

## VI Desire

### PREAMBLE: THE OBJECT OF DESIRE

Ordinary usage tends to give the object of desire as either an object ('He wants a glass of milk') or an action as represented with an infinitival clause ('He wants to drink a glass of milk'). Philosophical orthodoxy has tended to treat it as a state of affairs represented by a sentence ('He wants that he drinks a glass of milk'). We'll generally follow the orthodoxy, but note that that is not trivial (and may be mistaken!).

There is further unclarity whether desire should be thought of as an absolute relation, or as a comparative one: is it that desires milk more than beer, or that one desires milk *simpliciter*? The comparative relation is sometimes characterized as preference. We'll focus on the absolute, but again this is to beg various questions.

### DESIRE AS DISPOSITION TO BEHAVE

We saw from Berridge that desire is measured as a tendency to behave in a certain way. This suggests:

X desires that p obtains iff acts (or is disposed to act) to bring about p

But that doesn't seem quite right. First, a worry about necessity: X might be wrong about how to bring p about. Second a worry about sufficiency: by sneezing I project an aerosol cloud of saliva, but I don't desire that. So perhaps:

X desires that p obtains iff X is disposed to act in ways that X believes are best suited to bring about p

Is this still too broad? Does this still get the sneezing? What about the unwelcome self-fulfilling action (the insomniac; Stampe's tennis double-faulter). Perhaps add: 'because they bring about p'. Is this circular? It would be if it were: 'because they want to bring about p'. So what is packed into the 'because'?

Second, might there be states that move one that are not desires? McDowell on moral beliefs.

And what about 'mere urges': Quinn's radio man?

### DESIRE AS EXPECTATION OF PLEASURE

Recall Humberstone's discussion. Humberstone however is just thinking of this as one dimension. Galen Strawson thinks it is more central. His core case is of the 'Weatherwatchers' who can't move, but who are gratified by certain kinds of weather. Don't they desire it? (But equally, wouldn't they do something to get it if they could?)

#### DESIRE AS SEEMING GOOD

Graham Oddie: to desire something is for it to *appear good* to one; this is not the same as believing that it is good. For Scanlon things are closer to the judgment: to desire that p is to judge that one has reason to p. This sense of desire rationalises action for Scanlon; but a second kind of desire doesn't.

#### DESIRE AS ATTENTION MAGNET

Scanlon:

A person has a desire in the attention directed sense that P if the thought that P keeps occurring to him or her in a favorable light, that is to say, if the person's attention is directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favour of P.

WWOTEO p. 37

This seems very broad. How do we understand 'favorable'; not presumably as 'desirable'. But how else do we distinguish this from various obsessional thoughts?

#### DESIRE AS REWARD SIGNAL

Schroeder, and then Arpaly and Schroeder: neither motivation nor affect are essential features of desire. Instead, to desire something is for it to be the object of the reward system, that is, of the system—implemented in human beings and many other animals, by the mesolimbic dopamine system—that causes the formation of intrinsic desires for objects that are found rewarding. To be desired is to trigger a response in that system.

This enables him to say that something is still a desire if self-control represses it. But doesn't it tie it too closely to a certain neurological structure?