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OVERCOMING DIMINISHED MOTIVATION

by

JUMANA MORCIGLIO

Under the Direction of Andrea Scarantino

ABSTRACT

Self-control is required when an agent encounters some opposition to acting on her better judgments. One such opposition is diminished motivation, that is, a lack of desire to act on a better judgment. Thomas Connor compares two views of successful self-control, actional (i.e. the view that self-control is produced by a motivated action) and non-actional (i.e. the view that self-control consists of having unmotivated thoughts), and argues that non-actional views are better at explaining successful self-control in cases of diminished motivation. I reject Connor's suggestion that successful self-control is likely to be non-actional by presenting two arguments: (1) non-actional views do not possess an advantage in explaining successful self-control because of a failure to provide an account of how self-controlling thoughts arise when self-control is required, and (2) actional views can account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation, namely, by prescribing minimally taxing strategies of self-control.

INDEX WORDS: Self-control, Motivation, Better judgment, Ego depletion

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JUMANA MORCIGLIO

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the face of temptation, people attempt to utilize self-control in order to stick to their better judgments; an instance of self-control is marked by successfully acting on those better judgments. There are two types of self-control: diachronic and synchronic. Diachronic self-control occurs when one acts on one's better judgment in the *absence* of motivational opposition created by some recalcitrant desire. When an agent decides to go on a diet, for instance, she can throw away all the junk food in her home in order to *prevent potential future temptations* to break from her diet. Synchronic self-control, on the other hand, occurs when one acts on one's better judgment in the *presence* of motivational opposition created by some recalcitrant desire. A dieting agent, for example, can distract herself from a tempting slice of chocolate cake that is sitting right in front of her in order to prevent the present temptation to break from her diet. The difficulty in explaining how an agent can be synchronically self-controlled is finding a way to reconcile how a self-controlled agent can act on her better judgment despite a stronger motivation to indulge in some temptation (i.e., how she can manage to do what she is less motivated to do).

1.1 Background on the Debate

There are two types of views that explain how successful synchronic self-control is possible in temptation cases: actional and non-actional. Actional views of self-control explain that successful self-control is the product of an active pursuit (i.e. an intentional and motivated action) to stick to one's better judgments; if a dieting agent, for example, is faced with a slice of tempting chocolate cake, she can perform certain intentional actions to avoid this temptation, such as throwing away the slice of cake or distracting herself with thoughts about something

other than eating. Non-actional views, on the other hand, describe successful self-control as the product of a passive response (i.e. unmotivated thoughts that influence action) that helps one stick to one's better judgments; returning to the example of the dieting agent, her encounter with the cake can trigger the right sorts of thoughts that work to reduce the temptation that the cake is causing, such as thinking about herself as overweight or sick from too much sugar.

The self-control literature is primarily focused on temptation cases, that is, cases which involve some sort of recalcitrant desire that opposes one's better judgment. Another type of situation that requires self-control, according to Thomas D. Connor (2014), is when an agent experiences diminished motivation, that is, an attenuated desire to pursue her goals (786).¹ One can, for instance, believe that it is best for one to accomplish some chore like loading the dishwasher, but have no desire to actually go through with loading the dishwasher. In such a case, there is no temptation per se that opposes loading the dishwasher, but rather one is simply not motivated to complete the task. Successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation can occur if there is a significant increase in one's desire to act according to one's better judgments, such as inspiring sufficient desire in oneself to load the dishwasher. Connor compares how the two types of views could account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation and argues that non-actional views are better at accounting for successful self-control in this case than actional views, thus suggesting that all instances of successful self-control are likely to be non-actional.

¹ Connor discusses diminished motivation as both a deficit and a complete lack of desire, but I will treat this case as involving only a deficit in desire; Connor is willing to grant that diminished motivation isn't characterized by a complete lack of desire and I shall do the same.

1.2 Rejecting the Claim that Successful Self-Control is Non-Actional

I will reject Connor's suggestion that successful synchronic self-control is likely to be non-actional by presenting two arguments: (1) I will argue that non-actional views do not possess an advantage in explaining successful self-control because non-actional views have failed to provide an account of how self-controlling thoughts arise when self-control is required, and (2) I will present a way in which actional views can account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation, namely, by prescribing minimally taxing strategies of self-control. In section 2 of this paper, I will describe the actional and non-actional views, as well as the case of diminished motivation and the problem that this case poses for an actional account of successful self-control. In section 3, I will propose three potential sources of unmotivated self-controlling thoughts and explain how all three potential sources are problematic. In section 4, I propose a potential account of successful actional self-control in the case of diminished motivation and argue that it is plausible to utilize certain minimally taxing actional strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, in order to overcome diminished motivation because such strategies do not require many cognitive resources.

2 ACTIONAL SELF-CONTROL, NON-ACTIONAL SELF-CONTROL, AND DIMINISHED MOTIVATION

Thomas Connor points out that the majority of the self-control literature is concerned with the classic temptation case (i.e. where self-control is required to overcome a temptation that is contrary to one's better judgment); diminished motivation, however, occurs quite often as well, and should thus be included in the self-control debates. Examples of diminished motivation can range from more extreme examples, such as severe depression, to more common examples, such as apathy or general laziness. Connor compares the capacity of actional and non-actional views of self-control to explain successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation and argues that non-actional views are better able to account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation; this conclusion leads Connor to suggest that all instances of successful self-control are likely to be non-actional. In this section, I will outline the actional and non-actional positions, as well the case of diminished motivation and Connor's argument for why non-actional views are better able to account for successful self-control in this case.

2.1 Two Views of Synchronic Self-Control

The fundamental difference between actional and non-actional views of self-control is that the former describes self-control as a motivated action, whereas the latter identifies self-control as an unmotivated doing. Non-actional views posit that "self-control consists in the having of unmotivated thoughts"; this view is endorsed by Jeanette Kennett and Michael Smith (1996), who make the distinction between performing an action, which requires that an agent is motivated by some goal, and merely doing something, which does not require that an agent is motivated in the same way (2014; 784). Kennett and Smith recognize that a doing is often

considered an action, but they believe that this consideration is “an over-generalization because not all doings are actions” (1996; 69). For example, Kennett and Smith explain that “thinking need not be an action, because the having of thoughts need not be a *causal consequence* of a desire to achieve something and a belief that that can be achieved by having those very thoughts” (1996; 68-69 my emphasis). In order to illustrate this point, imagine the dieting agent who is being tempted by a slice of chocolate cake and comes to think certain thoughts about the negative aspects of the cake. This agent might imagine herself overweight, think about how much sugar is in a single slice of cake, recollect the reasons for why she went on a diet, etc. These thoughts are unmotivated because the agent has these thoughts without any intention to utilize them in order to achieve the goal of staying on one’s diet.

Actional views maintain that self-control is a motivated action. Conner makes a distinction between two types of actional views: holistic and partition views. The latter views argue that behavior is the product of two systems, an active cognitive system and a passive affective system, but self-control is a function of the active system.² The former, on the other hand, understand self-control as the product of both active and passive processes. Alfred Mele (1987; 2012) presents a holistic actional view of self-control, in that “the self of self-control is identified with the whole human being rather than with reason” (2012; 92). In other words, self-control is a product of both active (e.g. rational) and passive (e.g. affective) processes. Mele believes that exercising self-control is compatible with experiencing recalcitrant desires that oppose one’s better judgment by presenting the example of Ian, who judges that he ought to paint the shed but is tempted to remain on the couch watching TV instead. Given that Ian’s desire to stay on the couch is stronger than his motivation to paint the shed, Ian needs to exercise

² For examples of partition views, see Sripada (2012), who presents the “divided mind” view, and Holton (2009), who distinguishes between typical motivational processes and willpower.

self-control in order to get off the couch and go paint the shed. But how can Ian exercise self-control to paint the shed if he is more motivated to indulge in the temptation of staying on the couch? Mele responds to this question by pointing out that while Ian's motivation to paint the shed might be weaker than his motivation to remain on the couch, it could be the case that Ian's motivation to be self-controlled is stronger than his motivation to remain on the couch. In this sense, Ian's desire to remain on the couch does not preclude Ian's desire to be self-controlled, but rather the "real obstacle to his exercising self-control would be any motivation he has to refrain from doing so since he cannot satisfy both of these desires simultaneously (i.e. both exercise and refrain from exercising self-control)" (2014; 786). Importantly, if Ian got off the couch to paint the shed because he was motivated to be self-controlled, Ian would be exercising self-control in the actional sense.

2.2 Successful Self-Control in the Case of Diminished Motivation

In temptation cases (i.e. when an agent's better judgment is opposed by some contrary temptation, as in the shed and couch case), the motivation to act on one's better judgment is weak *relative to* the motivation to indulge in temptation. Diminished motivation, however, is characterized by a lack of motivation *in general*, that is, "the agent in these cases seems not to sufficiently care about pursuing his or her goals" to varying degrees (2014; 786). Diminished motivation can thus be understood as a deficit in the desire to accomplish one's goals. According to Connor, the extreme cases of diminished motivation (e.g. severe depression) instantly pose a problem for Mele's actional view of self-control, since "there seems to be nothing to motivate actional self-control" when an agent lacks any positive motivation to accomplish her goals. In other words, actional self-control requires motivation to be self-controlled but diminished

motivation is a case where agents lack motivation; an agent cannot be motivated to be self-controlled if she lacks motivation in general. In this sense, actional views are unable to account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation.

Connor, however, is willing to concede that diminished motivation involves a deficit in desire, rather than a complete lack of desire. ADD HERE Even granting that diminished motivation is a deficit of motivation, Connor argues that actional views are still unable to account for successful self-control in these cases. Even if Ian, for example, has enough motivation to exercise self-control in the actional sense,

he may still experience a failure of self-control in that he finds himself taking longer to get off the sofa; or, when he does get up, he paints the shed to a substandard degree, putting fewer number of coats of paint on, and making a shoddier job of it than he may otherwise have done. And this is due to his attempt at self-control being itself undermotivated (2014; 791).

The point that Connor emphasizes is that on the actional view, one's level of motivation is positively correlated with the likelihood that one will successfully stick to one's better judgments – the less motivation one has, the less likely it is that one will successfully act on one's better judgments. Given that diminished motivation inherently involves low levels of motivation, the likelihood that agents who experience diminished motivation will be successfully self-controlled in the actional sense is also low.

Non-actional views, by understanding self-control as the unmotivated having of thoughts, escape this problem that arises for actional views in the case of diminished motivation. Since the having of self-controlling thoughts is unmotivated, deficits in motivation will not hinder the likelihood of having those thoughts. Non-actional views seem to be readily able to account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation, whereas actional views encounter a challenge in accounting for successful self-control in this case; this leads Connor to conclude that

“if synchronic self-control over diminished motivation (in either more or less extreme cases) is possible then it is plausibly of the non-actional variety” (2014; 793).

3 THE MYSTERIOUS SOURCE OF SUCCESSFUL NON-ACTIONAL SELF-CONTROL

The feature that allegedly gives non-actional views the comparative advantage in explaining successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation is that non-actional self-control is unmotivated. Kennett and Smith seem to think that the source of a motivated action is a desire and belief set, specifically, the desire to be self-controlled and the belief that performing some action will result in self-control, and Connor adopts this model as well. The fundamental difference between temptation cases and diminished motivation cases is that the former involves an excess of desire (i.e. the desire motivating one's temptation is too strong), whereas the latter involves a deficiency of desire (i.e. the desire motivating one's better judgment is too weak); the challenge for actional views in accounting for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation is thus reconciling the need for desire to motivate the action of self-control and the deficiency of desire that agents with diminished motivation experience.

While denying the need for motivation, or the desire component of motivation in specific (i.e. the claim that the desire to be self-controlled is not necessary to produce successful self-control) appears to allow non-actional views to explain how an agent can be self-controlled when she experiences diminished motivation, this move actually makes the origin of non-actional self-control quite puzzling. The major question that arises when considering how the non-actional process of self-control works is the following: if self-controlling thoughts are not caused by a desire to be self-controlled, how does one come to have these thoughts? Kennett and Smith have stated that self-controlling thoughts are *not* the consequence of a desire to be self-controlled and a belief that having these thoughts will produce self-control, but they have not explicitly identified what does make an agent have the right thoughts at the right time in cases of

successful self-control. It seems to me that there are at least three ways to interpret the origin of self-controlling thoughts on the non-actional view, but all three ways are problematic.

3.1 Self-Controlling Thoughts as an Automatic Reflex

On the face of it, it seems like Kennett and Smith might be making the implication that self-controlling thoughts spontaneously appear at the right time. This general implication arises from claiming that a self-controlled agent doesn't perform any actions, but rather merely has certain thoughts. This is the least charitable interpretation of Kennett and Smith's view, but it is worth highlighting the problems with assuming that self-controlling thoughts arise spontaneously because doing so will help reveal what a process of self-control ought to be like.

The problem with assuming that the right self-controlling thoughts spontaneously arise at the right time is that self-control becomes a matter of sheer coincidence. If there is no causal mechanism responsible for producing self-control, and nothing but mere chance determines whether an agent will think the right thoughts, then thinking the right thoughts can hardly be called an instance of self-control. Instead, the concept of self-control intuitively demands that the agent plays some role in having the right sorts of thoughts at the right times. If, for example, a dieting agent became distracted from a slice of chocolate cake because someone else distracted them by running into the room and starting to scream, then the distraction would not be a matter of the agent doing something (even in the minimal sense). Rather, for distraction to count as an instance of self-control, it is expected that the distraction is somehow caused by the agent herself and not by some external force.³ Thus, for some instance of sticking to one's better judgment to

³ Emotion regulation literature defines attention deployment (i.e. capacity to shift attention) as a cognitive process, but I think it is also possible that non-cognitive processes can contribute to attention deployment. I will return to this point in the following section.

qualify as self-control, a minimal requirement is that the *self*, in some sense of the term, is the source of the control.

3.2 Recalling the Reasons for One's Better Judgment

Another potential origin of self-controlling thoughts that Kennett and Smith might be implying is that the right beliefs or thoughts were formed at a previous time and simply recalled upon encountering motivational opposition; recalling does not have to be a causal consequence of a desire to be self-controlled, but can rather arise as a passive response, thus recalling seems to qualify as a cause of self-controlling thoughts on the non-actional view. This interpretation is based on Kennett and Smith's portrayal of self-control as more of a passive response rather than an active pursuit; when making the distinction between an action and a doing, Kennett and Smith might be implying that self-control is a reflex-like process since a doing, on their view, is minimally active. For self-controlling thoughts to be a response to particular stimulus, those thoughts are likely to have been primed so that these thoughts can be a reliable response to the proper stimuli. It could be the case that these thoughts are formed in the agent's mind when she is deliberating (i.e. considering all relevant factors and potential instances of motivational opposition), so when she recalls those thoughts in an instance where motivational opposition is present, the agent doesn't have to actively engage in having those thoughts.⁴ In other words, reflexively recalling is akin to a doing, since the desire to be self-controlled is not the source of this recall, whereas intentionally forming thoughts or intentional recalling is an action because it requires the motivation that arises from a desire to be self-controlled. Importantly, the agent is

⁴ It could be argued that recollection is an active process, but the memory system is comprised of both active processes (i.e. hippocampal-dependent memory) and passive processes (i.e. the dorsal striatum-dependent memory); I will return to this point in the following section.

playing a significant role in the production of successful self-control, thus recalling self-controlling thoughts counts as a form of self-control and is a more charitable proposition for the source of these self-controlling thoughts on the non-actional view.

The problem that arises for this proposed interpretation of how one comes to have self-controlling thoughts is that such a process has a narrow scope of potential instances of motivational opposition that it is primed to respond to and this interpretation doesn't explain how an agent can form beliefs or thoughts that she needs but never has had. On this interpretation of how one comes to have the right sorts of thoughts, the non-actional process of self-control can produce an instance of successful self-control only in situations in which the agent's previously formed beliefs and thoughts are applicable. What if an agent encounters some opposition but none of her current beliefs are applicable to that particular situation? An agent could, for example, form the better judgment that she ought to go on a diet to lose weight but lack the general belief that ingesting sugar causes as much weight gain as ingesting fats because this agent has never made the association between weight gain and excessive sugar intake; in encountering sugar filled but fat free treats, this agent is not likely to have the right sorts of corresponding thoughts about this sugary fat-free snack because she does not have the right general beliefs to apply to her specific situation (i.e. that this particular snack, although fat free, still contributes to weight gain). Lacking a preexisting belief about weight gain due to excessive intake of sugar will not trigger a corresponding negative response to the sugar-free fatty snack, thus this agent is likely to fail to stick to her diet. A process that will likely produce successful self-control, however, must be flexible and adaptive enough to allow an agent to *form* the right sorts of beliefs or thoughts in instances where those beliefs or thoughts are needed but be passively recollected precisely because they were never formed to begin with. This is especially

true for the case of diminished motivation, as opposed to temptation, because the thing that gives rise to the opposition is very broad and general, whereas the thing that gives rise to opposition in temptation cases is very precise and particular (e.g. a slice of chocolate cake for dieters, a cigarette for someone who is attempting to quit smoking, an attractive person for one who is struggling with being in a faithful relationship, etc.). In other words, one can typically identify an object of temptation, but it is much harder to identify the object of diminished motivation precisely because diminished motivation doesn't involve an object. Without having a specific stimulus, the non-actional process will not be able to passively recall the right sorts of thoughts or beliefs that will result in successful self-control because there is nothing to trigger the passive recollection. Having such a rigid scope of passive responses and having no backup mechanism for instances where one lacks the appropriate beliefs or thoughts sets significant limits to the potentiality of the non-actional process to produce successful self-control.

3.3 Disposition to be Self-Controlled

One last possible source for self-controlling thoughts on the non-actional view, as elaborated by Connor, is a disposition to have those sorts of thoughts. In presenting an example of a smoker who is attempting to quit, Connor proposes to imagine that this smoker “had *acquired a disposition* to think certain self-controlling thoughts – e.g. thoughts about the cancerous effects of smoking – precisely when they feel tempted to smoke” (2013; 785, my emphasis). Acquiring a disposition to think certain thoughts certainly avoids the problems that the first two potential sources of self-controlling thoughts faced, namely, ascribing a significant role to the agent (i.e. the agent is the one who possesses the disposition), and self-control being an adaptive and flexible process (i.e. dispositions have the capacity to be quite sophisticated

response mechanisms); this seems to be the most charitable interpretation of how one comes to have self-controlling thoughts on the non-actional view. Importantly, having a disposition to think the right sorts of thoughts is a non-actional form of self-control since one's disposition, rather than a desire to be self-controlled, is the source of self-controlling thoughts.

Despite the virtues of pointing to an acquired disposition as the source of self-controlling thoughts, there still remains a problem for explaining successful self-control in this way. Specifically, pointing to an acquired disposition doesn't explain how an agent has the *right* thoughts at the *right* times. Dispositions can range from being active, such as the disposition to be honest, to being passive, such as the disposition to be disgusted by green vegetables. Presumably, active dispositions produce more effortful behavior while passive dispositions produce less effortful behavior. For example, an honest disposition manifested in a particular action, say, telling one's friend that her new haircut doesn't look flattering, can be properly called an effortful action because it involves an intentional pursuit of a goal, whereas a disposition to be disgusted by green vegetables manifested in a gagging reflex when served asparagus at a restaurant is essentially effortless because it is an automatic response. Non-actional self-control must be the product of a more passive disposition rather than an active disposition, since having self-controlling thoughts is more analogous to a gagging reflex at the sight of asparagus than to intentionally telling one's friend that she got a bad haircut. Passive dispositions, however, are not as sophisticated as active dispositions, in the sense that passive dispositions are more likely to respond to inappropriate stimuli. A green light, for example, can be shined over white cauliflower, which can trigger one's passive disposition to be disgusted by green vegetables; similarly, one can unknowingly eat an entire bowl of zucchini that was shredded to look like pasta without being disgusted. Self-control, however, requires a certain

degree of sophistication in responding to the right stimuli because self-control is required in complex situations (i.e. a motivational conflict between a better judgment and either a temptation or diminished motivation). An effective response must be sensitive to all the various factors there are to consider in a given situation, hence, if self-controlling thoughts are the product of a disposition, then successful self-control is more likely to be produced by a more active disposition.

All three possible sources of self-controlling thoughts that I have presented on behalf of the non-actional views face significant problems in accounting for other important features of self-control. It is possible that Kennett and Smith have a different answer in mind for how an agent comes to have self-controlling thoughts in the non-actional sense – one that is also able to account for the agent's role in being self-controlled, the adaptive flexibility of self-control, as well as a mechanism that is able to identify the right actions for the right situations – but they have not explicitly provided that answer. If there is nothing that allows an agent to have self-controlling thoughts, then it seems that it is not possible, let alone likely, that an agent will actually have these self-controlling thoughts. Without a clear explanation of how an agent can come to have self-controlling thoughts, the non-actional view cannot rely on unmotivated self-controlling thoughts as a way to overcome diminished motivation.

4 OVERCOMING DIMISHED MOTIVATION THROUGH ACTIONAL SELF-CONTROL

The general strategy of self-control prescribed by non-actional views (i.e. changing one's perspective on the situation) is a form of reappraisal; reappraisal is a very popular and effective emotion regulation strategy (Gross 2013). Reappraisal resulting in successful self-control is unmotivated on non-actional views, as opposed to the cognitive (i.e. deliberate and effortful) reappraisal discussed in the psychological literature. Actional views can account for successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation by pointing to a form of cognitive reappraisal, but such an account must explain where the motivation to reappraise comes from. A potential explanation that actional views can present is two-fold: (1) reappraisal is a minimally taxing (i.e. requires minimal cognitive resources) strategy of self-control, and (2) the feeling of diminished motivation signals a deficit, but not necessarily a complete lack, of cognitive resources available to the agent. Taken together, these two claims essentially point out that agents who experience diminished motivation might still have some, albeit very few, cognitive resources reserved, which could be utilized to reappraise the situation and thus provide the opportunity to overcome diminished motivation through an actional strategy of self-control.

4.1 Minimally Taxing Cognitive Reappraisal

There is reason to believe that reappraisal is a minimally taxing strategy of self-control. The discussion of effort by Olivier Massin (2014) clarifies how reappraisal could work in a situation that requires self-control (i.e. a situation that involves some sort of opposition to acting according to one's better judgments). Moreover, the results of the delay of gratification studies conducted by Walter Mischel and Ozlem Ayduk (2004), which test for the capacity to wait for a

larger reward while being tempted by a lesser reward, seem to nicely illustrate how effective and efficient reappraisal can be when used as a strategy of self-control in temptation cases, but the same strategy can be applied to cases of diminished motivation as well.

In explaining the nature of effort, Massin outlines six essential a priori claims that define effort, the last two being especially pertinent to active pursuits to be self-controlled:⁵

5. *INTENSITY*: efforts have an intensity. Our efforts are *more or less intense*.

6. *OPPOSITION*: effort entails the encounter of some *obstacle* or *resistance* to our attempt. E.g. «Julie makes an effort to swim against the tide». We make efforts *to φ against something* (*The Nature of Effort*, 2014).

Massin explains that the intensity of effort is “plausibly a function of the *resistance* met. Heavy objects require more effort to lift them, hard problems require more effort to solve them. The more they resist, the more intense our effort is” (*The Nature of Effort*, 2014). Actional self-control utilizes primarily mental effort, and thus requires cognitive resources, specifically when an agent experiences some form of mental opposition (e.g. the recalcitrant desire to indulge in some temptation). Since self-control involves mental activities, perceptions and mental representations will play a significant role – one must perceive some object and form the mental representation of that object as desirable in order for one to desire that object. Imagine, for example, a classic temptation case that involves a dieting agent who is struggling to avoid indulging in a slice of chocolate cake; the need for self-control in this situation arises not simply

⁵ The other four claims are:

1. *AGENTIVITY*: efforts are things we do, not things that happens to us. We *make* efforts.

2. *TELEOLOGY*: efforts are made with a certain intention, in order to reach some goal. We make efforts *to φ*.

3. *BIPOLARITY*: «S makes an effort to φ» neither entails «φ» nor «non-φ». Our efforts can **fail** or **succeed**.

4. *EFFECTIVITY*: *qua* actions, efforts however necessarily achieve **a result**. Something (be it mental) is actually done as a means to attain the goal. «Paul strives to seduce Julie *by buying her expensive gifts*» does not entails «Paul will seduce Julie», but does entail that «Paul buys her expensive gifts». What is done in an effort is distinct from what is aimed at.

from the presence of the cake, but from the agent perceiving the cake and mentally representing it as deliciously sweet and tantalizing.

If particular mental representations are essentially the cause of motivational opposition to one's better judgments (i.e. mentally representing the cake as deliciously tempting while holding the judgment that one ought to be on a diet), then perhaps manipulating those mental representations (i.e. reappraisal) will also cause changes in the intensity of opposition that is presented to one's judgments. In other words, changing one's perspective about the object of temptation might modulate the force of that temptation. This modulation of perspective as a strategy of self-control has been observed in the delay of gratification experiments conducted by Walter Mischel (1970, 2004), which are designed to test an individual's capacity to wait for a greater reward while being simultaneously tempted by a lesser reward.

The delay of gratification studies were conducted using children as the participants – the participants were placed in a room with a tasty treat (they were offered a choice between an Oreo cookie, a marshmallow, or a pretzel), then were told that the experimenter is leaving for a while and that the participants will receive two treats if they resist eating the first treat until the experimenter returns. The participants were allowed to eat the first treat at any point, even when the experimenter left the room, and successful self-control was marked by those participants who waited to indulge in the treat until the experimenter returned. Several conditions were tested for and the initial experiments suggest that “the presence of the rewards serves to increase the magnitude of the frustration effect and hence decreases delay of gratification by making the waiting period more difficult” (1970; 337). What the earlier studies show is that when the participants had their attention focused on the reward, it was harder for them to wait because having the temptation present escalated their frustration. Not focusing their attention on the

reward, on the other hand, allowed the participants to wait for the larger reward for longer periods of time. However, later experiments that tested for other conditions within delay of gratification (e.g. how the reward objects were presented) showed that the focus or diversion of attention is not what matters for delay of gratification. Mischel and Ayduk (2004) reach the conclusion that “delay of gratification depends not on whether or not attention is focused on the objects of desire, but rather on just how they are mentally represented” (114). They point out that successful delay of gratification was often due to the fact that the participants mentally represented the object of temptation (i.e. the treat) as dull and boring, whereas failed delay of gratification was typically the result of mentally representing the object of temptation as vivid and exciting.

The successfully self-controlled participants are basically reappraising the object of their temptation; presumably, reappraising the object of temptation as something dull and boring, as opposed to vivid and exciting, attenuates the intensity of opposition created by that mental representation of the object and thus makes it easier (i.e. requiring less mental effort) to ignore or avoid it. Furthermore, the participants in these studies might have been reappraising non-cognitively, that is, in the non-actional sense (i.e. passively unmotivated thoughts of the treats as dull and boring), but it is likely that many of them deliberately imagined, say, a marshmallow as a simple white square in order to achieve the goal of getting two marshmallows later. Cognitive reappraisal has thus been demonstrated as an effective and efficient strategy of self-control in classic temptation cases, and cognitive reappraisal can also work in the case of diminished motivation, but only if diminished motivation doesn't involve a *complete lack* of motivation. By establishing an analogy between self-control and a muscle, as well as drawing on muscle fatigue studies, there is reason to believe that agents who experience diminished motivation might have

reserved cognitive resources at their disposal that can be utilized to engage a minimally taxing strategy of self-control such as reappraisal.

4.2 Reserved Cognitive Resources in Agents with Diminished Motivation

Connor is willing to concede that perhaps diminished motivation involves a motivational deficit, rather than a complete lack of motivation, but he does so only to make a further point, namely, that any efforts to be self-controlled in the case of diminished motivation will themselves be undermotivated. There is, however, evidence which suggests that diminished motivation might be a signal that cognitive resources are running out, but not that they are completely depleted. This evidence derives from the studies on muscle fatigue conducted by St Clair Gibson et al. (2001), who show that muscle fatigue signals a deficit in physical resources, but not a complete lack. Roy Baumeister (2002) argues that his ego depletion studies (i.e. studies that test the capacity to maintain self-control across different tasks, described below) establish that self-control is analogous to a muscle; if self-control is sufficiently analogous to a muscle, then it is likely that mental fatigue (diminished motivation being a form of mental fatigue) signals a deficit in cognitive resources, but not a complete lack. In this sense, agents with diminished motivation might have enough cognitive resources (reserved for potential future needs by feelings of mental fatigue) to motivate reappraisal, which in turn could attenuate the intensity of opposition and hence result in successful self-control.

The ego depletion studies suggest an energy or strength model of self-control; according to Baumeister, “a strength model [of self-control] would predict that performance at self-control would grow worse during consecutive or continuous efforts, just as a muscle becomes tired” (2002; 131). The series of experiments conducted to test this hypothesis involve participants who

must perform two consecutive and seemingly unrelated tasks. The first set of experiments involves participants who “were randomly assigned to regulate their emotions (either amplifying or suppressing their emotions) or not to regulate them while watching a sad, distressing video clip” before moving on to the physical task of squeezing a handgrip for as long as they could. The participants who had been assigned to regulate their emotions, regardless of whether it was to amplify or suppress their emotions, gave up much sooner on the subsequent physical task than the participants who did not have to regulate their emotions. Another set of these experiments involved thought suppression, in that the participants had to list thoughts that they were having but some participants were instructed to suppress the thought of a white bear. After completing the lists, the participants moved on to attempting to solve unsolvable anagrams, and the participants who were instructed to suppress the thought of a white bear gave up much sooner on the anagram task than the participants who were instructed that they can think of whatever they want. A third set of experiments was directed towards temptation and impulse control, making hungry participants eat radishes in front of chocolates and cookies before making them solve geometric figure tracing puzzle. Again, what was found was that the participants who had to watch the cookies while eating radishes gave up much quicker on the tracing puzzle task than participants who were either allowed to eat the cookies or were not exposed to food. All of these experiments suggest that “a broad assortment of self-regulatory efforts draw upon a common resource and deplete it”, although, just like a muscle, consistent exercise of self-control allows this resource to become more resilient to depletion (2002; 132). Importantly, none of the subsequent tasks across the different variations of the studies required exceptional amounts of physical effort – squeezing handgrips, solving anagrams and tracing shapes do not demand

excessive amounts of physical resources – thus the resources that are being depleted by these tasks are specifically mental, or cognitive, resources.

If self-control is indeed like a muscle, in the sense that it can get tired and grow stronger through habitual exercise, then some cases of diminished motivation could be understood as a type of mental fatigue that accompanies the over-exercising (and, arguably, the under-exercising) of self-control. Other cases of diminished motivation, where one's self-control is not "tired out" from previous exercise, but rather occurs because one just simply doesn't want to engage in some unpleasant task, can also be considered tiring in a certain sense, if tired is taken to mean a depletion of resources – individuals often remark that even the thought of engaging in some tedious task is tiring in itself, indicating that they perceive an insufficient amount of resources to engage in that task. On this analogy, desire is the kinetic energy that bursts life into the muscle when exertion is required, but the lack of desire-energy results in diminished motivation (i.e. fatigue) and, consequently, inactivity.

The interesting thing about fatigue, however, is that it is not necessarily an accurate indicator of an actual depletion of resources, as pointed out by Tim Bayne and Neil Levy (2006). In their discussion of the phenomenology of effort, Bayne and Levy consider Baumeister's analogy between self-control and a muscle in relation to studies on muscle fatigue conducted by St Clair Gibson et al. (2001). The muscle fatigue studies, Bayne and Levy explain, suggest that

the degree of fatigue we experience is "teleoanticipative" – that is, it is influenced by unconscious representations of the amount of muscular effort that will be required in the near future, rather than merely being a response to the depletion of a physical resource... On this view the mechanisms causing the perception of fatigue are designed to preserve resources well above the critical level, and it seems natural to think of them as generating systematically misleading representations of our energy levels (2006; 19).

The mechanism that operates in this teleoanticipative way is a type of *resource-reservation mechanism*, and it is possible, Bayne and Levy suggest, that a similar mechanism might be responsible for creating feelings of mental fatigue before an agent experiences actual depletion of mental resources.

The resource-reservation mechanism that is engaged by physical effort seems to become active only given a certain condition: one must be exerting a substantive amount of physical effort, which indicates to this mechanism that perhaps too much resources are being utilized for some task and there might not be enough resources left for other potential needs. It seems, then, that the resource-reservation mechanism is activated only when a *threshold* has been reached – it would, after all, be imprudent to reserve one's resources in cases when only a small amount of resources have been utilized. Imagine, for example, that every time an agent exerted a minimal amount of physical effort (by, say, brushing her teeth), she will experience a maximal amount of fatigue as a response. Such a sensitive resource-reservation mechanism would prevent this agent from performing low-effort tasks, even though such low-effort tasks might be ones that are good for the agent to perform (brushing one's teeth, for example, is good for promoting one's oral health). According to St Clair Gibson et al., this threshold is gauged by unconscious representations of the amount of effort potentially needed in the near future; this process balances present needs for resources with potential future needs of resources. Since it appears that physical effort and mental effort are sufficiently similar, unconscious representations are likely to also influence the experience of mental fatigue. In this sense, agents who experience diminished motivation are not necessarily experiencing a complete depletion of cognitive resources and might still have a small reserve of resources to utilize towards producing successful self-control through cognitive reappraisal.

4.3 How Ian's Reappraisal Will Motivate Him to Paint the Shed Properly

Thus far, it has been argued that it is plausible to utilize certain actional strategies of self-control, such as cognitive reappraisal, even when one is experiencing diminished motivation. Connor, however, points out that even if it is plausible to initiate an actional strategy while one is experiencing diminished motivation, the resulting actions will still be under-motivated. Recall the example of Ian, who must paint the shed but feels minimal desire to do so – Connor predicts that even if Ian can convince himself to get off the couch, he will probably do a poor job at painting the shed.

In order to illustrate how Ian can utilize cognitive reappraisal to remove motivational opposition and be sufficiently motivated to paint the shed properly, a distinction that was implied in the preceding arguments needs to be made explicit: the target for overcoming temptation is the object of temptation, whereas the target for overcoming diminished motivation is the better judgment. Self-control is required when an agent's better judgments are opposed by something: the vivid and exciting mental representation of some object in temptation cases, and the lack of desire to do anything in diminished motivation cases; temptation is eliminated by eliminating the object of temptation (or, as was argued, the vivid and exciting mental representation of the object of temptation), but diminished motivation is eliminated by reigniting the motivation to act according to one's better judgment. Given this distinction between the targets in these two cases, reappraisal works by essentially attenuating desire in temptation cases and increasing desire in diminished motivation cases.

If Ian, who is experiencing diminished motivation to paint the shed, uses reappraisal to increase his desire to get up and paint the shed, presumably the "motivational opposition" in this

situation (i.e. Ian's lack of desire) is removed and he would be more motivated to paint the shed. Moreover, since Ian will be generally more motivated to paint the shed, he will presumably be more motivated to paint the shed properly, given that he is no longer in the same state of under-motivation.

There are at least two ways in which Ian can reappraise the thought of painting the shed in order to increase his desire to actually paint the shed. The first and, based on Mischel and Ayduk's conclusion, most obvious way for Ian to increase his own motivation is just to reappraise the seemingly boring task of painting the shed as something more fun and exciting. Ian could, for example, imagine that painting the shed is a game, perhaps giving himself a time limit in which to complete the project in order to be "king of painting" or tell himself that sitting on the couch will be "unlocked" if he completes the project. Jane McGonigal is a video game developer who has researched the benefit of games for over a decade and argues that games fuel motivation in a way that regular life does not. McGonigal (2011) discusses certain studies in positive psychology that are relevant to understanding the almost limitless motivation for playing games – she references Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975), who identifies a particular form of happiness that he has dubbed "flow", which refers to "the satisfying, exhilarating feeling of creative accomplishment and heightened functioning" (xiii). Essentially, it seems that a state of flow is the opposite of a state of diminished motivation; the former is characterized by feelings of elation, presumably as a result of being productive (i.e. experiencing high levels of motivation), whereas the latter is typically associated with feelings of depression or bleakness due to the lack of desire to engage in some task (i.e. experiencing low levels of motivation). Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi observed that flow more naturally accompanies games and game-like activities, but seems to be harder to harness in everyday activities that are typically regarded

as tedious. Presumably, perceiving a tedious project, such as painting a shed, as more game-like rather than as simply chore-like will increase flow for the activity and thus increase Ian's motivation for accomplishing his goal.

A speculative point about diminished motivation is that it often seems to accompany the perception of overwhelming daunting tasks. The reason why Ian could be feeling diminished motivation towards painting the shed is because he perceives that he will spend all day on this grueling and tedious task of painting an entire shed. If this perception is the source of Ian's lack of desire to paint the shed, then another strategy that he can utilize to increase that desire is to reappraise the task as more manageable, as opposed to simply more exciting. Mele (2012) points out that there is evidence which suggests that vague goals are less likely to be accomplished than concrete, planned-out goals – a review by Peter Gollwitzer (1999) discusses the effects of having an “implementation intention”, which is essentially a plan of how, when and where one will achieve one's goal (494). One study on implementation intentions found that 100% of participants who had a goal of administering a breast self-examination in the next month accomplished this goal “if they had been induced to form additional implementation intentions”, whereas only 53% of the control group, who were not induced to form additional implementation intentions, accomplished this goal (1999; 496). Similarly, another study focused on the goal to exercise for 20 minutes in the following week – only 29% of participants who aimed to exercise the following week but did not form corresponding implementation intentions successfully accomplished their goal, 39% of the participants successfully accomplished their goal when primed with all the health risks associated with lack of exercise; however, when the goal was accompanied by corresponding implementation intentions, the rate of goal accomplishment was significantly increased to 91% (1999; 496). The likely reason for why implementation intentions

have such a significant effect on goal accomplishment is that forming a “plan of attack” breaks down a vague and daunting goal into specific and concrete steps, which makes a goal seem less overwhelming and more manageable to achieve. In this sense, Ian can form an implementation intention to paint the shed at a certain time, perhaps even breaking the project down into smaller steps with their own specific time-line (e.g. paint one wall at 1:00pm, paint another wall at 2:00pm, paint the roof tomorrow morning at 9:00am, etc.). Making such a plan might alleviate the daunting nature of Ian’s task and reignite his motivation to get up to paint the shed.

Which strategy Ian decides to use in order to increase his desire to paint the shed is irrelevant; the point is that Ian has options of how he can reappraise painting the shed in a way that can potentially boost his motivation. By having his motivation to paint the shed boosted, Ian will also presumably take more care in making sure that he does a proper job. In other words, reigniting his own motivation to paint the shed will likely make Ian more motivated to not only complete the project, but to do so properly and with minimal mistakes.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Connor argues that non-actional views have the comparative advantage of explaining successful self-control in the case of diminished motivation because non-actional self-control (i.e. having the right sorts of thoughts) is not motivated (i.e. a causal consequence of a desire and belief that having these thoughts will result in self-control). I have argued that non-actional views do not possess the comparative advantage of explaining self-control in the case of diminished motivation. The non-actional view fails to provide an explanation of how an agent comes to have the right sorts of self-controlling thoughts, thus the non-actional view cannot rely on unmotivated thoughts as a likely cause of successful self-control. Actional views can prescribe the same strategy for producing successful self-control (i.e. having the right sorts of self-controlling thoughts), but actional views are capable of providing an explanation of how an agent comes to have these thoughts. Furthermore, having the right sorts of thoughts is a minimally taxing strategy, thus an agent with already diminished motivation can still utilize this strategy.

I would like to make one more point regarding the vital role of desire within an instance of successful self-control. In rejecting Connor's claim that successful self-control is likely to be non-actional, I have suggested some ways in which an agent who is experiencing diminished motivation can be successfully self-controlled in the actional sense, but in order to be able to utilize such strategies, the agent must have *some* motivation, albeit very minimal, to pursue her better judgment. One may raise the point that Connor's original conception of diminished motivation involved cases where an agent might have absolutely no desire, and hence motivation to act on her better judgment, which does present a significant problem for any actional account of successful self-control in these cases.

While it is true that an agent who has absolutely no motivation to pursue her better judgment is likely to be incapable of engaging in any form of actional self-control, it is not obvious that such agents could actually exist. Connor points out that it would be begging the question for actional accounts to require that the agent is somewhat motivated in order to be able to engage in self-control. However, the actional view does not need to claim that an agent must perform a motivated action for that particular behavior to count as an instance of self-control. Instead, a different point can be made – for a particular judgment about what is better to do to count as a sincere better judgment, the agent must have at least some desire to achieve the goal of that better judgment; if one didn't want to be healthy, one wouldn't believe that it would be better to eat healthy rather than to indulge in chocolate cake all the time. In this sense, every better judgment will entail some degree of motivation and thus the agent will be equipped with the minimal motivation needed to engage in minimally taxing actional strategies.

Making this move denies the possibility of self-control in an instance where the agent has absolutely no motivation to pursue her better judgments. Importantly, this denial does not stem from the assumption that self-control requires motivation, but rather from the pretty uncontroversial observation that peoples' sincere judgment about what is best entails some desire to achieve that best state of affairs.

Identifying the nature of self-control is vital in understanding how self-control can be properly utilized in order for agents to achieve their goals. Self-control is important not only because it helps individuals promote their own physical wellbeing, but self-control helps to cultivate psychological wellbeing too. Being able to act on better judgments provides the satisfaction of achieving the benefits of our goals, but also makes us feel more powerful and in charge of our own happiness. Understanding that attempts at being self-controlled can be

successful in both temptation cases and diminished motivation cases will also make the prospect of being self-controlled less overwhelming and more attainable, which in itself is somewhat of a motivational boost. Most importantly, however, being able to explain exactly how self-control can be successful has a powerful prescriptive feature, where understanding the nature of self-control also entails instructions on how one can be self-controlled in the face of any motivational opposition, whether that opposition is in the form of a temptation or in the form of deficient desire. Actional views of self-control, if they are successful at explaining how instances of self-control are possible, can offer very useful instructions on how to achieve the goals of one's better judgments. I have argued that non-actional views, on the other hand, seem to be missing this prescriptive feature. Explaining the conditions under which successful self-control is possible is important, but a well-rounded theory of self-control will also provide a practical guide of how individuals can actually be self-controlled, and thus contribute to the wellbeing of individuals who are seeking to learn how they can achieve their goals.

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