the fact that they make a difference *to the relevant desires*. And this is exactly why taking any of the four routes cannot be *more normatively significant* than taking any of the other three. Given the hiker's only desire, there is no reason to prefer any route to the others.

Something similar holds, I think, in Post Box. Your only desire is that you read the letter today. If there are two “routes” that lead to this outcome for certain, then why would, from a Humean perspective, the *way* the outcome is reached matter?

Let me formulate my point more generally. In a Humean framework, I think, we lack the rationale to claim that, given the certainty of the relevant outcome, the option that *causes* the outcome is *more normatively significant* than the option that does not cause the outcome. What is so special about causation? The fact that φ -ing causes *D* is just one feature of φ among many others. Other features of φ also make a difference to the route to *D*. If I fetch the letter I, say, pass by the bathroom, walk down the stairs and meet a neighbor on the way. All this comes with φ -ing. And all of it makes a difference to the way in which *D* occurs. But why would *these* changes in the route to desire satisfaction matter to the Humean? If the only desire is to read the letter today, how could it ever matter that I pass the bathroom, walk down the stairs and meet a neighbor? What is so special about *these* things that the Humean should say that fetching the letter is more normatively significant than not fetching it? Saying so must seem entirely arbitrary. (I believe that Behrends, DiPaolo and Sharadin would agree.) But why would it be arbitrary? Because Humeanism simply does not yield the resources to argue that these three “features” of φ are of any relevance at all. And the same holds, I think, regarding causation. Given the certainty of the satisfaction of the only desire in play, the Humean simply does not have any resources to argue that taking the option that *causes* the outcome is any more normatively significant than not taking the option. For a Humean, the fact that φ causes *D* must seem as irrelevant as any other feature of φ , for instance, that it comes with passing by the bathroom.

I think that the only rationale for granting causation this special role stems from our common intuitions about promotion.¹⁴ But these intuitions pertain to everyday life, where causation and an increase in probabilities usually go together. So we should not take our intuitions about promotion to be authoritative in highly unusual P(1) situations, in which causation and an increase in probabilities do *not* go together. Following the Humean Core Idea, we find that causation does not matter in such scenarios, because the action that causes *D* makes no difference to (the occurrence of) *D*. And

¹⁴ Cf. Behrends and DiPaolo (2011) and Sharadin (2015).

saying so has, I believe, intuitive support: plausibly, a desire-satisfaction-based theory of reasons should not tell us that we have reasons to perform actions that change nothing regarding (the occurrence) of what we want.

If my considerations are convincing, the Humean should say that there is no normative reason to φ in P(1) situations. Schroeder-Promote delivers this result. Fit-Promote does not. Therefore, Schroeder-Promote is the sense of promotion that is more adequate in the context of a Humean theory of reasons.

A final remark: it follows from what we have said that Causal Route Difference misses the point. It grants actions a special normative role “just because” they cause D , even if the occurrence of D is dead certain. It focuses on making a difference to the *route* to D , where what actually matters is making a difference *to the occurrence of D* . Now, does Probability Difference fail for similar reasons? Or does it, as it should, focus on differences to the occurrence of D ? I believe the answer is that Probability Difference focuses on the right thing. It does not miss the point, because facts about the probability of desire satisfaction very plausibly count as facts *about* (the occurrence of) desire satisfaction. In other words, Humeanism is about the occurrences of various D s, and facts about the probabilities of these occurrences are clearly facts about *these occurrences*. So Probability Difference does not miss the point.

6. Conclusion

My conclusion is that the argument from P(1) desires is unsound. The second premise is false. Contrary to what Behrends, DiPaolo and Sharadin claim, φ -ing does not promote D in P(1) situations. At least, φ -ing does not promote D in any sense that is relevant in the context of a Humean theory of reasons.

My first step was to appeal to the Humean Core Idea: an action must make a difference to D in order to count as promoting D . We then distinguished between the two kinds of difference-making that underlie Fit-Promote and Schroeder-Promote, respectively. Causal Route Difference presented us with a sufficient condition for promotion by telling us that a difference is made as soon as φ appears among the causal factors leading to D . Probability Difference gave us a necessary (and sufficient) condition for promotion: φ makes a difference to D just in case it changes its probability.

We then turned to Sartorio’s analysis of the notion of difference-making. Her lesson was that there is a distinction between making a difference to an outcome and making a difference to the route to an outcome. And this turned out to be helpful in our context. In Post Box, φ -ing only makes a difference in the latter sense. So Sartorio’s distinction opened the way to claim that Causal Route Difference cannot capture the Humean Core Idea – Humeans need a difference to the *outcome*, not a difference to the *route* to the outcome.

Why is the difference to the route irrelevant for Humeans? My answer was that Humeanism simply does not contain the resources to motivate the idea that causal routes matter. There is no Humean rationale for the idea that the *way* a desire is satisfied is of any relevance at all (given, of course,

that this way is not itself the object of a desire). In a scenario where D is certain to happen, the (arbitrary) fact that φ causes D changes as little about *the occurrence of D* as the (arbitrary) fact that φ -ing comes with, say, passing by the bathroom. So Causal Route Difference cannot generate a difference to D – and hence cannot capture the Humean Core Idea.

I said that the rationale for granting causation a special role stems from our commonsense intuitions about promotion. “Surely,” it is thought, “an action that *causes* an effect *promotes* this effect, right?” But once we step out of the contexts in which these intuitions have developed and start dealing with rather artificial P(1) situations, it should not surprise us that our commonsense intuitions are a less reliable guide. This unreliability comes to light, I think, in the face of Sharadin’s rather surprising claim that it is a matter of common sense that agents have a reason to φ in P(1) situations (2015: 4). I disagree. It is all but clear whether common sense tells us so. In my view, the commonsense reaction would be: “Well, I get what I want no matter if I φ or not, so why on earth should I φ ?!?” This is the way I take “lay Humeans” to react. If all roads lead to Rome and your only desire is getting to Rome, why bother with which road to take? The adequate *Humean* answer is: “Well, do not.”

All in all, probabilistic accounts of promotion seem alive and well. Furthermore, they seem *prima facie* convincing, because making a difference regarding the probability of desire satisfaction is a plausible way of spelling out the Humean Core Idea: we have reasons to perform actions because these actions make a difference to (the occurrence of) what we desire. And if desire satisfaction is dead certain, we have no reason to do anything.¹⁵

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¹⁵ I would like to thank Thomas Diemar and Peter Stemmer for several discussions about promotion. I am also grateful for the immensely helpful and substantive commentaries from several anonymous referees of *JESP*. As someone whose career in philosophy is still very young, this was an encouraging experience.

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