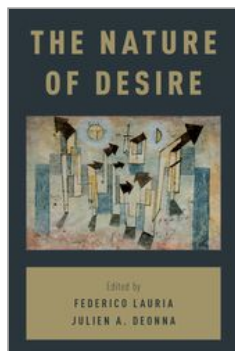


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The Nature of Desire

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Introduction

Reconsidering Some Dogmas about Desires

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Abstract and Keywords

Desire has not been at the center of recent preoccupations in the philosophy of mind. Consequently, the literature settled into several dogmas. The first part of this introduction presents these dogmas and invites readers to scrutinize them. The main dogma is that desires are motivational states. This approach contrasts with the other dominant conception: desires are positive evaluations. But there are at least four other dogmas: the world should conform to our desires (*world-to-mind* direction of fit), desires involve a positive evaluation (the “guise of the good”), we cannot desire what we think is actual (the “death of desire” principle), and, in neuroscience, the idea that the reward system is the key to understanding desire. The second part of the introduction summarizes the contributions to this volume. The hope is to contribute to the emergence of a fruitful debate on this neglected, albeit crucial, aspect of the mind.

Keywords: desire, motivational conception, evaluative conception, direction of fit, guise of the good, death of desire, deontic conception, reward system

OUR LIFE IS imbued with desire. While some people desire to see the ocean, others want to live in New York. While some people want to understand the laws of the universe, Juliet simply aspires to kiss Romeo. Some desires are stronger than others. Some last longer than others. Sometimes we are happy because one of our desires is gratified; on another occasion, we may cry due to the frustration of a desire. These are among the many platitudes of the life of desire. One may wonder: What is this thing called 'desire'? What is the essence of desire? This is the main question addressed in this volume.

Desires play an important role in our lives. Yet contemporary philosophy has neglected the issue of the nature of desire as compared with investigations of perception, belief, emotion, intention, and other types of mental states. Although there are some notable exceptions to this neglect (Marks 1986; Stampe 1986, 1987; Schroeder 2004; Oddie 2005; Tenenbaum 2007; Friedrich 2012; Arpaly and Schroeder 2013), it is fair to say that no live debate on the nature of desire is presently taking place (see Schroeder 2015 for a similar diagnosis). The aim of this volume is to redress this imbalance by bringing together scholars who adopt different perspectives on the subject. The volume aspires to draw a taxonomy of the main conceptions of desire and to create a fruitful debate about this underexplored topic. But why is it important to understand desire, and what does the philosophy of desire consist of? In what follows, this question is answered from three distinct angles.

(p.2) Beyond the Dogma of the Motivational Conception of Desire

The lack of a real debate about desire is perplexing. The central explanation for this fact is, we believe, that one intuitive view of desire is often taken for granted in the philosophical literature. It is, we conjecture, the main dogma of desire. Since Hume, most philosophers have assumed that desire is essentially a motivational state (Armstrong 1968; Stampe 1986; Stalnaker 1984; Smith 1994; Dretske 1988; Dancy 2000; Millikan 2005). In this "hydraulic" view of desire (McDowell's 1998 expression), desire is the spring of action *par excellence*. To desire, for example to listen to a symphony, is nothing but being inclined to do so—end of story. The motivational conception of desire is rarely defended in detail, but it is presupposed in numerous debates. Most interpretations of the notion of direction of fit rely on it; functionalist accounts of desire often mention it in passing; standard views of action and decision making in philosophy and economics build on it; and disagreements about whether desires can be reasons for acting often revolve around it. From this

perspective, action and motivation are key to understanding desire. But is motivation all there is to desiring?

There are reasons to doubt it. To start with, our folk concept of desire appears much richer. When we acknowledge our desires, are we merely talking about our motivations to act? Intuitively, professing my desire to see Juliet seems to go beyond conveying the motivation to act so as to see her; it seems to express something deeper.

Furthermore, looking at the history of philosophy or the contemporary literature, there is another approach to desire that deserves special attention. On this conception, to desire something is to evaluate it in a positive light. Desiring to swim in the river is to represent this state as good in some way or other. According to this evaluative conception, which can be traced back to Aristotle at least and which has found new advocates recently, goodness is the crux around which desire revolves.¹ Given their historical pedigree, we shall call the motivational and evaluative conceptions the “classical views of desire.” On the face of it, they seem very different. The evaluative view is centered on goodness, while the motivational view concentrates on motivation. Now, goodness and motivation seem to be distinct concepts despite the intimate relations that exist between them. As the debate on moral motivation has taught us, it might be that one could positively evaluate a state of affairs without being motivated to realize it. It is thus fair to ask which one of the two conceptions captures desire best. Is desire essentially a motivational (p.3) state? Is it a positive evaluation? Is it both? Or is it neither?

Most of the essays in this collection explore the classical views of desire. This is one way of going beyond the dogma that desiring is the state of being motivated and of adopting a more critical stance on the nature of desire.

Revisiting Other Philosophical and Empirical Dogmas of Desire

The philosophy of desire touches on many other issues, however. A survey of the philosophical literature reveals that several principles about desire are often taken for granted and are rarely put into doubt. In other words, there are other dogmas of desire. This book aims to discuss these dogmas too, covering more minutiae than is usually the case, from the perspective of the nature of desire. A brief presentation of these dogmas is thus in order.

Desires are often contrasted with beliefs in terms of their direction of fit. According to this metaphor or figurative way of talking, beliefs are supposed to fit the world, while the world is supposed to fit our desires.² In the case of a mismatch between the world and our beliefs, our beliefs should change—not the world. Changing the world so as to fit a belief would be inappropriate. Consequently, beliefs have the *mind-to-world* direction of fit: they aim at truth. In contrast, when the world does not correspond to some desire, the *world* should change. Changing a desire simply because it is frustrated would be wrong. Desires thus have the *world-to-mind* direction of fit: they aim at satisfaction. There is an important debate about the meaning of this notion (see Smith 1994; Humberstone 1992; Zangwill 1998; Gregory 2012; Archer 2015). Despite these controversies, the standard interpretation of the *world-to-mind* direction of fit of desire is motivational in spirit: in the case of a mismatch between desire and the world, subjects should *act* to bring about the satisfaction of the desire. This common interpretation fits well the motivational view of desire. Is it correct? Does the *world-to-mind* direction of fit reveal that desires are essentially motivations (see Gregory, Lauria, Railton *this volume*; for detractors of the metaphor, see Sobel and Copp 2001; Milliken 2008; Frost 2014)?

In addition to aiming toward satisfaction in the way explained, desires are often said to aim at the good, just as beliefs aim at the truth (De Sousa 1974; Velleman 2000; Hazlett *unpublished*). One way of understanding this slogan is to interpret it as follows: one cannot desire something without “seeing” some good in it. Call this the “guise of the good” thesis. The (p.4) “guise of the good” thesis has an important historical pedigree: it can be traced back to at least Plato, was at the heart of the scholastic conception of desire in the Middle Ages, and is often referred to in the contemporary literature.³ Although friends of the evaluative conception of desire naturally embrace this thesis, other views are compatible with it: that desiring involves a positive evaluation does not imply that it is a positive

evaluation. Can we not desire something without seeing any good in it? If so, what does this teach us about desire (see Oddie, Massin *this volume*; for detractors of this thesis, see Stocker 1979; Velleman 1992; Döring and Eker *this volume*)?

Another dogma that is less often examined concerns a form of impossibility in desire. Since Plato, it is common to think that one cannot desire what one already has. Consider that I want to climb Mount Etna. The intuition is that as long as I have a desire to climb Mount Etna, I have *not* climbed it. As soon as I have, my desire extinguishes itself. Desires are for absences, or, less metaphorically, they are about what is not actual.⁴ Although some scholars disagree about the formulation of the principle (see Boghossian 2003; Oddie 2005; Lauria *this volume*), some version of the principle is often taken for granted. What does this reveal about desire (see Oddie, Lauria, Massin *this volume*)? And is it true (for detractors, see Heathwood 2007; Oddie *this volume*)?

Finally, leaving armchair philosophy, it is uncontroversial in the neurosciences that desires are strongly implicated in the reward system and are closely connected to the neurotransmitter dopamine (Schultz 1997; Schultz, Tremblay and Hollerman 1998; Schroeder 2004). According to the standard neuroscientific picture, desire involves the anticipation of reward and the encoding of prediction errors: in desiring something, one anticipates some reward (say, a banana) and then compares the expected reward with the actual obtaining of the reward. In this way, desires are crucial for learning in the sense of adapting one's behavior to one's environment. How can this help us understand the nature of desire (see Schroeder, Railton, Lauria *this volume*)? Examining these four dogmas is another way of questioning the received wisdom about desire and has the potential to shed new light on its essence.

Beyond the Philosophy of Desire

The issue of the nature of desire is important *per se*, but it can also illuminate other philosophical puzzles—controversies in which desires are (p.5) frequently mentioned and their role examined without sufficient attention being paid to what they are. In the absence of a clear conception of desire, these debates are on shaky ground. This is especially so given that the motivational view of desire is often simply assumed. Let us present three examples of important debates featuring desires in, respectively, philosophy of mind, ethics, and meta-ethics, which could benefit from a deeper understanding of

what they are. This will reveal the wider philosophical significance of this book.

The direction of fit of desire is often considered an essential feature of desire, but it has broader ramifications in the philosophy of mind and of language (Searle 1983). In the philosophy of mind, it is used as a tool to contrast conations or states meant to modify the world (e.g. desires, intentions, needs) from cognitions or states meant to represent the world (beliefs, perceptions, etc.). This Humean picture of the mind is at the heart of traditional philosophical accounts of agency and the main models of decision making in economics. If our exploration into the nature of desire can elucidate the metaphor of direction of fit, it will *eo ipso* clarify the general issue of the taxonomy of the mental and of other types of representations suggested by the metaphor. This has far-ranging implications, since it can help to put in perspective traditional accounts of agency in philosophy and economics (see Railton *this volume*).

In ethics the most significant line of research about desire concerns its role in the explanation and justification of action. Can desires be reasons for acting in a certain way? If they can, are they motivating reasons, normative ones, or both? Although scholars disagree on how to answer these questions, they often rely on implicit and varying conceptions of desire—most of the time presupposing that desiring is nothing but the motivation to act. Addressing the issue of the nature of desire should thus help to solve the puzzle of their practical role. How can one determine whether desires are reasons for acting without knowing what they are? Four contributions in this volume attest to the fact that one's stance on the nature of desire has relevant implications for this investigation (Döring and Eker, Alvarez, Friedrich, Gregory *this volume*).

Finally, in meta-ethics desires appear in the debate about the very nature and definition of value. According to the mainstream fitting attitude analysis of value, what is good is just what is worth desiring (Broad 1930). *Prima facie*, this debate seems disconnected from the question of desire's essence and seems to rest on an intuitive grasp of what counts as a desire. Yet, as Oddie's essay reveals, the question of the nature of desire can contribute to this meta-ethical puzzle as well.

(p.6) A more detailed examination of what desires are can thus lead to a better understanding of important and various philosophical concerns. We have focused here on established controversies where

desires surface, but it goes without saying that more neglected issues will also benefit from this inquiry (see the second part of this volume).

With these clarifications in mind, the aim of this volume can be further specified as follows. In addition to examining the classical views of desire, this collection of essays purports to explore the dogmas about desire one finds in the literature. And it does so with an eye to the implications the nature of desire has with regard to wider controversies.

The book is divided into two parts. The first tackles directly the question of the essence of desire; the second addresses unexplored issues in the philosophical literature that bear on conceptions of desire. In the remainder of this introduction, we summarize each contribution and raise questions that connect each with other essays in the volume. This should convince the reader that a fruitful and rich debate about the nature of desire has begun.

I. Conceptions of Desire

Are desires positive evaluations? Are they motivations? Are there alternative conceptions? What does the empirical evidence suggest about the nature of desire?

This section is divided into four subsections corresponding to each question raised.

Evaluative Views: Desire and the Good

Is goodness the key for understanding desire? In their contributions, Oddie and Friedrich, elaborating on previous work, answer this question affirmatively. To desire, they argue, is to be struck by the goodness of certain things. Imagine a person who is disposed to switch on any radio she encounters (Quinn 1993). She is not doing this because she enjoys it or thinks there is something good about turning on radios (e.g. she considers it a means to listen to music). Rather she does not see any good whatsoever in the action she is performing. Does she desire to turn on radios? Quinn's (1993) intuition, which is shared by Oddie and Friedrich, is that this person does not desire to switch on radios precisely because she does not see any good in it. Hence a desire should involve a positive evaluation. Ultimately it might be that desire is essentially a positive evaluation. Which type of evaluation? Both contributors agree (p.7) that the evaluation that is crucial to desire does not amount to desires being evaluative judgments.

In his contribution “Desire and the Good: In Search of the Right Fit,” Oddie defends the “value appearance view.” In this conception, to desire something is for this thing to appear good. Juliet’s longing for Kyoto is the same thing as Kyoto appearing good to her. More specifically, Oddie expounds on the idea that desire and goodness fit like hand in glove, defends the view against objections, and presents a new argument in its favor. If we conceive of desires as value appearances, we may hope to fruitfully address issues surrounding the nature of values. The argument proposed concerns chiefly the fitting-attitude analysis of value: the thought that goodness is what is fitting to favor, in particular, what is fitting to desire. This analysis has been criticized on the grounds that it cannot account for “the wrong kind of reasons” to favor something (Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004) and for the existence of “solitary goods” (Bykvist 2009). Oddie elegantly specifies *desiderata* for the positive attitude that is part of the analysis so as to make it immune from these problems and to find the right fit between goodness and desire. The positive attitude should be a representation of a value and should neither entail a belief about goodness nor the presence of this value outside the mind of the favorer. Moreover, Oddie stresses that value judgments should stem from an experiential source that is not an evaluative belief and that entails desire. Desires, he argues, can fit this bill provided they are value seemings, i.e. representations of values. As the experiential source of value, they imply neither beliefs about goodness nor the existence of the value represented. And they entail desires.

Friedrich defends another variant of the evaluative conception in his “Desire, Mental Force and Desirous Experience.” His approach is original in that he addresses the issue by means of the distinction between mental force and mental content. Consider the contrast between asserting *p* and ordering *p*. Intuitively, both representations involve the same content, *p*, but they differ in their linguistic force. Friedrich’s proposal is that desires are positive evaluations in the sense that they involve a mental force that is evaluative in nature. Desiring is thus the representing of a state of affairs with the mental force of goodness. In this picture, desire differs from evaluative beliefs and value appearances: it is not a cognitive state but consists in a *sui generis* evaluation. What is this evaluation and evaluative mental force? Building on a similar proposal for the case of pleasure, Friedrich proposes to account for evaluative mental force in *phenomenal* terms. Desiring, in this view, involves a distinctive feeling—the ‘desirous (p.8) experience’—consisting of the feeling of felt need. When desiring a cup of coffee, one represents having coffee *as*

good, in that one feels the *need* for coffee and that one *must* have it. This captures the phenomenal tone of desire and can in turn explain desire's special motivational power.

The intuition that desires are evaluative representations is compelling. The authors do a great job of exploring it and rebutting several objections to the evaluative conception. Still, some questions remain and other contributions in the volume help to frame them.

Is it enough to represent a state of affairs in a positive way to desire that state of affairs? There are reasons to doubt it. For instance, one might positively evaluate that Mozart lived a longer life yet not desire this: one would rather *wish* that he lived longer (Döring and Eker *this volume*). Similarly, one can evaluate positively the fact that Obama was elected without desiring so, as one is aware that this state of affairs has obtained (Döring and Eker *this volume*). And, having lost hope, Pollyanna could believe that being in jail is after all a good thing without desiring to be there (Döring and Eker *this volume*). Or consider that Othello is clinically depressed: he represents Desdemona's well-being as a good thing but, because of his depression, fails to desire that she fare well (Lauria *this volume*). Aren't these possible scenarios? Strictly speaking, the evaluative conception does not entail that all positive evaluations are desires; some might be other phenomena such as emotions or long-standing affective states that involve desires only indirectly (see Oddie *this volume*). But isn't, then, the evaluative conception too modest as an account of desire? The appeal to the feeling of felt need might be helpful, since it seems to go beyond mere positive evaluation. But does this not amount to giving up on an evaluative account of desire and switching to a deontic approach like the one explored by Lauria and Massin in this volume?

The second question that we can raise about the evaluative conception of desire is more dramatic: Do all desires involve a positive evaluation? Do we desire everything under the "guise of the good"? This question is answered negatively by Döring and Eker, who open the exploration of the motivational conceptions of desire.

Motivational Views: Desire and Action

Desires bear a special relation to action and are usually thought of as explaining intentional actions. The fact that you are reading this book, say, can be explained by your desire to do so. This explanatory role is often understood in terms of two further features of desire. The first is that desires explain intentional actions in virtue of being *dispositional* states. (p.9) The second is that they explain intentional

action because they involve an *evaluative* component. In their respective contributions, Döring and Eker and Alvarez examine this explanatory role of desire and, in particular, the two facets just mentioned.

In “Desires without Guises: Why We Need Not Value What We Want,” Döring and Eker approach the issue of desire’s role in the explanation of actions by questioning the guise of the good thesis. They retrace the motivation for thinking that we desire only what seems good to us to the intuition that desires explain action through the evaluative component they involve, as Radioman-type scenarios are meant to reveal. However, in an original manner, they argue that Radioman’s scenario does not support the evaluative view. Indeed, Radioman’s behavior is not made more intelligible by appealing to his positive evaluation of switching on radios; quite the reverse. For such an evaluation is puzzling in itself. And this seriously undermines the main motivation for the evaluative picture. More generally, the authors argue that the evaluative conception, whether in its doxastic or appearance version, is inadequate. As has already been pointed out, evaluation might not be sufficient for desiring. The authors go as far as to argue that evaluation is not a necessary feature of desire: one might desire to tell a joke despite being aware that it is a bad thing, desire to go to the kitchen to have a drink without any positive representation of this state taking place, or want to watch a movie without having made up one’s mind about its value. Desires thus do not involve the guise of the good. This is not to say that they are just dispositions to act, however. The authors propose a more holistic motivational conception of desire: desires might involve wider agential dispositions, such as the disposition to form long-term plans or agential policies. This, they suggest, is absent in Radioman’s case while he undergoes an urge to switch on radios. Agential dispositions might thus suffice to make sense of his behavior without reference to the “guise of the good.”

Döring and Eker’s contribution is very challenging, as it casts doubt on one of the main dogmas of desire and does so by disputing the classical lesson drawn from Radioman’s scenario. They rightly point out that appealing to evaluation would not help make Radioman’s behavior less bizarre. Yet doesn’t a desire provide *pro tanto* justification for some action, irrespective of how strange the desire is (see Oddie *this volume*)? Consider that Radiowoman desires to switch on radios because she represents this action as good. Would it not be irrational to refrain from turning on radios given her state of mind? Isn’t the oddness of an action distinct from its justification? And would the appeal to a policy of switching on radios make

(p.10) Radiowoman's behavior less puzzling? This touches on the vexed question of whether desires justify actions and how they could do so.

In her contribution, "Desires, Dispositions and the Explanation of Action," Alvarez tackles this issue from an unexplored angle. She agrees that desires figure into action explanation in virtue of being dispositions. She thus proposes to explore the role of desire in action explanation by investigating the dispositional nature of desire. Dispositions can exist at some point in time without being manifested at that time: a sugar cube can be soluble even if it does not dissolve now. Similarly, I can desire something, at some point in time, even if I do not manifest my desire at this time. Desires are thus dispositions. But *to what* are they dispositions? In other words, how are we to characterize their manifestation? The traditional answer to this question is that desires are dispositions to act. By contrast, Alvarez argues that the manifestations of desire constitute a much richer set: it encompasses behaviors (e.g. actions), expressions (e.g. linguistic acts), and inner mental states (e.g. anticipated pleasure). By exploring the variety of desire's manifestations, Alvarez proposes an integrative approach to desire that reconciles rival accounts of desire (e.g. the hedonic and the motivational conceptions of desire). In addition, investigating further the relation between desires and their manifestations sheds new light on how desires explain action. Desires differ from physical dispositions such as fragility and solubility. A glass is still fragile even if it *never* breaks or manifests its fragility in some way; what is needed is that it *would* do so in some circumstances. Desires are not like this: one cannot desire something without manifesting the disposition in some way or other, i.e. being disposed to act or expect some pleasure, etc., as is attested by the fact that we do not attribute a desire for holidays to a person who never thinks about holidays, never expects pleasure from a holiday, or never considers taking one. It appears that desires are dispositions that cannot exist without at least one of their manifestations taking place. This invites us to think about the way desire explains action in a more holistic fashion than is usually the case.

At this junction we may wonder how the dispositional profile of desire relates to the classical views of desire. For instance, does the fact that desires are dispositions admitting of various manifestations go against the thought that they are essentially evaluations? Is the evaluative nature of desire not one way of unifying their manifold manifestations? We begin to appreciate how complex the relations

between the different conceptions of desires and the various perspectives we may have on them can become.

Another question concerns the intuitive distinction between dispositional or standing desires, on the one hand, and occurrent or episodic ones, (p.11) on the other (see Döring and Eker *this volume*). Some desires, like Romeo's desire that Juliet fares well, are dispositional or standing: they typically last longer than others (Romeo desires this his whole life long); they still exist when they are not conscious (e.g. when Romeo is sleeping); and they admit future manifestations (every time Juliet is suffering, Romeo's desire that she fare well manifests itself). Other desires, like Sam's desire to smoke a cigarette right now, are episodic or occurrent: they are short-lived, typically conscious, and do not admit of reiterated manifestations. How does this distinction connect with the thought that desires are essentially dispositions? Isn't there a tension between the view that desires are dispositions and the distinction between episodic and dispositional desires that is standard in the literature? Are there two senses of dispositionality involved here? This important ontological question will be left open here.

The Deontic Alternative: Desires, Norms, and Reasons

So far we have concentrated our attention on the classical views of desire and have briefly presented more holistic conceptions that build on them. Very recently an alternative perspective on desire has emerged: the appeal to deontic entities such as norms or reasons as opposed to values and motivation.

In his contribution “The ‘Guise of the Ought to Be’: A Deontic View of the Intentionality of Desire,” Lauria criticizes the classical pictures of desire and proposes the deontic view. In this conception, which can be traced back to Meinong (1917), to desire a state of affairs is to represent it *as what ought to be* or *as what should be*. Desiring to see the ocean is representing this state *as what ought to be*. Desires involve a specific *manner* of representing content: a *deontic* mode. Lauria provides three arguments for this picture, which correspond to the dimensions of desire that the classical views cannot accommodate: the arguments of direction of fit, of death of desire, and of explanatory relations. This is not to say that there is no grain of truth in the classical conceptions. Lauria suggests that desires are grounded in evaluations and, in turn, ground motivations. In other words, it makes sense to explain my desire to see the ocean by my positive evaluation of such a landscape. And desiring to see the ocean can explain why I am disposed to do so. This explanatory profile of desire is illuminated by the deontic view as follows. Some states of affairs (say, that people don’t die of cancer) ought to be *because* they are good, and subjects ought to bring them about *because* these states of affairs ought to be. If desires are deontic representations, it is not surprising that they are explained by evaluations and, in turn, explain motivations. For this is the (p.12) mental counterpart of the meta-ethical explanatory relations already mentioned. The deontic view can thus accommodate the intuitions that drive classical views of desire. Yet as far as desire is concerned, these conceptions slightly miss their target.

Lauria’s contribution brings a new perspective to the classical views. One line of criticism raised by other contributors to this volume concerns the “death of desire” principle—one of the dogmas of desire. Lauria assumes that a desire ceases to exist when one represents that its content obtains. And he argues that this is satisfactorily explained by the deontic view, because norms cease to exist when they are satisfied: a state of affairs, say, that it rains, cannot be such that it ought to obtain and is obtaining at the same time. Yet both the *explanandum* and the *explanans* are questionable. Consider that Hillary wants to be the first female president of the United States and

that at some point she becomes president (Oddie's example in this volume). Can she not still desire to be the first female president of the United States despite knowing that she has won the election? Moreover, can she not believe that things are exactly how they should be and rightly so (Massin *this volume*)?

Another question concerns the degree of sophistication that desires end up having in the deontic view. It seems that babies and non-human animals have desires. Do they really represent things as what ought to be? *Prima facie*, this seems a quite complex representation compared to evaluations or motivations. This worry is reminiscent of the objection often raised against doxastic views of desire (see Friedrich, Döring and Eker *this volume*) and examined by some contributor (see Gregory's reply).

Adopting a similar approach in his "Desire, Values and Norms," Massin argues that the formal object of desire is better construed as being deontic than evaluative. In other words, desiring something implies representing it under the guise of the ought-to-be or of the ought-to-do (the "guise of the ought" thesis). Unlike Lauria, Massin appeals to norms in general, not only norms of the ought-to-be type. Moreover, he considers that the "guise of the ought" thesis is necessary but not sufficient to desire. The argument he proposes focuses on the polarity of desire. Aversion is the polar opposite of desire, as hate is the polar opposite of love. Still, the two pairs of opposites differ. The opposition between desire and aversion, argues Massin, is best understood in deontic rather than evaluative terms, and this contrasts with love and hate. A detour in deontic logic reveals why. Logic teaches us that obligation and interdiction are interdefinable: they define each other with the help of negation. Something is forbidden (say, stealing) if, and only if, it is obligatory that this thing does not happen (it is obligatory not (p.13) to steal); something is obligatory (say, stopping at the red traffic light) if, and only if, it is forbidden that this thing does not happen. Goodness and badness, however, aren't interdefinable in the same way. A state's being good is not equivalent to its negation being bad. It might be elegant to wear a hat, but this does not mean that not wearing it is bad: not wearing it might be neutral. Now, Massin argues, desires and aversions are interdefinable, just as obligation and interdiction are. Desiring something is equivalent to being averse to its negation, and being averse to something is to desire it not to happen. Desiring to wear a hat is equivalent to being averse to not wearing it: it is incompatible with being indifferent to not wearing it. In contrast, liking something is not equivalent to disliking its negation: liking

cheesecake is compatible with indifference toward not eating cheesecake. Therefore, desire is to aversion what obligation is to interdiction, and love is to hate what goodness is to badness. The “guise of the ought” thesis thus fares better than the “guise of the good.”

Massin’s approach sheds light on the polar opposition characteristic of desire by appealing to polarity in meta-ethics, two issues that are rarely discussed. It can be put in perspective with the help of two questions.

The first concerns the restriction to obligation. Does a desire for something involve representing this thing as being obligatory? The other deontic accounts defended in this volume appeal to deontic entities like what ought to be (Lauria) or reasons (Gregory) without putting an emphasis on obligation. How are we to capture the deontic entity that is relevant for understanding desire?

The second issue concerns the relation between the polarity of desire and the essential features of desire. As observed, one might divorce the two features: that the polar opposition of desire is best understood in deontic terms is *prima facie* neutral with regard to desires being essentially deontic representations. This, however, contrasts with what other of our contributors assume. From the perspective of the evaluative view, it is natural to think that the polar opposite of desire, i.e. aversion, is a negative evaluation precisely because desiring is a positive one (Oddie, Railton *this volume*). What is the relation between polarity and the essence of desire?

In his contribution “Might Desires Be Beliefs about Normative Reasons for Action?,” Gregory defends another type of deontic view: the desire-as-belief view. He argues that desires are beliefs about reasons to act. Desiring to drink coffee is to believe that one has a normative, defeasible reason to do so. This claim differs importantly from all others, since desire is understood as a kind of *belief* rather than an appearance (Oddie *this volume*) or a non-cognitive attitude (e.g., Friedrich, Döring and Eker, Lauria (p.14) *this volume*). As mentioned earlier, there are some difficulties in accounting for desire in terms of beliefs. Gregory’s contribution goes a long way toward rebutting a number of objections. He considers worries concerning desires’ direction of fit, appetites, and objections about the sufficiency and necessity of the view. Let us mention two examples that tightly connect with other key issues in the volume. We already mentioned that desires differ from beliefs in terms of direction of fit. How, then, could a desire be a belief? Gregory argues that desires have both

directions of fit and that the same is true of beliefs about practical reasons. More importantly, it is common to think that desires cannot be assimilated to beliefs on the grounds that non-human animals have desires but lack beliefs (Friedrich, Döring and Eker *this volume*). Against this objection, Gregory considers the possibility that non-human animals have a minimal grasp of reasons to act and thus, in a sense, have normative beliefs. Alternatively, it might be that non-human animals have drives rather than desires. Finally, Gregory argues that his account is superior to the appearance view, i.e. the idea that desires are appearances of the good (Oddie *this volume*) or of reasons (Scanlon 2000). Appearances, he argues, are unlike desires in that they fall outside our rational control.

Gregory does a great job at undermining the main difficulties associated with the desire-as-belief account. The objections examined are reminiscent of the ones that have been raised against the view that desires are evaluative beliefs and that have often been used to dismiss it without being carefully examined. This similitude raises the following question: Should desires be understood in terms of beliefs about *reasons* rather than in terms of beliefs about *values* or other normative entities such as norms? Are we to identify values with reasons, in which case the two proposals would boil down to the same thing? This is where the philosophy of desire meets vexed meta-ethical issues.

From another perspective, one might wonder whether identifying desire with belief is supported by empirical evidence. Lewis famously argued that reducing desire to belief cannot accommodate the regulation of desire and belief predicted by Bayesian models of decision making, which is the main empirical model in economics (Lewis 1988). It is also an open question whether reducing desire to belief is compatible with neuroscientific studies in this area. The next section touches on these questions.

Empirical Perspectives: Desire, the Reward System, and Learning

The nature of desire can also be approached with the help of the empirical evidence on the subject, in particular through the lens of neuroscientific (p.15) findings on the reward system and models of decision making in economics. Given the importance of these perspectives, an exploration of the nature of desire would be incomplete without taking this literature into consideration.

Drawing on previous work, Schroeder's contribution, entitled "Empirical Evidence against a Cognitivist Theory of Desire and Action," is mainly inspired by neuroscientific findings on desire,

motivation, and action. His aim is to assess Scanlon's (2000) view of desire and motivation by confronting it with the neuroscientific evidence. Scanlon claims that motivation stems from judgments about reasons for action and that desires, in the wide sense of the term, are judgments about reasons for actions. Scanlon's proposal shares interesting connections with that of Gregory. More generally, let us call "cognitivism" the view that some judgment or cognition about reasons or values is the source of motivation. Schroeder's question is whether cognitivism is in line with the available empirical evidence. The relevant literature in neurobiology, he argues, suggests a negative answer. Importantly, it appears that the neural structures relevant for motivation are distinct from the ones involved in cognitions like perception, memory, and belief. Cognitivism is thus in serious tension with the empirical evidence. And none of the ways that cognitivism may try to accommodate the empirical evidence, Schroeder argues, is likely to succeed. These attempts to reconcile cognitivism with the empirical findings might explain alienated actions, like Tourette syndrome, or habitual actions. Yet they cannot be the whole story about motivation and action. Schroeder then warns against philosophical analysis that lacks proper empirical guidance.

In a similar spirit, in "Learning as an Inherent Dynamic of Belief and Desire," Railton builds on neuropsychological findings about desire and affect as well as on models of human behavior to be found in economics. As observed, it is common in philosophy and economics to think of belief and desire as the main determinants of human behavior. This Humean picture is partly motivated by the directions of fit of belief and desire. But is it compatible with learning in the realm of desire, i.e. the thought that we can improve our desires as we can improve our beliefs and cognitions? Learning comes with tracking facts. The direction of fit metaphor suggests that learning is the purpose of belief only, since beliefs aim to represent the world, unlike desires. Against this skepticism, Railton offers a model of learning for desire that is inspired by the way beliefs are regulated and, ironically, exploits Hume's account of belief as a feeling. In a nutshell, the thought is that learning in belief is made possible by the expectations and feelings of confidence that come with believing. Subjects learn what (p.16) to believe by confronting their expectations and feelings of confidence with the facts that are presented to them. Similarly, desires are regulated by means of comparisons between the positive anticipation they are associated with (the "liking" aspect of desire) and the actual satisfaction of the desire. When desiring something, unlike when experiencing an urge, one is not merely disposed to act

in a certain way: one sees the thing in a positive light. Studies on the reward system, at least for non-pathological cases, reveal that desires involve positive anticipation of reward. Now, this provides room for learning in desire as the positive anticipation can be compared with one's actual experience of desire satisfaction. With the help of feedback afforded by experience, one will learn what to desire, as one does for belief, by reducing discrepancy and by testing one's expectations and positive evaluations in the arena of life.

These findings and the philosophical considerations they elicit provide important insights for understanding desire. They raise ontological and metaphysical issues that are particularly relevant for the theories of desire explored in this volume.

For example, we may wonder whether Railton's proposal implies that desires are motivational states grounded in evaluation, in which case the proposal would be a variant of the motivational conception. Alternatively, we may think that the picture favors a compound view, in which desire is a whole made of evaluation and motivation or, more simply, that desires are multitrack dispositions, as one contribution in this volume suggests. This touches on the important ontological question of how types of mental states should be individuated.

Similarly, one question that is relevant to Schroeder's essay concerns the commonsense interpretation of the idea that desires are representations of rewards. Does it favor the evaluative view of desire or the motivational conception? Does it provide support for an alternative account of desire? In previous work (Schroeder 2004) and in his present contribution, Schroeder argues that the literature on the reward system does not favor the hedonic, evaluative, or motivational pictures of desire. How, then, are we to translate these findings into folk psychological terms?

II. Desiderative Puzzles

As outlined earlier, a better understanding of the nature of desire has wide-ranging significance. In the second part of this volume, three puzzles pertaining to practical rationality are addressed and approached from the perspective of the nature of desire. They concern, respectively, the (p.17) philosophy of mind, ethics, and epistemology. These issues are analogous to hotly debated questions on theoretical rationality. Yet the practical side of the inquiry is often left untouched. The first topic examined is desire inconsistency. Some desires are inconsistent. Is this to be understood along the same lines as inconsistency between beliefs? Does it teach us something about desire? The second issue is the direct practical analogue of

theoretical reasoning. Desires, it is commonly thought, figure into the process of deliberating about what to do. They are commonly viewed as the first premise of practical reasoning. How are we to understand this feature? What should desires be to play such a role? The last puzzle concerns self-knowledge. Self-knowledge has been widely discussed in the case of belief. How are we to understand self-knowledge of one's desires? What does it reveal about the nature of desire? The last contributions aim to fill these lacunas in the philosophical literature. Let us briefly summarize how.

Juliet desires to be faithful to her partner while also desiring to have an affair. Something is wrong with this combination. Why is it so? This is the main question addressed by Wall's contribution, "Desiderative Inconsistency, Moore's Paradox, and Norms of Desire." More specifically, Wall discusses Marino's contention that there is nothing especially or necessarily problematic with desiderative inconsistency (e.g. Marino 2009). What goes wrong pertains to the subject's well-being—one of her desires is not satisfied—and thus has no special connection to desire inconsistency. Moreover, desiderative inconsistency is not necessarily bad, since some desires are better not satisfied. By contrast, Wall argues that there is something especially and necessarily wrong in having inconsistent desires: the subject violates a constitutive norm for desire. It is common to think that beliefs are constituted by the norm of believing the truth. Wall extends this approach to the case of desire so as to shed light on desiderative inconsistency. To do so he makes use of Moore's Paradox, the well-known puzzle of belief. Asserting "*p* and I do not believe that *p*" or believing *that p and I do not believe that p* is an odd thing to say or to believe (Moore's Paradox). This can be explained by the violation of the norm of belief: one should believe the truth. *Mutatis mutandis*, this norm explains what is wrong with inconsistent beliefs. If a similar paradox for desire can be found, it will reveal the existence of a constitutive norm for desire. Elaborating on previous work (Wall 2012), Wall proposes that the desire *that p and I do not desire that p* is such a case. The oddness of this desire suggests that desires are constituted by the norm of avoiding frustration. Having inconsistent desires violates this norm and is thus (p.18) necessarily wrong irrespective of the subject's well-being or other considerations. This is analogous to the case of belief.

Wall's use of constitutive norms in approaching the issue of the nature of desire is promising. Yet proponents of the evaluative conception of desire have argued that desires are constituted by the norm of the good and have thus proposed cases of Moore's Paradox

along evaluative lines, for instance, “I desire that p and p does not seem good to me” (Stampe 1987; see Oddie 2005 for another proposal). How does Wall’s candidates for Moore’s Paradox and norms of desire connect with the ones inspired by the conceptions of desire examined in this volume? Is the norm of avoiding frustration compatible with them, or is it to be preferred over them? This is where the normative approach of the mental that appeals to constitutive norms meets the approach of the mind adopted so far in this volume, which focuses on the intentionality or functional role of desire understood in descriptive terms.

Desire seems to play an important role in practical deliberation. According to the traditional understanding, desires appear as the first premise of the reasoning. Discussions on the nature of deliberation are often focused on the result of the deliberative process. In “Deliberation and Desire,” Schueler’s pioneering approach aims to question the role of desire in such a process and, by doing so, to shed light on the nature of desire. We do not deliberate about everything we desire. For instance, I do not deliberate about my whim of seeing my neighbor’s front lawn filled with wildflowers even if I favor this state of affairs. Consequently, it would appear that the ‘favoring’ view does not accommodate the role of desire in practical deliberation. That is why Schueler argues that desires can play this role only if they are conceived as being representations of aims or purposes. But do desires *qua* representations of aims actually figure in the first premise of practical deliberation, as the traditional picture has it? Since practical deliberation is a kind of reasoning, the first premise must be understood as being a *belief* about one’s desire. Now, this belief can be false: Othello can believe that he desires something, when in fact he does not. It thus appears that one can deliberate from a desire that one does not have, and so, contrary to received wisdom, desires do not play a significant role in practical reasoning. This being said, subjects who intentionally did something resulting from a process of deliberation *eo ipso* wanted to do so. For intentionally bringing about something entails having this thing as an aim, i.e. desiring it. This is puzzling. On the one hand, it appears that deliberation doesn’t involve actual desire; on the other hand, desire is necessarily involved in deliberation when the latter results in intentional (p.19) action. How are we to disentangle this puzzle? Schueler proposes distinguishing between two kinds of practical reasoning. We sometimes reason from our beliefs about what we desire and determine the action that suits their satisfaction. In this case, desire can be absent from the process, since the belief about desire does not imply the presence of the desire. But we sometimes deliberate differently, starting with our

intentions. As soon as I have formed the intention to go for coffee, I might deliberate about the best means of doing so and settle on the appropriate actions. In this case, the starting point is the intention itself—not a belief. This is what happens when we act out of deliberation. The goal of an intention is something we want, so it appears that this type of deliberation requires a desire. Desires, however, do not figure into the content of this sort of deliberation: they are constituted by the actions based on deliberation. The puzzle is thus dissolved.

At least two issues that connect with other pieces in this volume are worth noting. Schueler argues that we do not deliberate from our desires when the latter are understood as states of favoring. Is it to say that desires cannot be the starting point of deliberation insofar as they are understood as evaluations? Turning to the case of Radioman, one might be inclined to think that the evaluative nature of desires is what provides them with the power to explain action. Is it not the case, then, that the evaluative dimension of desires is also the key for understanding their contribution to deliberation?

The second issue concerns the extent to which intentions are immune to the type of error desires are liable to. Can't we be wrong in our beliefs that we have some intentions (even when we act on them), in the same way that we can falsely believe that we desire something? This raises the issue of self-knowledge that is the focus of the final contribution.

In "Introspection and the Nature of Desire," Ashwell explores desire from the viewpoint of self-knowledge. We can know other people's desires by observing their behavior. In contrast, we have direct access to our own desires: we do not need to observe them; we can introspect them. While the question of how we know our own beliefs is familiar, its desiderative counterpart is more rarely investigated. The originality of Ashwell's contribution lies in the way her account of desire introspection is informed by various views of desire. She argues that desires are not evaluations but are better viewed as motivations. Indeed, we commonly attribute to ourselves evaluative beliefs without attributing corresponding desires. For instance, in the case of weakness of will, I can introspect my belief that going to the gym would be a good thing while being aware that (p.20) I do not desire to go to the gym. If that is the case, desires cannot be evaluative beliefs, as the self-attribution of the latter can be rightly separated from that of the former. The appearance view of desire—that desires are seemings of value—fares better in this respect, however. In being weak-willed, going to the gym might not appear

good to me, hence I neither desire to go nor do I introspect this desire. This being said, the appearance view does not provide the right phenomenological picture of desire. While experiencing my desire to have another glass of wine, I do not only experience this state of affairs as good; I am also aware that I am drawn to act in a certain way. These feelings of motivation are an integral part of desire and the basis on which we introspect them. The weak-willed person does not introspect any feelings of motivation and hence does not attribute to herself a desire. Consequently, one condition for a reliable introspective access to our desires is that desires be motivational rather than evaluative states.

Comparing Ashwell's picture to other contributions in the volume brings them into sharper focus. Her argument relies on the assumption that weakness of will comes with absence of desire. But is it so? Gregory argues that weakness of will involves a failure of motivation rather than a failure of desire: one lacks the motivation to realize a desire that one has. How best to capture the nature of weakness of will, then?

This in turn touches on the question of whether feelings of motivation are necessary features of desire and thus of desire introspection. Famously Strawson has argued that we can conceive of creatures having desires without any motivation: Weather Watchers desire sunshine without being motivated to act in any way (Strawson 2009). Leaving this thought experiment to one side, some contributors to this volume discuss actual cases of desiring subjects who are not motivated to act. Being weak-willed, in one description, is such a case (Gregory *this volume*); being severely depressed is another (Lauria *this volume*). These conditions might impair one's motivational system and feelings without affecting one's desire and presumably one's knowledge of them. This is one way of making the question of whether motivation is the essence of desire particularly salient—which is this volume's starting point.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that this collection creates the ground for a more systematic debate on the nature of desire. It is high time that contemporary philosophers paid more attention to desire and put into question the dogmas associated with it. In exploring various conceptions of desire from different perspectives, and in examining how these conceptions can illuminate many issues in several domains, we hope that this volume (p.21) makes a first step toward reinstalling desire at the heart of our philosophical preoccupations.

Notes

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Notes:

(1.) See Stampe 1987; Oddie 2005; Tenenbaum 2007; Friedrich 2012.

(2.) The thought behind the intuition is already present in Hume 2000, but the metaphor has been introduced into the philosophy of mind by Anscombe 1963 and Searle 1983.

(3.) See, for instance, Plato 1953b; Aristotle 1962; Aquinas 1920–1942; Kant 1997; Oddie 2005; Raz 2008; Tenenbaum 2013.

(4.) See Plato 1953a, Aquinas 1920–1942; Descartes 1989; Locke 1975; Hobbes 1994; Sartre 1984; Kenny 1963; Dretske 1988.



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