

PHIL 5983: Hume and Practical Reasoning  
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*SP*, Chapters 8–11

## Chapter 8

- Rather than trying to look for the psychological state that is present whenever anyone has a reason, Schroeder will investigate what psychological state is best suited for the role of grounding reasons. Schroeder will argue that desires, construed as motivationally efficacious states, are best suited for this role.
- Remember that Schroeder rejects No Background Conditions. This might be thought to generate a puzzle.

So this has to be possible: that Ronnie acts *for* a reason, without knowing that the sufficient conditions for it to be a reason for him are satisfied. (149)

- Schroeder then offers a convenient solution.

What if (1) that psychological state were itself motivationally efficacious? And what if (2) being motivated in the right way by this state counted as acting for a reason, even if one has no explicit beliefs about what reasons one has? That would solve all our problems. For then it could be the background condition *itself* that explains how Ronnie could act for a reason, without appeal to Ronnie being aware either of the background condition, or that he actually had a reason. All that we have to say in order to dispel our puzzle in this way, are two things: (1) that the psychological state that explains the difference between Ronnie and Bradley is *motivationally efficacious*, and (2) that being motivated in the right way by this state counts as acting *for* a reason. (149)

- Scanlon offers an alternative psychological state — seeing something as reasons — as being better suited to ground reasons. In particular, the idea is that only such a state can make sense of an agent acting *for* a reason. The

challenge to Schroeder is to explain how being motivated by a desire can, all by itself, constitute acting for a reason.

The challenge, if we think that being motivated by a desire is sufficient to count as having acted for a reason, is to explain how being motivated by a desire is different from being motivated by a bizarre virus, in the way that Ronnie is in this unusual example. (152)

- Desires direct thoughts:

So when you want a cup of coffee, you find yourself thinking about a wide range of topics, and considerations having to do with these topics strike you in a special, *salient*, way, and when they do, this is the kind of thing to prompt you to act in a way that is non-alienating. These are the kinds of thing that are involved in having a *desire* for a cup of coffee, on my account. Moreover, I can say *which* topics your attention will be directed to, which considerations you will find salient, and which actions they will prompt you to do. You will be prompted to do actions which obviously, given your beliefs, promote *P*, the object of your desire. The salient considerations that prompt some such action, *A*, are the things you believe which, given your beliefs, would obviously help to explain why your doing *A* would help to bring about *P*. And the topics to which your attention is turned are the topics to which these salient considerations would provide answers. (156)

- And this feature is prominent in Schroeder's analysis of desire.

For *X* to have a desire whose object is *P* is for *X* to be in a psychological state grounding the disposition: when for some action *a* and proposition *r* believed by *X*, given *X*'s beliefs *r* obviously helps to explain why *X*'s doing *a* promotes *P*, *X* finds *r* salient, and this tends to prompt *X* to do *a*, and *X*'s attention is directed toward considerations like *r*. (156–157)

Note that this analysis is not in terms of reasons.

- Schroeder next explains how on this conception of desires they involve seeing considerations as reasons, but not as part of the analysis of desire.

When you desire that *p*, according to Reason, your reasons are the things that help to explain why your doing *A* would promote *p*. And according to Desire, the things that strike you as salient are the considerations that obviously, given your beliefs,

explain why your doing *A* would promote *p*. So there is a very intimate structural connection between your actual reasons and your salience-strikings.

I think that this structural connection is close enough to support the hypothesis that an adequate theory of mental content would yield the result that the salience-strikings associated with desires turn out to have the content that the consideration so striking you is a reason for you to act. (159)

## Chapter 9

- Schroeder discusses the connection between reasons and motivation. He characterizes internalism as follows:

It is widely thought that there is some such set of circumstances that we can specify, such that in every case of a reason, there will be a non-trivially true subjunctive conditional about the agent's motivation to act for that reason. Internalists hold that reasons are sufficient for facts about motivation of this kind. (165)

But Schroeder offers a counter-example:

Nate loves successful surprise parties thrown in his honor, but can't stand unsuccessful surprise parties. If there is an unsuspected surprise party waiting for Nate in the living room, then plausibly there is a reason for Nate to go into the living room. There is certainly something God would put in the 'pros' column in listing pros and cons of Nate's going into the living room. But it is simply impossible to motivate Nate to go into the living room for this reason — for as soon as you tell him about it, it will go away. Nate's case looks to me like a counter-example to many strong theses about the connection between reasons and motivation. (165)

- Schroeder makes an even stronger claim. Namely, people can have a reason to do something without having any motivation to do it whatsoever. Example: Joel and Madison, WI. But, is Schroeder's analysis here correct?
- Schroeder, as a Hypotheticalist, does acknowledge that there is some serious connection between reasons and motivation.

For Hypotheticalism holds that every reason is connected to some desire, and that desires are, dispositionally, motivating states, motivation by which counts as acting for reasons. There are simply many ways in which these dispositions can fail to be realized — and particularly so, in the case of agent-neutral reasons such as those of morality. (167)

◦ All reasons are grounded in desires, but Schroeder says that a reason can fail to motivate if it has only a remote connection to promoting your desires.

Q: But why isn't there a *little* motivation in these cases?

◦ Evaluate Schroeder's reasoning in this passage:

If the central moral reasons are agent-neutral, then they are reasons that everyone has, no matter what her desires. Still, agents who desire certain things that are closely connected to these reasons will do better at acting for those reasons. So since everyone has a reason to do those things, and having such desires is universally instrumental for doing so, it follows that everyone has a reason to have desires that are closely related to moral reasons. (169)

• Schroeder also discusses epistemological puzzles concerning the normative. But, I'll skip this stuff.

## Chapter 10

• Schroeder will argue that the Humean Theory of Reasons is not objectionably instrumental. Note the 6 claims that are supposed to fall under this objection, as listed on p. 180. Schroeder claims that Hypotheticalism can allow for deliberation about desires. It is only committed to the (relatively) weak claim that you cannot have reasons to act without having desires. (But surely Hypotheticalism is committed to something a little stronger than that, isn't it?)

• A possible objection:

According to those who think that the Humean is committed to 2, I can only allow for reasons in favor of *extrinsic* or *instrumental* desires, and not for reasons in favor of *intrinsic* desires. (181)

But Schroeder cannot find a way of understanding an instrumental desire that makes this claim plausible.

◦ Schroeder even rejects the weaker claim that, for the Humean about reasons, at least some desires must be beyond rational criticism. See p. 183 for the argument Schroeder is targeting.

◦ The "trickle-down" theory:

Consider, for example, a simple theory that I call the *trickle-down theory*. The trickle-down theory, like most views we have

considered so far, is a theory about *how* a reason can be explained by a desire. The theory is that the reason gets explained by the desire only in company with a further reason to *have* that desire. Then, the idea goes, the force of the reason to have the desire ‘trickles down’ through the desire, to reasons to do what promotes that desire. (184)

This theory is supposed to lead to the problematic explanatory regress. But Schroeder says that the Humean about reasons simply shouldn’t accept the trickle-down theory.

Schroeder provides an example — Bob — of someone with intrinsic desires that supposedly provide reasons in support of one another. (185–186). But there is nothign circular here.

- But surely, according to the Humean Theory of Reasons, it cannot be the case that *all* of one’s desires are the result of rational deliberation. Schroeder presents another example involving Bob. (189)

## Chapter 11

- On pp. 92–96 Schroeder reviews all the main claims made in the book.
- Schroeder summarizes some of the advantages of Hypotheticalism.
  1. It is a reductive theory of the normative.
  2. It provides a good account of the weight of reasons.
  3. It explains moral motivation and moral epistemology.
- Schroeder endorses a methodological principle which states that it is better to start by looking at agent-relational reasons, rather than agent-neutral reasons, when investigating a theory of reasons in general.