

# **Synchronic Self-Control and the Nature of Willpower**

Tom Mens

Student Number: 3694100  
Date of submission: 08/08/2016



**Utrecht University**

First Supervisor: dr. J.M. Mulder  
Second Supervisor: dr. J.H. Anderson

*This Master's Thesis is submitted as the final part of the Academic master Philosophy*

*Not being able to govern events, I govern myself, and apply myself to them, if they will not apply themselves to me.*

— Michel de Montaigne

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Establishing self-control</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Self-control? Two questions . . . . .	5
1.2 Actional or not? . . . . .	6
1.3 The "self" in self-control . . . . .	6
1.4 Motivation . . . . .	7
1.5 The will and willpower . . . . .	8
1.6 Moving forward . . . . .	9
<b>2. Three philosophical approaches to self-control</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Cognitive dispositional self-control: Frog and Toad eat cookies	11
2.2 Desire-based accounts . . . . .	14
2.2.1 Rethinking the principle of motivated Action . . . . .	14
2.2.2 Mele's motivational shift . . . . .	17
2.3 Willpower accounts of self-control . . . . .	20
2.3.1 Sripada's divided mind account . . . . .	20
2.3.2 Weakness of the will and sticking to one's resolutions . . . . .	25
2.4 Two questions . . . . .	29
<b>3. Willpower strength and Ego-depletion</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1 Introducing Ego-depletion . . . . .	32
3.2 Should we believe in the depletion effect? . . . . .	33
3.2.1 What explains the depletion effect? . . . . .	33
3.2.2 The Covariance question and three junctures of self-control	37
<b>4. Self-Control and the perceived locus of causality</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 What do we want from a theory of self-control . . . . .	40
4.2 Personal autonomy and the 'self' in self-control . . . . .	41
4.3 Self-determination theory and the mediating role of autonomy . . . . .	42
4.4 Autonomous self-control . . . . .	45
4.5 Quasi self-control and structural failures of self-regulation . . . . .	47
4.6 Autonomous self-control and diminished motivation . . . . .	49
4.7 Some possible objections . . . . .	51
4.7.1 Just another desire . . . . .	51
4.7.2 Quasi self-control initiation and the will . . . . .	51
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>55</b>

# Introduction

If we always did what we wanted most, our lives would quickly run out of control. The ability to mediate between our impulses and our rational judgements is a defining feature of human beings. Unlike other animals we are able to employ practical reasoning to pick and choose the actions which are, all things considered, best. This ability to self-regulate has gained increasingly more interest from psychologists and philosophers over the past decades, for it seems to lay at the heart of numerous issues such as addiction and depression among others. Even economists have taken an interest as many of the questions concerning consumer behaviour and decision-making can be traced back to their ability to control their actions. Self-control is a hot topic indeed. Although we exercise self-control numerous times every day, theorists have a great deal of trouble explaining the phenomenon. It is often described as the ability to master competing motivation. That is, to act in defiance of our strongest desire. There are two types of self-control, synchronic and diachronic. The latter is a form of self-control which is not contemporaneous with the desire we aim to control. An example of this would be not going to a bar the night before you have to work early to prevent yourself from losing control and drinking too much. The desire which is expected to lead to trouble is that of having another beer. Knowing that you usually have trouble resisting the temptation once the drinking has begun, you decide to not put yourself in a situation that might lead to a loss of control. Synchronic self-control is the ability to master a wayward desire at the very time that desire is the strongest. Rebecca is severely overweight and has been struggling with this fact for a long time. She knows that being overweight is not conducive to her health and that it would, all things considered, be best to lose her excess weight. In spite of having this judgement she still has a very strong desire to eat. At a birthday party she is offered a big slice of cheesecake and she wants nothing more than to accept it and eat it whole. Despite the fact that eating the pie is her strongest desire, Rebecca manages to turn it down. She has successfully exercised synchronic self-control and mastered her strongest motivation by stopping it from leading to an action. This thesis will be concerned only with synchronic self-control. For simplicity's sake I will simply speak of self-control for the remainder of this thesis. The examples in the literature on self-control usually go something like the example with Rebecca and focus mainly on conquering temptation. There are however many more aspects of our mental lives that require self-control that do not necessarily involve temptation. Self-control has recently been found to be factor in numerous cognitive processes such as decision-making, controlling emotions and focusing attention. Crucial processes as they are for successful functioning, it is no surprise that several studies have shown a correlation between an individual's ability for self-control and

their general state of well-being. Moreover, a child's self-regulatory capacity was found to be a reliable predictor of their success in adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance this seems like a widespread and straightforward phenomenon. It is nevertheless deeply paradoxical when we try to explain what happens theoretically. For it conflicts with one of our most basic ideas about human action, namely that people, if given a choice, always choose to do what they desire most. This principle is formulated and referred to differently in the literature. Originally stemming from Davidson, formulated as:

**P1** *If an agent wants to do x more than he wants to do y and he believes himself free to do either x or y, then he will intentionally do x if he does either x or y intentionally.* [Davidson 1970, 23]

In this thesis I will refer to it as the principle of motivated action or PMA for short.<sup>2</sup> If Rebecca desires most to indulge her wayward desire and eat the pie whole and there is nothing stopping her from doing so, then why doesn't she do it?<sup>3</sup> One might reply and say that she obviously wanted to refrain from doing it more. But if this is so, and her strongest motivation is indeed to reject the pie, then we do not have a genuine case of self-control since there was no need for any intervention by the agent. Thus we are faced with two conflicting situations. On the one hand it seems almost trivially true that a person, choosing among all his options, chooses that option which he or she desires most. On the other, we are faced with the very commonly occurring phenomenon of self-control in which one refrains from acting on one's strongest desire at the time. Something has to budge.

The easiest way would be to claim that Rebecca's refusal of the pie should not be called an act of self-control because there is no intention on her part that caused the action. What caused Rebecca's abstaining were merely dispositions to think in certain ways that lead to a shift in her motivational state. This view, put forward initially by Kenneth and Smith [1996,1997], denies that self-control can ever be actional. The implication of their idea is that an agent's power over his own actions is very limited and dependent on his cognitive dispositions. I find this a very unappealing and counterintuitive idea. However, maintaining that self-control is an intentional act done by agents requires relieving the tension with the PMA. Another route pursued by theorists is to attempt to re-describe the paradox in such terms that no conflict occurs. Zhu [2005] argues that we should re-evaluate the PMA so that it allows for self-control. Alfred Mele [1997], although also providing a substantive explanation of self-control, takes a similar line in that he argues that the problem arises because we, unjustifiably, take two motivations to be direct competitors of one another. Sripada [2011] follows a similar strategy and argues that intervention by the agent during a conflict of motivations elevates it beyond the reach of this principle. Richard Holton [2002]

---

<sup>1</sup> See [Baumeiser and Tangey 2004] and [Moffit et.al 2011]

<sup>2</sup> As used by Jing Zhu [2005]

<sup>3</sup> Nothing stopping her in the sense that she is capable of performing those actions.

famously argues for an account of self-control in which willpower plays an important role. Understood as separate from ordinary motivation, willpower may provide an explanation of self-control which is not liable to the paradox. These proposals will be critically discussed in chapter two.

The problem with these accounts, or so I will argue, is that they do not successfully capture an important condition for self-control, namely a motivation to engage it. Often we know quite well that we are being tempted to do something we would not rationally endorse, but this knowledge is not always enough to resist the temptation. Controlling ourselves and doing the right thing can be hard work and we frequently lack the willpower to put in the effort. Recently, Connor [2014] has argued that current accounts fail to explain how agents in a state of diminished motivation can exert self-control. Engaging in self-control is itself motivated and it can therefore not be actionally employed to regulate our motivations. Connor concludes that, given this difficulty, non-actional accounts of self-control should be preferred over actional ones. Given that the alternative to actional variants of self-control put heavy constraints on human agency, the main question is : Can we provide a substantive account of self-control which explains how agents can exert self-control in states of diminished motivation?

The main aim of this thesis is to critically examine the main positions in the debate on self-control and to articulate a position that can deal with cases of diminished motivation. In the first chapter I will set the stage for the following examination of the main positions in the second chapter. My aim for the first chapter will be to clear up and flesh out some of the main concepts in the debate on self-control, as well as articulate the contours of what we want from the concept we end up with. In the second chapter I will critically discuss the main lines of argument employed by theorists to explain the phenomenon of self-control in order to elucidate the main problems. In the third chapter I will discuss recent research in social psychology which ties the notion of willpower to self-control capacity. In Chapter 4 I will propose a conception of self-control which aims to solve the problems set out in the previous chapters, as well as accommodate findings from psychological research on self-control. In closing, I will summarise and offer some concluding remarks.

## 1. Establishing Self-Control

In this chapter I will attempt to explicate some of the main concepts involved in the debate on self-control, as well as explain the main questions associated with the project. As mentioned in the introduction, many of the philosophical accounts of self-control have focused on cases that involve resisting temptation. Although these are perhaps the most exemplary cases, recent research in social psychology has shown us that self-control may be required for many other cognitive processes.<sup>4</sup> If we are to explain what self-control is, how it works and which mental states it involves, it is imperative to fully understand the breath of the concept.

What do theorists refer to when they talk about self-control? Given that self-control is the matter in need of explanation, there is no non-question begging answer to this question. However, we can rely on our intuitions and common experience to single out the sort of mental events we would want to conceptualise as exercises of self-control. The danger in formulating a position on the topic is that the adequacy of any explanation depends on the scope that was taken at the outset. In picking a scope, i.e. specifying the set of phenomena we propose to explain, we already constrain the concept to a significant extent. There are two questions pertaining to self-control which are in need of explanation. Firstly, we may ask what actually goes on during self-control in terms of mental processes and their effects. Secondly, we should inquire into the necessary and sufficient conditions for engaging in self-control. Answering either question alone will not result in a complete account of self-control. I will discuss these questions in more detail in 1.1.

Although the majority of theorists hold that self-control is a kind of intentional control over action, there are those who argue that self-control is non-actional. Deciding whether or not it is should be constrained by the plausibility of the explanations given. It is nevertheless important to understand the implications of the idea that self-control is non-actional. I will elaborate on this in 1.2.

The notion of self-control implies a divided understanding of the mind. Generally understood, the notion of control involves a controller and an object over which control is exercised. This mental division provides constraints on what self-control can turn out to be. I will discuss this further in paragraph 1.3.

Self-control essentially involves competing motivations. Given that motivation is itself a complex topic about which much is written, I will provide a short explanation of the concept of motivation employed in this thesis in 1.4.

Another important point of contention among theorists is the role of willpower in self-control. Some equate exercises of the will to exercises of self-control while yet

---

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Decision-making and the focusing of attention. see [Schmeichel 2007] and [Wright et.al 2007]

others see the will as a faculty which is more or less independent from our motivations. Whatever line of argument is taken, it seems willpower plays a defining role in what exercises of self-control are and as such, how we can explain them. In paragraph 1.5 I will briefly introduce the key questions pertaining to the connection between willpower and self-control.

In paragraph 1.6 I will provide a wish list for an eventual theory of self-control incorporating the conceptual points made in the preceding paragraphs. In doing so, I intend to provide a framework from which we can gauge the proposals to be discussed in chapter 2.

## **1.1 Self-Control? Two Questions**

Self-control comes in many forms. The most puzzling and typical form is that of resisting temptation where an agent acts counter to his strongest desire. A common description of self-control is the ability to master motivation that is contrary to one's better judgement, that is, an ability that prevents such motivation from resulting in behaviour that is contrary to one's overall better judgement. There are already some constraints on what self-control could be build into this definition for it essentially links self-control to acting in accordance with our best judgement.

In providing an account of self-control we must distinguish between two questions. On the one hand we need to ask what happens during self-control, i.e. what mental processes are involved and their effects are. On the other we must inquire into the conditions required for a person to enter into a state of self-control. This latter question has been, I believe, underappreciated in the literature and it going unanswered poses a problem for most theorists who have focused on the first question. Even if we can tell a plausible story about the mental processes involved in self-control and how these effect the goal of bringing our actions into line with our best judgement, we are still required to explain how we can bring about this state. These two questions reflect common experience in the sense that we usually know quite well what is demanded of us and what is required to some extent. We know that when we are confronted with temptation we ought to control ourselves and do the right thing. However, often we do not engage mental activities characteristic of self-control even though we have the capacity for it. If self-control is indeed an act done by agents, then failure to engage self-control is itself a failure to act in accordance with our better judgement. Thus, failure of self-control can itself be a self-control problem and it is therefore insufficient to solely discuss the conditions for its success in terms of the efficacy of mental processes. In chapter 2 I will examine various philosophical accounts of self-control and attempt to show how they answer the two questions just outlined. In doing so I intend to set the stage for my own proposal in chapter 4.



## 1.2 Actional or not?

That self-control is a common phenomenon is undisputed by philosophers and psychologists alike. There is, however, widespread disagreement as to the involvement of agency in the process. Explaining self-control in terms of passive mental processes eliminates many troubling questions and, as we shall see later, circumvents the paradox of self-control. It also puts a significant and undesirable limit on the power we have as agents to control our actions. For we would, in many cases, be unable to consciously choose between options and are, in a sense, reduced to being helpless bystanders of our own dispositions. An important reason for arguing for an actional account involves the phenomenology typically associated with self-control. While engaging in it, we experience a sense of struggle that requires effort. It feels hard to overcome our strongest desires. If we were to explain self-control as a passive process we would not be able to account for this experience since there would be no sense in which we were intentionally, effort fully trying anything.

Whether or not self-control is actional may also have an important bearing on ascribing responsibility for actions. If self-control is required for individuals in order to stop themselves from committing criminal acts, then it is undesirable to think that they, should they commit such acts, were powerless to stop themselves.

## 1.3 The "Self" in Self-Control

That we can fail at self-control and yet act on our own desires, wayward or otherwise, implies a distinction between desires and the 'self'. If 'self' simply denoted the conjunction of all our mental states, including our desires and impulses, then we would not speak of a failure of self-control when acting on a wayward desire. Consequently, there must be a separation between that which controls and those things that are in need of controlling. In psychology this separation is classically described in terms of different sorts of mental processes; system 1- and system 2.<sup>5</sup> System 1 typically involves quick primal processes including cravings and emotional wants. The second system is slow, deliberate and is responsible for our higher cognition and reasoning. These systems can produce conflicting motivations, offering two mutually exclusive options for action. A simple example would be a dieter who craves to eat a piece of pie while at the same time being motivated by the belief that it is best to abstain. Typically philosophers associate the 'self' with second order processes. By deliberately reflecting on our beliefs and desires, we form an all things considered best judgment which is a belief about what we take ourselves to have most reason to do. Exercising self-control is to bring our actions into line with this judgement.

---

<sup>5</sup> Originally introduced by [Watson and Evans 1975]

The tight connection between our best judgement and acts of self-control is problematic. To speak of an instance of self-control we require two conflicting options for action. It is however, not immediately clear that one of these options must be the best of all our possible choices. Consider again the dieter who is deliberating on whether to eat a slice of pie. Do we only speak of an act of self-control if he completely turns it down if that is his best judgment? What if he compromises with himself and only has half a slice? It may be the case that he exercised self-control but was only partially successful. Even though he has failed to act in accordance with his best judgement, he nevertheless partially resisted the wayward inclination of having a whole slice. Pinning self-control to acting on our best judgement may be undesirably restrictive. For the concept of self-control to be suitably adequate to describe everyday experiences, it should allow for cases in which one acts on a judgment which may not be best. The compromise made by taking half a slice of pie is an example of such a judgment. Rather than saying to the pie-eater that he failed at self-control completely, we ought to be able to say that he did well at controlling himself given the intensity of his pie-eating desire. The 'self' is also taken, by some philosophers, as the source of motivation for acts of self-control in the sense that we are motivated by a desire to act in accordance with our all things-considered best judgement. In chapter 2 I will review some prominent proposals for 'desire-based' accounts of self-control.

If self-control acts only count as such if they are in service of 'the self', then our definition of what the 'self' is places constraints on what self-controlling acts can turn out to be. As such, the concept of self-control must be linked to an account of personal autonomy in order to allow for its proper application. Philosophers are not always explicit about their underlying assumptions regarding personal autonomy. Their explanations of self-control however hinge on the concept of 'self' they employ.

## 1.4 Motivation

During the course of this thesis there will be a lot of talk about motivation and desires. It is therefore important to explain at the outset what I mean when saying someone is motivated to A. Classically motivation is a belief-desire pair.<sup>6</sup> We have a desire, and a belief that doing a certain action A will lead to the fulfilment of that desire, and thus we are motivated to A. This sort of motivation is typically associated with deliberation and conscious choice in which we choose, among all the available options for action, that choice which is most likely to lead to the fulfilment of our desire. Our rationality contributes to our motivation in the sense that we, aside from wanting our desire fulfilled, are also motivated by making the best choice we can make. It remains however that we are not always fully instrumentally rational. If we were, then there would be no need for this thesis. We are also subject to passive motivation which may lead to action

---

<sup>6</sup> Commonly referred to as the Humean theory of motivation

without the mediation of our instrumental rationality.<sup>7</sup> One may think here of desires and impulses generated by system 1 processes which never enter into our conscious deliberation. In this way a person can be motivated to A without having the occurring thought that A will lead to the fulfilment of some associated desire. When we are craving for a cookie we do not need the conscious belief that lifting our arm and reaching into the cookie bag will result in the quenching of our craving. We are nevertheless passively motivated to undertake the action.

Concerning desires, I want to introduce a well-known conceptual distinction here. Desires break down into either intrinsic or extrinsic desires. The former is a general desire aimed at a certain state of affairs. One may think of wanting to be happy or wanting one's child to be well. The latter is an instrumental desire aimed at realising the state of affairs which is intrinsically desired. For instance, one might extrinsically desire one's child to graduate for it promotes the intrinsically desired state of the child's wellbeing. The potential force of any extrinsic desire is determined by the force of the intrinsic desire to which it is connected. This connection is and will be referred to as the means-end relation.

A helpful concept introduced by Mele [1992] is that of a motivational base. S's motivational base for an action A is the total of S's pro-attitudes towards A. This includes both active motivation in terms of belief-desire pairs and passive motivation in the form of latent emotional desires. To say that S is more motivated to A than to not A, is to say that the motivational base of S to A is stronger than S's motivational base to not-A or that there is an action B, which is mutually exclusive with A, for which the motivational base is weaker than for A. This may seem to be an overly technical explanation of a simple concept. It is, however, important for it bears on the interdependence of the two systems described in 1.1 in producing motivation. Talk about motivation and desires in this thesis should be read with these concepts and distinctions in mind.

## 1.5 The Will and Willpower

Willpower and self-control are closely related concepts. Some philosophers, following recent developments in psychology, even equate the two notions as will become clear later on. A recent trend in social psychology suggests that self-control is a capacity which can be exercised but wears out on use leading to the ego-depleted state.<sup>8</sup> They argue that this capacity is akin to a muscle in the sense that it can tire out after repeated use and needs time to regenerate afterwards. Important to note is that these psychologists take willpower to be synonymous with self-control capacity. That is to say that our ability to control ourselves is directly determined by our reserve of willpower energy. The experiments conducted by researchers in this field typically involve a dual-task approach in which the comparative capacity for self-control is measured between

---

<sup>7</sup> Desires may 'present' certain actions to us without conscious intervention, see [Wallace 1999]

<sup>8</sup> Pioneered by [Baumeister, Muraven and Tice 1998, 2000]

two groups. One group is given a first task which is hypothesised to consume self-control capacity, while the control group is given a task which should not consume any self-control strength. Both groups are then given the same follow up task in which self-control is required and the difference in their success at exercising it is measured. Many of these experiments have been conducted and it seems evident that repeated exercise of self-control has a depleting effect resulting in a diminished capacity.

What is interesting about this research is that the depleting effect is not limited to the resisting of temptations but also occurs during other mental efforts such as the controlling of emotions, attention and thoughts. This may imply a broader notion of self-control than the temptation cases typically discussed by philosophers. There is, however, a more worrisome implication of these findings. If it is indeed the case that our ability to control ourselves is invariably determined by our available willpower reserves, then the actional theorist is faced with a dilemma. Either he must accept that a person suffering from severe ego-depletion cannot actionally control himself, or he must show how it is possible that this state can be actionally overcome.

I will consider the implications of these findings for a philosophical theory of self-control in-depth in chapter 3. One may wonder to what extent philosophical theorising should be informed by research done in psychology and vice versa. With both fields overlapping, I think philosophers should be sensitive to the implicit empirical predictions in their accounts and ensure that they do not conflict with results from empirical studies. It is, however, often the case that concepts employed by psychologists are sufficiently accurate and exhaustive for their own field, but insufficiently precise and comprehensive philosophically. Consequently, different intensions of concepts such as the will and willpower, among psychologists and philosophers, need to be considered when making judgements about the empirical adequacy of philosophical accounts of self-control.

Another important question flowing from the supposed connection between willpower and self-control is the latter's relation to weakness of the will. When we fail to control ourselves, does this entail that we are also weak-willed? A related question pertains to the connection between the will and willpower. If willpower is required for acts of self-control, as much is indicated by research on ego-depletion, then what is implied for the 'will' should we lack any willpower?

## **1.6 Moving forward**

Before turning to some of the most influential proposals made, it is important to consider some constraints on any adequate philosophical account of self-control. It goes without saying that it must, first and foremost, resolve the paradox mentioned in the introduction. Either by explaining how the paradox is only superficial or by refuting the principle of motivated action. As mentioned in 1.1, it must also be able to answer two questions. Apart from explaining the mental processes involved in self-control and how they alter or otherwise effect a change in motivation, it must also explain how we enter in to these processes and how they are actively sustained.

The concept of self-control must be fleshed out in such a way that it is applicable to cases we would readily call self-control cases. A caveat is in order here because we must also allow for the possibility that we are mistaken in our current application of the concept to some cases. If so, then the theorist ought to explain why our intuitions regarding these cases are mistaken. In any explanation of self-control involving the will, we cannot make either concept fit the other if it entails counterintuitive explanations of phenomena unrelated to self-control. It is theoretically undesirable to connect the will and self-control in such a way that it conflicts with our common sense understanding of will, especially given that the will is a much broader concept.

Explanations must also be able to incorporate, or at least accommodate, developments in social psychology. That is not to say that philosophers should simply accept explanations of empirical results. However, some of these results, such as the ego-depletion effect, are seemingly evident and cannot reasonably be ignored from an armchair.

## 2. Three Philosophical Approaches to Self-Control

Although most of the following proposals focus mainly on the question pertaining to the mental processes involved in self-control, they are distinguishable primarily by the mental states they pose as a necessary condition for engaging in self-control. I will follow the categorisation made by Edmund Henden [2008] for I believe it to accurately reflect the main differences among theorists. The cognitive dispositional take on self-control poses that dispositions to have self-controlling thoughts are necessary for self-control. In 2.1 I will discuss the most influential variant of this view as expounded by Kenneth and Smith. Their explanation can be seen as the antithesis to actional accounts of self-control. Desire based accounts, to be discussed in 2.2, pose that an extra intrinsic desire to act in accordance with what we have most reason to do is necessary for engaging in self-control. Self-control is possible, according to these accounts, if this extra desire is present, and a person has a capacity for self-control. Lastly there are volitional explanations of self-control which tie its exercise to willpower. These accounts claim that willpower is a necessary, and on some accounts sufficient, condition for engaging in self-control. I will discuss and criticise some prominent arguments along this line in 2.3. In 2.4 I will summarise the discussed proposals and argue that willpower must play an explanatory role in the concept of self-control.

### 2.1 Cognitive-Dispositional Self-control: Frog and Toad eat Cookies

In two seminal papers, Kenneth and Smith [1996,1997] argue that synchronic self-control is not an action but rather the result of a disposition to have certain thoughts. In doing so they use the famous example of Frog and Toad who lose control and eat too many cookies. For uniformity reasons I will stick to Rebecca's example [p.1] for I believe it to be sufficiently similar. On Kenneth and Smith's non-actional account, the reason why Rebecca refrained from eating the cheesecake was that she, at the time, had certain thoughts which had the effect of reducing the force of her wayward desire to eat the cheesecake, as well as restoring (some of) her instrumental rationality in the sense that her desire for health could transmit its causal force across the means end relation. On this account, failures of self-control are failures of instrumental rationality. Rebecca has two intrinsic desires: one intrinsic desire to be healthy and another to have immediate pleasure. The latter being the weakest of both desires may, as a result of a failure of instrumental rationality, transfer more causal force across the means-end relation than the former desire. That is to say that Rebecca's desire for immediate pleasure can cause a relatively strong extrinsic desire to eat the cheesecake, while her desire to be healthy

does not cause the competing desire to refrain from doing so.<sup>9</sup> Her being confronted with the cheesecake caused her motivation for immediate pleasure to be more salient by, in a sense, making it easier for her to generate an extrinsic desire connected to it. Even though Rebecca's desire to be healthy is her strongest desire at the time she eats the cheesecake, her lack of instrumental rationality has led to her acting on a desire which is a direct competitor of her strongest one. That Rebecca was successful at exercising self-control, on this picture, is explained by her disposition to have certain thoughts restoring the force transmission of her strongest desire across the means-end relation. Suppose Rebecca, when confronted with the offering of cheesecake, was disposed to think of the cheesecake in a certain way. Perhaps she felt that eating it would be embarrassing given that she is already overweight, or that she thought of the cheesecake as being a lump of fat rather than a delicious treat. These types of thoughts are connected to her intrinsic desire of being healthy and having a good self-image and therefore restore some of her instrumental rationality by allowing that desire to result in the extrinsic desire to refrain from eating cookies.

The main advantage of this view is that it circumvents the paradox resulting from the principle of motivated action. If instances of self-control cannot properly be called actions, which they are not if they are the result of dispositions to have certain thoughts, then the PMA does not apply. Furthermore, that we act against our strongest desire, as the result of passively generated thoughts, is not through some shift of the comparative force of our intrinsic desires. It is rather the result of a change in the way these desires transmit their force to extrinsic desires. As such, instances of self-control are, under Kenneth and Smith's description, proper cases of self-control.

There are, however, some major issues with this account. If we are to understand exercises of self-control as passive processes in which the agent can exercise no conscious control, we are left with a very unappealing picture of human agency. We, as conscious agents, are not really in control over our desires and urges. One way of improving our capacity for self-control is to exercise diachronic self-control, which can be actional according to Kenneth and Smith, in order to prevent failing synchronically at a later time. Given this account, if we do not have the appropriate dispositions and the associated occurring thoughts at the time we require self-control, then we are simply out of luck. The severe limitations on human agency implied by a cognitive-dispositional understanding of self-control are unappealing. We would not only be helpless bystanders of our own actions, there would also be no ground for ascribing responsibility for those actions to the agent. It could be argued that we are responsible for our cognitive dispositions and that, when the time comes when self-control is called for, we are to blame for a lack self-controlling thoughts. Although we might, from a theoretical perspective, be able to understand this responsibility, it does not make much sense if reflected on by agents after having failed to control themselves.

There is a distinct phenomenology we associate with acts of self-control. It typically involves effort to overcome our immediate impulses. When Rebecca is offered

---

<sup>9</sup> Either it does not cause the desire or it does so without the necessary force to properly compete and win out on the wayward desire.

the cheesecake it seems unlikely that she would not experience an inner conflict. She knows she should not take it and she knows she wants to. On the above account, it would not make sense to ascribe to Rebecca a sense of struggle or doubt when deciding whether or not to accept the cake. Her passively generated thoughts are either sufficient to result in her refraining or they are not. There is no sense in which Rebecca is consciously deciding or resisting anything since she is not the author of her thoughts but merely a witness to them. The problem of a dispositional explanation in accounting for the distinct phenomenology associated with self-control ties in to problem pertaining to responsibility mentioned earlier. Should Rebecca fail to control herself and eat the slice of cake, then she would not take her action to be blameworthy because she failed to diachronically instil dispositions. Similarly when anticipating being offered food at a birthday party, does it make sense for her to contemplate whether she has the appropriate dispositions to have self-controlling thoughts? Surely, this is not the way in which we generally think about self-control or failures thereof. Although the argument from phenomenology is hardly conclusive, it reflects an important intuition namely that we are responsible for and able to control actions come what may.

Another problem that cognitive dispositional accounts face is that they have trouble explaining how self-control processes are prompted. If it is indeed a passive process instigated by conflicting desires with the function of manipulating the force transmission of our intrinsic desires, then how does one enter into self-control? From the explanation given for the failure in instrumental rationality, it seems to follow that the more we are in need of self-controlling thoughts, the less likely it is that we will have them. The cognitive dispositions Kenneth and Smith talk about, passive as they are, still require the right circumstances for them to be triggered. We must, at some level, recognise that we are in need of self-controlling thoughts or that we are engaging in thought to which we are disposed to think so and so. Being tempted to eat a slice of cheesecake should only prompt self-controlling thoughts if it is connected to a second-order belief about the desire to eat. If it were not, then dieters and non-dieters alike would engage in self-control when offered a piece of pie.



## 2.2 Desire based Accounts

### 2.2.1 Rethinking the Principle of Motivated Action

Instead of coming up with a scheme to circumvent the apparent paradox of self-control, Jing Zhu [2005] argues that the paradox results from the unwarranted demandingness of the principle of motivated action. The reason why we have trouble with the concept of self-control is because the PMA implies that there is always some action for which we are most motivated. Zhu suggests that the notions of 'desire' and 'want' are ambiguous. A 'desire' may refer to a 'want' in the volitional sense and is based on reasons. In another sense, having a desire simply means having an appetite or craving which is essentially not reason-responsive. To say an agent wants to do some action the most is, given the ambiguity of 'want', ignorant of the complexity of our motivational machinery. Although wants and desires can vary in their degree of strength, it is not invariably possible to determine what one's strongest motive is. Zhu proposed that the PMA should be replaced with a weakened principle:

**PMA1:** *Whenever people intentionally do something, or at least try to do something, they do what they have an appealing motivation to do. [Zhu 2005, 486]*

As a benefit of this weakened thesis, Zhu maintains that it is, under its description, perfectly possible for an agent to carry out two actions simultaneously with conflicting motivations. Rebecca, having returned home from the party, still craves for something to eat. She remembers having stashed away some chocolates and decides to eat them. She is also still very motivated to being healthy and losing her excess weight and decides to work out on the treadmill while eating the chocolates. While running, she also engages in self-control by trying hard to picture the chocolates as repulsive lumps of fat in an attempt to get herself to stop eating them. Zhu would say that Rebecca is engaged in synchronic self-control under an explanation that is not paradoxical, for the eating of chocolates is not what *she most wants to do*, but simply one of the appealing motivations for action. Surely, it seems true that her desire to eat chocolates is a different sort of desire from her walking the treadmill or picturing the chocolates as lumps of fat. The former 'desire' is a craving which is not responsive to reason unlike the latter. Determining which of her occurring desires is strongest may be difficult before she engages in any of these actions. However, to say that Rebecca is engaging in self-control seems highly problematic. Her motivation for walking the treadmill and picturing the lumps of fat are means to an end, namely being thin and healthy. Her eating of the chocolates is in direct conflict with that end. Zhu recognises this problem and adds another principle:

**PMA2** *A motivation for an action must transfer its force across the means-end relation in order to causally figure in the actual production of the intentional action. [Zhu 2005, 487]*

Rebecca not stopping her consumption of chocolates while engaging in self-control on the treadmill could be explained, according to this principle, as a failure of force transmission across the means end relation. Although she is very motivated to be thin and healthy, this motivation transfers insufficient causal force to stop her from eating cookies. To explain the failure in transmission, Zhu states yet another principle:

**PMA3** *The degree of how strongly a motivation can proximately generate a vivid, salient sense to the agent can sometimes substantively affect the transmission of the motivation's force across the means-end relation. [Zhu 2005, 487]*

Combining these three principles and applying them to Rebecca's case, we might say that she is engaged in synchronic self-control without there being a conflict with the principled description of her actions. The underlying rationale of Zhu's story seems to be a rejection of the idea that an agent's decisions are the result of the motivations the agent has at the time, leaving little room for conscious agency. I find myself in general agreement with Zhu when it pertains to the undesirability of explanations that reduce human agency to a kind of calculus with motivations and desires. There are however some serious problems with Zhu's story.

The most immediate concern is the question whether or not we can speak of a genuine case of self-control under the above description. Surely Rebecca's picturing of fat resembles what sometimes goes on when we try to control ourselves, but is it a true act of self-control? Under Zhu's description the picturing act is a deliberative choice in concordance with her intrinsic desire to be thin and healthy. Now, if her intrinsic desire for health motivates her to walk the treadmill and picture the fat, how can it fail to lack the salience needed for her to stop eating the chocolate? Suppose that Rebecca did not have the intrinsic desire to stay healthy, and as such, would not be acting irrationally by eating the chocolate. Not experiencing an internal conflict, she would simply continue to eat the chocolate without pause. The point is that Rebecca would only be prompted to initiate self-control if she was aware of an inner conflict, i.e. doing something she knows is wrong. How does she know? A likely explanation is that it conflicts with what she thinks she should be doing or what she has committed herself to doing earlier. The motivation to control herself could derive from and be sustained by a sense of guilt in acting contrary to how she thinks she ought to act. It seems that Rebecca, rather than engaging in self-control, is deceiving herself in thinking so.

A more plausible explanation of events, it seems to me, is that Rebecca's failure to control herself leads her to actions aimed at mediating feelings of guilt and shame. Instead of having the genuine intention to stop eating the cookies, Rebecca engages in rationalising thought and activities which alleviate her sense of self-blame. Her intention

to stop eating is not aimed at effecting the goal of not eating, but is rather a facilitating reason to continue to eat. A similar phenomenon occurs among procrastinators who continuously push back their deadlines. Every time another deadline is violated and self-blame occurs, an intention to meet the next deadline is formed to reduce some of the anxiety caused by the failure in self-control.<sup>10</sup> Rebecca is motivated to exert self-control precisely because she knows that she shouldn't be doing what she is doing. It is the very salience of this judgment which prompts her motivation for self-control. It is therefore puzzling how self-control, i.e. restoring instrumental rationality by boosting force transmission of our rational desires, can be successful if it is a requirement for engaging in self-control to begin with. At what point when walking on the treadmill eating cookies and picturing them as lumps of fat does the balance tip in favour of the desire to be thin and healthy? And when it does, shouldn't we then be justified in saying that her desire to remain thin and healthy is stronger than her desire for immediate pleasure? One might reply and claim that given PMA 1-3 we could simply say that neither desire was strongest but that they were both appealing. Her eventual opting to refrain from eating cookies was the result of her manipulating the way in which her desires transferred their force. But isn't this what we ordinarily take motivational strength to mean, namely their ability to bring about actions? How could we make sense of the appeal to motivations if not their ability to cause action?

Zhu argues that the PMA leaves little room for agency, as mentioned earlier, and that this should be reason to reconsider it. On the traditional Humean picture, understanding Rebecca's success at self-control would either be paradoxical or explained by cognitive dispositions which involve no deliberative agency on her part. Both of which are undesirable. On the new picture, her success would be explained by her act of self-control restoring, or at least influencing, the force transmission of her desire to be healthy across the means-end relation. Given that Zhu has emphasised the importance of leaving room for deliberative agency, he seems to make a glaring oversight in proposing his own account. Amidst a variety of motivations and desires, we as agents can still exert control in such a way that our choices are not fully determined merely by the strength of our motivations. However, if our efforts to control ourselves are themselves motivated, then it seems Zhu would end up in the position he aims to argue against. He writes:

*Just like such mental activities as making a practical decision, conducting a mental calculation, doing a thought experiment or recalling a particular item from memory, exercising synchronic self-control by having certain thoughts or mental images enhance or suppress the effects of the mediating processes that channel motivation into action execution can be intentional, active and controllable, motivated by the agent's desire for self-control. [Zhu 2005, 490]*

How might we understand an agent's desire for self-control? This is an important

---

<sup>10</sup> It has recently been argued that self-forgiveness may play a vital role in overcoming procrastination. See [Wohl, Pychyl and Bennet 2009] and [Haghbin, Mcaffrey and Psychyl 2012]

question for Zhu's account to which he provides no clear answer. Given his vantage point it seems plausible he would think that our desire for self-control is a special kind of intrinsic desire which puts it apart from ordinary motivations. If it were not, then the problem of limited agency would re-emerge, because we could simply add an agent's desire for self-control to the set of variables making up his decision. Thus, the desire for self-control cannot be an instrumental desire connected to some intrinsic desire. If it was, then we end up with the same problem should the intrinsic desire not transfer the needed force to the extrinsic self-control desire. Being unmotivated to exert self-control could then itself be a self-control problem. If we understood this extra desire as an intrinsic desire unconnected to the competing motivations at hand, then it follows that a person would be unable to control himself in absence of this desire. We would then have to say that depressed or otherwise motivationally deficient individuals would be unable to engage in self-control. Furthermore, we must then be able to explain how this intrinsic desire motivates self-control actions such as having certain thoughts. What value would there be in self-control if not that it allows us to act in a way which concords with what we think is best to do overall? To drive the point home, if the desire for self-control is an intrinsic desire, we must be able to explain its ability to motivate acts of self-control in a way that is not liable to motivational deficiencies. If it is, on the other hand, an extrinsic desire connected to some intrinsic desire, e.g. the desire to be thin and healthy, then the salience of the latter desire is required for initiating self-control. In other words, what would be required for its initiation is the very thing it is meant to effect.

### 2.2.2 Mele's Motivational Shift

Alfred Mele proposes an account which aims to sidestep the paradox raised by Kenneth and Smith.<sup>11</sup> To recap, the main issue was that given the principle of motivated action, synchronic self-control is impossible for a desire cannot at one time be the strongest and not the strongest. Mele suggests that the problem can be avoided if multiple intentional actions can occur simultaneously which are not direct competitors of each other, and proposes an alternative formulation of the principle of motivated action to allow for this:

*At any time at which an agent is acting intentionally, she is intentionally doing, or at least trying to do, what at that time she wants most to do then of the things she believes she can do at the time.* Mele [1998, 309]

Unlike Zhu's alternate formulation of the principle, Mele maintains that there is one action we prefer doing the most. The idea is that our most desirable action can be accompanied by more simultaneous acts if those do not directly compete with the main action. The notion of the competitiveness of ideas is important here. According to Mele,

---

<sup>11</sup> Mele's writings on self-control are extensive, see [Mele 1992, 1987, 1998 and 2003]

actions which are open to us do not compete if both actions can be done simultaneously without affecting the attractiveness of either. He uses the example of Ian [Mele 1987, 69] who is sitting on the couch watching TV (the thing he wants to do most) and exercises self-control to get himself off the couch and on to paint his shed (his all things considered best judgement). Given the standard formulation of the PMA, Ian will stay on the couch because his desire to do so is strongest and in competition with his desire to paint the shed. What happens when Ian controls himself and gets up to paint is that Ian, by uttering a self-command (Get up and paint!), increases the salience and vividness of his goal to paint the shed allowing it to motivate him to act despite it being weaker than his desire to sit and watch TV. To avoid the paradox Mele argues that Ian's desire to utter the self-command is not a direct competitor of his desire to watch TV. The direct competitor of this former desire is a desire not to utter the self-command. Ian's eventual act to get up and paint the shed is not motivated by his strongest desire but the result of his influencing the way in which his desires transfer their force across the means-end relation.

The core of Mele's account is that the PMA implies that we can sometimes do things which are not in accordance with our strongest motivation given that we can exercise multiple actions simultaneously. Mele's example of Ian is one of, as he calls it, *extreme self-control* [Mele 1998,307]. In cases of this type, one is already engaged in acting on one's wayward desire. To explain cases of *moderate self-control*, in which one is about to act, Mele argues that there is a short time in between our proximal desire and the intention to act on it. Rebecca being offered a slice of cheesecake desires most to accept and eat it. However, before she reaches out her hand to grab the plate, she has a short moment to reflect on whether or not she wants herself to succumb to her desire. Being more motivated to reflect rather than not, she does and exercises self-control.

Mele's analysis of the extreme cases seems questionable considering that our successful acts of self-control prohibit us from acting on our strongest desire. Maintaining then that self-control acts and indulging wayward desires are not competitors seems difficult. Perhaps we can understand acts of self-control in such a way from a theoretical perspective, but given the phenomenological points made earlier, it seems evident that we generally know very well what we are doing, namely fighting against a strong inclination. The struggle and effort typically involved in self-control would not be well explained in terms of competing motivations to exert self-control. Rather, it is the force of our proximate wayward desire which requires effort to overcome. With respect to Mele's analysis of the moderate cases, which I have taken as paradigmatic thus far, he refers to his work on free will and the time gap between the neurological initiation of actions and the execution of that action by the agent. In this gap an agent can utter the sort of self-command featured in the example with Ian to get himself to act differently. The effect of this command would be to alter the way in which our intrinsic motivations convey their force to our direct options for actions by affecting their salience.

Mele's answer to the first question seems to be similar to that of Zhu. Self-control involves actively influencing the salience of intrinsic motivations. But why would we?

What makes Ian, while sitting on the couch doing the thing he desires most, utter the self-command? Similarly, why would Rebecca in the moderate case of being offered the pie exert self-control? The answer Mele gives is that the initiation of self-controlling acts is motivated by our desire to act in accordance with our best judgement.<sup>12</sup> However, it seems that in order to do so, we must form such a judgment through reflection. Often, however, it does not even get this far. We may be very tired or de-motivated after a long day of work and simply fail to engage in the sort of judgment formation required to motivate self-control. The rehearsal of reasons we have for acting against our wayward desire is itself a tiresome process which may require self-control to overcome. If, as Mele argues, the motivation to initiate self-control acts can be in competition with motivation not to, then engaging self-control and overcoming this negative motivation seems to require further explanation than a mere desire to act on our best judgement. I will return to the problem of answering the second question posed at the outset, pertaining to the conditions required for self-control initiation, in terms of reasons in chapter 4.

Successful self-control, on Mele's view, is the result of a motivational shift effected by the agent. By engaging in mental processes aimed at blocking and suppressing the force of a wayward desire and thereby allowing for the weaker practical desire to become more salient, the motivational strength tips in favour of the latter desire. This involves a narrowing of reasoning in which an agent attempts to restrain himself from thinking about the desirability of the action he aims at controlling. As opposed to Zhu, Mele believes that self-control acts alter the motivational force of desires such that the problematic proximal desire is no longer strongest. I agree with Mele on this point. In much the same way we can increase our motivation for something, by intentionally focusing on it, we can also decrease it by averting our attention. These are, however, cognitively demanding tasks that often require strong motivation to engage in.

---

<sup>12</sup> That is, the motivational base of our practical judgement. see [Mele 1987]

## 2.3 Willpower Accounts of Self-Control

As to this point, we have seen little talk of the will as playing a role in or having an explicit conceptual connection to exercises of self-control. That is not to say that the previously discussed theorists consider willpower to be irrelevant to self-control. They, however, do not assign any special explanatory role to the will or willpower in their accounts. I will now turn to some proposals which claim exactly this connection in order to explain the phenomenon of self-control.

### 2.3.1 Sripada's Divided Mind Account

According to Chandra Sekhar Sripada [2010, 2012], synchronic self-control is an act of willpower which involves strategies of attenuation, suppression and blocking of wayward motivation. The key feature of his account is the division of the mind he posits to explain instances of self-control. Similar to the system-1 and system-2 distinction mentioned earlier, Sripada divides the mind into an emotional and deliberative compartment. The emotional system generates emotional action-desires and is relatively independent from the deliberative system in the sense that emotions are generally unaffected by our practical judgements. Sripada explains this independence by attesting to the recalcitrance of emotions. When we are in an emotional state, we cannot simply cease to be emotional by judging consciously that it would be best to do so. The deliberative system is associated with practical reasoning which terminates in practical judgements about what it is best to do. These judgments motivate action in that they generate intentions and new action-desires which Sripada calls practical desires. Given these two systems, Sripada claims that willpower is an action exclusively available, i.e. proprietary to, the deliberative compartment of the mind.

Whether or not willpower is exercised depends on its motivational base *M*.

**M** *The motivational base, both positive and negative, for the exercise of willpower consists exclusively of the motivation-encompassing attitudes within the deliberative motivational system. [Sripada 2012, 52]*

Important to note is that emotional desires are not irrelevant to willpower in the sense that the strength of a wayward desire can co-determine whether the exercise of willpower will succeed. However, one's motivation to exert willpower and engage self-control systems does not include motivation from the emotional compartment. To be clear, Sripada holds that the strategies of self-control mentioned at the start of the paragraph are regulatory systems and together they comprise willpower. Unlike on Mele's account, exercising willpower does not involve the narrowing of reasoning or attention but rather the opposite. The deliberative system integrates a broad range of considerations to arrive at an all things considered best judgement about what to do.

The practical desire motivated by this judgment in turn motivates a person to initiate regulatory systems (willpower) to make it win out over a wayward desire.

In answering the paradox posed by the PMA, Sripada claims that exercises of will power are beyond its scope and thus outside of its jurisdiction. He does so by arguing that, in exercises of will power, desires compete in a *regulation mediated contest* rather than a *motivational contest*. Sripada defines the latter sort of contest as follows:

**Motivational Contest**      *Desire A competes with desire B in a motivational contest if A competes with B for control over action, and whether A or B wins out is (non-deviantly) explained exclusively by manifestation of their respective D-power.* [Sripada 2012, 57]

For Sripada, the motivational force of a desire is determined by the disposition for action it generates. Thus action A is motivationally stronger than B, if A inclines more action than B. The causal powers of desires to incline action he calls D-powers. He mentions such D-powers as the biasing of information or affecting the salience of certain actions and prospects. Given these causal power he claims that if A is motivationally stronger than B, then this must be in virtue of the fact that some or other specific D-power associated with A is more potent than those associated with B.

There is however another kind of action causing power he calls R-powers, the regulatory systems mentioned earlier, which have the role of regulating and controlling the force of our desires. With these R-powers in place he presents a sequence [Sripada 2012, 57] of how a weaker desire may defeat a stronger one:

1. A is the person's motivationally strongest practical desire, and A is opposed by B, an emotional desire that is the person's overall strongest.
2. A Provides the motivation for exercising willpower against B, and an exercise of willpower ensues.
3. The R-powers of regulatory systems that implement willpower are sufficient to defeat B.
4. B is defeated.

At first glance, this proposal covers a lot of questions we associate with self-control. The paradox is seemingly avoided when we understand willpower as a proprietary system within the deliberative compartment. For it cannot therefore be said to compete with desires from which it is isolated. Furthermore, Sripada makes explicit how we engage in self-control, i.e. what the motivation behind its initiation is. As he states in 2 in the sequence above, it is our practical desire (our all things considered best judgement) which motivates our engaging of willpower. There are, however, some possible objections to the way in which Sripada has fleshed out his concepts.

The most immediate concern is the seemingly arbitrary distinction between D-power and R-powers and Sripada acknowledges this. He parries this objection by claiming: "*...that it confuses the causal powers of desires to motivate an action with the*



*powers of the processes that unfold as a consequence of this action.*" [Sripada 2012, 58] Let us look at a concrete example to get a better understanding of how these powers are meant to function. Rebecca still craves for something to eat. Her desire A (Grabbing a piece of pie) is strongest in virtue of its D-powers being stronger than that of its competitor, desire B (Refraining from eating the pie). Desire A causes Rebecca to think about how the pie would smell, how delicious it would be and so on. The D-powers of desire B cause Rebecca's attention to be drawn to the prospect of being thin and healthy. Being conflicted, Rebecca chooses to engage willpower, i.e. to initiate regulatory systems aimed at suppressing the force of her A desire, blocking and attenuating its causal power. One of the problems here is the mistaken assumption that the D-powers of A and B are wholly independent. The processes making up the causal force of either desire affect one another. The D-powers of A include an increased salience and the biasing of thought and narrowing or broadening of attention regarding A type thoughts. The processes associated with these powers 'crowd out' the effects of B's D-powers. In this sense, the D-powers of desires have the intrinsic effect of attenuating and blocking thought which promote conflicting desires. This effect becomes more apparent if we consider what happens in scenarios in which our practical action-desires are stronger than our emotional action-desires. In such cases willpower is not needed to act in accordance with what we judge best, but it is nevertheless illuminating to examine the process. Suppose we have a emotional action desire A to stay in the bar and have another beer, alongside a practical action-desire B to go home and wake up fresh for work in the morning. Suppose also that B is stronger than A. Sripada would maintain that this is to be explained in terms of B's D-power being stronger than A's. How would we then describe B's D-powers? Presumably we would think about such things as the importance of being on time and waking up the next morning feeling fit to work. But most of all we would think about the consequences of failing to do as we judge best and waking up sick and unable to work. Being focused on and even biased towards thoughts which promote B has the effect of attenuating the D-powers of A. The effect of the D-powers of B is the very thing Sripada designates as the function of the regulatory systems, namely attenuating the force of A by *distancing* ourselves and focusing on the prospects of B. If D-powers have the effect of suppressing opposing D-powers and can explain why we, in cases where our practical action-desire is the strongest, modify the force of emotional desires, then there is no reason to suppose these belong to a separate regulatory system which gets engaged when we choose to exert willpower. If this line of argument is correct, then we either engage regulatory systems passively, which would undermine Sripada's actional approach, or the line between D-powers and R-powers is arbitrary. In further defence of the R/D-power distinction, Sripada states the following principle:

- C**     *The causal powers of processes that operate as a consequence of one's action cannot be credited backwards to the desire that initiated the action.*  
[Sripada 2012, 58]

C is relevant, Sripada claims, because willpower cannot be conflated with the causal powers of our practical desires. Sripada seems to be begging the question here. C is only relevant if there is indeed a separation between D- and R-powers. He follows up with an example meant to show why we cannot subsume these two powers under one term.

*On Monday, Sally's strongest practical desire is to stay on her diet, but her strongest overall desire is to have a large slice of key lime pie. Sally actionally exercises willpower and she successfully blocks her desire for pie from ever manifesting in action. On Tuesday the exact same situation ensues, with the strengths of Sally's competing desires exactly the same as Monday. The difference, however, is that someone has slipped Sally a psychoactive pill that specifically targets the neural circuits that comprise her regulatory systems. As a Result, the relevant R-powers of her regulatory systems to suppress the wayward desire are diminished. Sally actionally engages these regulatory systems exactly as she did on Monday but this time willpower fails and her desire for pie wins out. [Sripada 2012, 59]*

If we were to subsume R-powers under D-powers, as I have suggested, then we must say that Sally's desire to stay on her diet is weaker (motivationally) on Tuesday than on Monday, or so the argument goes. Sripada maintains this is false because her desire to stay on her diet was identical on Monday and Tuesday as stated in the example. Again, Sripada is begging the question. The premise of the argument is that it is possible to disable someone's regulatory systems without affecting that person's motivational state, i.e. the D-powers of that person's motivations. In other words, that regulatory systems are separate from D-powers. If we hold that regulatory processes are a part of the D-powers of practical desires, and these D-powers determine the force of a desire's motivating capacity, then this premise can simply be rejected. Sally's failure to exert self-control on Tuesday is the result of diminished D-powers as opposed to Monday.

The seemingly arbitrary distinction between R- and D-powers is the result of a more fundamental problem, namely the thesis that both compartments of the mind are independent. To recap, he claims that emotions exhibit certain features such as passivity and recalcitrance which makes them relatively unaffected by our rational judgements. Although there are some cases in which Sripada is correct about this view, there are some obvious counterexamples. Sometimes emotions behave like judgments and the dismissing of a judgment which causes (or is) that emotion immediately puts an end to the emotional state and its power to generate action-desires. Consider the following example: Jim cannot find his car and he believes it is stolen by Paul, who was the only one who had access to the keys.<sup>13</sup> Angry about his car being stolen Jim desires to repay Paul's betrayal by stealing his car. Jim then receives a call informing him his car was towed and realises his judgment of Paul is not longer warranted. Does it make sense to say that Jim's emotions and action-desires associated with his judgment that Paul stole his car will exhibit recalcitrance? Surely there may be instances in which emotional bouts continue for a time after the underlying judgment has proven inapt. However,

---

<sup>13</sup> Modified an example from [Solomon 1973]

there does not seem to be a reason to suppose that all emotional states and the action-desire they generate exhibit this kind of recalcitrance. Without going in too deep on the role of emotions in the production of action, it seems fair to say that they are not wholly distinct from our judgements and deliberation. Emotions are *about something*, i.e. they have an object.<sup>14</sup> Given the importance of the relative independence of both systems for Sripada's account, this poses a problem. Mele [2013, 369] notices that if Sripada's strict division of the mind breaks down, then we may also suppose that the regulatory systems be engaged by the emotional system. In chapter 4 I will propose that something like this is possible.

The relatedness of the two systems goes in the other direction as well. Sripada claims that our motivational base for willpower does not contain any emotion-desires. In other words, what we feel does not affect whether or not we engage willpower. Some caution is in order here for Sripada does acknowledge that an all-things considered best judgement incorporates our emotional desires. The troubling part is that, as seen in step 2 on page 21, that our practical judgement motivates our action of exercising willpower. If our motivation to engage willpower is determined by our all things considered judgement, and this judgment incorporates our emotional wants, then whether or not we exercise willpower cannot be wholly independent from our emotional state. It seems commonsensical to think that our most intense emotional desires make us less eager to suppress them. If the functioning of one system can have the effect of restricting the operation of another system, then a divided mind account, such as Sripada proposes, should give way to another explanation of willpower. To be more specific, if D-powers of emotion-desires can have the effect influencing the strength of practical-desire's D-powers (and vice versa), and D-powers and R-powers are not distinct, then holding on to the idea that willpower is independent and proprietary to the deliberative system seems untenable.

Following the issues outlined in this paragraph, the way in which the will is fleshed out in Sripada's account seems to contradict what we ordinarily understand as acts of will. Mele points this out with an example which illustrates that we can exercise willpower to act counter to our all-things considered best judgement.<sup>15</sup> According to Sripada, regulatory systems work only in the service of our practical desires which he conflates with our all-things considered best judgement. This excludes the possibility that willpower may be exercised in favour of actions which may not fit this description. Consider the following example. Rebecca is yet again at a birthday party and this time everyone is offered a piece of pie, except for her. She concludes that it must be because the one handing out the pie has decided that, given her weight, she ought not have a slice. Rationally Rebecca agrees with this decision and yet, despite judging it best not to indulge, asks for a slice. Under Sripada's description, Rebecca would be exhibiting a lack of self-control in this scenario. Judging it best not to eat the pie failed to motivate her to

---

<sup>14</sup> In this context I am talking about emotions pertaining to intentional objects rather than moods or other general feelings.

<sup>15</sup> Mele uses an example of a rebellious cub scout who uses willpower to overcome his fear and steal something. See [Mele 1995, 60]

engage regulatory systems. There is, however, another possible explanation. Keeping fixed the strength of her motivations to eat and refrain from eating, Rebecca exercises willpower because she refuses to let herself be determined by her all-things considered best judgement. Not being offered the pie and her judging that she ought not have one, has resulted in her wilfully reclaiming control over her actions. In this case, willpower is not used in service of rational deliberation and choice-making, but rather in service of her very capacity to self-determine her actions. Is this also an act of self-control? I will argue that it is in chapter 4.

In a recent paper, Connor [2013] has argued that non-actional accounts of self-control should be preferred over actional ones because the latter sort fails to explain how we can exert self-control if we lack any motivation to do so. This he claims is true of Sripada's proposal among others. In doing so, Connor notices the same problem in the mental division I have elaborated on earlier in this paragraph. If willpower is a proprietary action exclusively available to the deliberative system then, given a state of diminished motivation, it would be impossible to explain how we could exert self-control. For the deliberative system would have to self-regulate to generate motivation to then regulate the emotional partition. And yet, there are many examples of depressed or heavily addicted persons suddenly exercising wilful actions. The possibility of such states either calls for the rejection of Sripada's division in favour of a non-actional alternative, or entails that in some cases agents could not possibly engage their regulatory systems, i.e. they have no will. I will elaborate further on this problem and propose an actional solution in chapter 4.

### **2.3.2 Weakness of the Will and sticking to one's resolutions**

Richard Holton [2002] defends an account of willpower which depends on a special sort of intention; a resolution. A caveat is in order here for Holton has more recently argued for an account of self-control which is devoid of any mention of resolutions.<sup>16</sup> I will nevertheless proceed to discuss his initial proposal in this paragraph and proceed to his later proposal in the context of recent research in social psychology to be discussed in chapter 3. Resolutions have the distinctive feature of being especially resilient to amendment in the face of conflicting desires. Being more robust than ordinary intentions, failing to stick to one's resolution results in a special kind of failure; a failure of the will or *weakness of the will*. Consider again the example of Rebecca going to the party and being offered a slice of cheesecake. Knowing beforehand that she will be confronted with an opportunity to indulge, and that she will be very tempted by it, Rebecca forms a resolution to refrain from acting on her future desire. When the time comes for the rebellious desire to occur, she remembers having resolved herself to rejecting the offer and rejects it. Rebecca has shown strength of will by sticking to her resolution. Conversely, should she indulge despite having resolved not to, Rebecca would be exhibiting weakness of the will. How do these notions of will Holton employs

---

<sup>16</sup> See [Holton and Dill 2014]

relate to acts of self-control? Holton is not explicit about this, as far as I can tell. However, he mobilises psychological research on self-control strength which equates this strength with willpower and Holton seems to believe this equivalence holds. That synchronic self-control is sticking to one's resolutions in the face of a stronger desire to act against them seems to be accurately sum up his position. But what does sticking to one's resolutions entail and what factors go in to determining whether self-control is successful?

The primary way in which strength of will is achieved is through refusing to revise one's resolutions. Holton frequently points out that acts of will are strenuous and involve an inner struggle. In being torn between two actions, we must employ effort to exert our willpower in favour of our resolution. Holton takes the energy this process requires as evidence for the hypothesis that the will is a separate faculty endowed with a limited amount of energy.[Holton 2002, 14-15] The way we maintain our resolve, he claims, is by rehearsing our resolution. That is, remembering it, reaffirming its validity and refusing to revise it. The danger is that when we rehearse, we are also prone to reconsider. Holton takes reconsideration of resolutions to involve their suspension meaning that they become liable to revision pending the conclusion of the reconsideration. He concludes that reconsideration should be avoided through thought suppression. This is done by actively controlling one's thought process and preventing it from elaborating or furthering thought which aids reconsideration. One may imagine that Rebecca, when faced with the choice of accepted the piece of pie, tries to avoid imagining how delicious it would be. She might also recognise the way in which she tries to rationalise eating the pie, such as thinking that one more piece is insignificant taken on the whole. Recently some studies have suggested that thought repression does involve the use of willpower energy. Subjects who were given thought repression tasks scored lower on a subsequent task of self-control compared to a control group which did not perform the antecedent task.<sup>17</sup> These results seem to corroborate Holton's story in the sense that willpower is required in the process of sticking to one's resolutions.

How does Holton's account compare to the explanations of self-control discussed earlier? Perhaps its closest relative is Sripada's account. Both theorists posit a mental division to explain acts of self-control and both deploy willpower as the process by which it is to be understood. The main difference is the way in which the will is fleshed out on both accounts. Recall that Sripada equates willpower with the regulatory systems proprietary to the deliberative partition. Holton seems to suggest that although cognitive processes are involved in the rehearsal of resolutions, these processes are not equivalent to willpower. Rather, willpower is *required* for the operation of these processes. The distinct advantage of Holton's view over that of Sripada is that willpower can be understood in a much broader sense, as the exertion of conscious mental effort. This advantage is however undone if we confine the use of willpower to cases involving resolutions. I will return to this problem later.

In what sense can we understand the mental processes involved in the rehearsal

---

<sup>17</sup> See [Sheppes, Catran and Meiran 2009]

of resolutions as efforts to restore and maintain our instrumental rationality? Recall that Zhu and Mele both argue that acts of self-control involve conscious influence on the force transmission of our desires. Holton's idea of refraining from reconsideration by employing thought suppression techniques seem to have the similar effect of blocking the force transmission to our proximal desire. Rebecca being resolved not to indulge, actively stops herself from dwelling on thoughts which would make it more likely for her to reconsider her resolution. Thereby actively preventing her intrinsic desire to have immediate pleasure from transmitting its force across the means end relation to the extrinsic desire of eating a piece of pie. The main divergence among these proposals is the way in which they explain the success or failure of acts of self-control. In Mele's motivational shift view, self-control fails when the manipulation was insufficient to cause the strength of wayward desire to be trumped by the practical desire. Zhu would provide a similar explanation without wanting to commit to any definite answer as to what motivation was strongest. Sripada would say that a failure of self-control is to be explained as the shortcoming of regulatory systems, i.e. willpower, to attenuate our wayward desire. Important to note here is that unlike any of the other authors discussed so far, both Sripada and Holton- through a division allowing them to sidestep the paradox raised by the PMA - are the only one's committed to a view of self-control in which the wayward desire remains strongest throughout. Like Sripada, Holton proposes a mental division but one that is subtly different. He claims that the will is a separate faculty which may be exercised by the agent to settle an inner conflict in favour of our resolutions. Sripada draws the following similarity with Holton's account:

*The version of a divided mind view I developed draws a distinction between motivation-encompassing attitudes located in the deliberative compartment versus the emotional compartment, and says that the motivational base for willpower is exclusively the former. Holton's version of a divided mind view draws a distinction between one's resolutions and one's wayward inclinations, and says, in effect, that the motivational base for willpower is exclusively one's resolutions. [Sripada 2012, 62]*

He continues to claim that his account is preferable for he takes there to be an essential connection between motivation-encompassing attitudes, such as intentions and resolutions, and one's practical judgments, i.e. one's all things considered best judgement. Subsequently, we can only be resolved to an action which we judge to be best, thus we can only employ willpower in accordance with our best judgement. I am puzzled by the distinctions and similarities made by Sripada here.

On the one hand he seems to say, as quoted, that Holton agrees with his idea that motivation to exert willpower can only come from one's resolutions. On the other, he claims his account is to be preferred just because Holton denies the direct connection between resolutions and one's best judgment. If resolutions are not necessarily tied to practical judgments, and we can still be motivated to exert willpower on the basis of them, then these accounts diverge significantly. For Holton it would be possible for our emotional states to factor into our resolutions given that he denies their tight connection

to an all things considered best judgement. We may be resolved to an action which is blatantly irrational, all things considered, we would nevertheless have formed a special sort of intention and revising it would mean a failure of self-control. Conversely, holding on to our irrational resolution would require motivation to exert our willpower which cannot reasonable be said to stem from Sripada's deliberative compartment. The latter's claim that Holton's view is similar to his in terms of the division they employ is simply mistaken.

The main issue I took with Sripada's view is that it underestimates what willpower is and how it operates. Common sense tells us that we exert willpower to perform an action even if we lack the belief that this action is the best among all our options.<sup>18</sup> Holton's account, even though it does not share the connection between our best judgement and willpower, restricts the notion in another way. By defining weakness of the will as an over-readiness to abandon our resolutions, we can only be weak-willed if we are resolved to something. Conversely, strength of will can only occur given that we have a resolution to rehearse and maintain. It seems almost obvious that this cannot be the whole story. One may think of many examples of a person exhibiting self-control without any prior resolution. For instance, consider that Rebecca comes to the realisation that she is overweight and wants to be healthy the very moment she is offered the slice of cheesecake. Without being resolved beforehand, and with her motivation to indulge being the strongest overall, she exercises self-control and refrains from eating it. The same processes Holton describes are involved in sticking to one's resolutions may be involved in Rebecca's mental effort to enforce her ad hoc decision that it would be best to turn down the cake. She may repress thoughts which would lead her to be more inclined to eat the cake and expand thought aimed at strengthening her motivation not to. Being conflicted, she also experiences mental discomfort and has to exert effort to stick to her judgement. Clearly, Rebecca exhibits self-control in this scenario, but on Holton's account, she does not exhibit strength of will for there is no resolution for her to stick to. One could argue that her newly formed belief that she ought to stay healthy can be seen as a resolution, but this does not seem to be what Holton has in mind. Resolutions are deliberately constructed to allow one to resist a future anticipated temptation. Allowing for ad hoc resolutions would undermine the way in which Holton has himself conceptualised them. The implication of the problem just outlined is that, in absence of any resolution, we would be unable to exert willpower. Concordantly, if willpower is required for self-control, which Holton holds, we would literally be unable to exert self-control without a prior resolution.

Holton's view on resolutions as special kinds of intentions requiring willpower to maintain seems to get it right in many cases in which we manage to control ourselves. However, the processes Holton takes to be involved in acts of self-control, and its accompanying phenomenology, do not require the presence of a resolution. For it is conceivable, and in accordance with common sense, that a person could choose to exert

---

<sup>18</sup> Children can act wilfully without having the capacity to form judgments based on a composite of reasons. Additionally, agents may deploy willpower perversely, i.e. to get themselves to act in a way that runs counter to their best judgment.

willpower at any time he or she chooses to.

### 2.3.3 Two questions

Having discussed the major candidates for a philosophical account of self-control, we are now in a position to assess where the main problems lie. The desire-based accounts proposed by Mele and Zhu share the problem of failing to substantiate our desire for self-control. The divided mind view proposed by Sripada is problematic in the sense that it ties our ability to exert willpower and self-control to our being motivated by our all-things considered best judgement. Moreover, there are strong objections possible to his understanding of the divided mind and the relative independence of both compartments which is, given its theoretical importance for his overall proposal, very problematic. Holton's idea of regarding willpower as a separate faculty providing the explanation for why we engage in self-control is promising. His tying willpower to resolutions is, however, too restricting. The consequence of this connection is that, in absence of a prior resolution, we would be unable to use our faculty of willpower. As mentioned earlier, Holton seems not to consider resolutions important to explaining self-control as evidenced by his recent paper. We might surmise that he has either abandoned his resolutions approach, or takes weakness of the will to be some other phenomenon than failing self-control. It is hard to understand how it could, given that he takes willpower to be necessary for self-control and there is, presumably, a close connection to willpower and the will.

What these accounts have in common is that they give similar answers to the first question I posited in 1.1: What mental processes are involved in actional self-control and what are their effects? Although there are subtle differences among these theorists, they would all, presumably, underwrite the following thesis:

**S** Acts of self-control essentially involve mental processes with the function of manipulating the force transmission of motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic desires by the agent.

S reflects an important connection between intentional actions and motivation. Namely that the strength of motivation and its causal powers of producing actions are not a given, but can be under direct control of the agent. If we, as Sripada does, subsume the powers of motivations to engage and sustain processes which affect their force transmission under their motivational strength, i.e. their action causing power, then we seem to be committed to a view that pins successful self-control to a motivational shift. As discussed in 2.3.1, I think there is sufficient reason to think that regulatory systems and D-powers are indistinct. A successful act of self-control must involve altering the motivational strength of conflicting desires by manipulating the way in which these desires can form and empower action-desires. The mental processes, such as thought suppression, narrowing or broadening of reasoning and the attenuation of desires,



involved in altering our motivational states require mental effort.

On the nature of this effort opinions really diverge. If self-control is an act with the function of manipulating our motivational state, then how is it initiated? We have seen that both desire-based accounts and volitional-accounts have trouble explaining how we can exert self-control if we lack motivation to do so. It seems natural to think that being in control of oneself includes being able to overcome states in which we are motivationally deficient. The desire-accounts proposed by Mele and Zhu (Sripada could also be viewed as proposing a desire based proposal) do not allow for the possibility of actional self-control if one lacks this extra desire. The unlikely consequence is that people suffering from depression or other motivational deficiencies are literally unable to exert self-control. Holton, having tied his account to recent research in ego-depletion, faces a similar worry. If willpower is needed to exert self-control and can be depleted for a number of reasons, then we could not exert self-control if our willpower muscle is tired. Actional accounts of self-control, given this problem, depend on conditions which are not under actional control.

An account of actional synchronic self-control ought to be able to explain not just what processes it involves, but also how a person can overcome a state of diminished motivation. There are two reasons to think that people in this kind of state should be able to. Firstly, there are examples available of deeply depressed or addicted individuals suddenly, wilfully, turning their lives around. If we are to accept that willpower, or a desire to act in accordance with our practical desires, is required for self-control as the above accounts hold, then we cannot explain what happens in these cases. Secondly, it is theoretically unappealing to concede these cases to the non-actional accounts of self-control. Especially given that the rationale behind actional accounts is the intuition that agents should be able to exercise control over themselves come what may. As Connor [2014] points out, states of diminished motivation are not confined to mental illnesses such as depression. Often mentally healthy people find themselves in lust less de-motivated states in which self-control is required to spring into action.

As mentioned at the outset, it is not enough to explain the process of self-control if the initiation of that process is itself a self-control problem. The theorists discussed so far all seem to undervalue this problem. The idea that we have an intrinsic desire to exert self-control, i.e. bring our actions into line with what we have most reason to do, falls short in explaining acts of self-control in the absence of such a desire. In such a state, one would be required to rekindle one's lacking desire for self-control, but to do so we are in need of the very thing we lack, namely motivation to exert mental effort. Desire-based accounts must therefore either; relinquish the claim that actional self-control is possible when we lack the necessary intrinsic desire, which is quite often, or it must provide an answer to how we can exert self-regulate our motivation for self-control. The first option has the unappealing consequence of turning human beings into helpless bystanders of their own (in)action. Should one be depressed, de-motivated or simply very bored, then it would be impossible to take control over our own actions. The latter option seems to involve explaining a blatant contradiction. If we find ourselves in a position in which we are unable to initiate self-control owing to an insufficient desire

to do so, we cannot possibly engage self-control to regulate our failing desire. A proper analogy would be trying to lift a box one is standing in. Neither option seems to be very promising.

Although I have argued that Holton's willpower account is too restrictive, it has the distinct advantage of tying our capacity for self-control to an independent faculty of willpower. In employing this faculty in explaining how acts of self-control are initiated and sustained, we can avoid the problem plaguing the desire-accounts. There is no need to postulate an intrinsic desire to act in accordance with our all things considered best judgement to explain how we engage in self-control. However, recent research in social psychology, which Holton himself employs, suggests that our faculty of willpower can be depleted. A similar problem would then arise for the willpower account of self-control. If we lack any positive motivation to exert self-control, and our faculty of willpower is depleted, then how can a person engage in self-control?

In the next chapter I will review some research done in psychology about the phenomenon of ego-depletion and the possible implications for our understanding of the will. In chapter 5 I will attempt to outline a proposal that can provide an explanation for the actional exercise of self-control in depleted states.

### 3. Willpower Strength and Ego-depletion

#### 3.1 Introducing Ego-Depletion

Studies in social psychology on self-control typically follow a sequential task paradigm. In sequential task studies two groups are given two tasks each. One group is given two tasks which are both demanding in terms of required self-control, while the second (control) group is given a neutral, or otherwise undemanding, task and the same subsequent task as group one. The difference in self-control performance between both groups on the second task is then measured. Various potential mediating factors can be tested by altering the nature of the first task, or by manipulating the apprehension of the second task by the subjects. Many of these sequential tasks studies have since been done and they almost invariably indicate that exertion of self-control on one task diminishes subject's capacity to control themselves on the second.

In two famous articles, Baumeister and colleagues [1998 , 2000] have argued that self-control strength is a limited resource and functions much like muscle. Hence, the model is referred to as the strength model of self-control. Repeated exercise of our capacity for self-control diminishes its potency for a short period of time after which it is replenished. One of the key assumptions behind this theory is that the availability of willpower resources directly determines the success of self-control acts. Should a person use up all of his self-control strength, then he would be literally unable to exert self-control. Baumeister and colleagues describe a state of low resources as an ego-depleted state. Another important tenet of this theory is that self-regulatory resources are not domain specific. In a study done by Vohs and Heatherton[2000] it was shown that subjects who exerted self-control in refraining from eating tempting food were subsequently less successful at enduring solving an unsolvable puzzle. Additionally this study showed that controlling one's emotions also requires self-control strength. Several other studies have later corroborated the idea that self-control strength is required for a wide array of cognitive processes.<sup>19</sup>

Self-control strength is, however, not the only determinant of whether self-control is successful. In a study by Muraven and Slessareva [2003], subjects were given an extra incentive to complete their subsequent task. They were told that the findings of the study could significantly benefit research on Alzheimer's disease. Given this extra incentive, depleted individuals performed just as well as non-depleted participants on the subsequent task. This, the authors suggest, might indicate that depleted individuals may not be unable to exert self-control, they might just be unwilling. They also suggest that a depleted state may make one more sensitive to potential rewards. There is,

---

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Emotion regulation see [Vohs and Heatherton 2000] and self-presentation, see [Baumeister, Bohs and Ciarocco 2005].

however, a more plausible explanation. By providing additional pro-motivation for the subsequent task, the researchers have made the exertion of willpower less important in the sense that completing the task is the thing the subjects most wanted to do. Under this description we can readily explain why the state of depletion is irrelevant to the comparative success of both groups. However, in a later article, Baumeister and Vohs [2007] note that a plausible understanding of the interaction between motivation and depletion is that the former can compensate for the latter but that ego-depletion should not be understood as a state of diminished motivation.

If the strength model of self-control is right, and willpower plays an essential role in self-control, then we are often unable to control ourselves. Moreover, individuals who are chronically depleted can be understood as mere automatons simply acting on their desires without having the potential of intervening. Furthermore the strength model rules out, or at the very least gives it primacy over, any desire-based account of self-control. This is due to the seeming irrelevance of self-control techniques or a desire to control oneself given a depleted state. To allow for actional accounts of self-control which include the possibility of agents controlling themselves despite lacking the proper motivation to do so, there seem to be two options. Either it must be shown that the conclusions drawn from research on ego-depletion are unwarranted, or that they are insufficient to support the thesis that self-control capacity is a limited resource and can be depleted. The other option is to bite the bullet and concede that willpower has these features and then show how depleted states can be actionally overcome. I will pursue the first option in the remainder of this chapter by critically discussing some the conclusions drawn by proponents of the strength model of self-control. In chapter 4 I will propose an understanding of self-control that can account for these seemingly evident depleted states without committing to the notion of a resource as the means of explaining them.

## **3.2 Should we believe in the depletion effect?**

As mentioned earlier, the core implication of the strength model is that self-control depletes mental resources and leads to the ego-depleted state. We may, following Holton and Dill [2014], distinguish two important questions concerning ego-depletion: *The depletion and the covariance question*. The former pertains to the depletion effect and how we can account for it. The latter concerns the wide array of cognitive processes which seem to be affected by depletion. Why are some tasks depleting while others are not? I will discuss these questions in turn.

### **3.2.1 What explains the depletion effect?**

The strength model of self-control, as outlined at the start of this chapter, posits a limited mental resource to explain the depletion effect. There are some good reasons to be sceptical about the existence of this resource. The main method of testing self-control capacity is the sequential task study. There are some important inherent features to

consider about this form and the implications thereof on potential results. Firstly, the motivational states of subjects participating in these studies are likely to include the same pro-attitudes. Having agreed to participate, they would feel an obligation to meet the demands set by the researchers. As pointed out by Inzlicht, Schmeichel and Macrae [2014], it is plausible to think that completion of the first task would lead to subjects believing they have satisfied their primary obligation to the project. Owing to this belief they might be less motivated on the second task. They argue further that once self-control has been exerted, people tend to focus their attention on gratification and become more susceptible to impulses. In other words, motivation can be a mediating factor on the depletion effect and is inherent in dual-task tests. In a study done by Dang et.al [2013] the hypothesis was tested that the poorer performance of subjects on the second task is due to the costs of switching between different cognitive processes. They found that subjects, if given the appropriate time to adapt to a new task, did not exhibit a depletion effect compared to a control group. Moreover, subjects who were given two tasks demanding the same cognitive processes also exhibited a significantly decreased depletion effect on the second task. This might indicate that the depletion effect is not the result of self-control effort by itself, but rather that switching between cognitive processes requires mental energy. This latter study seems to support the hypothesis that we switch in to a different mode of attention after having exerted self-control. After completion of the first task and feeling satisfied in having fulfilled their commitment to the study, subjects revert to less cognitively demanding mental state aimed at gratification. Having to then complete a second task requiring yet another switch in cognitive states might be especially demanding.

A second inherent feature of the sequential method, tightly connected to the first, is that the tasks subjects are asked to perform are not one's they have themselves chosen to perform. One might object and claim that by having chosen to participate they have by extension chosen to perform these tasks. There is, however, a crucial difference in the sort of motivation for self-initiated tasks and actions we are required to perform by others. In the former case we act because we value doing it and, should we fail to or stop valuing it, simply stop. In the latter case these shifts in value judgement are secondary to our having obligated ourselves to others which, as suggested in the previous paragraph, may play a vital role in these studies. The second of the two tasks in these studies is almost invariably demanding of cognitive resources. In one study subjects are offered an impossible puzzle to solve. Another requires them to squeeze a handgrip until they cannot hold out any longer. Surely, we cannot plausibly hold that subjects value doing these tedious and demanding tasks were it not for the research context in which they are done. What this tells us is that the ego-depletion effect, if it is real, can only be corroborated under circumstances involving motivation generated by the subject's sense of obligation. This constraint is likely to be a factor in any potential psychological study on self-control.

At the end of the previous chapter I stated the following principle:

**S** Acts of self-control essentially involve mental processes with the function of manipulating the force transmission of motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic desires by the agent.

How can we explain typical sequential task studies given S? The intrinsic desire of subjects participating in these studies is likely something akin to being dependable or trustworthy. The extrinsic desire is to complete the tasks handed to them by the researchers. They, presumably, intrinsically value keeping their promises and being perceived by others as dependable and trustworthy. Fulfilling their commitment to participating is a means of showing themselves and others this quality. Now, given these desires there are two ways to understand the disparity in self-control strength on the subsequent task between the two groups. Either there is a difference in their comparative ability to exert self-control, as the strength model would predict, or there is a motivational shift occurring in one group allowing for the disparity to occur. By having exerted themselves on the first task, as opposed to the control group, the 'depleted' individuals may feel they have done enough to show their commitment to their promise. Subsequently, on the second task, the difference in ability for self-control may be due to the force of the underlying desires rather than the capacity for self-control. If self-control essentially involves getting oneself to be more extrinsically motivated by one's intrinsic desires, then studies which inherently manipulate the force of intrinsic desires cannot possibly infer self-control capacity from their subject's actions. For it is possible, given S and the motivational analysis given, that both groups were equally successful at exerting self-control. The fact that this leads to differing results in terms of performance, could reflect what subjects aimed at, consciously or otherwise, with their self-control efforts.

The previous analysis is also congruent with studies done pertaining to the mediating role of motivation. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, depletion effects can be mitigated by sufficient motivation. Being informed that the second task would directly further research on Alzheimer's disease, subjects may have been given an extra intrinsic motivation compensating for their having lost it after the first task. In an analysis of the connection between motivation and ego-depletion, Baumeister and Vohs [2007] argue that although motivation may contribute to individuals being able to overcome depleted states, it is implausible to say that ego-depletion (or tiredness as they call it) is equivalent to being unmotivated. Rather, they maintain that motivation may compensate for the reduced ability to self-regulate that ordinarily marks depleted states. They seem to be misconstruing the conceptual connection between motivation and self-control. Although I agree with their claim that lacking motivation is not the same as being mentally tired, I disagree with the way in which they picture motivation as somehow independent from self-control. Our motivational states *determine* how much self-control is required and how likely it is to succeed. Consider an individual with a superhuman motivation to act in accordance with his best judgement. If he is ever tempted to indulge a wayward desire, it is very faint. We could say about this individual

that he has tremendous self-control strength and that, should he be minimally tempted, his motivation to do the right thing can compensate for his reduced ability to self-regulate. A more plausible explanation is that his motivational states, his intrinsic desires and the way in which they transfer their force across the means-end relation, is such that he is almost never in need of manipulating them. He is nearly perfectly instrumentally rational. Although ego-depletion may not be synonymous with a state of lacking motivation, it may be a consequence of it.<sup>20</sup> If we understand acts of self-control as effortful cognitive processes aimed at altering our motivational states, it follows that more effort is required the lesser we are motivated for the action in favour of which we are exerting control. Motivation does not compensate for lacking willpower, but rather decreases the amount that is needed.

Recently, several researchers have raised serious concerns regarding the sequential task studies and the validity of inferring the depletion effect from them.<sup>21</sup> Gauging the soundness of these concerns is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless it seems that studies on ego-depletion have been, to varying degrees, insensitive to the specific moderating circumstances of their research setups. Although this has prompted some psychologists to reject the idea that there is indeed a limited resource responsible for willpower efforts, others have argued that we ought to maintain the strength model and alter the way in which test moderating factors.<sup>22</sup> If self-control is only depleting in some circumstances, then it seems there must be a more fundamental process underlying self-control. We could wonder how much theoretical importance we ought to place in a limited resource if we cannot employ it in our explanations independent from more fundamental notions. In other words, if we can describe what happens during self-control, and how subsequent self-control tasks are less effective, without invoking a spooky resource, then adding a resource might be superfluous.

### 3.3.2 The Covariance Question and three junctures of Self-control

The depletion effect is not limited to garden variety cases of self-control such as resisting an immediate temptation. It affects decision-making, emotion control, self-esteem and many other cognitive processes. Explaining these effects by positing that they all depend on the same resource is theoretically appealing. Holton and Dill [2014] take this line and argue that these processes all depend on the operation of a self-control system. Furthermore, they take this explanation to be compatible with both the strength model and alternative explanations tying self-control to a motivation to exert it. Following Amelie Rorty's example they carve out three stages in which the failure of self-control can be located: The deliberative stage, the volitional stage and the implemental stage. In the first stage, the agent forms an evaluative judgement about what would be best. The volitional stage involves the agent selecting a goal suitable to their previously made all things considered judgement. The latter stage involves the

---

<sup>20</sup> Assuming that the Strength model is correct

<sup>21</sup> See [Carter & McCullough 2013,2014]

<sup>22</sup> See for instance [Hagger and Chatzisarantis 2014] and [Lee, Chatzisarantis and Hagger 2016]

agent's selection of intentions which further the previously set goal. The self-control system is required in all stages to resist the disrupting influence of our desires over our practical rationality. Holton's new approach to self-control is significantly different from his past resolution based approach and it captures, I believe, something very important, namely that we cannot think of the process of self-control becoming relevant when the two competing motivations are already active. It is required in the very mental construal of the actions we consider as competing options. For if it is not, then we may be up against impossible odds in the later stages owing to biased evaluative judgements.

To improve self-control in the first stage, Holton suggests that mindfulness meditation can lead agents to limit the biasing of their evaluative judgements and improve self-control. Mindfulness involves the active focusing on a particular aspect of one's experience over an extended period of time. He refers to research which seems to support this hypothesis. I am not doubting the veracity of this research nor the idea that focusing one's attention away from one's wayward desires is a means of achieving greater control. However, mindfulness under the above description, seems simply to be another form of self-control. Recall that self-control, as I have argued, essentially involves the manipulation of force transmission from intrinsic to extrinsic desires. By narrowing attention to a particular aspect of one's motivations, one is effectively blocking one's intrinsic desire from conveying its force while at the same time allowing another particular desire to be more salient. Holton and Dill seem to separate mindfulness and self-control in terms of their status as means and end respectively. Suppose an agent is trained in the practise of mindfulness and enters the deliberative stage in which he forms an all things considered judgement. In this stage he is severely biased by his strong wayward desires and would, without intervention, come to a biased judgement. How is this agent prompted to engage mindfulness? Presumably, he must recognise that the process he is in may lead to undesirable results and that mindfulness can be instrumental to his achieving self-control. Perhaps extensive therapy has instilled him with mental cues activating mindfulness thoughts at the appropriate time. It is, however, then again in doubt to what extent agency is involved in self-control. If, on the other hand, mindfulness is actionally engaged by the agent as a means of controlling himself, then we may ask how this action is motivated. Moreover, if engaging mindfulness is a response to the agent's apprehension of his biased thinking, then it seems likely that his motivation to engage is itself liable to be influenced by his wayward desire. Holton and Dill offer two additional strategies for improving self-control: mental contrasting and implementation intentions for the volitional stage and the implementation stage respectively. Again, I do not doubt that these are effective strategies of self-control. Mental contrasting involves distancing ourselves and comparing competing goals in such a way that it allows our all things considered better goal to be more forceful. Implementation intentions are conditional intentions triggered by certain cues allowing agents to overcome habitual responses. Although proven to be effective, they are motivated mental acts aimed at promoting certain actions in the face of powerful alternatives. We may once again ask, why would the agent bother?

The analysis of self-control in terms of three stages is illuminating and captures



the wide array of processes seemingly affected by the depletion effect. Nevertheless it faces the same problem as the accounts outlined in the third chapter of this thesis for it fails to provide a substantive account of the self-control system and how its operation is initiated and sustained. If engaging in self-control can be hampered by lacking motivation or willpower to do so, then no amount of elaboration on the processes will explain how they come to be activated in the first place. Although the idea of a limited mental resource does a lot of work in terms of explaining agent's shifts in capacity for self-control, there are some tough questions implied by this understanding which are in need of explaining. Furthermore, the strength model implies that agency, to a large extent, is constrained by a resource over which we can exert no direct control. Surely, we can exert control over this resource diachronically by 'exercising our willpower muscle'. Nevertheless, the unappealing and counterintuitive implication remains that the degree to which we can exercise our agency is tied to some undefined battery of energy somewhere in our brains.

Perhaps the most crucial question we could ask about willpower strength is: What is the nature of this mental resource and what is its source? If willpower strength is indeed a kind of reservoir filled with energy, then how do we explain its initial volume and its increased capacity following repeated exercise? The amount of willpower energy available varies from person to person, and we might assume that individuals who continuously fail at self-control due to, for instance, depression or addiction, have a very small reservoir of willpower energy insufficient to engage in self-control. If self-control practise is a means of training our willpower muscle, then how are we to make sense of cases in which addicts suddenly turn their lives around and exert self-control? Perhaps one could argue that, in such cases, a sudden up rise in motivation allows the addict to compensate for his chronic deficiency in willpower. Perhaps he connects to some newly found goal for which he is highly motivated. If so, then we ought to say also that his sudden refusal to get another score is not an act of willpower, but rather one that is simply highly motivated. Should this former addict continue to abstain after his sudden reversal, then this is, presumably, also explained by his high motivation to do so. The question then is, does his motivated acting increase his willpower reserve? Proponents of the strength model argue that motivation can only compensate for willpower, as we have seen. Thus, the addict is not using his willpower energy while kicking his habit, but is rather acting on motivation compensating for his inability to use his 'muscle'. Given that his abstaining does not depend on him exercising his muscle, we may also conclude that, given how the strength model explains the increase in reserve over time, the former addict does not 'train his muscle'. The consequence of this is that, given that willpower energy is used for many cognitive processes, the addict should be unable to engage willpower for these processes if they are not in service of his newly found motivation. He may be highly motivated to resist phoning his dealer to secure another hit, but yet completely lack the willpower energy to decide what to eat for dinner, or control his temper. To sum up, the relative independence of motivation and willpower energy, posited by advocates of the strength model, leads one to be committed to saying that, in cases like the one just outlined, willpower does not play a

role. I find this a very implausible understanding of what goes on in these types of cases. If anything, it would be commonsensical to think that an addict suddenly kicking his habit exhibits great willpower. In a sense, he triumphed over himself against almost impossible odds. Yet, on the strength model, this can only be explained in terms of motivation compensating for his lack of willpower.

In conclusion I think that, given the undesirable implications and pervasive questions outlined in this chapter, we should prefer alternative explanations of the depletion effect. I will propose such an explanation in the next chapter.

## 4. Self-control and the Perceived Causal Locus of Actions

### 4.1 What do we want from a theory of self-control?

As mentioned at the outset, there are two important questions an account of self-control ought to answer. Firstly, it should be able to explain what goes on during acts of self-control in terms of mental processes and their effects. Secondly, it should be able to explain how an agent can engage these self-control processes and which conditions are necessary for it. I have reviewed the main candidates for such an account and have argued that they all answer the first question in roughly the same fashion. Self-control involves strategies aimed at manipulating the force of the motivations empowering options for actions. Pertaining to the second question, I have argued that none of the discussed accounts provides a satisfactory and substantive explanation of how self-control processes or systems are initiated and sustained. If, as the desire-accounts propose, we are intrinsically motivated to act in accordance with our best judgement, we cannot explain acts of self-control should an agent lack this desire. If, as the volitional accounts propose, the limited resource of willpower is required to initiate and sustain acts of self-control, then it follows that ego-depleted individuals are literally unable to control their actions. Initiating self-control processes is then itself a self-control problem. Before expounding my own proposal, I will summarise the main questions an account of self-control should provide an answer to which have gone unanswered up to this point. In paragraph 4.2, I will argue that there is an underlying assumption behind desire- and volitional based accounts of self-control, namely that the will, and thus willpower, is essentially tied to reasons. Furthermore, I will claim that we should abandon this assumption to make our understanding of self-control more inclusive. In 4.3 I will propose that we should employ a minimalist conception of personal autonomy to explain how individuals engage in wilful self-control. I will provide a conceptual framework for synchronic self-control in 4.4 and will argue for its explanatory virtues in paragraph 4.5. In 4.6 I will explain how this proposed framework can provide an explanation for self-control cases featuring diminished motivation. I will end this chapter by discussing some possible objections to this proposal in 4.7.

How it is possible that an agent, lacking any motivation or mental resources to exert self-control, can exert self-control? This question is important for two reasons. Firstly, there is evidence of severely depressed or addicted individuals suddenly turning their lives around by engaging in self-control. An account of self-control ought to be able to explain how this sudden revival of will is possible. Secondly, if we should dodge the question and hold that severe depression or other motivationally deficient conditions preclude the possibility of self-control, we are left with a very unappealing picture of human agency.

What is the nature of willpower strength, what is its source?

Willpower or self-control capacity has thus far been under-explained. If it is indeed a kind of mental energy which is required for many cognitive processes, we ought to be able to explain what the source of this energy is and which factors go in to determining its strength. Furthermore, there is, presumably, a tight connection between willpower and the will. The recent trend, viewing willpower as a limited resource, has obfuscated this connection. Either willpower is an energy we may use to get ourselves to act a certain way, and whether or not this act is our will, the amount of energy available is the same, or the amount of willpower we have available is determined by our will.

How do we account for variances in ego-depletion effects?

Many factors have been found to mediate depletion effects. Self-control acts, in some studies, did not cause a depleted state. Some proposals have been made by psychologists to explain this variance. They should also be captured in a philosophical account.

## 4.2 Personal Autonomy and the 'self' in self-control

The problem with accounts of self-control thus far, or so I will argue, is that they have mistakenly understood the 'self' to be essentially responsive to reasons. That is, for an agent to act autonomously, he or she must act in accordance with reflectively endorsed reasons. Self-control has often been defined as bringing our actions in line with what we have most reason to do. All philosophers discussed so far seem to subscribe to this definition with the exception Holton who allows for resolutions which may not be in line with our best judgement. However, his proposal faces troubles of his own even if it does not employ the assumption that the self is essentially tied to reasons as stringently as others. An agent's will is tied by some philosophers to a highest order judgement about what to do.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, strength of will is associated with a desire to act in accordance with our highest order volition. There are a number of reasons to suppose that the understanding of personal autonomy in terms of a responsiveness to reasons is mistaken.

Firstly, rather than our best judgement being an expression of our autonomy, an individual may experience it as a constraint on his potential actions. We may feel that if we act counter to our judgement we are liable to blame. Willpower may be needed to overcome the anxiety caused by the prospect of failing to do the right thing. Frankfurt uses an example of a mother who has most reason to put her child up for adoption but cannot recognise herself in this action.<sup>24</sup> Rather than experiencing her judgment regarding adoption as an expression of her autonomy, she feels constrained by it. One might reply and claim that her feeling constrained by her reasons is yet another higher level volition. However, it is conceivable that this volition will never take the form of a reason in the sense that it can rationally compete with her judgement that it would be best to give up the child. For if it did, she would have to recognise it as a selfish reason

---

<sup>23</sup> The analysis of will in terms of ordered volition is from [Frankfurt 1988c]

<sup>24</sup> Example from [Frankfurt 2002]

which would, all things considered, harm her child in the long run. She might think: I know I ought to but I cannot bring myself to do it, I do not want to. Her being fully rational and appreciative of her reasons does not align her will with the outcome of her reasoning.

Secondly, it is not clear that any judgement is required for wilful actions. Children can exhibit a strong will even though they do not have the capacity for complex reasoning. Presumably, the grounds for attributing a strong will to a child pertains to the perseverance and intensity with which they pursue actions. It is implausible to connect these attributes to a judgement about that action compared to other alternatives. Furthermore, linking strength of will to reflexively endorsed reasons renders perverse cases of willpower very hard to explain. In this type of case, an agent uses willpower to get himself to act against his own better judgement. In Mele's example of the cub scout [Mele 1995, 60] who employs willpower to conquer his fear and steal something, he, presumably, knows that he ought not to steal and that it would be best just to go home.

Self-control under a reason responsiveness understanding of personal autonomy faces an even deeper problem. In contemplating one's reasons and forming a judgement, self-control may be required to resist the temptation of biased thinking and the dominance of external constraints. If engaging self-control requires a set of competing options for actions, a temptation and an action we have most reason to do, it becomes paradoxical if the very process of generating these options requires the very thing we aim to engage. In order to resolve these issues we need a different understanding of the 'self' underlying our conception of self-control. I will propose such an understanding in the next paragraph.

### **4.3 Self-determination theory and the mediating role of autonomy**

It seems natural to think that an agent's will is that which he reflexively chooses among all his options. If it is not reasons which determine our will then what is? According to self-determination theory (SDT), autonomy should be defined as an agent's phenomenological experience of an internal locus of causality.<sup>25</sup> Under this description, an agent's motivation for acting can be differentiated in terms of the extent to which it is internalised. SDT also distinguishes between two different kinds of motivation: Intrinsic and extrinsic. To be intrinsically motivated for an action is to value doing that action for its own sake. Conversely, being extrinsically motivated for an action involves external constraints or rewards which render the action instrumental to some external goal.<sup>26</sup> The degree to which an action is internalised, depends on whether the motivation supporting this action is intrinsic to the agent. Autonomous acts, under this description, are intrinsically motivated acts that do not depend on external demands or constraints.

---

<sup>25</sup> Self-determination theory originated from Deci and Ryan in several works, see [Deci and Ryan 2002, 2008 and 2012]

<sup>26</sup> Although there are some similarities between the internal/external distinction employed earlier in this thesis, both uses of the distinction are not interchangeable. According to SDT, we may be intrinsically motivated for an instrumental act, see [Vallerand and Ratelle 2002]

In this way, when acting, the agent experiences having self-caused the act. That is not to say that being motivated by external demands precludes the possibility of autonomous behaviour, for they may be internalised by the agent. In this way, as Kant would put it, the agent then gives the law to himself. That is to say, an agent identifies with the reasons he has for acting. However, we should not understand these reasons as the means of identification, but rather as its object. A well known counterexample to Kant's view of autonomy as giving the law to oneself is that of the murderer at the door asking a mother where her children are. The right thing to do for the mother, given the categorical imperative, is to tell the truth and point the murderer to her children. Suppose, she has internalised the categorical imperative and unfailingly applies it until the murderer arrives at her door. In making a decision about what to do, she may find that she cannot bring herself to tell the truth. Even though she knows the categorical imperative is correct and the right thing to do is to tell the truth, she cannot authorise the action. Recall Frankfurt's example of the mother putting her child up for adoption. Her reasons for judging it best to put her child up for adoption may be perfectly rational and coherent with associated beliefs she has about a child's welfare. Nevertheless, she does not recognise herself in the action even though she knows she ought to, she does not identify with it. In sum, an agent may reach an all out considered best judgement about what to do, but this judgement is not necessarily accompanied by the agent's own endorsement. The concept of internalisation may be crucial to understanding problems of self-control. Thus far we have seen that philosophers generally take intrinsic motivation to be undifferentiated as an agent's all things considered best judgement. Self-control involves techniques and strategies to allow motivation to flow from this judgement to an act instrumental to the value captured in that judgement. If we, however, consider that our judgments, even our all things considered judgements, may not be internalised, then we end up with different types of self-control.

SDT suggests that the essential element of autonomy is an agent's subjective experience of being the locus of causality for his actions. According to reason-responsiveness conceptions of personal autonomy, an agent can only be said to govern himself if his motives or the mental processes that produce them are responsive to a sufficiently wide range of reasons for and against behaving as he does<sup>27</sup> In other words, if the action is in line with an agent's all things considered judgement. How do these two understandings of personal autonomy relate? The main question is whether the subjective experience of being the author of an action requires that it coheres with associated beliefs about the action. Perhaps it does in many cases but surely not all. The point is that, if the reasons and beliefs going into our point of view break up in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, then it is possible, and probably quite common, that our all things considered judgement is constrained by external motivation in a problematic way. The coherence among our beliefs may be the cause of a breakdown in autonomy if we act on reasons we know to be right and would rationally endorse, but do not identify with. In this way we might also not invariably identify with our long term plans and

---

<sup>27</sup> Sentence borrowed from [Buss 2013]

intentions, or even evaluative judgements.

Whether an agent is acting autonomously is a very difficult thing to determine. It is not my aim to refute any such positive account here, but merely to show there seems to be something more fundamental about agency than the ability to appreciate reasons. At the core, it seems that there is no apparent contradiction in saying that we can autonomously decide to act against our all things considered best judgement. We may even decide not to reflect on a particular action and our motives for it. At the very least, an agent acts autonomously if and only if he authorises that action.<sup>28</sup> Under this minimal requirement an agent can be said to exert self-control if he gets himself to act in a way he himself authorises. Surely, the majority of cases in which we exert self-control involves contemplating reasons and deciding on an action we take to be the best one. However, if we understand the autonomy of the self as the power of authorising actions, then contemplating reasons and forming a judgement is but one way of exercising that power.

I will take a moment to address a possible objection to this understanding of personal autonomy. One might say that autonomy, as outlined above, is liable to all kinds of objections which more substantive accounts are aimed at relieving. After all, we may experience ourselves as being the locus of causality for our own actions even if we are not. We might be indoctrinated or otherwise externally manipulated into thinking or acting in a certain way. Additionally, we may feel autonomous when acting on reasons which are irrational or the result of faulty self-reflection.

It has not been my aim to provide a catch-all account of autonomy, but rather to make explicit an essential experiential aspect of any such account. Namely that if a person can be said to act autonomously, he or she will experience being the locus of causality for that action. Whether or not a person truly is autonomous, under a complete description of autonomy, is irrelevant to the action causing power of a person's experiencing autonomy. In other words, If there is some action with which an individual completely identifies, then that person is intrinsically motivated to undertake that action regardless of the fact that this action could not be understood as autonomous with respect to some complete account of autonomy. This idea reflects something important about the typical theoretical approach philosophers take in answering questions about agency. Namely that our theorising about mental events does not always map on to the subjective experience of agents in these states. The way we perceive ourselves and our surroundings forms the very basis of our motivations, even if these perceptions are not veridical.

The subjective experience of autonomy has been found to mediate depletion effects. In one study by Muraven et.al [2006], subjects were given two tasks demanding of self-control resources. One group was given the impression of being a valuable member of the research team, while the other group was given the impression of being a 'cog in the machine'. The hypothesis was that subjects engaging in self-control in the autonomy supportive condition of feeling valuable would be less depleted by self-

---

<sup>28</sup> That is to say, that the agent's authorisation is intrinsically motivated.

control efforts than subjects in a non-autonomy supportive condition. Results of the experiments showed that there is indeed a connection between perceived autonomy and the depleting effects of self-control. More studies have since corroborated the hypothesis that intrinsically motivated self-control is less depleting than extrinsically motivated self-control.<sup>29</sup>

SDT further posits that feeling autonomous is a basic psychological need and is an essential component of well-being. As such it is differentiated from motives, strivings and desires which are contingent on the circumstances an agent finds himself in. The interesting implication of this is that an individual may be highly effective at forming goals and attaining them, but may fail to satisfy his basic need of feeling autonomous. Without digressing further into the moral implications of the existence of such a basic need, it may have an important bearing on our understanding of self-control. If autonomy, i.e. experiencing oneself as the locus of causality of one's own actions, is an inalienable human need distinct from desires, motives and strivings, and self-control is an expression of this need, then we have grounds for maintaining that self-control is possible regardless of an agent's contingent desires or resources.

#### 4.4 Autonomous Self-Control

I will expound my own explanation of self-control in the following way: Firstly, I will provide a definition of self-control. Secondly, I will define the concepts featured in this definition in turn. Thirdly, I will address the main questions and problems outlined in this thesis and attempt to provide answers within the proposed framework.

##### *Self-Control*

Actional synchronic self-control is engaged and sustained by an agent's willpower and essentially involves mental processes with the function of manipulating the force transmission of intrinsic to extrinsic desires across the means-end relation in order for the agent to better resist motivation external to himself.

##### *Will*

An agent's will is to be understood as that action with which the agent identifies. That is to say, an action for which an agent's intrinsic motivation is highest.

##### *Willpower*

Is a kind of mental energy which is required for numerous cognitive processes. This energy is available to the extent in which the agent perceives himself as autonomous. Should an agent have no will, i.e. should there not be a salient option for action with which the agent identifies, then no willpower is available to him.

---

<sup>29</sup> See [Muraven 2007, 2008] and [Moller, Deci and Ryan 2006]



### *The Self*

The locus of causality of actions for the agent, his sense of autonomy. That which identifies with actions, reasons and beliefs.

### *Control*

The controlling of motivations external to the agent, i.e. motivation with which the agent does not identify. Taking the form of the many different discussed strategies of self-control.

### *Identification*

The degree of identification with an action is determined by the degree to which the motivation for that action is internalised by the agent. Motivation for an action is internal to the agent if that agent values doing that action regardless of external constraints. These constraints are the consequences of doing or not doing that action. For example, a young child is externally motivated to not steal a cookie from the jar because he might get caught. After growing up, the child has internalised moral ideas about stealing and now does not want to steal a cookie regardless of the consequences. He now completely identifies with the action of not stealing as opposed to being constrained by external reasons.

Given this framework, how does self-control break down? There are two ways of answering this question. Firstly, the self-control processes aimed at attenuating our wayward desire may be insufficient to allow an agent to resist it. This can either be explained in terms of lacking self-control skill and/or the very high intensity of a proximate desire which is often the case for addicts. Secondly, we may fail to engage or sustain self-control processes due to insufficient willpower. This latter failure is to be explained, on the proposed framework, as a lacking sense of autonomy on the part of the agent. The action in favour of which self-control processes are initiated is not sufficiently internalised by the agent. Consider again the example of Rebecca at the birthday party. Being offered a slice of pie, she engages self-control to stop herself from accepting it. We may, given this framework, understand her engaging self-control as motivated in different ways. Recall that her desire to stay healthy and thin is connected to her instrumental desire of rejecting the pie. She judges that, all things considered, it is best to be thin and healthy and rejecting the pie promotes that end. However, this judgement may or may not be internalised by her. It is perfectly conceivable that her wanting to be thin is externally motivated by her not wanting to be mocked or seen as unattractive by others. She is therefore not intrinsically, but extrinsically motivated by her desire to be thin. In a way, she is externally constrained by her judgement and does not identify with it. Conversely, Rebecca may have completely internalised the value of being thin and healthy and actions in line with this value are a direct expression of her autonomy. Rejecting the pie is then not instrumental to meeting external demands, but is rather valuable in itself as an action with which she completely identifies. I propose that Rebecca's success at self-control in this particular scenario depends on the degree to

which the intrinsic desire connected to her extrinsic desire of rejecting the pie is internalised. For the degree of internalisation determines her sense of autonomy with regard to that action and the amount of willpower available to her. An implication of this account is what I would call Quasi self-control in which an agent attempts self-control in favour of an action which is not his will. I will flesh out this concept later on in this chapter.

How can we, given this framework, answer the two questions posited at the outset of this thesis? The first question pertained to the cognitive processes involved in self-control and their effects. I find myself in general agreement with Holton and Dill when it pertains to self-controlling mechanisms and their relevance in different stages leading up to an action. As stated earlier in this thesis, I take self-control processes to essentially involve the manipulation of the motivational force of contradicting desires which may be effected by varying strategies. The second question concerned the initiation of self-control processes. On the proposed account, self-control is prompted by the anticipation of an action which runs counter to our will. In other words, we are tempted to undertake an action with which we do not identify. The urges, cravings and desires comprising the temptation are, in a sense, foreign to ourselves. We do not experience having direct control over them, but rather experience them as an external constraints on our action. Our refusal to be determined by these constraints, leads us to initiate processes which allow us to resist them more easily.

#### **4.5 Quasi self-control and structural failures of self-regulation**

In cases of Quasi self-control an agent engages self-control processes for some action which is not the agent's will. We may imagine Frankfurt's mother engaging self-control to get herself to give her baby up for adoption. She might, for instance, direct her attention towards the child's welfare and away from the distress she would experience when giving her child away. How might we explain the mother engaging in self-control? Given the overwhelming strength of the reasons favouring adoption, she might believe that giving the child up for adoption ought to be what she wills. However, her attempt at self-control is not successful because the action in favour of which it was exercised was not her will. Recall the example of Rebecca exerting self-control while eating cookies mentioned in 2.2.1. I suggested that Rebecca was deceiving herself in thinking she was exercising self-control. Clearly, Rebecca cannot experience autonomy while engaging in an action with which she does not identify. Presumably, she feels guilty about surrendering herself to her cravings and urges. Her act of self-control is not aimed at regaining her sense of autonomy but rather relieving the guilt and mental anguish accompanying her deplorable action. In this way, her act of self-control is not intrinsically motivated, but is rather instrumental to relieving her anxiety. I submit that Rebecca's example is also one of Quasi Self-control for it has the appearance of genuine self-control but is done in service of some other motivation than the agent's will. Quasi self-control as a concept yields great explanatory power. For it explains why self-control is so often ineffective without the need of postulating some mental resource or a

failing desire to act in accordance with our best judgement. For self-controlling acts may be understood differently depending on the motivation by which they are initiated. An agent who engages self-control to stop eating cookies in order to avoid being teased and mocked for his weight by his peers is not in fact trying to assert or restore his autonomy. For the control he exerts is not done by himself for the composite of his reasons to do so are externally constrained.

Another virtue of this understanding is that we can make better sense of the effectiveness of self-control processes. If an agent's better judgement is constrained by external demands, then these cannot hope to gain the kind of salience and motivational force required to make the act of self-control effective. Say Rebecca wants to reject the pie offered to her, as she desires to be thin and healthy, just because she wants to avoid the scorn of her peers. This judgement does not yield any positive motivation for her to reject it, nor would there be an immediate pleasure in acting on this judgement. After all, she is presumably still overweight and the circumstances may not be such that she sees an immediate effect of her self-control act. If, on the other hand, she has internalised the desire to be thin and healthy and values it regardless of the opinions of others, then her self-control act yields the immediate gratification of having done something she truly values.

Given this framework we can also explain how mentally healthy individuals can structurally fail to regulate their lives. Rather than exercising self-control in service of their will, an agent may be engaging only in Quasi-self control. It is not always easy to figure out what our will is. It may be obscured by external constraints or an overwhelming array of options.<sup>30</sup> An agent may be convinced that his will ought to be so and so as to conform to his environment. He may find himself lacking motivation to do the things he thinks he ought to do and exercise self-control to move himself along. However, he will find himself continuously, and with increasing certainty, failing due to a lack of willpower.<sup>31</sup> The proposed account yields the prediction that such individuals will, owing to their continued failure at self-control, be continuously depleted. For they cannot connect to themselves as being autonomous given that they structurally fail to carry out their intentions. However, this perpetual state of depleted willpower is not to be understood in terms of the limited resource posited by psychologists and philosophers alike. The continued failure at self-control and acting on intentions has not led to a diminished capacity or a 'smaller reservoir of willpower energy'. Rather, the agent's willpower generation is blocked by his perceived self-inefficacy, by his lack of perceived autonomy creating a vicious circle of ineffective intentions and failed attempts at self-control rendering his future attempts even less likely to succeed. The agent has, in a sense, no will because none of the actions available to him meet with his approval due to them being tainted by an increasing burden of external considerations.

At the outset of this chapter I posited three questions an actional account of

---

<sup>30</sup> Frankfurt argues that an abundance of options may weaken a person's sense of identity in [Frankfurt 1999]

<sup>31</sup> Insufficient self-control techniques may also play a role.

synchronic self-control ought to be able to answer. So far, I have addressed how willpower is generated and how it is linked to an agent's will. How should we understand the depletion effect measured by psychologists? Earlier I have argued that the dual task paradigm might inherently bring about a decreased motivation for the second task among participants. I maintain this claim and I believe the proposed framework can further explain why this is so. Presumably, participants are motivated differently for the two tasks. On the first, they are intrinsically motivated by the perceived value of being someone who lives up to his promises regardless of whether they will be blamed for lacking participation. Given that they have themselves agreed to participate, they experience their execution of the task as their own choice, i.e. they are not externally forced to do so. On the second task, they will likely feel as though they have completed their commitment to the project, and themselves. On the second task their motivation is likely shifted from intrinsic to extrinsic. Rather than valuing that action as an expression of their values, they experience it as an external demand on them. For this reason, the willpower available to participants on the second task is lacking as opposed to the first. Rather than taking this disparity in willpower as the result of using up a limited resource, we can, given this framework, understand it as a difference in willpower generation owing to the diminished sense of autonomy of participants. The research on the mediating role of autonomy referred to earlier seems to corroborate this understanding. When participants were given incentives to complete the second task, such as the knowledge that it would aid research in Alzheimer's disease, depletion effects were also absent.<sup>32</sup> Presumably, participants were intrinsically motivated by the prospect of aiding the sick rather than be extrinsically motivated by the researchers demanding them to complete the project.

Pertaining to the covariance question we may understand our subjective experience of autonomy to be a factor in many different cognitive affairs. Decision making is known to require self-control resources. We may understand its depletion effect as the results of contemplating external constraints while making decisions. Presumably, when having to choose between two options with which we both identify, we experience our choice as self-caused and effortless. Similarly, the focusing and perseverance of attention might be glossed in the same way. Should we intently focus on something we are curious about or otherwise intrinsically interested in, then the amount of willpower available to us makes this almost effortless. Conversely, should we be externally demanded to keep our intention fixed on something we are not intrinsically interested in, as is the case in many self-control studies, then we will likely experience a great deal of struggle.

#### **4.6 Autonomous Self-Control and Diminished Motivation**

The main question of this thesis has been: Can we provide an actional account of synchronic self-control which can deal with cases of diminished motivation to exert self-

---

<sup>32</sup> See [Muraven and Slessareva 2003]

control? We are now in a position to provide an affirmative answer to this question. I will proceed along two lines. Firstly, I will explain how severely depressed individuals are able to suddenly engage in self-control. Secondly, I will suggest how severely demotivated individuals might actionally unlock their willpower. Typically, philosophers are wary of making empirical predictions. However, on a topic where philosophy and psychology are so heavily entwined, conceptual analysis is bound to entail empirical predictions.

As mentioned earlier, there are plentiful examples of severely depressed or addicted individuals suddenly and wilfully turning their lives around. I have argued in chapter 2 that linking our motivation for self-control to an intrinsic desire to act in accordance with our best judgement cannot explain how such an individual engages in self-control. Willpower accounts also fail if we hold that severe depression implies continuous depletion. In this case of the addict, we may say that willpower is insufficient to overcome the enormous pull of his proximate desire for a fix. And yet, there are examples of addicts suddenly quitting which cannot be explained in terms of a diminished desire for substance. I want to suggest that the break in the behavioural patterns of these individuals is to be explained by their sudden abhorrence of their own behaviour accompanied by the realisation that they do not have to act the way they do. Presumably, the event prompting such a realisation is linked to an intrinsic need.<sup>33</sup> Their ensuing success at self-control is due to their experience of autonomy generating the necessary willpower to overcome their immediate desires. As for the severely depressed individual, the realisation restoring his sense of autonomy may be the outright refusal to be determined by his condition. Rather than having to say that these individuals lack any positive motivation or willpower to exert self-control, we can say that their failure to connect their own autonomy has made their willpower temporarily unavailable to them. By objectifying their condition, they may find that they cannot identify themselves with what they are doing.

As explained in the preceding proposal, self-control breaks down when its characteristic mental processes are insufficient, or when the attempt at self-control is motivated by something other than the agent's will. In the latter case, self-control efforts are undermining an agent's sense of autonomy rather than restoring it. By forcing oneself to act on reasons with which one does not identify, such as shame, self-blame or failing to meet external standards, an agent's self-perceived autonomy is further diminished. Instead of focusing on direct behavioural outcomes, objectifying one's predicament and reflecting on the nature of one's motivations might yield better results and set the stage for eventual autonomous self-control. In other words, perceived autonomy is a necessary condition for willpower and thus for autonomous self-control.

---

<sup>33</sup> SDT posits connectedness as an essential human need. see [Deci and Ryan 2002]

## **4.7 Some possible objections**

### **4.7.1 Just another desire**

One possible objection to the above proposal would be to claim that the need for autonomy posited by SDT and employed to support this thesis is simply an intrinsic desire akin to those used to support desire-based accounts. If so, we cannot explain acts of self-control should an agent lack this desire. There are a number of reasons to suppose this objection is invalid. As I have previously argued, our desire to act in accordance with our best judgement is contingent on the content of that judgement and the degree to which we identify with it. In this way, we may understand without contradiction how we, in particular instances, lack this desire. However, there seems to be an inherent contradiction in claiming that we do not need or value our own autonomy. For deciding whether or not we value it is predicated upon our having autonomy and our ability to identify with beliefs.

### **4.7.2 Quasi Self-control initiation and the Will**

If, as I have argued, self-control is prompted by the anticipation of an action which runs counter to our will, then how do we explain how agents enter into Quasi self-control given that the latter is done in favour of an action which is not the agent's will? Firstly, an agent's will and the act in favour of which Quasi self-control is initiated may be the same. Recall the example with Rebecca at the birthday party. Her attempt at self-control to refuse the piece of pie offered to her may be extrinsically motivated by her desire not to be mocked for her weight. Should these external constraints be absent however, she might autonomously decide to reject the pie because she values being healthy regardless of what anyone else thinks.

Secondly, an agent may be mistaken about what his will is. Recall the example with the mother who contemplates putting her child up for adoption. She may believe that she is about to do something, i.e. keeping her child, which ought not be what she wills.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to critically examine the problems facing the main positions in the debate on synchronic self-control, and to develop an understanding of self-control which is not liable to these problems. Furthermore, as argued in chapter 1, given the severe limitation on human agency implied by- and the counterintuitive consequences of non-actional accounts of self-control, we have good reason to favour actional variants.

In chapter two I have discussed the three most influential lines of argument regarding synchronic self-control: Cognitive-Dispositional, Desire-based and Volitional. I have argued that the cognitive dispositional take cannot account for the distinct phenomenology associated with self-control, nor can it explain how dispositions to have self-controlling thoughts are triggered without the agent being aware of a conflict in motivations. Generally we know quite well that we are in need of self-control as we contemplating undertaking an action which conflicts what we think we ought to do. I have further argued in this chapter that since self-control is itself motivated, we must be able to account for this motivation in a way that is not liable to self-control problems. Along this line, I diagnosed an inherent problem in the so-called desire-based accounts of self-control. If, we would lack the intrinsic desire to act in accordance with our best judgement and are therefore unable to exert self-control, then we are precluded from explaining cases of self-control which feature this lacking desire. Either we would have to concede these types of cases to the non-actional theorists accompanied with the associated concerns pertaining to phenomenology, or the idea that self-control is motivated by one's better judgement should give way to another explanation. Volitional accounts feature distinct roles for the will and willpower in their explanations of self-control. Although at an advantage in explaining self-control initiation over the desire-based accounts, the downside to the volitional accounts discussed is that in their efforts to explain self-control, they constrain the will in a problematic way. If the will is located solely in the deliberative, rational part of our minds then we have trouble making sense of ordinary exercises of will. Moreover, would our will and the means of engaging self-control, again be tied to our all things considered best judgement. Given that perverse cases in which agents use their willpower to act against their better judgement seem perfectly possible and quite common, we ought to favour an explanation which features a more inclusive understanding of willpower. I have concluded the chapter, after having dismissed alternatives, by assenting to the thesis that willpower is a necessary condition for exercises of willpower. Following this, I have articulated what I take to be the main problem facing current accounts of self-control, namely to explain how individuals may control themselves should they lack either willpower, or a desire to act in accordance with their best judgement.

In chapter 3 I have provided an analysis of the strength model of synchronic self-control as an explanation of the depletion effects measured in sequential task studies. In doing so, I have pointed to some inherent features of this paradigm and how these may be partially responsible for the effect measured. Moreover, given the procedural outline of self-control processes as the manipulation of motivational states by the agent in the preceding chapter, alternative explanations of the depletion effect may be given that do not have to rely on a spooky resource. I have argued further that willpower as a limited resource is insufficiently substantiated under the strength model given that it is seemingly decoupled from an agent's will. Whether or not an agent's attempts at self-control is aligned with his will is ostensibly irrelevant to his available willpower reserves. Concluding this chapter I have argued that there is good reason to doubt the existence of a limited resource. Not only given that the sequential task study has come under intense scrutiny from within the field of social psychology, but also because taking its mechanics seriously would lead to counterintuitive explanations of a large number of cases.

After setting the stage in the preceding chapters, I have proposed an account of self-control which ties its initiation to an agent's subjective experience of autonomy. In doing so, I have argued that the implicit assumption behind desire-based and volitional account is that the will is essentially tied to reasons. What is constitutive of the agent's 'self' is not his responsiveness to reasons or his ability to reflect, but rather the minimal requirement of being the author of actions. In this minimalistic sense of autonomy, self-control can be understood as an agent's actional attempt to conduct himself in a way with which he identifies, with actions he would himself authorise. This identification is not constituted by the agent's reasons but rather, his reasons and judgements are objects that may or may not meet with his identification. By conceptualising an agent's will as that action with which he most identifies and is intrinsically motivated for, I have tied willpower to a subjective sense of autonomy. Self-control is, from this framework, initiated and sustained by the agent's intrinsic need to be the locus of causality for that action, i.e. to be autonomous regarding that action. The desires, cravings and urges the agent attempts to control are not internalised by him, he does not identify with them and must exert effort to resist their pull. Self-control is a process aimed at facilitating an agent's will. An implication of the proposed account is that self-control efforts done in favour of an action which are not the agent's will are not really instances in which an agent exerts control in favour of 'himself'. I have dubbed these cases as Quasi self-control cases. They exhibit the typical features of self-control in that they involve competing motivations and an effort by the agent to align his actions with what he thinks he ought to do, but willpower to initiate and sustain the effort is insufficiently generated as opposed to 'real' self-control.

Finally, I have argued that, given the proposed framework, we can explain how individuals in a state of diminished motivation can exert self-control. Individuals who are chronically willpower deficient such as addicts and those suffering from depression, are likely overwhelmed by motivation external to themselves. As a result, they cannot connect to themselves as being autonomous, and thus cannot identify with actions.



The perhaps counterintuitive implication of this understanding is that these individuals would do well to refrain from attempting self-control. For their condition precludes the possibility of autonomous self-control and they are instead relegated to Quasi self-control which may worsen their condition rather than improve it. Instead the demotivated agent ought to first create the conditions from which he or she can exert self-control by objectifying his condition and tracing the source of his motivations. Relieving self-blame and a sense of shame may be instrumental as these are pervasive forms of external constraints. This is by no means an easy task, but it remains possible given that the agent has an intrinsic need to be autonomous. Willpower is not a reserve which can be depleted. Its generation can, however, be blocked by the immense weight of external considerations we can accumulate.

I would like to close with an intuition of mine. In talking about the 'self' and what it means to have a will, one contemplates what is essential about us. If stripped completely bare of accrued beliefs and conditioning, what remains? Perhaps only that which is unconditional and valued for the sheer pleasure of it, and the freedom to pursue these things wholeheartedly.

## References

- Baumeister, R.F., Muraven, M., Tice, D.M., 1998. "Self-control as a limited resource: Regulatory depletion patterns". in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.74 (3): pp 774-789.
- Baumeister, R.F., Muraven, M., 2000. "Self-Regulation and Depletion of Limited Resources: Does Self-control Resemble a Muscle?". In *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.126 (2): pp 247-259.
- Baumeister, R., Tangey, J.P., Boone, A.L., 2004. "High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success". In *Journal of personality*, May 2004: pp 270-324
- Baumeister, R.F., Vohs, K.D., Ciarocco, N.J., 2005. "Self-Regulation and Self-Presentation: Regulatory depletion impairs impression management and effortful self-presentation depletes regulatory resources". In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.88 (4): pp 632-657.
- Baumeister, R.F., Vohs, K.D., 2007. "Self-regulation, ego-depletion and motivation". In *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, vol.1 (2007)
- Buss, S., 2014. "Personal Autonomy", In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Winter 2014 Edition).URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/personal-autonomy/>.
- Carter, E.C., McCullough, M.E., 2013. "Is ego depletion too incredible? Evidence for the overestimation of the depletion effect." In *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol.36 (6): pp 683-684.
- .2014. "Publication bias and the limited strength model of self-control: has the evidence for ego depletion been overestimated?". In *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 5.
- Connor, T.D., 2014. "Self-control, willpower and the problem of diminished motivation". In *Philosophical Studies*, vol.168(3): pp 783-796.
- Dang, J., Dewitte. S., Mao. L., Xiao. S., Shi. Y., 2013. "Adapting to an initial self-regulatory task cancels the ego-depletion effect". In *Consciousness and Cognition*, vol.22(3): pp 816-821.

Davidson, D., 1970. "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?". In Feinberg, J., (ed.) *Moral Concepts*, (Oxford University Press.)

Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M., eds., 2002. "An overview of Self-Determination Theory: an Organismic-Dialectical Perspective". In *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (The University of Rochester Press): pp 3-27.

———. 2008. "Self-determination theory: A macro theory of human motivation, development and health." In *Canadian Psychology*, vol.49: pp 182-185.

———. 2012. "Self-determination theory." In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, vol.1: pp. 416-437.

Dill, B., Holton, R., 2014. "The Addict in Us All." In *Frontiers of Psychiatry*, vol.5(139): pp 1-20.

Frankfurt, H., 1988. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Importance of What We Care About*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): pp 11–25

———. 1999. "On the Necessity of Ideals". In *Necessity, Volition and Love*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): pp 108-116

———., 2002. "Reply to J. David Velleman,". in *Buss and Overton*, pp 124–28.

Hagger, M.S., Wood, C., Stiff, C., Chatzisarantis, N. L. D., 2010. "Ego depletion and the strength model of self-control: a meta-analysis." In *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 136: pp 495–525.

Haghbin, M., McCaffrey, A., Pychyl, T.A. 2012." The complexity of the relation between fear of failure and procrastination". In *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, vol.30 (4) pp 249-263.

Henden, E., 2008. "What is self-control?" In *Philosophical Psychology*, vol.21(1): pp 69 – 90.

Holton, R., 1999. "Intention and Weakness of Will". In *Journal of Philosophy*, vol.96(5): pp 241-262.

———. 2003. "How is strength of will possible?" In Christine Tappolet & Sarah Stroud (eds.), *Weakness of the Will and Practical Irrationality*, (Oxford University Press): pp 39-67.

———. 2009. *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*. Oxford University Press.

Holton, R., May, J., 2012. "What in the world is weakness of the will?". in *Philosophical studies*, vol.157: pp 341-360.

- Inzlicht, M., Schmeichel, B. J., Macrae, C.N., 2014. "Why self-control seems limited." In *Trend in Cognitive Science*, vol.18(3): pp 127-133.
- Kennett, J., Smith, M., 1996. "Frog and toad lose control". In *Analysis*, vol.56(2): pp 63–73.
- . 1997. "Synchronic self-control is always non-actional". In *Analysis*, vol.57 (2): pp 123–131.
- Lee, N., Chatzisarantis, N., Hagger, M.S., 2016. "Adequacy of the Sequential-Task Paradigm in Evoking Ego-Depletion and How to Improve Detection of Ego-Depleting Phenomena." In *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 7.
- Mele, A.R., 1987. *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control*. (New York: Oxford University Press).
- . 1992. *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-Deception, and Self-Control*. (New York : Oxford University Press).
- . 1997. "Underestimating Self-control: Kennett and Smith on frog and toad". In *Analysis*, vol. 57(2): pp 119–123.
- . 1998. "Motivational Strength". in *Nous*, vol.32 (1): pp 23-36
- . 1998. "Synchronic Self-control revisited: Frog and toad shape up". In *Analysis*, vol.58 (4): pp 305–310.
- . 2014. "Self-control, motivational strength, and exposure therapy". In *Philosophical studies*, vol.170: pp 359-375
- Moffit, T.E., et.al., 2011. "A Gradient of Childhood Self-Control Predicts Health, Wealth, and Public Safety". in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol.108 (7): pp-2693-2698.
- Moller, A.C., Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M., 2006. "Choice and Ego-Depletion: The Moderating Role of Autonomy". In *Personality Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol.32(8) : pp 1024-1036
- Muraven, M., Slessareva, E., 2003. "Mechanisms of self-control failure: Motivation and limited resources". In *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol.29: pp 894–906.
- Solomon, R.C., 1974. "Emotions and Choice". In *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 27(1): pp 20-41.
- Sripada, C.S., 2010. "Philosophical Questions about the Nature of Willpower. In *Philosophy Compass*, vol.5(9): pp 793–805.
- .2012. "How is Willpower Possible? The Puzzle of Synchronic Self-Control and the Divided Mind". In *Nous*, vol.48 (1): pp 41-74.

Schmeichel, B. J., 2007. "Attention control, memory updating, and emotion regulation temporarily reduce the capacity for executive control". In *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, vol. 13: pp 241–255.

Sheppes, G., Catran, E., Meiran, N., 2009. "Reappraisal (but not distraction) is going to make you sweat: Physiological evidence for self-control effort". In *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, vol.71 (2009): pp 91-96.

Vallerand, R.J., Ratelle, C.F., 2002. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: A Hierarchical Model". In Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M., (eds.) *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (The University of Rochester Press): pp 37-65.

Vohs, K.D., Heatherton, T.F., 2000. "Self-regulatory failure: a resource-depletion approach". in *Psychological science*, vol.11(3): pp 249-254.

Wallace, R. Jay. 1999. "Addiction as defect of the will: Some philosophical reflections". In *Law and Philosophy*, vol.18(6): pp 621–654.

Watson, P. C., Evans, J. St. B. T. 1975. "Dual processes in reasoning?" In *Cognition*, vol.3: pp 141–154.

Wright, R. A., Junious, T. R., Neal, C., Avello, A., Graham, C., Herrmann, L., Junious, S., Walton, N. 2007. "Mental fatigue influence on effort-related cardiovascular response: Difficulty effects and extension across cognitive performance domains". In *Motivation and Emotion*, vol.31: pp 219–231.

Wohl, M.J.A., Pychyl, T.A., Bennett, S.H., 2009. "I forgive myself, now I can study: How self-forgiveness for procrastinating can reduce future procrastination". In *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol.48(2010): pp 803-808.

Zhu, J., 2005. "Explaining Synchronic Self-Control". In *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol.43(3): pp 475-492.