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Defending the motivational theory of desire

(Defendiendo la teoría motivacional del deseo)

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I offer a defense of the motivational theory of desire. According to the motivational view, a desire is basically a disposition to bring about the desire's content. First, I argue that two rival views on the nature of desire, the evaluative theory and the deontic theory, fall prey to the problem of the death of desire and that, when one tries to develop a plausible version of these theories which is able to overcome this problem, one ends up with a view that is not relevantly different from the evaluative view. Second, I respond to some objections to the claim that motivations are sufficient for desire, namely, the Radioman objection and the objection that some motivational states like intentions and habits are not desires.

KEYWORDS: desires; motivational theory; evaluative theory; deontic theory; death of desire; intentions; habits.

RESUMEN: *En este artículo defiendo la teoría motivacional del deseo. De acuerdo con esta teoría, un deseo consiste básicamente en una disposición a causar el contenido del deseo. En primer lugar, argumento que dos teorías rivales de la teoría motivacional, la teoría evaluativa y la teoría deóntica del deseo, sucumben ante el problema de la muerte del deseo y que, cuando tratamos de desarrollar alguna versión plausible de estas teorías capaz de soslayar este problema, acabamos obteniendo algo que no difiere sustancialmente de lo que dice la teoría evaluativa. En segundo lugar, respondo a ciertas objeciones a la tesis de que las motivaciones son suficientes para los deseos, en particular, respondo a la objeción basada en el caso Radioman y a la objeción que dice que otros estados motivacionales, como las intenciones y los hábitos, no son deseos.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: deseos; teoría motivacional; teoría deóntica; muerte del deseo; intenciones; hábitos.

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Introduction

In philosophical circles, the default position on the nature of desire has been that desires are motivations, with motivations being roughly understood as dispositions to bring about the content of desire. In recent years, however, a new interest in desires seems to be emerging and in the most recent literature this default position has been seriously challenged in two ways. First, alternative views on the nature of desire, based on ideas which were first introduced a long time ago, are witnessing new developments. New defenders of these views present them as better ways of understanding the nature of desire than the motivational view. Second, a battery of objections to the motivational view have been presented, which would arguably show the inadequacy of understanding desires as motivations.

So in sum this new interest in the nature of desire has brought along a serious attack on the view that desires are motivations. The aim of this paper is to defend this default view from this attack. My strategy will accordingly be twofold. I will first object to two rival views on the nature of desire, the evaluative view and the deontic view. I will argue that both of them are fraught with the same general problem and that when one tries to develop a plausible version of any of these alternative views, a version free from this problem, one ends up, in both cases, with something that amounts to the motivational view. Thus a first conclusion of this paper will be that the evaluative and the deontic view of desire, when plausibly developed, are not genuine alternatives to the view that desires are motivations. Second, I will respond to some of the most forceful objections to the motivational view, namely, those which try to show that motivations are not sufficient for desires.

Although the main strategy of this paper is defensive—to argue against rival views of the motivational theory and to respond to some objections—I think that the following discussion will teach us important things about the nature of desire and about how to better understand the motivational view. Responding to objections will lead us to introduce some developments and refinements of the standard motivational view and to better reflect on what the theory reveals about the nature of desire, while discussion of the rival views will actually lead to an important reinforcement of the merits of the motivational theory.

Three theories on the nature of desire

Let us first begin by offering a brief description of the theories on the nature of desire at stake. I will neither try to be exhaustive nor to offer a very detailed analysis here. I will just characterize them and mention what we need to know in order to follow the discussion.[1]

The core idea of the motivational view, the view I wish to defend, is that to desire something is being disposed to bring it about (Stalnaker, 1984; Smith, 1994; Dretske, 1988; Millikan 2005). According to this view, what is essential and definitional of desires is their motivational role. Desires make us move. They motivate us into bringing about their satisfaction. These motivations are usually understood as dispositions. Thus, according to this view, desires are dispositional states which tend towards their own accomplishment or satisfaction. Here is a first formulation encapsulating this idea:

(M) To desire X is to be disposed to bring about X

[1] For an interesting and detailed recent discussion of these three views see (Lauria and Deonna, 2017).

Although this formulation is good enough as a starting point it does not convey all the complexity of desires understood as motivations. For instance, in order to have a chance to succeed in bringing about its satisfaction, a desire needs to causally interact with other mental states. Consider in this regard Robert Stalnaker's definition of desires:

> to desire that P is to be disposed to act in ways that would tend to bring it about that P in a world in which one's beliefs, whatever they are, were true. (Stalnaker,1984, p. 15)

This definition makes it clear that motivations are better understood as functional states, that is to say, as states characterized by a causal role. Later on, when we consider the objections to the motivational view, we will need to introduce further refinements on (M).

For the time being, however, it is worthy to mention that the reference to beliefs in Stalnaker's definition seems too specific. It seems reasonable to hold that it is part of the nature of desire, understood as a motivational state, to causally interact with the subject's doxastic states, in order to make it happen that the world matches its content. To bring about X, the content of the desire, the subject needs to rely on her doxastic states informing her about how the world is supposed to be like. But such doxastic states need not be beliefs; perceptual experiences or memories will do in many cases.

All these considerations lead then to the following refinement of the motivational view:

> (M') For an agent A to desire X is for A to be disposed to act in ways that would tend to bring about X when A's relevant doxastic states are true or veridical.

By 'relevant doxastic states' is meant in (M') those which concern where to find, or how to obtain, X. The idea here is simply that a desire for X would tend to produce X even when one has false or unveridical doxastic states unrelated to X provided that those which do concern X are correct. Also, this formulation is neutral on the issue of whether non-human animals can harbor desires. There is in effect no reason why a non-human animal like a dog cannot instantiate mental states satisfying (M').

One main rationale for the motivational view is that it offers an outright explanation of the motivational role of desires. Actually, the core of the view is that desires are motivations. This accords well also with the common sense view of the role of desires in the explanation of action, as they would indeed set goals and motivate us into fulfilling them according to the motivational view.

Furthermore, as motivations are construed as dispositions in (M'), this allows the theory to resort to well-known properties of dispositions to explain important features of desires. This is so because, as it is commonly accepted, dispositions involve triggering circumstances and are hedged by ceteris paribus clauses. So it follows that desires, understood as dispositions, will bring about its own satisfaction, its manifestation, only when appropriate triggering circumstances occur (or, to be more precise, only when the subject perceives, believes or remembers that such circumstances do occur) and when conditions are normal or ceteris paribus. Hence, it makes perfect sense in this view to attribute a desire for X to someone when being asleep and therefore doing nothing about it. And the attribution will again be correct, according to (M'), in cases where the desire for X does not seem to motivate us into actively seeking X when, for instance, such desire is overridden by a stronger desire. Also, one may sometimes desire things one cannot bring about, as when one desires a drop in the temperature. This makes sense on the motivational account provided that the subject would in fact try to effect a drop in temperature were she to acquire the belief that she can somehow manage to do so.

Let us now move on to the next theory of desire: the evaluative theory. The origins of this view are commonly traced back to the writings of Aristotle. The core idea here is that desiring X involves regarding X as something good (Anscombe, 1976; Stampe, 1987; Quinn, 1993; Friedrich, 2017; Oddie, 2005, 2017). Again, if one thinks it makes sense to attribute desires to non-human animals, desires for X cannot simply be considered beliefs that X is good. Here is a formulation that tries to capture the core idea of this view and also takes into account this last point:

(E) For an agent A to desire X is for X to appear good to A.

One should immediately be warned that the good alluded to in (E) is not intended to be the morally good. One may of course hold immoral, or for that matter, amoral desires, as when one wants, say, to play with one's hair. The idea is rather that to desire X consists in seeing X under a favorable light.

One main rationale for this view is that it is consistent with the common idea (at least quite common among philosophers) that a desire gives us a reason for action. If I see X under a favorable light, if it appears to me as good, then this gives me a prima facie reason to pursue X. Thus, on the evaluative view motivational states are not desires but rather states caused by desires. It is because I desire X, because X appears to me as good, that I feel motivated for X, that is to say, that I will be disposed to bring it about.

Our third and last contender is a more recent view which is however inspired by ideas from the nineteenth century Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong (1972). The central idea here is that desires are appearances of what ought to be rather than appearances of the good (Lauria, 2017; Massin, 2017). Desiring something involves, according to this deontic view, viewing it as what ought to be. It would then be in the nature of desire that it presents its object as imbued of some necessity. For reasons similar to those already discussed in relation to the two preceding views, it would be inappropriate to characterize the deontic theory with the claim that desiring X is believing that X ought to be. A more accurate formulation would then be the following:

(D) For an agent A to desire X is for it to appear to A that X ought to be the case.

Defenders of this view argue that the logic of desires coincides with the logic of norms. For instance, just as the world should conform to the norm rather than the norm to the world, it is also true that the world should conform to the desire's content rather than the desire's content to the world. Another argument is that the deontic view would, according to their defenders, nicely accommodate some of the intuitions behind the two other views. Thus, it is claimed that it can also explain why desires are regarded as providing reasons for action. If one sees X as what ought to be, then it is quite rational to pursue X. But defenders of the deontic view think it is actually superior to the evaluative view since, they claim, it is quite possible that one regards X as good and still does not feel motivated to pursue X unless one also regards X as what ought to be. At the same time, they also claim that appearances of the good give actually a reason to regard the thing so appraised as what ought to be. Thus, proponents of (D) regard their view as correct because it predicts that desires originate in appearances of the good and give rise to motivational states, this sort of middle role being, according to them, what actually captures the nature of desire.[2]

An objection to both the evaluative and the deontic view

In this section I will raise an objection against both (E) and (D). This objection is partly based on worries which have actually been raised by other authors and which in fact have been acknowledged by some proponents of these two views. However, here I will go a step further and argue that solving these worries, and adequately responding to my objection, compels these proponents to a version of their views which in fact amounts to the motivational theory, (M').

Let us look at this in some detail. Desires are said to have a world-to-mind direction of fit. It is the world which should match the content of the desire and not the other way around. My desire to speak to my boss about a wage increase is perfectly OK when it turns out I haven't yet spoken to her about this. Yet, beliefs, intellectual seemings or perception-like states are all doxastic states with a mind-to-world direction of fit. They should conform or adjust their content to the world and not the other way around. This problem affects both (E) and (D). Consider, for instance, (E). If I believe, or it appears to me, that it is good I speak to my boss but it is actually not good, then my doxastic state is wrong and I should change it accordingly.

However, I will not press on this objection against both (E) and (D), for two reasons. First, the notion of direction fit has come under severe attack recently and for some philosophers it is controversial (Milliken, 2008; Frost, 2014). Second, some authors defend that desires have both directions of fit at the same time (see, for instance, Gregory, 2017). Now addressing all these worries would take us too far afield.

Yet, there is a closely connected consideration about desires which does not rely on the notion of direction of fit and which causes deep trouble to the evaluative view or the deontic view. My objection will be based on this consideration. The fact is that, at least in most and standard cases of desire, knowing or believing that the content of the desire obtains leads to its extinction (the so-called 'death of desire principle').[3] To continue with my example: if I know, or believe, I have already talked to my boss about this issue of a wage increase I will stop from desiring so. Actually, as many authors writing about desires have

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[2] Alex Gregory defends a version of the deontic view according to which for an agent A to desire to X is for A to believe that she has a normative reason to X, where a normative reason is to be understood as "something that counts in favor of X-ing" (Gregory, 2017, p. 202). This view is peculiar in two respects, namely, it equates desires with certain types of beliefs and takes desires to act as basic or paradigmatic. Both features involve, I think, some specific problems that I cannot properly discuss here. In any event, for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to say that this version seems equally vulnerable to the objection raised against both the deontic and the evaluative views related to the death of desire principle (see next section).

[3] This is a principle defended by many classical philosophers, including Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke or Hobbes. Most contemporary philosophers working on desires accept it too (see, for instance, Oddie, 2005; Döring & Ekker, 2017; Lauria, 2017; Massin, 2017).

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rightly pointed out, in standard cases our desires concern things or states of affairs which do not obtain or are such that we do not believe that they obtain (Deonna & Teroni, 2012; Döring & Ekker, 2017). Now the problem is that there is no good reason for thinking that my believing that X obtains will lead to X no longer appearing to me as good. Why should this indeed be so? Why should appearances of the good cease when I realize that the thing that appears so actually occurs? Why shouldn't I continue to regard X as good once I know X holds? If I regarded it as good talking to my boss about my wage increase I will rather still regard it as good after having talked to her. In any event, it seems it makes perfect sense that I regard it as good things or states of affairs that I know obtain (this same problem for evaluativism is raised in Lauria, 2017 and Döring & Ekker, 2017).

Similar considerations apply to the deontic theory of desire. There is no good reason why my appearances about what ought to be should cease when I learn that these things are actually taking place. Nor is there any reason why it should not appear to me as what ought to be something which I know it obtains.

A possible objection against this argument is that it assumes that all desires are subject to the death of desire principle. But this assumption seems doubtful. Consider standing desires such as the desire to live a long and healthy life. Standing desires are typically highly stable in the lifetime of an agent, and this encourages the thought that they tend to persist even after the agent learns that they are satisfied.[4] A first response to this objection is that the present argument does not require that we accept that all desires conform to the death of desire principle, but only that we accept the somewhat weaker claim that conforming to this principle is a paradigmatic feature of most of them (Lauria, 2017). And the fact is that (E) and (D) fail to explain this weaker claim too. On the evaluative or deontic view of desires there is no way to see why it should be true that desires paradigmatically conform to the death of desire principle. This is again because there is no relevant connection between regarding something as good or as what ought to be and regarding it as not being the case. Still, one may feel that this first response is not good enough since standing desires such as wanting to have a long and healthy life appear to be quite common. So in case they do not conform to the death of desire principle, it appears dubious to hold on to the claim that it is paradigmatic of desires that they respond to this principle. I think however that a second response to the objection can be invoked here: standing desires do indeed conform to the death of desire principle. My view about standing desires is that they typically concern states of affairs or situations which take a considerable amount of time to complete. This is why they are standing desires in the first place.[5] My desire of having a long and healthy life is not satisfied simply because up to now my life has been indeed healthy and not brief. If we think about it, we should say not that this standing desire of mine has been satisfied but at most that it is being

[4] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for THEORIA for raising this concern.

[5] Some authors seem to conceive standing desires as dispositional states that last a long time and contrast them to occurrent desires, which would only last for a short period of time and would consist in a phenomenally conscious state (see for instance Döring and Ekker, 2017; Butlin, 2017; Shaw, 2020). I think this is wrong. On the motivational view I wish to defend, all desires are dispositions, regardless of the fact that many of them typically will tend to produce the sort of phenomenally conscious events these authors seem to have in mind. It is true that standing desires tend to last a long time, but this is not due to their dispositional nature, but to the fact that they concern a content which it takes time to satisfy completely, as I explain in the main text.

satisfied. So I will think that the satisfaction of this desire is in progress but not indeed completed. Hence there is no infringement here of the death of desire principle.[6]

Federico Lauria, a defender of the deontic view, has argued that (D) does not fall prey to the death of desire problem because norms cease when they are met. Here Lauria draws on the analogy between norms and desires which, as explained above, drives the deontic view of desire. Now, according to Lauria:

> norms are incompatible with the obtaining of their content. The norm is in place as long as its content does not obtain. As soon as its content is realized, it disappears. Norms do not survive their satisfaction. (Lauria, 2017, p. 157)

For instance, (this is Lauria's own example), if Sam ought to answer a certain question, then Sam's obligation ceases as soon as he has already answered (Lauria, 2017).

But I think that this argument can be rebutted. Some norms may perhaps be such that they no longer make sense once they are met, as in the clever example posed by Lauria, yet it is not in the spirit of norms, in general, to cease when they are met. Nor is it the case that, generally speaking, norms do not survive their satisfaction. If one ought not to smoke in class, the norm still makes sense when nobody in class is actually smoking. In fact, one can say that as regards the issue of whether a norm should stand or not, it is completely irrelevant whether it has never been met or it has been met once or many times.[7] Only special

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[6] What about desires for types of experiences or outcomes which can be satisfied repeatedly, for instance eating chocolate? One may perhaps object to my argument that a subject's desire for chocolate is a standing desire which causes occurrent desires to eat chocolate on several different occasions and that each time chocolate is eaten the corresponding occurrent desire is extinguished but the standing desire for chocolate remains. If this is correct, then such standing desires as a desire for chocolate are not subject to the death of desire principle. I do not think, however, that this train of thought is correct. First, as mentioned in the previous footnote, on the motivational view all desires are dispositions and therefore there are no occurrent desires. Second, I do not think that in the example envisioned the subject has a standing desire for chocolate, but rather that she has a preference or liking for chocolate. This person loves chocolate and this, I understand, is a disposition or tendency to form desires of eating chocolate (desires which in their turn are also dispositions, a disposition to get some chocolate eaten). Her liking will thus make her prone to repeatedly form desires of eating chocolate, but all such desires will be (numerically) different. The reason why loving chocolate is not a desire is that it is not intrinsically motivating. Once a person loving chocolate gets her occasional desire to eat chocolate satisfied such a desire vanishes and as a result this person is not motivated into continuing eating chocolate in spite of the fact that she still loves chocolate. So such liking state does not motivate her into going on eating chocolate once the desire to eat chocolate caused by it is satisfied. Since its motivational role is essential to a desire such states as a liking for chocolate, we should conclude, are dispositions to form desires but as such they are not desires themselves.

[7] Lauria admits that there are exceptional cases of norms that do survive their satisfaction, like the norm to treat others with respect, but he argues that the corresponding desire is also not subject to the death of desire principle. This symmetry would show, according to him, that the analogy between desires and norms, on which the deontic view would be based, is sound. I offer two lines of reply here. First, as explained in the main text, I do not think that norms which survive their satisfaction are exceptional in any ordinary sense of the word. To repeat, I think it is not in the spirit of norms, in general, to cease when they are met. Second, the desire to treat others with respect is a standing desire and, as defended above, it indeed conforms to the death of desire principle.

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cases of norms concerning specific and unrepeatable actions, like answering a certain question, may escape this rule. And, on second thoughts, not even them. If it's a norm to answer a certain question the norm stands no matter how many times the question has been answered.[8]

On his part, Graham Oddie, a defender of the evaluative theory of desire, has also tried to argue that (E) is compatible with the fact that the desire ceases when the subject thinks that its content is the case. Oddie's strategy is, first, to declare that desires are a type of preferences (where preferences are defined in terms of appearances of the good) and, second, to define a class of desires as preferences such that the subject is uncertain about whether the content of the preference is or will be satisfied (Oddie, 2017). More specifically, Oddie distinguishes between "thin" desires and "prospective" desires. To thinly desire X is simply to prefer S to not-S, where preferring S to not-S is, according to Oddie, a case of S's appearing better than not-S. Oddie admits that thin desires may survive the agent's knowledge that they are satisfied, contrary to the death of desire principle. He claims, however, that the death of desire principle only applies to what he calls prospective desires, where to prospectively desire X is to thinly desire X while being more or less uncertain about whether X is or will be the case. Oddie also adds that when we speak of desires we often refer to prospective desires and that only prospective desires can give rise to actions (Oddie, 2017, pp. 48-9).

Oddies's suggestion, however, has at least three problems. First, as I have been arguing, all desires seem subject to the death of desire principle, not just a species of them as Oddie would have it. Second, on Oddie's view that a prospective desire ceases when the subject thinks it is satisfied holds by a sort of stipulation, by the way in which prospective desires are defined. But this seems wrong, since one would say that this principle of the death of desire should follow from the nature of desire and not by definition as in this case. Third, the idea that desires are preferences is highly dubious. If I'm forced to make a choice between two things I dislike, I may actually have a preference for one of them over the other without actually desiring it.

It is worth mentioning, by contrast, that the motivational theory is not fraught with the death of desire problem, since it is to be expected that I will not be disposed to bring about X if I believe or know that X is actually the case.

Recently, some defenders both of the evaluative theory and the deontic theory of desire have tried to circumvent some problems for their views by making the same move: they claim that the goodness or the oughtness of the thing desired is not part of the content of

[8] What if we take desires to be appearances of what ought to be brought about instead of appearances of what ought to be? Arguably, this move avoids any problem with the death of desire principle, since it would seem that if an agent thinks that X is already the case, then it does not make sense it appears to such an agent that X ought to be brought about. So, perhaps the defender of the deontic view should shift to this version of her general deontic view that desiring imbues what is desired with some kind of necessity (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for THEORIA for raising this possibility). The problem with this proposed version of the deontic view is that it betrays the main rationale of the view as the one that explains the intuitions driving the two rival views (E) and (M'). Desires are supposed to be causal intermediaries, on the deontic view, between evaluations and motivations. Defenders of the deontic view explain this as appearances of the good causing appearances of what ought to be (namely, desires), and appearances of what ought to be as causing appearances of what ought to be brought about (namely, motivations) (see Lauria & Deonna, 2017, p. 11).

the desire. So it is not the case that a desire for X represents X as good, or represents X as what ought to be. The idea is rather that a desire represents X under the goodness mode or the oughtness mode (Friedrich, 2017; Lauria, 2017; Massin 2017).

The problems that this move wants to deal with concern the direction of fit of desire (which I briefly mentioned above) and problems about whether appearances of the good or what ought to be are sufficient for desiring X. They need not concern us here. What is of course relevant for our discussion is whether this move is helpful when it comes to solving the problems of the evaluative or the deontic view with the death of desire principle. The answer is that this entirely depends on how the whole idea of a content "under the goodness, or the oughtness, mode" is to be understood. The idea seems to be that in a mental state we can discern its content and its attitude, just as when in the early days of contemporary analytic philosophy Russell introduced the notion of propositional attitude (Russell, 1921). A propositional attitude is supposed to be a mental state consisting in a psychological attitude to a proposition. And, as it happens, two different propositional attitudes may involve two different attitudes to exactly the same proposition, as when one believes that one's salary will be raised or when one hopes that one's salary will be raised.

It is at precisely this point that I can mount my argument that a plausible version of both (E) and (D) will actually amount to the motivational theory (M'). Here is how it goes. A common way of understanding this idea of an attitude to a proposition is the functionalist way, that is to say, the difference between believing that P and hoping that P would be in terms of the different defining causal roles of these two types of mental states. A long time ago, functionalists used the metaphor of "the box" to express this idea and they said the difference was in terms of putting the proposition that P into the belief box or into the hope box. Now if proponents of (E) and (D) wish to elucidate their notion of a mental attitude in terms of a causal role they will run into trouble and the reason is this. As we have seen, motivational states are also functional states defined by a causal role. According to (M'), desiring X is a mental state with a certain defining causal role involving X and the same holds for proponents of (E) and (D) under the present version of these theories. According to (E), for example (the same would apply to the deontic theory), desiring X is a mental state representing X under the goodness mode, or attitude, but this, we are now assuming, means that it is a mental state involving X with a certain defining causal role. So unless the defining causal role is distinctly different from the one postulated by the motivational theory, then under this version of both (E) and (D) the evaluative and the deontic view would not be relevantly different from the motivational view. Yet it is hard to see how the causal role could be distinctly different if the defender of either (E) or (D) wants to take into account the characteristic conative aspect of desire, namely, that desiring things somehow involves that the world should conform to these things.[9] The reason for this is that accounting for this conative aspect of desire in terms of its causal role would seem to require, inevitably, that such a causal role involves the causal role of motivational states, in short, precisely the causal role attributed to desires by the motivational theory. Now, for those having some qualms about understanding the conative aspect of a mental state in terms of

[9] Some authors have defended that desires involve a doxastic aspect as well (roughly, represent the thing desired as being a certain way, see for instance Gregory, 2017), but my argument only requires that we accept that desires have a characteristic conative aspect, something which seems hardly deniable.

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its causal role (Frost, 2014), it is nonetheless hard to deny that a desire's causal role involves motivating the subject to act in order to satisfy the desire. Also such a causal role should take into account the death of desire principle, namely, that a desire for X typically ceases when X is thought to obtain. Taking into account all of this, I submit, will make us end up with a causal role for desires which is the one precisely suggested by the motivational theory of desire. But this being so, then the present version of either (E) or (D) would actually amount to a version of (M') and in fact to nothing relevantly different from the motivational theory of desire.

Before we leave this matter, however, we need to discuss a possible way for the defender of either (E) or (D) to escape my argument. Perhaps, it could be suggested, desires may be conceived as states defined by a causal role involving sensitivity to value in a way that such a causal role turns out to be different from the one that the motivational theory assigns to desires.[10] To see whether this helps defenders of the evaluative or deontic view of desire to forestall my objection we need first to consider how desire's sensitivity to value is construed in causal role terms and whether so construed desires end up having a causal role which is different from the causal role they should have according to the motivational view. One natural way of understanding desires' sensitivity to value is simply to acknowledge that desires are typically caused by the subject seeing some good, or some necessity, in the object desired. Yet the defender of the motivational theory need not deny that most desires are caused by the subject seeing something good or some necessity in the object desired. Again then, we would be simply pointing to a theory of desire that is not relevantly different from the motivational view. An alternative way of understanding desires' sensitivity to value in causal role terms may however appear more helpful. Suppose we conceive of desires as functional states such that their causal role involves being typically caused by considerations of value and typically causing motivations. This is indeed a genuine alternative to the motivational view of desire, since according to it desires are not motivations, nor do they have the causal role of motivations, but they are states defined by a causal role which includes causing motivations. So, on this account, desires will be characterized as causal intermediaries between evaluations and motivations. As I mentioned above, this is precisely how proponents of the deontic view seem to think of desires, with the provisos that on the present account desires are also seen as functional states, states defined by a causal role, and that they may respond to considerations of necessity as well. The trouble with this view is whether we have a reason to hold it which is not ad hoc. A troublesome aspect of this theory is that it is ontologically promiscuous: it postulates two functional states, desires and motivations, the former causing the latter. Yet, in principle, it seems we can explain all that seems important about desires just with evaluations (or considerations of value or necessity) and motivations. Thus we can say that typically seeing something good or some necessity in X would motivate us into achieving X, though this need not be so. And we can also explain that in certain special cases we may be motivated without any antecedent consideration of value (see below the discussion on Radioman's case). So I think the onus is on the proponent of this alternative view to convince us that it is indeed necessary to postulate this intermediate functional state between evaluations and motivations. And of course the reason offered should be independent from the problem of dealing with the death of desire

[10] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for THEORIA for pressing on this issue.

principle, otherwise the defense of such a view would be clearly ad hoc. One crucial step the defender of this view should take is convincing us that there are what one might call inert desires, that is to say, desires such that do not motivate us into achieving their object, even when the conditions are normal (e.g. there is no incompatible overriding desire at work). Federico Lauria has tried to come up with examples of such inert desires, but I find them utterly unconvincing. For instance, he imagines a depressed Romeo who is deprived, on account of his illness, of any disposition to act. Still, he could desire that his beloved Juliet fares well, according to Lauria:

> Romeo has no stronger desire, nor is he lacking the modal beliefs necessary for being disposed to act. He strongly wants that p, has no conflicting desire, and believes that he can act in favor of p, yet fails to be disposed to act. The depression has not only masked the manifestation of the disposition; it has damaged the motivational system. This, I contend, is conceivable. (Lauria, 2017, p. 152)

Is it really conceivable? It is highly doubtful to say the least. I think that the case for inert desires is, at the very least, very weak. If we add to this that the theory appears baroque and ontologically promiscuous and that it would lead us to reject the claim that desires involve a conative aspect (because they typically cause motivations though they need not to, according to the theory), then I think we should conclude that we are on firmer ground by sticking to the original motivational theory of desire. At the very least, the proponent of this alternative account should provide us with a stronger argument for it.

So if the above reasoning is correct, we can conclude that elucidating mental attitude in terms of causal roles is not an option open to the defender of either the evaluative or the deontic view of desire who wants to sharply differentiate her view from the motivational theory. Now, alternatives to identifying a desire's mode with its causal role are scarce in the literature on desires. I know of only two. I will then finish my argument arguing against them.

One alternative is Lauria's view (Lauria, 2016 and 2017). Lauria ends up with a version of the deontic view according to which desiring X is not the same as having a doxastic state (for instance, a belief) to the effect that X ought to be. The difference is that the belief represents that X ought to be while the desire just represents X, only that it is represented under the ought-to-be mode. Lauria then suggests that the ought-to-be mode of desires should be understood as an ought-to-be norm (Lauria distinguishes between ought-to-be norms and ought-to-do norms, although this distinction is irrelevant for our specific concerns here). The trouble with this is that Lauria assumes that norms work like desires, or that the logic of norms is like the logic of desires, as defenders of the deontic view of desires like to put it (Massin, 2017). Thus, Lauria says that "norms do not survive their satisfaction" (Lauria, 2017, p. 157). But, as previously argued, I think this is not in fact the case.

The remaining alternative I know of is offered by Daniel Friedrich. Friedrich has argued that there is a phenomenology distinctive of desire which consists in feeling the need of what is desired. This felt need for X is what Friedrich calls a "desirous experience" of X. His idea is that the relevant attitude of the desire is to be elucidated not in terms of its causal role but in terms of its phenomenology, in terms of such desirous experience. The idea is indeed suggestive and prima facie plausible. When I want something I may indeed feel the need for it. As Friedrich says, I may feel I must have X. This is in fact again the intuitive idea behind the deontic theory, namely, that desiring involves some kind of necessity, the novelty here is that this necessity is not represented but felt by the subject (Friedrich, 2017).

I think however that Friedrich's idea, interesting as it is, will not do as a plausible alternative to the motivational theory. A first consideration against it is that according to representationalism, the view that phenomenology is to be explicated by, or at least is supervenient on, content, Friedrich's phenomenological account will not be a relevant alternative to the problematic views that goodness or oughtness are represented by the desire. But let us put this to one side. Representationalism, after all, may be a wrong view about phenomenology. In any event, however, it is good to notice that Friedrich's strategy will work only if representationalism is false (see Lycan, 2019 for an updated discussion of representationalism).

With regard to the death of desire problem, Friedrich's account looks indeed promising. Perhaps the view here is that I will only feel the need for something I do not think I presently have. Yet there is a further problem in Friedrich's account which is perhaps the more pressing one. Phenomenological states are occurrent states. So embracing Friedrich's idea would make us renounce the idea that desires are dispositions. But as we saw there are good reasons supporting this idea. It seems it makes perfect sense to attribute to me the desire to visit Canada this summer when I'm asleep or at times when I'm not even remotely considering the issue. But in all these cases I'm certainly not feeling the need to visit Canada. Friedrich is aware of this problem and responds that for this reason one cannot simply equate a desire for X with having a desirous experience of X (with feeling the need for X). He then considers the following three alternative characterizations of desire (he says he finds all of them plausible enough and remains neutral about them):

> (i) desiring P entails that the subject from time to time has a desirous experience of P; (ii) desiring P entails being disposed to be in a state of desirous consciousness of P given appropriate triggering conditions; or (iii) desiring P entails that the desire could in principle become an occurrent one and it would then manifest itself in a desirous experience of P. (Friedrich, 2017, p. 68)

So that I may want to visit Canada even when I'm asleep and I'm not having a "desirous experience of P", that is to say, when I'm not feeling the need for P, is correct under any of these three alternatives. But it is easy to see that this will not do for Friedrich's purposes. Once one introduces a distinction between the content and the attitude of a mental state, both are supposed to be essential. One cannot desire P without representing P with the attitude of desire. So, when I'm not feeling the need to visit Canada I don't have the desire to visit Canada if the attitude of desire consists in having the desirous experience. In any event, if it is possible to desire X without feeling the need for X, and feeling the need for X is what captures the goodness or oughtness that according to the (E) or (D) define desire, then it follows that both (E) and (D) are wrong. In fact, a defender of the motivational view of desire could be happy to accept the second or the third characterizations proposed by Friedrich. So we can conclude that Friedrich's attempt does not succeed.[11]

[11] Friedrich claims, strangely enough, that a desirous experience is essential to desire and that the three alternatives mentioned in the main text are all "plausible weak specifications of this claim" (Friedrich, 2017, p. 68). This claim is rather puzzling since on none of these three formulations the desirous experience seems essential to desire.

In this way we reach our final conclusion with respect to the goodness/oughtness mode versions of (E) or (D). Either we interpret modes as causal roles and then we end up with a version of (E) and (D) not relevantly different from (M'), or we interpret them in ways which render these versions of (E) and (D) implausible views.

The sufficiency of motivation for desire

In this section I will complete my defense of the motivational theory by responding to some objections intended to show that motivation is not sufficient for desire. Arguments against the sufficiency of motivation for desire are more frequent, more numerous and more compelling than arguments against necessity. I will respond here to two of the most pressing objections against the sufficiency claim.

Radioman

As mentioned in the first section, both defenders of (E) and (D) think that an important desideratum for a theory of desire is that it explains why desires give us reasons for action. They think their theories are quite able to do so (as we saw, if the subject regards the object of desire as good or as what ought to be this gives her a reason to pursue it) while the motivational theory is supposed to fail in this regard. This is precisely what the Radioman objection to (M) is supposed to show. This is a thought experiment purporting to show that a mere tendency or disposition to bring about X does not constitute a reason for action. Consider a subject, Radioman, such that an evil demon implants in his brain a chip which makes him, compulsively, as it were, to turn on every radio within his reach. Is Radioman bestowed with a reason to turn radios on? Does he want, or desire, to turn radios on? The proponent of the Radioman experiment thinks we should answer both questions in the negative, which means of course deep trouble for the motivational theory since Radioman has indeed acquired the disposition to turn radios on. So motivation is not sufficient for desire and the motivational theory is wrong (Quinn, 1993; Oddie, 2017).

I will on the contrary argue that Radioman's disposition constitutes a desire and that it bestows him with a reason to turn radios on in, at the very least, the sense in which it is said that actions are rationalized by desires causing them. To substantiate my claim it will prove useful that we look into how Quinn himself describes his thought experiment (on Quinn's version of the thought experiment he himself is Radioman):

> Suppose I am in a strange functional state that disposes me to turn radios on that I see turned off (...) Does this state rationalize my choices? Told nothing more than this, one may certainly doubt that it does. But in the case I'm imagining, this is all there is to the state. I do not turn the radios on in order to hear music or get news (...) Indeed, I do not turn them on in order to hear anything. My disposition is, I am supposing, basic rather than instrumental. (Quinn, 1993, pp. 236-237)

Quinn seems to be arguing here, first, that his disposition to turn radios on does not rationalize his behavior of turning radios on and, second, that this disposition does not rationalize his behavior because it is "basic, rather than instrumental". He will then conclude from these two points that such a disposition cannot constitute any desire. Now the second point is very important, not only because it justifies the first, but because, as I will try to show, it is the intuition driving the whole thought experiment. And as such, what it shows, so I will argue, is a problem about the nature of intentional action rather than a problem about the nature of desire. Let us see why.

The quoted text makes it clear that what is troubling Quinn is that Radioman's behavior constitutes what Aristotle would call an autotelic action (Aristotle, 2000). That is to say, as the thought experiment is described, Radioman's action of turning radios on is not performed as a means to a further end (it is not that he turns the radio on, as Quinn explains, in order to hear the news, or to hear anything at all); performing the action is rather the end itself. Consider a standard example of Aristotelian autotelic action: following the flight of a bird just for the sake of it. For instance, suppose I'm following a bird's flight not as a means to attain a further end (e.g., in order to learn about how birds use their wings to fly) but simply for the sake of it. Such actions are puzzling precisely because the end is the action itself; they are not done as a means to attain something else. But there is little doubt that such actions do exist, and that they can be explained, and rationalized, by a desire to perform the action. I may indeed be following the bird's flight just because I want to (and of course I believe that I can satisfy my desire by just performing the action). The uneasiness that such explanations provoke arises of course from the fact that the object of the rationalizing desire is the action itself, not something else that the agent believes the action will bring about. In usual contexts, when we ask for a rationalization of an action, we expect that the attribution of a desire to the agent will inform us about what purpose the action is pursuing. And we become somewhat puzzled when we learn that there is no other purpose than performing the action itself. But, I insist, there is no doubt that autotelic actions exist and that they are explained, and rationalized, by a desire to perform the action. The desire, as it is required in rationalizations, informs us about the purpose, or goal, that the agent has in mind when performing the action. The only thing that is special about autotelic action is that in such a case the purpose or goal is the action itself.

Now, as I said above, it seems clear from Quinn's description of the case that Radioman's behavior of turning radios on is an autotelic action, namely, it is indeed not performed to attain some further end. And, I claim, it is indeed an action explained, and rationalized, by Radioman's disposition to turn radios on, in exactly the same sense in which my desire to follow a bird's flight rationalizes my following a bird's flight just for the sake of it. I also claim that it is the autotelic character of the action involved in the Radioman's example that is puzzling and that makes people draw wrong conclusions about the nature of desire. To show this, just consider a version of the Radioman's thought experiment where this puzzling element is dropped. Suppose that this time the evil demon instills in me a disposition to be in noisy environments. So when I step into a quiet room I begin to devise ways to produce a loud noise: if I spot a nearby radio, I will turn it on; or I will open the windows and let the outside traffic noise flow in; or I will start singing aloud; or, even better, I will perform all these behaviors. I think that if such were the case, we would have no objection to explaining my behavior as purposeful behavior, the purpose being to make the environment noisy, and to accepting that such purpose or goal is set by my desire to live in noisy environments.

There might indeed be a difference between a standard autotelic action and the sort of autotelic action involved in the original Radioman's example. When I'm following a bird just for the sake of it, it might well be that my desire to do so stems from the fact that I see some good in doing so. Yet, as the Radioman's thought experiment is described, this does not seem to be so in this case, as the origin of the desire to turn radios on is the demon's evil workings rather than anything else.[12] But this is precisely the oddity involved in this thought experiment, that is to say, it invites us to consider a rather unusual and odd way in which someone may acquire a disposition to act constituting a desire. One may even doubt whether the evil demon will manage to instill such a disposition to Radioman, with all the complexity required by the motivational theory of desires (M'), without it actually also instilling in him the thought that turning radios on is good in a certain vague sense of 'good'. But let that pass. I hope that what I have said so far is enough to see that the intuition behind the Radioman's thought experiment is no menace for the motivational theory of desires.

The defender of the Radioman objection will respond that it is incorrect to attribute to Radioman the desire to turn radios on because, when asked, Radioman may tell us he actually detests turning radios on (Oddie, 2017). But once we are in possession of all the relevant facts here, including Radioman's disposition, I think we shouldn't interpret such a claim as revealing the fact that Radioman does not desire to turn radios on, but rather as revealing the fact that he desires not to desire it. Consider the case of a drug addict telling us she detests taking drugs right when she's doing it in our presence. Given the evidence, it seems clear that she definitely desires the drug and we should interpret her protest as expressing her desire not to desire it. It is true that desiring something and at the same time desiring not to desire it is anomalous and far from ideal, but this has nothing to do with the nature of desire but rather with the limits of human rationality. In any case, poor Radioman is supposed to have been placed in such a far from ideal situation by an evil demon.

Intentions and habits

Another objection to the sufficiency of motivation for desire is that there are other mental states, or conditions, like intentions and habits, which are motivational but are not desires. It would seem that my intention, say, to visit Canada involves my being disposed to bring it about that I visit Canada and that my habit to answer the phone by pacing up and down involves my disposition to do so when answering the phone. So they both satisfy (M), but neither intentions nor habits are desires and surely a theory that conflates them is wrong (Schroeder, 2004).

I think that what this objection shows is that, as stated, (M) is too crude a description of the motivational theory of desire. This was already hinted at all along in this paper when I said that according to the motivational view desires are characterized by a complex causal role involving that they have to interact in certain ways with suitable doxastic states, hence our claim (M'). This objection just shows we need to refine further the causal role which defines a desire in order to distinguish it from intentions and habits, since there are indeed important differences between the causal role of all these things.

Consider first intentions. An important difference between the defining causal role of intentions and that of desires is that intentions, unlike desires, have the role of controlling and monitoring behaviour (Bratman, 1987; Searle 1983). In order to fulfill the goal set by

[12] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for THEORIA for making this point.

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it, an intention will typically cause further more specific intentions defining subgoals as the action progresses and adjust the behavior depending on feedback information about what results are being achieved by the action performed. It is true that desires may also cause more specific desires defining subgoals, or instrumental goals. For instance, my desire to become a rich man may cause my desire to invest in stocks and this latter desire may cause my desire to open an account with a suitable broker. But in the case of desire this does not happen as the action progresses nor does the desire cause the aforementioned adjustments of behavior. This is also why one cannot hold incompatible intentions at the same time, since their defining role of monitoring behavior would be impossible to exert in such a case. By contrast, holding incompatible desires at the same time, far from being impossible, almost defines the human condition.[13]

Also there are differences with the causal role of habits. As psychologists studying habits say, habits are behaviours which are "stimulus-driven", that is to say, they are under the control of (the detection of) a specific stimulus. A habit is triggered only when the subject having it is placed in the right specific context and it always leads to the same type of stereotyped behavior (Moors & De Houwer, 2006). In my childhood I acquired the habit of pacing up and down when answering the phone (too long to explain why), so whenever the specific stimulus occurs, the phone rings, I automatically stand up and begin to walk. But it is clear that desires are not so rigid. They are not under the control of a specific stimulus, or a specific type of stimulus, nor do they always lead to the same stereotyped behavior. My desire to visit Canada in August may manifest itself under a wild variety of different stimulus contexts (and even when no salient stimulus occurs) and it may lead to a wild variety of behaviours depending on the circumstances.[14]

The remaining issue is I think purely terminological. If we want to say that a motivational state for X is just one which involves the disposition to bring about X, then we should say that intentions and habits as well as desires are motivational states since they fulfill this generic causal role. If so, we should then say that desires are not just motivational states but motivations with a characteristic sort of causal role, different from the characteristic causal role of intentions and habits. Hence we should change accordingly the name of the motivational theory. Perhaps we should call it the functional-motivational theory of desire. But as stated this is purely terminological. The core idea of the motivational theory of desire would still hold, namely, that desires are functional states defined by their characteristic causal role which tend to their own satisfaction.

[13] Sinhababu (2013) argues that intentions are just desires operating in certain background conditions (conditions spelled out in terms of certain beliefs and how desires produce behavior when combined with such beliefs). I do not think that Sinhababu's reductive thesis is correct, although I will have to leave the task of arguing for this for another occasion. For the purposes of this paper, notice in any event that if such a reductive thesis turned out to be correct, then of course the objection to the motivational theory of desires that it cannot discriminate between desires and intentions would not stand.

[14] One may even argue that habits are indeed too rigid to satisfy (M'). Thus, many authors (for instance, Searle, 1983) think that actions resulting from habits appear goalless and so habits are not dispositions which mesh with instrumental beliefs about how to attain a goal in the way which is characteristic of desires. This is however an intricate issue, since it requires that we elucidate properly the notion of goal pursued in an action. Depending on how we do this, habits may also involve goals, albeit action-specific ones. Again, this is a matter for another paper.

Conclusions

I have been defending the main conception of desire in philosophy: the motivational view. As stated in the introduction, I hope that this defense has revealed important issues about both the nature of this theory and the nature of desire. According to the motivational view, desires are motivations (and not mental states typically causing motivations as both the evaluative and deontic view would have it), and motivations are dispositions, mental states defined by a causal role. My discussion of the objections, particularly those against the sufficiency of motivations for desire, has shown that we need to refine the causal role that defines desires in order to sharply differentiate them from other things such as habits or intentions. So I hope that our discussion of these issues has been enlightening as to how this should be done. Also the discussion of the Radioman objection has tried to sort out issues regarding actions and their rationalizations from issues about the nature of desire which I think have been muddled up in the discussion of this objection. Finally, I have tried to show that the death of desire principle is a key aspect of the nature of desire which can only be properly accommodated by the motivational view. So I hope that the discussion contained in this paper will contribute to reinforce the still predominant view that desires are motivational states as the motivational theory characterizes them.

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