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Moral Rationalism and the Normative Status of Desiderative Coherence

It is common nowadays to appeal to coherence in making sense of moral knowledge and justification. For example, in the method of "reflective equilibrium," we check our moral intuitions and our general principles for consistency, and modify each in hopes of achieving a fully coherent system. But what does such a method deliver? While some are content to view the method as a practical, or morally good one, others suggest that what it gives us are objective moral truths, externally justified bits of real moral knowledge.¹ My own belief is these latter views are on the wrong track: coherence is no route to moral objectivity, because moral coherence isn't connected in the right way to norms of truth or rationality. In this paper, I'll consider, and reject, one of the most sophisticated and elegant attempts to establish a kind of objectivity view: that of Michael Smith.²

It is often thought that what is good about coherence in general is that coherence leads to truth. And under certain assumptions, this seems plausible: if a theory aims to accurately represent the external world, that theory is more likely to be true if its parts fit together in the right sort of way.³ But in the moral domain, what our beliefs represent, and even whether they are in the business of representing, is part of what is under contention. What do they represent? How could a simple representational belief motivate us to act? One skeptical response is the Humean one: moral beliefs are grounded in sympathy; they are emotive, not cognitive; we act morally because we care about each other. Of course, on such a view, moral reasons for action are desire-

dependent and thus agent-relative: you have reason to act morally only if you have the right sorts of desires.

Some moral epistemologists hope to deploy coherence as a means of avoiding such Humean conclusions. On Michael Smith's neo-rationalist view, you have "normative reason" to do whatever your fully rational self would want you to do -- that is, whatever you* would want yourself to do if you* had full information and a maximally coherent, unified set of desires. The subset of particularly moral reasons is picked out by appeal to moral substance, and it follows that when you desire to act badly, you fail to have the desires of your rational self. Thus you will desire to act morally just insofar as you are rational.⁴

The "tendency toward coherence" that is part of rationality, Smith explains, plays two roles in this process. First, it is because we have a tendency toward coherence in our desires that our particular desire sets are rationally criticizable with respect to coherence. So coherence helps ground the content of normative reason claims. Second, this tendency explains how we come to be motivated to do what we have normative reason to do: a person who believes he would have a desire to do A if he were fully coherent is more coherent if he actually desires to do A. Moral beliefs, then, are grounded in rationality, moral reasons for action are non-desire dependent and non-agent relative, and those reasons apply to you regardless of the set of desires you happen to have.

As various commentators have noted, for this to follow, coherence of desires must have a special status. We can't explain its normative force with an appeal to truth and representation, since desires don't represent, and in any case, it would be question-begging to simply assume that moral claims correspond to an external world. It can't be

that a tendency toward coherence of desires is just a desire for coherence, since then normative reasons would be desire-dependent and agent-relative, and the view would be Humean. It can't be that the tendency toward coherence of desires is merely a pragmatic one, in service of other desires, for the same reason. Rather, what we might call "desiderative coherence" must be a genuine part of rationality. But it's not clear why it should have this status. In reply, Smith has given new arguments that "a tendency toward coherence, is constitutive of what it is to be a rational creature."⁵ These new arguments rest on an analogy between coherence in desires and coherence in a priori beliefs and logical reasoning.

In this paper, I discuss these new arguments of Smith's and argue that they do not succeed. Along the way, I offer an account of the normative status of desiderative coherence. The question before us is, Why should our desires be coherent? Smith's answer is that such status is grounded in rationality, but I will challenge this. In fact, as I see it, the normative ground of coherence is a mix of desiderative, pragmatic, and, in morally significant cases, moral elements; and the analogies support this. This means pressures for desiderative coherence are agent-relative and overridable. If this is right, Smith's "anti-Humean" theory of reasons is quite Humean, and reasons are agent-relative after all.⁶

1. What is a maximally coherent and unified set of desires?

To find out what we have normative reason to do, Smith explains, we deliberate. An important part of this process involves asking whether our desires are "systematically justifiable;" this means trying to integrate our specific desires into a "coherent," and

"unified" outlook. As I'll explain, it is not always clear what this means, but the basic idea is a kind of reflective equilibrium: if we can find general desires that explain and justify our more specific ones, then our overall set is more unified with those general desires added. If those general desires have specific implications, we might adopt those as well, or if they conflict with desires we already have, we might decide the general desire is on the wrong track. In the latter case, we can try to find some other general desire that would fit.

A simple example involves the proper distribution of goods. If Maria desires that Adam, Bob, and Charles each get x , and that David gets less than x , she may make her desire set more unified by asking what it is that Adam, Bob and Charles all have in common. If that quality -- say, being in desperate need -- is one that David has too, she should come to desire giving x to David, too.⁷ In this example, Maria's new desires are more coherent and unified, and thus "make more sense" than the set of desires she started with.⁸

It is important to generalize in the right way. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord casts some doubt on the importance of generalization by raising the following question. If one has a desire to eat coffee ice cream, it seems that a general desire to eat all kinds of ice cream would explain and justify his specific desire. Ought one then to develop a desire to eat all kinds of ice cream? This would be strange.⁹ Smith says in reply that the proper generalization here is that one should simply desire to eat what one enjoys eating. He writes, "Adding this desire will indeed ensure that [the person's] overall desire set makes more sense, and so make it less liable to reasoned criticism because if the new desire were added he would no longer be liable to the charge of making arbitrary distinctions."¹⁰

Our rational selves will have fully unified, coherent desire sets. Now, what we have normative reason to do is what our rational selves would advise (later, want) us to do. One is more coherent, Smith says, if one wants to do what one believes one's rational self would advise one to do, and since coherence is part of rationality, the rational person will desire to do just that.¹¹

Now, Russ Shafer-Landau points out that Smith seems to have a problem here with overridden normative reasons. Normative reasons, it seems, can conflict: "I may have moral reason to keep our lunch date," he writes, "but my ideal self would advise against it, as keeping the date prevents me from attending to an even greater moral concern that's just unexpectedly arisen." Or perhaps I have legal reason to do what my ideal self would tell me not to do, because what the law requires is immoral or imprudent. If my rational self just gives me advice about what to do, we have normative reason to do what our ideal selves tell us not to do. And the account fails to explain such normative reasons.¹²

The answer, Smith says, is that instead of looking specifically at the advice of my rational self, we may look at the desires of my rational self -- what he wants me to do. My rational self can have conflicting desires about what I ought to do, wanting me to do A and B, where I cannot do both, and where one of these overrides the other. And then when we say, "If S believes that an action is right, he believes he has normative reason to do it," the normative reasons in play are, as Smith calls them, pro tanto reasons, not all-things-considered reasons.¹³ So, for example, I have normative reason to keep my lunch date, because my fully rational self wants me to, and normative reason to attend to my greater moral concern -- in keeping with tradition in moral dilemmas, this is probably

helping some accident victim -- and the latter overrides the former, though they are both normative reasons. My fully rational self, then, can have conflicting desires. In what follows, I'll call desires that we have before settling on what to do prima facie desires, as opposed to "all-things-considered" desires, or intentions.¹⁴

So, for Smith, coherence means something like systematic unification among prima facie, overridable desires, in a way that maximizes generality. Let me call this "desiderative coherence." Unless otherwise specified, this is the kind of coherence I mean when I say "coherence" below. Now, the question I want to ask is, what is the normative status of desiderative coherence? Smith claims such coherence is part of rationality. And this claim is central to his conclusion that his "normative reasons" are not desire-dependent or agent-relative. But why should we see it this way?

2. Two unsuccessful candidates for the normative status of coherence

Before I turn to Smith's discussion of the status of coherence, let me set aside what might seem to be two candidates for its normative force. First, notice that desiderative coherence is separate from logical consistency and one can have noncoherent desire sets without believing any contradictions. I may know my desire to give David less is utterly arbitrary, and still be in logically fine shape. I can want A and not-A and still not believe any contradictions.¹⁵ So desiderative coherence is not grounded in logical consistency, and its normativity can't be found there.¹⁶

A second possibility might be something like this: what is wrong with noncoherent desire sets is that they contain desires that conflict, and just as conflicting beliefs cannot all be true, conflicting desires cannot all be fulfilled. But this seems to be

barking up the wrong tree, since it seems that there are desire sets that are coherent in Smith's sense that contain mutually unfulfillable desires. Consider the desire to keep all of one's promises, considered alone. It seems that my desire set is more coherent if I develop specific desires to keep specific promises as particular occasions arise for doing so. But, of course, that might mean adding desires that cannot all be fulfilled --- if, say, I promised to meet A at 2:00 and B at 2:05 in two distant places. So a fully coherent desire set might have desires inconsistent in this narrowly construed way.

Perhaps one might insist that the problem here is that I only have prima facie desires to keep both appointments, and that what coherence requires is having unconflicting all-things-considered desires. But notice first, as Smith makes clear in his reply to Shafer-Landau, our fully rational self should inform us about all of our normative reasons: even if ultimately, my overall normative reason is to keep my promise to meet A, it still seems that I have an overridden normative reason to meet B. And my fully rational self must therefore want me to meet B even if he wants me to meet A more. So even though it may be right to say that I only have one all-things-considered normative reason, and it may be right to say that my fully rational self has only one all-things-considered desire about what I ought to do, that fully rational self must be allowed to have conflicting prima facie desires.¹⁷

More significantly -- and this will be important later on -- it is clear that it is at the level of such prima facie desires that coherence is important. The move from specific desires for keeping some specific promises, to the general desire to keep one's promises, back to the specific desire to keep all specific promises seems a paradigm case of applying coherence. And such reasoning must happen at the level of prima facie desires,

since as my example shows, my desires to keep specific promises can conflict. It is true that in planning and forming all-things-considered desires -- or intentions -- one must make use of a certain kind of coherence of plans: one cannot intend to do A and B if doing A precludes doing B and vice versa. But this is not the kind of coherence at stake here. As my promise-keeping example shows, unless he is very lucky, a maximally coherent agent's prima facie desire set as a whole will contain mutually unfulfillable desires. And of course, full coherence goes beyond such considerations in any case: if I want to give x to Adam, Bob and Charles but not to David, I may gauge the strengths of my desires and the money I have and decide, indeed, to give money to A, B, and C, and not to D. I'll have intentions that are "coherent" in the sense that they can all be carried out. The desiderative coherence relevant here must be coherence of prima facie desires, and the normativity of this cannot be grounded in coherence of intention or planning. So mutual satisfiability cannot be the key to understanding desiderative coherence.

3. The normative status of coherence I -- consistency, generality, and unity

So what is the normative status of desiderative coherence? Sayre-McCord points out that the explanation we rely on in the belief case doesn't carry over. In that case, "more general beliefs have as their content considerations that both serve as evidence for the truth of the lower level claims and find support themselves from their being able to explain (what the person takes to be) other facts."¹⁸ But this doesn't carry over to the desire case.

In reply, Smith says that while this problem may arise in thinking of empirical domains, it doesn't arise if we think of a priori domains. There, the pressure for

coherence and unity doesn't come from their role linking facts and more general beliefs. Instead, he says, when we reason a priori, we feel pressure for coherence and unity that "is not so much explained but assumed."¹⁹ And the desire case is the same. The idea seems to be: there are coherence pressures in all a priori reasoning, so it is fair to appeal to such pressures in the desire case as well. This line of thought rests on an analogy between desiderative coherence and coherence in a priori beliefs.

But I claim that this analogy with the a priori doesn't end in the conclusion Smith wants, partly because of dissimilarities between desire and belief, and partly because the situation with respect to coherence in a priori reasoning is complex. The most obvious relevant context, I'll argue, is mathematics of the infinite. Here, coherence and unity are not always required; when they are, they are explained, and are best explained in terms of pragmatic considerations and intra-mathematical goals and interests, some of which carry over to the desire case and some of which do not.

What we're looking for in our analogy is convergence, from a set of initial a priori beliefs, via a reflective generalizing process, to a single, particular set of coherent beliefs. Mathematical reasoning is an obvious starting point when considering a priori reasoning and constructed ontologies. And Smith himself suggests that it provides an apt analogue for ethics.²⁰ But simple arithmetic is not the right thing to compare with here, because coherence in simple arithmetic can be simply understood as logical consistency: the elements of simple arithmetic, after all, can be captured in purely logical terms. And as we've seen, logical consistency is not what we're after. A better analogy would be with reasoning about the infinite; infinite set theory seems to involve just the kind of convergence process that Smith hopes rational reflection on desires will produce.²¹

Notice, one kind of consideration we cannot appeal to is the realist one. A certain type of realist about mathematics might say this: We care about coherence and unity because the point of set-theoretic axioms is to correctly describe the objective set-theoretic universe, and we have reason to believe that that universe is a certain way. There is nothing like "correct description" in the desire case, and in any case, the point of the desiderative coherence project is to establish a metaethical view, not assume one. Realist pressures toward coherence and unity would be relevant here only under an assumption of realism, which would be question begging in the present context.

I'll discuss the normative status of three parts of coherence, taken in turn: consistency, generality, and unity, in each case discussing why desires should be coherent in this sense. In each case, I'll argue 1) that rationality is not part of the answer; 2) that the pressure for such coherence rests on desiderative and pragmatic elements; 3) that desiderative coherence pressures are thus agent-relative and overridable, 4) that coherence pressures in mathematics are pragmatic and "internal" -- they are related to particularly mathematical goals and expectations; and 5) that therefore the analogy with mathematics doesn't establish anything about coherence and rationality. I'll argue further that 6) that this suggests a possible moral ground for moral coherence: we may look to internal moral pressures to explain the coherence pressures only for the special class of morally significant desires. A moral explanation of moral coherence is, I believe, correct, but it is of no help for the metaethical project on offer here, which seeks to carve our moral reasons as a subset of normative reasons. To sum up: my claim is the pressures for desiderative coherence are pragmatic, desiderative, agent-relative, and overridable;

and while there is no rationally-grounded pressure for coherence among general desires, there may be moral pressure for coherence among morally significant desires.

3a. Consistency

I've already rejected logical consistency and unsatisfiability as sources for the normativity of desiderative coherence. But perhaps we might try making use of a different kind of consistency norm applicable specifically to desires. For notice, while I am logically consistent if I want A and not-A, I may not seem "desideratively consistent," since the things I want not only conflict, but in some sense "contradict" one another.²² Then, our analogy would inform us that just as it is irrational to believe P and not-P for a priori P, so it is irrational to want A and want not-A.²³

In fact, I claim, it isn't irrational to want A and not-A, and the analogy isn't of any help here.²⁴ In my previous work on desiderative consistency, I argued that the proper characterization of "consistency" for desires concerns not their logical form, but rather whether they are mutually satisfiable, and that such "essentially conflicting" desires are no less rational for an agent than ordinary conflicting desires.²⁵ A set of desires, I claim, is "consistent" when there is a possible world in which they can all be fulfilled; A and B are inconsistent when they essentially conflict.²⁶ On such a characterization, the desire to eat cookies and the desire to be healthy would be consistent but conflicting. But a desire to have a sexually exclusive relationship with P and a desire to have sex with Q would be inconsistent (wanting A and B, essentially conflicting), as would a desire for my rival to win and a desire for him not to win (wanting A and not-A).²⁷ This makes desire ambivalence -- wanting A and not-A -- part of desiderative inconsistency, but only a part.

It is sometimes thought that desire-ambivalence and inconsistency are merely artifacts of representation of desires, and that a finely grained representation would show both to be quite rare. For example, if I want to eat cookies every day, but also want to refrain for health reasons, then I am not ambivalent about cookies: the proper representation would show that what I want is not cookies and no cookies (A and not-A), but rather cookies and health (A and B). My desire for cookies and health only contingently conflict, since there is a possible world in which cookies are healthy foods. So, on this view, wanting to eat cookies and to refrain from eating them would not form a pair of inconsistent desires.

As I argued in my previous work, however, there are cases for which this treatment fails; even when it succeeds, I believe the agent can be properly regarded as desideratively inconsistent nonetheless. Consider the case in which my rival is my friend: if I want my friendly rival to win, because he is my friend, and I also want him not to win, because he is my rival, there is no finer grained representation of my desires available. I may simply want him to win and not to win. Indeed, we can imagine a case in which I want someone to win and not to win, for reasons I don't understand myself: perhaps I find myself wanting him to win, because I have warm feelings for him I didn't know I had, and perhaps I find myself wanting him not to win, because I feel competitive with him in ways I didn't know I did. That we can imagine such cases suggests the proper representation of the desire is that I am ambivalent.²⁸ And similarly for wanting sexual exclusivity with A and sex with B, assuming these desires are non-instrumental. I may want exclusivity with A because she is my spouse, and sex with B partly because she is not; then no finer-grained representation is available. Finally, even in cookie-type

cases, the agent who wants health and cookies faces the same practical problems in choosing what to do as any ambivalent agent, and is better off if he has a desire to refrain than if he has only a desire to eat. So even this agent, in a sense, wants to eat cookies (A) and refrain from eating them (not-A).²⁹

This definition of consistency, in terms of possibility rather than logical form, is well-supported and intuitive. It is in line with Ruth Marcus's definition for consistency for a set of rules,³⁰ and with consistency for a set of sentences. Whatever is "incoherent" about wanting A and not-A applies just as well to wanting A and B where these essentially conflict: in each case there is no way the world could be to satisfy one's desires; in each case one is bound to be dissatisfied; in each case to become satisfied, one would have to change not the world, but one's self.

So desires are "inconsistent" when they essentially conflict. As I also argued in my previous work, there is nothing worse from the point of view of rationality about having essentially conflicting desires than having desires that contingently conflict, which, as we've already seen, must be allowed in the fully coherent agent's full desire set.³¹ With respect to action, essential conflicts raise the same sorts of problems that contingent conflicts do: the agent must deliberate and decide which he wants to make his all-things-considered desire. It is true that a person with essentially conflicting desires is bound to be dissatisfied, but a merely conflicted person is often bound to be dissatisfied too: my desire to smoke and my desire to be healthy conflict only contingently, but this fact is no solace to me, since it is unlikely they will become mutually fulfillable in my lifetime, and I wouldn't know how to change to world to make them mutually fulfillable.³² The person who is drinking himself to death and wants to live has a merely

"contingent" conflict, while the person who wants his friendly rival to win and not to win has an essential one; clearly the former is worse off with respect to life's happiness.³³

So, since essential conflicts pose no more difficulties for an agent than contingent ones, it cannot be that there is something less-than-fully rational about desiderative inconsistency; rationality is not part of the normative ground of desiderative consistency (1). Of course, some agents, in some circumstances, will be happier and better off if they are desideratively consistent than if they are not. The person whose all-things-considered desire is to be healthy may be happier if he loses his desire to smoke. And some agents simply want to be desideratively consistent. So consistency has a pragmatic and desiderative normative ground (2). But some agents may not be best off in being desideratively consistent. The person whose all-things-considered desire is for his friendly rival to lose ought not give up his desire that his friend win: such a desire is admirable and a natural part of friendship. This means the pressure for desiderative consistency is agent-relative and overridable (3).

Now, what does the analogy tell us here? In the case of a priori beliefs, the relevant kind of consistency is logical consistency. We take pains to ensure that our a priori beliefs are logically consistent for various reasons: believing that P and not-P is not very useful or informative, especially since P and not-P together logically imply everything. In the mathematics case, an inconsistent theory would allow us to prove any mathematical claim; such a theory would be mathematically uninteresting and useless. So there are intra-mathematical pressures for mathematical coherence (4).³⁴

But nothing like this applies in the desire case. Having essentially conflicting desires, and even wanting A and not-A, does not in itself render my desires less

interesting or less useful, especially in the ordinary case in which one of these desires will outweigh the other.³⁵ As is often pointed out, when I come to have a prima facie desire for A, this need not lead me to get rid of prima facie desires that are inconsistent with A. So there is a pressure toward consistency in the case of a priori beliefs, but this pressure has no analogue in the desire case, and fails to show a connection between coherence and rationality (5).

If the pressures for logical consistency in the mathematical case are pragmatic and intra-mathematical, we might ask whether there are pragmatic, intra-moral pressures for the special class of moral desires. A certain kind of extra-logical consistency is often taken to be morally significant. Some argue that consistency pressures show there can be no real moral dilemmas, because it would be unfair to blame agents who have done their best.³⁶ Marcus, as I've mentioned, says that a set of moral rules is consistent if there is a possible world in which they can all be obeyed; this kind of consistency is necessary for the role she says dilemmas play in our lives, motivating us to arrange our lives and institutions so that dilemmas do not arise. On this view, there are obvious moral pressures to endorse a consistent set of rules, since otherwise this demand would be impossible to fulfill. Finally, some take it to be in the nature of an ought claim that if you ought to do A, it cannot be the case that you ought to do not-A.³⁷

These are all intra-moral pressures for moral consistency. The most one could say in the case of desires, it seems to me, is that if A is the morally right thing to do and you want to do A then your desires are more admirable if you do not also want to do those things that prevent you from doing A, including not-A. So while there is no rationally grounded pressure for consistency among general desires, there may be moral pressure

for consistency among morally significant desires (6). This "moral pressure" in the desire case seems weak for consistency, but as we will see, is more interesting in the next case: generality.

3b. Generality

Next, I'll discuss generality.³⁸ Consider the example of giving money to Adam, Bob, and Charles, and then generalizing this desire so it applies to David as well. And recall Smith's explanation of what happens when one adds a generalizing desire: "Adding this desire will indeed ensure that [the person's] overall desire set makes more sense, and so make it less liable to reasoned criticism because if the new desire were added he would no longer be liable to the charge of making arbitrary distinctions." So the importance of generality is grounded in its connection to non-arbitrariness. But I'll argue that when it comes to the non-arbitrariness of desires, generality is not what we're after: a desire's being general, or generalizable, does not make that desire more rational; "arbitrariness" is more complex than simple particularity. In the mathematics case, generality is connected to non-arbitrariness, but the intra-mathematical sources of pressure toward generality do not have analogues for general desires. In the moral context, a kind of "generality" is morally significant, but this generality, I argue, can only be explicated from within an established moral point of view.

Let's look first the non-moral ice-cream example. Smith says adding the general desire to eat what I enjoy eating explains and justifies my specific desire to eat coffee ice cream, and that adding such a general desire will make my overall desire set less arbitrary and less liable to criticism. But I claim generality itself does not play an important role

here at all. If the question is "Why do you want to eat that"? and the answer is "Because I like it," the content of this is something along the lines of, "I expect it to bring me pleasure." But this answer suits the purpose without any generalizing desire that one must always want to do what one expects will bring one pleasure. On this interpretation, we see the desire as a kind of instrumental desire: a means to a certain end. And instrumental desires, it seems, are justified and explained by reference to the agent's ultimate ends, and not by reference to generality.

What if we see the desire as a non-instrumental, "intrinsic" one? Here things are more complex, since it is a matter of some controversy whether, and when, intrinsic stand in need of justification. But I claim that even in cases where it seems possible that they do, that justification is not grounded in generality.

Consider these further examples of intrinsic desires. If I want to play Tetris, will my desire set make more sense or be more rational if I develop a desire to play all video games? If I want to have a baby, will my desire set be improved by the addition of a general desire to have children? If I want to have sex with Adam, will I be more rational if I also want to have sex with John, James, and Charlie? Along the lines of Smith's ice cream example, one might say that these are the wrong generalizations: the proper generalizations are: you should want to play games you enjoy; you should want to have as many children as pleases you; you should want to have sex with those you expect to like having sex with. But these generalizations aren't specific to the cases in question; they are all variations on the claim that you should desire to do what you enjoy doing. They do not get their plausibility from being generalizations of specific desires; they get

their plausibility from an intuition we have that we ought to want the things we think will make us happy.³⁹

This intuition is not, itself, grounded in any kind of coherence principle; the things that make us happy often fit together at best uncomfortably, and, as the baby and sex examples show, our desires are often best thought of as desires for very particular things. So insofar as we do give explanations and justifications for intrinsic desires, we look to reasons specific to a given desire (I want to play Tetris because I find it fun) or to generalities about what is good to want (One ought to want to do things one enjoys). The particular reasons are case-specific and not general. The generalities are based on reflections on the nature of happiness and what it makes sense to want, and not on whether the desire in question is usefully generalized.

Furthermore, a desire that is general is as open to the demand for justification and explanation as specific desires are. To answer the question, "Why do you want to play Tetris" with "Because I want to play all video games" just pushes the question one step back. We still want to ask, "Why do you want to play all video games?"

In her classic discussion of the intelligibility of intrinsic desires, Anscombe says that an agent's desire for a saucer of mud is unintelligible unless we have a sense of why the agent wants the mud: for pleasure? for a game? for a purpose?⁴⁰ Again, generality here seems to leave the intelligibility of desires unaffected. If we ask the agent why she wants a saucer of mud and she says, "Because I always want saucers of mud," or, "Because I want all saucers of mud," this leaves her desire as unintelligible as it was before. If she says, "Because I expect its cool texture to please me," this removes the

unintelligibility, but this is because it situates her desire in a specific context we recognize, not because of generality.

Recall that in his discussion, Smith ties generality to non-arbitrariness. So perhaps one may say here that while generality itself need not justify and explain intrinsic desires, there is some sense in which the "arbitrariness" of a desire counts against it. And one way to flesh this out is to say that certain kinds of exceptions to general desires make no sense. For example, in Parfittian cases, we find an agent who generally seeks pleasure and avoids pain, but who cares nothing about either on any future Tuesday; our intuition is that there is something "arbitrary" about this future-Tuesday-indifference.⁴¹

As Donald Hubin points out in his discussion of such cases, the claim of irrationality here attaches not to any particular desire, but rather to a "pattern of concern" -- it is the pattern of desires, involving, as it does, this peculiar exception, that seems odd.⁴² But we know that some exceptions do not seem odd: if I want to refrain from having sex with all men except Adam, and I want to have sex with Adam, there is nothing strange about this pattern of concern. So then we must ask, what is it about the one exception that makes it seem so odd, while other exceptions do not?

The answer to this question, I claim, must depend on a standard of evaluation, and thus cannot establish one.⁴³ A standard of evaluation tells us that things like X are worth wanting, while things like Y there are no reasons to want. Relying on such a standard, we can then infer that to care about X except in cases where Y is present makes no sense. But without such a standard, we know only that the pattern of concern has exceptions, which as my examples show, many patterns of concern rationally do. That a desire is particular does not mean it is arbitrary. So the generality, or even the generalizability, of

a desire does not make it rational, and conversely, the particularity of a desire does not make it less rational.

In a different direction, perhaps we may look to the role coherence plays in making plans to explain the normativity of generality. It is also a matter of controversy whether all desires give a person a reason for action. And one role coherence is thought to play in this debate is in distinguishing between desires that do give us reasons to act and those that do not: when a desire fits with other desires we have reason to act on it.

But this of no help here: we are asking after what we have reason to want, not reason to do; this is not at the level of action, but at the level of prima facie desires. To see the difference, consider, what should a person do who has a set of desires S, and a particular desire T that does not fit with S? One obvious answer seems to be: maximize.

Determine whether there are costs associated with T, and how much one is willing to give up to get it; choose T or not-T; then try to create a plan that ends in the chosen alternative. Such a process requires the imposition of no coherence or generalization at the level of prima facie desires.⁴⁴

So generality is not grounded in rationality, when it comes to prima facie desires (1). Of course, there may be pragmatic reasons for generalization: perhaps a desire to read novels in general is more practical and easier to make sense of than a desire only to read a single one. Perhaps I may make my desire to listen to some opera easier for others to understand if I explain that I simply like opera, in general. And some people may not want their desires to be particular, and will prefer generality. But even these agents may find that some particular wants are hard to fit into general patterns. For many people, desires for the affection and love of particular persons and impulsive desires for

particular kinds of food and sex are, in their nature, particular in this sense. This means the pressures for coherence in the form of generalization are pragmatic, desiderative, agent-relative, and overridable (2 and 3).

Now let's see what the a priori beliefs analogy has to offer. The analogue in the set theory case of adding general desires is adding general axioms. So the relevant questions are, why develop general axioms of set theory, rather than simply stipulating facts about particular sets?⁴⁵

One source of the pressure for generality that seems to have no analogue in the desire case is that we tend in some cases to think of mathematical beliefs in terms of concepts we already understand. The idea of a set as a "container" for things and the idea of sets as constructed through a series of levels in the iterative hierarchy are both sources for beliefs about sets. Both involve making use of concepts we are familiar with to motivate our understanding of sets and our development of the theory of sets. Thinking about sets in terms of familiar objects or concepts tends naturally to lead us to formulate axioms that assert things about sets in general, rather than about particular sets.⁴⁶ But since desires don't describe anything at all, there is no analogue here.

A second reason to make use of general axioms is that we want to prove more things, and more things follow from general axioms than from particular assumptions about specific sets. This pragmatic pressure may seem to have a partial analogue in the desire case: faced with a possible situation we may want to figure out whether to want it or its absence. But if I am right that in my argument above that generality is not necessary for desire sets, this answer still leaves us wondering why such a method would be a good one. I would not usually use generality to figure out whether I should want to

play another video game, whether I should want to have another child, or whether I should want to have sex with Charlie.

A third reason to make use of general axioms has to do with intuitions about what mathematics is and what kind of norms should apply there. Mathematics is often considered a science of generality itself. And set theory has a special claim to generality, in part because set theory sometimes functions as a theoretical foundation for the rest of mathematics. Some set theorists invoke such intuitions when arguing for or against certain developments of set theory. In the mathematical context, generality is a kind of norm in itself; if a proposed axiom leads to a result that seems to violate this norm, this violation may be a strike against it. The axiom might seem inelegant or parochial.⁴⁷ This is an intra-mathematical source of pressure for mathematical coherence in the form of generality (4).

This third item also seems to me to have no analogue in the desiderative case. While there is disagreement, as I mentioned above, over the extent to which intrinsic desires are subject to rationality constraints, there is nothing in the idea of something's being a desire that carries with it an assumption of generality. Indeed, as my examples show, many common desires are quite particular, and are not on this ground criticizable. The mathematical norm of generality has no desiderative analogue. So none of these three sources of pressure for generality in the math case show that rationality is part of the pressure in the desire case (5).

As in the consistency discussion, we might ask whether this intra-mathematical source of pressure for generality has an analogue in the intra-moral case. And the answer, I believe, is yes: this third intra-mathematical pressure does have a striking

analogue when it comes to morality. Morality, like mathematics, is often assumed to have a kind of generality built right into it: if a principle is a moral principle, the thinking goes, it ought to apply to everyone in the same way. This is part of what it is to be a moral principle.

This suggests a moral explanation of generality, an explanation I think is right. If you find that it is right to give x to Adam, Bob and Charles, and you see that David is in the same circumstances, then you ought to find that it is right to give x to David as well. This is an application of moral generality, in the particular form of fairness. I said before that if we assume a standard of evaluation, we can explain when desires are arbitrary. A moral standard of evaluation is one of these: from a moral perspective that includes a fairness principle, we can ask what are good reasons, and what are arbitrary reasons, for distinguishing David from Adam, Bob, and Charles, and we can judge whether the exception is a morally valid one. Indeed, the general kind of coherence norm applicable in moral reasoning is something like this: if you judge that some action is right in some particular set of circumstances, you ought to judge that it is right in those circumstances on every occasion, absent some moral distinction between the cases that would allow you to justify treating them differently.⁴⁸ Again, the judgment of what makes a distinction a "moral" one presupposes a moral framework, and again, the principle itself is an application of a fairness principle. It thus has a moral normative foundation, in the moral case.

The most one could say in the case of desires, then, is that the person whose morally significant desires are general in the right sort of way has morally admirable desires. The person whose desires to give to Adam, Bob, and Charles lead him to want to

give to David has a desiderative tendency that we might describe as just or fair. So while there is no rationally grounded pressure for generality among general desires, there may be moral pressure for generality among morally significant desires (6).

So there is a moral ground to the normativity of generality; it applies only to a certain range of desires and from a particularly moral perspective; it fails to show a connection between generality and rationality.

3c. Unity

The final kind of coherence under consideration is unity. Smith does not mark out anything specific by "unity," but the analogy with mathematics suggests a fruitful characterization: "unity" in the set theoretic context is the state of there being a single fundamental theory of sets;⁴⁹ so we may say more generally that "unity" in any domain is the state of there being a single set of axioms, general moral principles, general desires, or what have you that we can all share.

In this case, let me start with a brief discussion of mathematics. In many mathematical contexts, unity does not seem of much importance at all: faced with the fact that there are axioms for geometry under which the parallel postulate holds and ones in which it does not, we do not reject one of these as illegitimate, we simply distinguish between Euclidean and Non-Euclidean geometry, and use each for various purposes. We don't need agreement on what the axioms of geometry really are.

Famously, the set theory case presents us with many similar conflicting possibilities for development. There are various models of the standard axioms of set theory, and since Gödel's theorem, we have known that for any plausible list of set-

theoretic axioms, there will be "undecidable statements": statements that cannot be proven or disproven from the axioms. Some of these undecidable statements concern questions of live mathematical interest. It is undetermined, for example, what the size of the continuum is: how many real numbers are there? Mathematicians study models in which various answers obtain. And there are divisions even with respect to the "standard" list: even though the Axiom of Choice is now part of that list, some mathematicians study what follows from the Axiom of Determinacy, which contradicts AC.

From one point of view, this is much like the geometry case: there are different ways to develop set theory, which can co-exist alongside one another. It is only when we start thinking of set theory as foundational that we start to worry that this answer will not suffice. Set theory can be taken to form the "foundation" for mathematics in the sense that any mathematical proof is a valid one if it can, in principle, be translated into a set-theoretic proof that the conclusion follows from the axioms via first-order logic. This gives us a precise criterion for what counts as a valid mathematical proof and allows us to say with certainty when a particular mathematical sentence cannot be proved or disproved. On this formal way of thinking, mathematics is axiomatic; the axioms of mathematics are the axioms of set theory; and what is mathematically valid is what is set-theoretically valid. As a simple example, we know that "Every vector space has a basis," is provable only if we assume the Axiom of Choice, so if this axiom is part of our standard list, the theorem is mathematically true, and if not, not.

When we take set theory in this foundational way, there are obvious pressures for unity. The benefits of the foundational project depend on having a single formulation.

Agreement over a precise criterion for mathematical truth allows us to develop mathematics systematically, allows mathematicians to communicate easily, and gives a univocal sense to something being a theorem of mathematics. All of these require that we converge on a standard list of set theoretic axioms, and from these comes the pressure to unify in the foundational setting.⁵⁰

In the desire case, since we all start with different desires, it is possible that the process of generalization will lead each of us to different general desire sets. Perhaps while I desire that people always maximize happiness, you desire that people be just and fair, even when it does not seem for the best. The pressure to unify here is the pressure to settle on a single set of shared general desires. But this cannot be a matter of rationality. If I have a general desires to listen to opera, you needn't have one also; indeed, unless we are trying to listen together, it may be a good thing that we enjoy different kinds of music. Even if I desire to listen to music I enjoy listening to, the pressure for you to want to listen to music you enjoy listening to does not come from me or my desires. So unity in this sense is not a matter of rationality (1).

In some places, Smith suggests that one aspect of good deliberation involves listening to and trusting one's community, so, for example, the opinions of others would tell you why you ought not form the general desire "Steal whenever it will benefit me." We may ask, why should we do this? Obviously, one ought not always trust one's peers and colleagues -- one may live in a debased society. But there are obvious practical benefits to trying to some extent to coordinate our most general desires. A shared desiderative outlook is part of what makes a community more than a group of people. Some people want to have the desires of others. If we are trying to cooperate, or enjoy

something together, we will be best off sharing some desires. So the pressure to unify our desires is pragmatic and desiderative (2). That this pressure applies in select ways only in some circumstances shows that it is agent-relative and overridable. If your community desires the death penalty for small crimes, out of an excess of vengeance, the pressure for unity does not apply; it is overridden by the appropriateness of desiring not to kill (3).

As the mathematics discussion shows, the mathematical pressure to unify applies only in the foundational context, and there, too, it applies for pragmatic reasons: we want, for various mathematical purposes, to have a single foundation, and this involves a pressure to unity. As I mentioned above, unity facilitates agreement and communication among mathematicians in general, allowing us to say with one voice what should count as a bona fide mathematical theorem. These pressures are related to particularly mathematical goals and interests: it is mathematically desirable to settle on a single axiom system (4).

But these pragmatic pressures are overridable too. There are, and there will always be, sentences of set theory neither provable nor disprovable from the axioms. In some cases, there may be benefits from adopting either the sentence or its negation as an axiom, and we may face some uncertainty about what to do. In this case, the pressure to allow for various possibilities can override the pressure for unity.⁵¹ So the mathematical case fits with my desiderative claims above (5).

Again, this suggests the possibility of internal pressures for unity in the particular case of morally significant desires, and again, this seems right. It is easy to see how there would be social pressure for unity in the moral case: if we have agreement about the

proper way of generalizing our specific morally significant desires, this may help us develop a set of shared moral principles, which is an obvious social good. Those who care more about overall happiness and those who care more about justice and fairness can work together if they develop a shared framework. Again, this shows a moral and pragmatic pressure for unity (6).

I've argued in this section that the pressure for desiderative coherence is not connected to rationality, and is instead pragmatic and desiderative in its ground, and agent-relative and overridable in its manifestations. The appeal to a priori beliefs doesn't help link coherence and rationality, since in the obvious case of infinite set theory, coherence pressure are pragmatic and related to particularly mathematical goals. I've suggested too that there may be moral pressures for coherence in the domain of morally significant desires, but that this doesn't apply to the desire case in general.

If this is right, it means that answer to the question, what is the normative status of desiderative coherence? is that it is not grounded in rationality, but is rather desiderative, pragmatic, agent-relative and overridable.⁵² In that case, an appeal to coherence as part of maximal rationality cannot help support an account of normative reasons as desire-independent and non-agent-relative. In some places, Smith seems to suggest that one may use the term "rationality" however one wants, as a term of art, with a stipulative definition. But however we use the word, if the normativity of desiderative coherence is desiderative, pragmatic, agent-relative -- and sometimes, moral -- then such coherence cannot function to ground an account of non-agent-relative reasons. In that case, normative reasons collapse into Humean desire-means-end reasons.

4. The Normative Status of Coherence II -- Causing and rationalizing beliefs

I have so far focused on criticizing the use of coherence as a constraint on the content of a rational desires set. But Smith takes coherence to a second, motivational role as well: coherence here grounds not the content of a rational person's desire set, but rather the connection between what you have normative reason to do and what you desire to do. You are more coherent if you want to do what your fully rational self would want you to do, so full coherence requires that you want to do what you have normative reason to do.

To make good his case that normative reasons are non-agent-relative, Smith must show that they function differently from means-end reasons, which are obviously relative to a particular agent's desires and beliefs. Ingmar Persson raises the worry that if the "tendency" for coherence is just another desire, then this fails; normative reasons apply only to agents that have a desire for coherence. In that case, as Smith puts it, the analysis would fail "to describe a case in which a belief both causes and rationalizes a desire in anything other than a means-end way."⁵³

I've already argued that the tendency toward coherence is agent-relative and so cannot play a role such as this. But in reply to Persson, Smith offers a new analogy: the tendency toward coherence is like the tendency to put together ordinary beliefs.⁵⁴ If I believe that Bill lives next door, and I believe that the man next door rides a motorcycle, then I may come to believe that Bill rides a motorcycle. My earlier two beliefs may "cause" and "rationalize" my new one, but they do not, by themselves, explain why I come to have it -- I may, after all, have failed to make the inference. The missing element, the one that explains my disposition to make the inference, is a tendency toward

coherence -- the same tendency in operation in the desires case. Such a tendency is not a further desire, nor does it follow conceptually from the notion of belief, and if we need to posit this tendency in explaining belief-belief cases, there can be no objection to using it in belief-desire cases.⁵⁵

In this discussion, the pressure to develop a view about Bill is like the pressure to develop a desire regarding what to give David in our previous example. Just as it is less coherent, and thus less rational, not to form the belief that Bill rides, it is less coherent, and thus less rational, not to form the desire to give David x, where the content about riding and about giving x in particular follows from his earlier discussion.

But the idea that coherence explains my new Bill-beliefs doesn't seem quite right. Why do I develop a belief about Bill? Well, perhaps I'm curious, or perhaps someone has asked me, or perhaps it just pops into my head when I see the bike parked outside. The "pressure" here seems more aptly described as the pressure to know more about the world than a pressure toward coherence -- it's more a pressure toward gathering information, a kind of information acquisitiveness. Perhaps one may say that the role of coherence is not in the pressure to develop a belief at all, but in the pressure to develop this particular belief. But the pressure to develop this particular belief can be explained entirely through the pressure for logical consistency, which I've shown is not the relevant kind of normativity here. Logical consistency together with information acquisitiveness explains my Bill-beliefs.

Might the move to the a priori help? We might ask in the set theory case, if I have two beliefs about sets, that A and that $A \rightarrow B$, why do I come to believe that B? Again, it is straightforward logical pressure that determines that I come to believe B instead of not-

B. But what kind of pressure is there to develop a belief regarding B at all? The answer seems to have to do with the same kind of pressure simply to increase one's knowledge. But in the mathematical realm, it is particularly striking that this pressure may apply only in limited contexts, in particular to those who care about mathematics, and is not a general pressure for coherence.

Consider an example. Why do I come to form a belief that the cardinality of the continuum is greater than that of the natural numbers, when I learn that this follows from the axioms? When Cantor first proved this cardinality fact, it was with great effort and over an extended period of time. Those who never bother to sit down and work out the proof for themselves do not seem lacking in coherence. The most one might say is that they don't care about mathematics. Indeed, even a mathematician is under no pressure to come to believe B when he knows it follows from A if B is just mathematically uninteresting.

If this is right, the most we could say about the person who fails to develop the proper desires is that he is indifferent, not that he is lacking in coherence. And then, again, this fails to connect coherence to rationality, and thus fails to ground a non-agent-relative account.

I've argued that the normative ground of desiderative coherence is a mix of desiderative, pragmatic, and moral elements: some people want to be coherent; some are better off being coherent; and some desires are morally admirable when coherent in a certain kind of way. Desiderative coherence is not, then, related to rationality, and

analogies with the a priori and logic do not help show that it is. So coherence pressures cannot work to ground an account of non-agent-relative, desire-independent reasons claims.

If this is right, we cannot say with Smith that you will desire to act morally just insofar as you are rational; rather, you will desire to act morally just insofar as you want what is morally admirable. Reflection on the coherence of desires yields at most a pragmatically or morally good method, and does not show morality to be grounded in rationality.

¹ Geoffrey Sayre McCord lays out various such interpretations in his "Coherentist Epistemology and Moral Theory" in Moral Knowledge? (Water Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons, eds., New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 137-189; see p. 143.

² It may not be quite right to saddle Smith with the word "objectivity." But Smith does claim that moral reasons apply to a person regardless of his desires, and are grounded extra-morally in "rationality." It is these claims I will challenge.

³ See, for example, Paul Thagard's "Coherence, Truth, and the Development of Scientific Knowledge" (Philosophy of Science, 74 (2007), pp. 28-47.

⁴ Writing from a different perspective, Gil Harman says something similar about coherence when he writes that in moral reasoning, "one modifies one's intentions, often by forming new intentions, sometimes by giving up old ones, so that one's plans become more rational and coherent -- or, rather, one seeks to make all of one's attitudes coherent with each other" ("Moral Relativism Defended," The Philosophical Review, 84 (1975), 3-22, p. 20).

⁵ Michael Smith, "Moral Realism," in Singer and His Critics (Oxford: Blackwell 1999), pp. 38-63, p. 48.

⁶ If I am right about the normative status of desiderative coherence, this will have wider implications as well, but I will leave an exploration of these for another time.

⁷ Michael Smith, "In Defence of The Moral Problem," repr. in Ethics and The A Priori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). First published 1997.

⁸ "Make more sense" is Smith's way of putting it; see his "In Defense of the Moral Problem," p. 269.

⁹ Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "The Metaethical Problem," Ethics 108, 1997, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰ Michael Smith, "In Defense of the Moral Problem," p. 269. Of course, there are systematically justifiable desiderative outlooks that would be very peculiar indeed despite being maximally coherent; we might, for example, develop a general desire to always get the most goods for ourselves, regardless of the cost to others, and so on. But, Smith explains, when we deliberate, we ought to trust others to tell us which of our basic desires are good ones. To endorse one's own desire X because X is part of a coherent whole, while knowing at the same time that the rest of the community thinks X is appalling, is

wrong because it is intellectually arrogant. See pp. 194-196 of The Moral Problem and p. 269 of "In Defence of the Moral Problem."

¹¹ This "advice" or desire model comes into play (instead of say, a model in which our fully rational selves set an example for us) because it is possible that we irrational beings ought to do different things than fully rational ones ought to do: if I am deathly afraid of spiders, advice to just "get over it, and be rational" will not help, whereas advice about calming down and getting help will.

¹² Russ Shafer-Landau, "Moral Judgment and Normative Reasons," Analysis 59 (1999), 33-40, pp. 37-38. See also pp. 46-47 of Smith's "The Incoherence Argument: Reply to Schafer-Landau [sic]" repr. in Ethics and The A Priori.

¹³ Michael Smith, "The Incoherence Argument."

¹⁴ In the case of desires this strikes me as a better name than "pro tanto," since we may have desires that do not themselves carry information about how they interact with other desires. It may only be on reflection that one understands how to resolve conflicts.

¹⁵ One might worry that there is a logical contradiction close by: wanting A and not-A is close to believing that A and not-A are both good and this is not far from believing that A is good and that A is bad. Notice, however, that even this last is not a logical consistency. It does become one if one adds that what is good is not bad, an assumption that could be challenged. Even if the assumption stands, one may simply qualify: A is good in this sense, not-A good in another. An agent may also refrain from judging: I want A and not-A but withhold judgment on whether A is good. Finally, I may admit that in some cases I desire what I believe to be bad. So one may be genuinely desire-

ambivalent while believing no contradictions. For more on this, see my Patricia Marino, "On Essentially Conflicting Desires," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (2009), 274-291, and Patricia Greenspan, "A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion," in Amélie Rorty, ed., Explaining Emotions (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980).

¹⁶ One might want to say that there is an analogy between logical consistency and the consistency of desires; I take this up in section 3a below.

¹⁷ In fact, Smith emphasizes the importance of thinking this way: it should turn out that even if I have normative reason to keep my promise to A, I should have an overridden normative reason -- but a reason nonetheless -- to keep my promise to B. So my fully rational, maximally coherent self may well want me to keep my promise to A and keep my promise to B, though his former desire is overriding. Smith, "The Incoherence Argument: Reply to Schafer-Landau [sic]" repr. in Ethics and The A Priori.

¹⁸ Sayre-McCord, "The Metaethical Problem," p. 75. See also Smith, "In Defence of the Moral Problem," p. 270.

¹⁹ Smith, "In Defence of the Moral Problem," p. 271.

²⁰ Michael Smith, "Moral Realism," p. 408. He says there, "After all, something like such a convergence in mathematical practice lies behind our conviction that mathematical claims enjoy a privileged rational status. So why not think that a like convergence in moral practice would show that moral judgments enjoy the same privileged rational status?"

²¹ Analogies between morality and axiomatic mathematics have tempted several philosophers; see especially Ross's "What Makes Right Acts Right" from The Right and The Good (Clarendon, 2002, originally published 1930).

²² For an argument in sympathy with this, see David Brink, "Moral Conflict and Its Structure," Philosophical Review 103 (4), 1994, 215-247, p. 243.

²³ In his attempt to address the Frege-Geach problem, Simon Blackburn argues roughly along these lines, hoping to show that inconsistency of attitudes is like logical consistency. I criticize this line of thought in my "Expressivism, Logic, Consistency, and Moral Dilemmas," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 9 (2006), 517-533.

²⁴ It may be irrational to plan or intend A and not-A, but that is of no help here.

²⁵ Patricia Marino, "On Essentially Conflicting Desires."

²⁶ That is, when there is no possible world in which they can be mutually satisfied.

²⁷ For discussion of this example and further thoughts about ambivalence see Patricia Greenspan, "A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion."

²⁸ To say I want my rival to win in that I expect his winning to please me, and I want him to lose in that I expect his winning to annoy me, is to lose the sense that I am responding to different qualities of one object, and so is not a good strategy.

²⁹ For a full discussion, see my "On Essentially Conflicting Desires."

³⁰ Marcus says that a set of rules is consistent if there is a possible world in which all of them are obeyable. See Ruth Marcus, "Moral Dilemmas and Consistency," Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980), 121-136.

³¹ Marino, "On Essentially Conflicting Desires."

³² One might have thought that what is worse about essential conflicts is that in the case of contingent conflicts, I can work toward bringing about a world in which my desires do not conflict. But of course, in many cases this just isn't so; I have no idea how to bring about a world in which smoking does not cause ill-health, and the person who wants to smoke and wants to be healthy is in the same situation with respect to decision making and regret as the person who wants to smoke and wants not to smoke.

³³ For more on this see my "On Essentially Conflicting Desires."

³⁴ I discuss below the interesting fact that we sometimes do mathematics under conflicting assumptions; see the section on Unity. Of course, we may also want to think of the pressure against believing P and not-P as straightforward logical pressure, which I argued above also cannot ground desiderative consistency.

³⁵ Since wanting A and B does not entail wanting (A and B) there is no problem analogous to the one that arises in truth, that in a world in which A is true and not-A is true, everything is true. I may want to marry Jane and want to marry Joan but not want to marry both.

³⁶ See, for example, Philippa Foot's "Moral Realism and Moral Dilemma," [The Journal of Philosophy](#), 80 (1983), 379-398, and for some discussion see my "Moral Dilemmas, Collective Responsibility, and Moral Progress," [Philosophical Studies](#), 104 (2001), 203-225.

³⁷ This is the so-called "Principle of Deontic Consistency."

³⁸ Harman says that in addition to consistency, moral coherence "involves generality and lack of arbitrariness" ("Moral Relativism Defended," p. 20).

³⁹ It seems to me this intuitive connection might also be questioned. In his book Stumbling on Happiness (Knopf, 2006), Daniel Gilbert argues that we often misestimate how happy and unhappy events will make us. So, for example, those who lose limbs or loved ones are often roughly as happy a few years later as they were before their loss. If it were true that we ought to want what we expect to make us happy, this would suggest we should care less than we do about losing limbs and loved ones, a conclusion that seems troubling.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Anscombe, Intention (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957).

⁴¹ See Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

⁴² Donald Hubin, "Irrational Desires," Philosophical Studies 62: 23 - 44, 1991. In what follows about patterns of concern I am indebted to Hubin's illuminating discussion.

⁴³ Hubin points out that different standards of evaluation will lead to different exceptions seeming strange: it would be strange from the moral perspective to distinguish between my pain and yours, but not strange at all from the prudential perspective.

⁴⁴ If I want to count blades of grass and doing so gives me pleasure, it does not seem to matter whether this desire fits with others, except in the sense that my doing so has "costs" in the form of time I might be spending doing something else.

⁴⁵ Thanks to Penelope Maddy for helping me reflect on this question. For discussion of the pragmatic aspect of axiom adoption, see her "Believing the Axioms, I and II" Journal of Symbolic Logic 53 (1988), 481-511 and 736-764, " Naturalism in Mathematics (Oxford University Press, 1997), especially III.6, "Defending the Axioms" (unpublished manuscript) and Second Philosophy: A Naturalistic Method (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), section IV.3.

⁴⁶ See also Maddy's "Defending the axioms," pp. 36-37. There she argues that having a "viable concept" to guide our thinking is good and fruitful, but is ultimately valuable in a pragmatic way, in helping us to do more good mathematics and realize more of our mathematical goals.

⁴⁷ Consider the case of the "Axiom of Projective Determinacy," or PD, which says that for any two player game of perfect information of length ω in which the players play natural numbers, if the victory set is projective then one player or the other has a winning strategy. PD implies that the projective sets are Lebesgue measurable. PD is not part of the standard axiom list for sets. Some arguments against its adoption as such rest on the idea that it has a non-general character that makes it seem improperly "local" or "parochial," since it ascribes a property to a certain specific range of sets (projective sets of real numbers). Contra Smith's claim that the pressures in the a priori case are assumed, not explained, it seems appropriate to ask why such non-generality is of such concern here. Though she doesn't discuss this case, Maddy argues in "Defending the Axioms" that such considerations are ultimately explainable in terms of pragmatic mathematical goals and should not carry much force on their own. This mirrors my claim above that a standard of evaluation is needed to explain desiderative arbitrariness; here the standard is one of intra-mathematical norms. In any case, as I argue below, the pressures involved have no analogue in the realm of desires.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Alan Goldman, Practical Rules (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 161.

⁴⁹ I have adopted this characterization from Maddy, who writes in terms of a mathematical methodological maxim, "UNIFY," which means, "aim for a single, fundamental theory of sets" (Naturalism in Mathematics, p. 209).

⁵⁰ See Penelope Maddy, Naturalism in Mathematics, p. 209. Maddy cites Saunders MacLane explaining that if we have no settled answer about questions like the Continuum Hypothesis, then 'set' turns out to have many meanings, so that "the purported foundation of all Mathematics upon set theory totters." Maddy writes, "We arrive at the methodological maxim UNIFY by running this argument in reverse."

⁵¹ See Maddy's discussion in "V=L and Maximize" and Naturalism in Mathematics, p. 208-215. On the one hand, we want mathematical richness, and this argues for working under a range of different assumptions; this conflicts with our desire for unity. Maddy writes, "Notice that there is a tension between MAXIMIZE and UNIFY: faced with alternatives like V=L and MC [two conflicting mathematical assumptions], the easiest way to MAXIMIZE would be to adopt both theories, to use whichever happens to be most useful in a given situation. But UNIFY counsels against this course." p. 211, Naturalism in Mathematics.

⁵² One final remark. In his arguments, Smith talks of a "tendency" or "pressure" toward coherence of desires. And it may seem that agents often, if not invariably, experience a tendency toward certain kinds of desiderative coherence: if I want A and B which conflict, I may, after choosing one, cool on the unchosen option. But this particular "tendency" or "pressure" applies in the wrong way, as the discussion of section 2 shows, since it would rule out all contingently conflicting desires.

⁵³ Michael Smith, "The Definition of Moral," in Singer and His Critics, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 38-63, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Smith, "The Definition of Moral," p. 54.

⁵⁵ There are also important differences between the belief and desire cases that undermine this analogy. In what way do my first two Bill-beliefs "cause and rationalize" the third? One answer is that they constrain what I can believe about Bill while remaining logically consistent. I may never draw the inference, but if I ask myself whether Bill rides, I am logically constrained to say yes. As we've seen, there is no similar constraint in the desire case; I can be logically consistent while still wanting to give David much less than I give his fellows.