Desires

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It is not at all obvious how best to draw the distinction between conditional and un-conditional desires. In this paper we examine extant attempts to analyse conditional desire. From the failures of those attempts, we draw a moral that leads us to the correct account of conditional desires. We then extend the account of conditional desires to an account of all desires. It emerges that desires do not have the structure that they have been thought to have. We attempt to explain the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic desire in light of our account of desire. We show how to use our account to solve Wollheim's paradox of democracy and to save modus ponens. Finally, we extend the account of desire to related phenomena, such as conditional promises, intentions, and commands.

1. Preliminaries

Consider the following exchange:

> A: Do you want to go out for a beer later?
>
> B: Sure, as long as I am not too tired by then.

B is expressing a desire to have a beer. But B is also putting a condition on his desire: he wants to have a beer later, provided that he is not too tired. Presumably there are other conditions on this desire; he probably wants to have a beer later only given that he does not feel bloated at that time. If B had wished to be more general, B might have said: I want to have a beer later, provided that when later comes, I still want a beer. Following Derek Parfit, let us call B's desire a *desire that is conditional on its persistence*, or a CP-desire (Parfit 1984, p. 151). CP-desires are a species of *conditional desires*. In general, a conditional desire is a desire of the form *I want P on the condition that Q*.

Not all of our desires are conditional on their own persistence. Some desires are conditional on other things; for example, B might want to go out for a beer as long as C will be there. Other desires seem not to be conditional on anything at all. This is often true of our most deeply held desires, such as the desire that our children be good people (Persson 2005, p. 323).

It is not at all obvious how best to draw the distinction between conditional and unconditional desires. But it is important that we understand the distinction properly. It has played a role in discussions of rationality, well-being, immortality, the evil of death, the resurrection of the dead, the logic of desire, and democratic theory.[1] Perhaps most importantly, a proper understanding of the distinction reveals a hitherto unnoticed feature of desire generally.

In what follows we examine extant attempts to analyse conditional desire. From the failures of those attempts, we draw a moral that leads us to the correct account of conditional desires. We then extend the account of conditional desires to an account of all desires. It emerges that desires do not have the structure that they have been thought to have. We show how to use our account to solve Richard Wollheim's paradox of democracy and to save modus ponens. We attempt to explain the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic desire in light of our account of desire. Finally, we extend the account of desire to related phenomena, such as conditional promises, intentions, and commands.

2. The received wisdom about desire

The received wisdom is that desire is a propositional attitude. Facts about desires consist of a person at a time desiring that some proposition is true. The received wisdom is indeed wisdom, but it is only close to the truth. On our view, desires are propositional attitudes that are directed towards *two* propositions. More on this momentarily.

The received wisdom might seem unmotivated. Typically, when we express desires, or ascribe desires to others, we do so by saying, 'S wants *an F*'. When expressing a beer-related desire, one typically says 'I want a beer'. This suggests that some physical object, a beer, is the object of the desire. According to the received wisdom, it is true to say that one wants a beer only if one wants that one has a beer. The sentence 'Bob wants a beer (now)' is true in virtue of Bob desiring *that* Bob has a beer now.

Sometimes when we express desires, or ascribe desires to others, we do so by saying, 'S wants *to φ*'. For example, if you are feeling restless, you might say, 'I want to go running'. If you are concerned with your appearance, you might think to yourself, 'I want to be thin'. This suggests that an *activity* or *feature* is the object of the desire. According to

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[1] On rationality and well-being, see Parfit 1984, pp. 150–1. On immortality and the evil of death, see Williams 1973, and Luper 1996, p. 114. On the resurrection, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa Suppl. 78.1. On the logic of desire, see Schiffer 1976, p. 200. On democratic theory, see Goldstein 1992, pp. 411–14, and Moore 1994, pp. 231–2.

the received wisdom, it is true to say that one wants to run only if one wants *that* one runs. The sentence 'Bob wants to run (now)' is true in virtue of Bob's desiring *that* Bob runs now.[2]

So according to the received wisdom, desires take propositions as their objects, just as beliefs do. And just as a belief succeeds if and only if its object is true, a desire is *satisfied* when its object is true; it is *frustrated* when its object is false.[3] Thus we have the following three theses about desire:

(RW1):   Desire is a relation between a person and a proposition[4]

(RW2):   S's desire that *P* is satisfied iff *P* is true

(RW3):   S's desire that *P* is frustrated iff *P* is not true

(RW1)–(RW3) constitute the received wisdom about desire. We will argue that all three theses are false, and we will replace them with a better view.

3. The received wisdom about conditional desire

Suppose one accepts the received wisdom about desire. All desires are desires that a proposition be true. A natural thought then is that conditional desires are desires that certain conditional propositions be true. This view has a long and impressive pedigree. It seems to have appeared first in the writings of John Buridan.[5] More recently, it has been explic-

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[2] See, for example, Jeffrey 1983, pp. 59–60, Sumner 1996, p. 124, and Schueler 1995, p. 12. Schueler says that understanding desires as propositional attitudes is 'standard philosophic practice' (1995, p. 197 n. 2).

[3] For a clear statement of this received wisdom, see Sumner 1996, p. 124. However, see Brewer 2006 for arguments against the received wisdom. We cannot address Brewer's arguments in this paper.

[4] The received wisdom also likely holds, correctly, that desires relate people to propositions *at times.* For ease of exposition we suppress references to times unless such references are necessary. We also do not mean to exclude non-humans as possible desirers; 'person' should be interpreted broadly enough to include all possible desiring subjects.

[5] Buridan states the account in his discussion of the eighteenth sophism (Hughes 1982, pp. 122–3) and repeats it in the twentieth (pp. 126–9). We hesitate to attribute the view to Buridan only because it is possible that while he discusses desires that have conditionals as their propositional objects, he did not think all conditional desires have conditional propositions as objects. Goldstein (1992) and Moore (1994) seem to endorse Buridan's account of conditional desire. The eighteenth sophism concerns the following apparent paradox. Socrates wants to eat if and only if Plato does, and Plato wants to eat if and only if Socrates does not. Therefore if Socrates wants to eat, Plato does not, so (contrary to the hypothesis) Socrates does not; and if Socrates does not, then Plato does, so Socrates does; so Socrates wants to eat if and only if he does not want to eat (Hughes 1982, pp. 122–3). For more discussion of this sophism see Goldstein 1992 and Moore 1994. By the end of the paper it should be clear to the reader how our account resolves the apparent paradox.

itly endorsed by Stephen Schiffer (1976, p. 200), Steven Luper (1996, p. 114, n. 7), and Ingmar Persson (2005, p. 154), and can plausibly be attributed to Derek Parfit (1984, p. 152).[6] On this account, B's conditional desire for a beer later is the desire that the following conditional be true: if I desire a beer later, then I get a beer later.[7] If any view deserves to be called the received wisdom about conditional desire, it is this one. So we add to the received wisdom a fourth principle:

(RW4):   A conditional desire is a desire for a proposition of the form *if P, then Q*

There are many kinds of conditionals. In our original example, what sort of conditional is being desired? Suppose it is a material conditional. Then B's desire is equivalent to a disjunctive desire. B desires that either B does not want a beer later or B gets one later. So B's conditional desire to have a beer later can be satisfied merely by his not wanting a beer later. But surely B's desire for beer cannot be satisfied without B getting some beer.[8]

Suppose what is desired is a subjunctive conditional. Just for the sake of exposition, suppose the Lewis-Stalnaker account of subjunctives is true; then B's conditional desire for a beer is just B's desire that the closest world where he wants a beer is a world where he gets one (Lewis 1973; Stalnaker 1984, Chs 6–8).[9] But the closest world where B wants a beer could be a world where he gets one, while the actual world is a world where (because B does not want beer) B does not get beer at all. Again, it just seems wrong to say that B's desire for beer has been satisfied in this situation.[10] Here is another strange result. Suppose that a malicious person is trying to prevent B from getting what he wants, and is very effective in doing so. Then the closest world where B wants a beer later is one

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[6] What Parfit says is perhaps too vague to warrant this attribution. Luper claims to be explicating the account of conditional desire put forth by Williams (1973). Like Williams, Luper is concerned with desires that are conditional on the survival of the desirer, rather than the persistence of the desire. The relevant feature remains, however: on Luper's view, a conditional desire is a desire for the truth of a conditional proposition.

[7] In some discussions, for example Parfit's, the conditional seems to be reversed: 'I get a beer later *only if* I desire one later,' that is, 'if I get a beer later, then I desire one later'. We consider only the more natural formulation. The reverse formulation is, if anything, even less promising.

[8] Dorothy Edgington makes this criticism of the material conditional view in Edgington 1995, p. 288. Also see pp. 8–9 of Shieva Kleinschmidt's unpublished manuscript. Paul Weirich gives an argument that is very suggestive of this one (1980, p. 704), except that it concerns conditional utility rather than conditional desire.

[9] The differences between Lewis and Stalnaker are not relevant here.

[10] For further discussion, see pp. 10–11 of Kleinschmidt's unpublished manuscript.

where B does not get one later. Suppose also that, in the actual world, B loses the desire for beer before later comes. The malicious person notices this and stops trying to prevent B from getting beer. A thinks B still wants the beer and gives B the beer anyway. In this case, on the subjunctive view, B's desire would count as frustrated. But this seems wrong too.[11] (It seems wrong even if B does not get the beer, but even more wrong if B does get it.) So the subjunctive view wrongly counts certain desires as satisfied and wrongly counts other desires as frustrated.

We could continue to monkey around with this approach, trying out different sorts of conditional propositions, but there are antecedent reasons to think the project will be fruitless. There can in principle be no way to distinguish conditional desires from unconditional desires merely by distinguishing the propositions that are the objects of the desires. We offer the following argument. (1) *Some desires are neither satisfied nor frustrated*. Suppose B now desires to have a beer later conditional on his wanting one later, but when later comes, B does not desire a beer. Suppose he does not get the beer. Surely it is just wrong to say that his previous desire has been frustrated. Suppose he does get the beer. Surely it is just wrong to say that his previous desire has been satisfied. (2) *If (RW1)–(RW4) are true, every desire is satisfied or frustrated*. This is because according to (RW1), every desire has a proposition as an object, and propositions are (at least arguably) always either true or false. It does not matter how complicated we make the conditional proposition that is the object of the desire; that proposition will be either true or false, and if the received wisdom holds, that is sufficient to make the conditional desire satisfied or frustrated.

Now, perhaps this is too quick. There are two reasons one might reject (2). Some have held that conditionals lack truth-values (Adams 1965; Gibbard 1981; Edgington 1986). We disagree; we think that at least some conditionals are true or false.[12] In any case, the view that conditionals lack truth-values is of no help to the received wisdom. For if all conditionals lack truth-values, and the received wisdom is correct, then no conditional desire is ever satisfied or frustrated. This is unacceptable. However, for reasons that will become apparent, those who think all conditionals (or all indicative conditionals) lack truth-values should find our alternative view much more attractive than the received wisdom.

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[11] Note that there is a difference between not wanting something and positively wanting not to have it. In the example, B does not want beer anymore, but does not positively want not to have beer. If B wanted not to have beer, it might make sense to say that getting the beer frustrates B's desire.

[12] For defences of the claim that indicative conditionals have truth-values, see Jackson 1998, Ch. 4, and Lycan 2001, Ch. 4.

Others have maintained that conditionals with false antecedents lack truth-values, while conditionals with true antecedents have them.[13] This would also undermine (2). We cannot fully defend a view about the truth-values of conditionals in this paper. But it seems to us that in typical cases of conditional desires, the conditional proposition that is the alleged object of the desire does in fact have a truth-value, even if its antecedent is false.

In rejecting the received wisdom, we do not mean to imply that a desire can never have a conditional proposition as its object. Of course that is possible. For example, a philosopher might be attempting to state a necessary condition for something. She might desire that her account be true. The object of her desire will be a conditional proposition. But this is not the sort of desire that people have had in mind when thinking about conditional desire. We claim that the desires that have typically been thought of as conditional desires are not desires with conditional propositions as their objects.

4. Alternative accounts of conditional desire

It might be thought that for one to have a conditional desire that *P* on the condition that *Q* is for it to be true that, were *Q* to obtain, one would want *P*. But this view cannot be right. Suppose you would desire something truly despicable were you to take a certain drug. It does not follow that you desire to do something truly despicable even conditionally. (It is one thing to desire that *P on the condition that Q*; it is another thing to be in a world in which *Q* is true, and to want that *P*.) It might be thought that one desires that *P* on the condition that *Q* if and only if, if one were to know that *Q*, one would want that *P*. But this cannot be right. Suppose that were you to know that a party were being thrown for you at Phil's house, you would want to go to Phil's house. But since you do not know, and in fact have never even heard of Phil or his house, you have no desire to go to Phil's house, not even conditionally. Both these proposals confuse conditional desires with what we might call 'hypothetical desires,' that is, desires that one *would* have *were* some hypothetical condition to obtain.[14]

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[13] Dummett discusses such a view and attributes it to von Wright (Dummett 1978, p. 11).

[14] Relatedly, it is important to note that one can want *P* (on some condition or other), and know that *Q*, without wanting *P* on the condition that *Q*. One can want to be a philosopher, and know that people are starving, without wanting to be a philosopher on the condition that people are starving.

It might be thought that to have a conditional desire that *P* on condition *Q* is to have some pro-attitude towards *P* that is in some way proportionate to the degree to which one believes that *Q*. This thought is developed by Richard Bradley, who claims that:

> [T]o have a conditional desire for *X* if *Y* is to desire *X* and *Y* to the degree that one believes *Y*. (Bradley 1999, p. 25)

> Think of the desirability of a proposition as the amount of money an agent is prepared to spend to make it true … Our definition of conditional desirability is now translated as follows: the amount of money you are prepared to spend to make *X* true if *Y* is, is the difference between the amount you are prepared to spend on making *XY* true and the amount you are prepared to spend on making *Y* true, i.e., given that you are prepared to pay a certain amount for *Y*, then it is the extra amount that you are prepared to make *X* true as well. (Bradley 1999, p. 31)

But this view cannot be right.[15] One can have a strong conditional desire that *P* given *Q* but not want (to any degree) that *P and Q*. (This happens when, for example, one wants *Q* not to be true.) One can have a *strong* conditional desire that *P* given *Q* but only weakly believe that *Q*. Finally, one's conditional desire that *P* given *Q* is not automatically frustrated simply in virtue of *Q's* falsity. But it would be, if a conditional desire were simply a desire for a conjunction.

A remark made by Persson suggests a different approach to conditional desires:

> Consider my desire to travel by train tomorrow: is the mere fact that I will travel by train tomorrow sufficient to fulfil it? Not if the desire is, to borrow Parfit's phrase, implicitly conditional on its own persistence … that is, not if it is a necessary condition of my now having this desire that (a) I believe I will still desire to travel by train tomorrow. (Persson 2005, pp. 153–4)

Perhaps the idea is this: S's desire that *P* is conditional on its own persistence (i.e. is a CP-desire) if and only if S desires that *P*, but S would not now desire that *P* if S now believed that S would no longer desire that *P* when *P* obtained. This is a very different view. According to this view, the conditionality of the desire does not appear in its *object*. Rather, *the existence of the desire itself* is conditional on the desirer's having a certain belief about his future desires.

We do not see how this account of CP-desires can be generalized to account for all conditional desires. Moreover, it is false. Suppose S desires that *P*, S believes that he will continue to desire that *P* when *P* obtains, and in fact S would not now desire that *P* if S did not have that

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[15] We are concerned that there is more than one view expressed in these passages. We will focus on the first view; the others are similarly problematic.

belief. Then S's desire that *P* is conditional on its own persistence. Suppose S's belief is false; *P* later obtains, but S no longer desires that *P* when *P* obtains. Then given the account of conditional desire just stated, S's past conditional desire that *P* is satisfied! This is just what Persson himself, in the passage just quoted, says should not be the case. Though this is a very different view from the received wisdom, it fails for a similar reason: it does not provide for a way for desires to be neither satisfied nor frustrated.[16]

We draw the following moral: conditional desires differ from unconditional desires in that it is possible for a conditional desire to be neither satisfied nor frustrated.[17] There is a third possibility. Let us say that the desire has been *cancelled* when it is neither satisfied nor frustrated.[18] Unconditional desires are never cancelled: every unconditional desire is either satisfied or frustrated.

A successful general theory of desire must explain two things. First, it must explain why conditional desires can be cancelled whereas unconditional desires cannot. Second, it must explain what it is for a desire to be cancelled. None of the accounts of conditional desire just considered can meet these demands, because they all assume (RW1)–(RW3).

5. The new story about conditional desire

Let us focus for a moment on CP-desires. In order for a CP-desire to be satisfied, it is not sufficient that its object be true. It must also be the case that the desire has not been cancelled. Likewise, in order for a CP-desire to be frustrated, it must not be cancelled. But what is it for a desire to be cancelled?

It can help to think about our beer example again. B's desire for beer is conditional on his continuing to have that desire later; thus the desire is cancelled if, at the later time, it is not the case that he desires a beer.[19] In general, if a person desires that something obtain at time *t* only if, at

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[16] There is an account of conditional desire that we do not discuss in this paper: the one put forth by Mark Platts in part one of his (1991), especially p. 73. We cannot tell, on Platts's view, under what conditions a conditional desire is satisfied. So we refrain from passing judgement on this view.

[17] Robert Gordon draws the same moral (1986, pp. 108–9).

[18] Aquinas said that conditional desires may be 'void' (*Summa Theologiae*, IIIa Sppl. 78.1). Perhaps a cancelled desire is a void desire in Aquinas's sense.

[19] Persson says that 'if [this desire] is conditional in this fashion, it is also necessary for its fulfilment that this desire persists tomorrow' (2005, p. 154). Persson is right about this, but since he presupposes the received wisdom about desire, he concludes that the object of the desire must be a conditional proposition.

t, the person wants the thing to obtain, then the person's desire is cancelled when, at *t,* the person does not want the thing to obtain. However, if, when that time comes, the person does still want the thing in question, the desire is not cancelled: it is *operant*, and can be either frustrated or satisfied.

We think a general lesson can be drawn. When a person's desire that *P* is conditional on *Q*, the desire that *P* is cancelled if and only if *Q* is false.

To say that a desire has been cancelled is not to say that it has gone out of existence. Even an unconditional desire can go out of existence. A child might desire to become a poet no matter what else happens—his desire to become a poet might be unconditional—yet he could outgrow that desire. And a conditional desire might persist even after it has been cancelled. (Of course, this can happen only when the desire is conditional on something other than its own persistence.) When this happens, it just means that the desire can no longer be satisfied or frustrated, not that it does not exist.

What we say about cancelled conditional desires is in one respect analogous to Strawson's well-known account of utterances of sentences containing referring expressions that fail to refer. Here is Strawson explaining what we should say about the truth-value of the sentence 'The king of France is wise':

> Now suppose someone were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: 'The king of France is wise'. Would you say, 'That's untrue'? I think it's quite certain that you wouldn't. But suppose he went on to *ask* you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you had agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn't do either; that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply *didn't arise*, because there was no such person as the king of France. (Strawson 1950, p. 330)

On Strawson's view, the question of whether an utterance of a sentence about the king of France is true or false does not arise because the utterance rests on a false presupposition. Such utterances are incapable of truth or falsity. We say, similarly, that when B's desire at t_1 for beer at t_2 rests on the presupposition that at t_2 B desires beer, and that presupposition is false, the question of whether B's desire at t_1 is satisfied or frustrated simply does not arise. The desire is incapable of being satisfied or frustrated; it has been cancelled.[20]

[20] Our account of conditional desires also mimics what some philosophers have said about conditional assertions. For example, consider the following remarks by Dorothy Edgington: 'A conditional assertion 'If *A*, *B*' is an assertion of *B* when *A* is true, and an assertion of nothing when *A* is false. It is natural then, to say my conditional assertion is true if *A* and *B* are both true, and false if *A* is true and *B* is not, and has no truth-value when *A* is false' (Edgington 1995, p. 290). Note that a

Our account is also similar to a well-known account of conditional bets proposed by Michael Dummett: 'There is a distinction between a conditional bet and a bet on the truth of a material conditional; if the antecedent is unfulfilled, in the first case the bet is off—it is just as if no bet had been made—but in the second case the bet is won' (Dummett 1978, p. 8). In the case of a conditional desire, when the condition is unfulfilled, in an important respect it is as if the desire never happened. The desire is off; there is nothing that can be satisfied or frustrated.

As we mentioned in section three, one possible way of fleshing out the idea of cancellation is by claiming that the relevant sort of conditional lacks a truth-value when its antecedent is false.[21] One might then claim that a conditional desire is cancelled if and only if its object lacks a truth-value. This move is worth exploring, but we will not explore it here. We will, however, register the worry that we should not let our desire to give an account of conditional desire drive our semantics in this way: we should not postulate that there is a class of propositions that lack a truth-value simply to make sense of conditional desire. And we doubt there is sufficient independent reason to think that the relevant sort of conditionals lack truth-values when they have false antecedents.

A more conservative solution is to rethink the nature of conditional desire. Instead of taking a conditional desire to be a two-place relation between a person and a conditional proposition (perhaps a funny kind of proposition which can lack a truth-value), we take conditional desire to be *three-place* relation between a person and *two* propositions. Suppose that (now) Bob desires a beer later, provided that, when later comes, Bob desires a beer then. We say that the desiring relation has three places to be saturated: one for a person, and two for the propositions in question. In this case, Bob's conditional desire is a desire that

conditional assertion is not the assertion of a conditional; Edgington holds that no indicative conditional has a truth-value.

[21] Given one way of understanding conditional desire, the suggestion would have to be that conditionals with false *consequents* lack truth-values (see n. 7). But this is preposterous, as it entails that the conditional 'if monkeys are mammals, then monkeys are reptiles' lacks a truth value. So we consider only the view that conditionals with false antecedents lack truth-values. As noted above, some philosophers, such as Edgington (1995), deny that any ordinary language conditional has a truth-value.

Bob gets a beer later (the first proposition) given that, later, Bob wants a beer (the second proposition).[22]

The fundamental conditional-desire-locution is not 'S desires that *P*' (where *P* is some complicated conditional proposition), but rather 'S desires that *P* on the condition that *Q*'. Conditional desire is not a relation between a person and a proposition, but rather a relation between a person and two propositions. If S desires that *P* on the condition that *Q*, S's desire cannot be satisfied or frustrated if *Q* is false. If *Q* is true, S's desire that *P* is satisfied if *P* is true and is frustrated if *P* is false. So in the case of conditional desire, we can replace the received wisdom with the following four principles, which together constitute the *new story about conditional desire* (NSCD):

(CD1): Conditional desire is a relation between a person and two propositions: one is the *object* of the desire, the other is the *condition* of the desire

(CD2): S's conditional desire that *P* given *Q* is satisfied iff *P* is true and *Q* is true

(CD3): S's conditional desire that *P* given *Q* is frustrated iff *P* is not true and *Q* is true

(CD4): S's conditional desire that *P* given *Q* is cancelled iff *Q* is not true (S's conditional desire that *P* given *Q* is operant iff *Q* is true)

The literature on conditional desires typically focuses on what we have called CP-desires. But, as we have also noted, not all conditional desires are CP-desires. Recall the conversation we mentioned at the beginning of the paper. In response to A's query about having a beer, B might have said: 'Sure, I'd like to get a beer later, but only if *you* still want to'. In this scenario, B's desire is conditional not on its own persistence, but on the persistence of A's desire. This is also a kind of conditional desire, and it should receive the same treatment that CP-desires receive.

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[22] This second proposition concerns Bob's later desire, so given our account, it concerns a desire that may itself be conditional. Accordingly, we need to be careful when describing this second proposition. For reasons that will emerge later, we think it is unlikely that the content of this second proposition is that, at that later time, Bob *unconditionally* desires that he has a beer. We think it is likely that the second proposition entails that, at that later time, there is some proposition Q such that Bob desires that he has a beer (at the later time) on the condition that Q. (We do not commit ourselves to there being some specific Q such that the second proposition entails that, at that later time, Bob desires that he has a beer on the condition that Q.) We see no threat of a regress here. Thanks to Benj Hellie and Ted Sider for discussion of this point.

Moreover, a conditional desire need not be conditional on any desire at all. B's desire to get a beer might be conditional on the beer being less filling, whether the favourite beer-drinking location is open that night, or just about anything else. A conditional desire might relate a person to any two propositions at all; there need be no interesting connection between the two propositions, and neither proposition need be about that desire itself.

6. The new story about desire

It might be thought that, if (NSCD) is true, there is an important difference between conditional and unconditional desire, and that these 'kinds of desire' are in fact two distinct psychological phenomena. Unconditional desire relates a person to a single proposition; conditional desire relates a person to two propositions. How then could these 'kinds' of desire form a unified psychological kind? It seems that they could not.

We do not wish to divide desire into two fundamentally different kinds. We think that *all* fundamental facts about desires have the same logical form: all such facts consist of a person desiring that P on the condition that Q.

A genuinely unconditional desire that P is a desire that P *no matter what*, or given *any possible situation*. We might express this by saying that an unconditional desire that P is a desire that P that is conditional on a triviality: *that something is the case*. This condition has an important feature: it is necessarily true. As we noted earlier, unconditional desires are never cancelled. They are always operant, and hence are either satisfied or frustrated. Our theory accounts for this fact: unconditional desires cannot be cancelled because the 'condition' of an unconditional desire is a necessary truth: that something is the case.

This account of unconditional desire has an important advantage. It allows us to maintain that desire is a unitary phenomenon. There are not two distinct psychological attitudes; unconditional desire is just desire with a certain sort of condition. So now we have the following account of desire:

(D1):   Desire is a relation between a person and two propositions: one is the *object* of the desire, the other is the *condition* of the desire

(D2):   S's desire that P conditional on Q is satisfied iff P & Q

(D3):   S's desire that *P* conditional on *Q* is frustrated iff ¬*P* & *Q*

(D4):   S's desire that *P* conditional on *Q* is cancelled iff ¬*Q*, and is operant iff *Q*

(D5):   S's desire that *P* is unconditional iff S's desire that P is conditional on the proposition that something or other is the case

(D6):   S's desire that *P* conditional on *Q* is a conditional desire iff it is not an unconditional desire

Call the conjunction of these six principles *the new story about desire*, or (NSD). (NSD) has some attractive features. First, as we have noted, (NSD) explains why unconditional desires *cannot* be cancelled, since the condition of an unconditional desire is a necessary truth.

Second, when B conditionally desires a beer, it seems natural to say that the object of his desire is the proposition that he gets a beer, which is a proposition with a relatively simple logical form. The object of B's desire is *not* some complicated conditional proposition. (NSD) accounts for this nicely. The object of B's desire is that he gets a beer. The condition of B's desire is the proposition that B continues to want the beer by beer-time. But that is not part of the object of his desire. This seems exactly right. The object of B's desire is that he gets a beer—not that some complicated conditional proposition is true. This is a point in favour of (NSD) over any account according to which the object of a conditional desire concerns the desirer's desires.

Third, (NSD) gives an account of conditional and unconditional desire that does not require distinct desire relations. Desires form a unified psychological kind. There is just one desire relation. To have a conditional desire is one way to instantiate that relation, and to have an unconditional desire is another way to instantiate that same relation. The only difference is the content of the proposition on which the desire is conditional. So the view is simple and elegant.

Fourth, (NSD) demystifies the 'logic' of desire in certain ways. Stephen Schiffer noted the following puzzle about conditional desire:

> [W]e begin by noting our commitment to the falsity of yet another intuitive principle of desire. That principle is that if one desires both that *p* and that if *p*, *q*, then one—at any rate one who is rational and aware of what his desires are—desires that *q* … For if I desire to eat a piece of cake I shall certainly desire to eat the cake only if I still have the desire to eat it … And yet, or so I suggested, I need not desire to have any desire to eat the cake. (Schiffer 1976, p. 200)

Suppose the following two states of affairs obtain:

(B1):   Bob, at t_1, desires that Bob eats cake at t_2

(B2):   Bob, at t_1, desires that Bob eats cake at t_2 on the condition that Bob desires cake at t_2

And suppose the following state of affairs does *not* obtain:

(B3):   Bob, at t_1, desires that Bob desires cake at t_2

As Schiffer says, Bob would not be irrational in virtue of (B1) and (B2) obtaining while (B3) fails to obtain. This is indeed puzzling, since this modus ponens-like principle seems initially plausible.[23]

If we accept (NSD), there is no mystery. In the example, we have failed to fully capture the content of Bob's desires. (B1) apparently involves Bob having an *unconditional* desire for cake later. But Bob's desire for cake is not unconditional. He desires cake later on the condition that he later wants some. If we fully capture the content of Bob's desire in (B1), we discover that there is just one desire here: (B2). So we do not have the components of anything like a modus ponens inference. More importantly, if (NSD) is true, (B2) does not involve Bob having a desire with a conditional proposition as an object. Rather, it involves Bob having a desire whose object is that Bob gets cake at t_2, and whose condition is that Bob desires cake at t_2. In order to show that the modus ponens-like principle fails for desire, it must be shown that it is rational to desire that *P* and desire that if *P* then *Q*, but fail to desire that *Q*. The example just described fails to show this, if we interpret conditional desires in the way prescribed by (NSD), since the example does not involve any desire whose object is a conditional proposition.[24]

(NSD) does require some revision in how we think about the logic of desire. It would seem that in order to criticize someone for desiring irrationally, the conditions of the person's desires must match up appropriately. If Jane has desires whose objects are (i) *P* and (ii) if *P* then *Q*, she may be irrational for failing to have a desire whose object is *Q*—but only if her desire that *P* and her desire that if *P* then *Q* have the same conditions.

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[23] Goldstein discusses a similar question; he claims that if *P* is true, and someone desires that if *P* then Q, that person desires that *Q* (Goldstein 1992, pp. 407–8). Goldstein attributes this view to Buridan as well; Moore thinks this attribution is mistaken (Moore 1994, 230). We do not endorse the inference.

[24] This discussion also makes clear how we would solve Buridan's Eighteenth Sophismata (Hughes 1982, pp. 122–3); see footnote 5.

A related problem was raised by Richard Wollheim (1962, p. 78).[25] Suppose a democracy has a choice between two policies, *A* and *B*. Majority vote will decide which policy is enacted. One of the citizens of this democracy, George, wants *A* to be enacted. But given his commitment to democratic ideals, George also thinks that whichever outcome is chosen by the majority should be enacted. Let us say, furthermore, that George *wants* the majority's will to be enacted.[26] The majority chooses *B*. Then George seems to have contradictory desires: he desires that *A* be enacted, and that *A* not be enacted. This is not a paradox, but it is a problem. It seems perfectly rational for someone to have George's desires, but how can it be rational to hold contradictory desires?

By now it should be clear how (NSD) resolves this problem. At least some of George's desires are conditional desires. In order to determine whether his desires are irrational, we need to know more about them. In particular, we need to know the conditions on his desires. George seems to desire (i) that A be enacted on the condition that A is chosen by the majority, (ii) that B be enacted on the condition that B is chosen by the majority, and (iii) that the majority chooses A (perhaps this last desire is unconditional). Since the majority chooses B, (i) is cancelled, (ii) is satisfied, and (iii) is frustrated. His desires are, in one sense at least, not contradictory, because there is no proposition such that he desires both it and its negation given the same conditions. His desire set does have this interesting feature: (i) and (ii) cannot both be satisfied. (Perhaps his desires may be said to be contradictory in this weaker sense.) At least one of his desires must be cancelled. But that does not mean his desires are contradictory, or that he is irrational. As F. C. T. Moore points out, we can make perfect sense of how George ought to act given this set of desires: he ought to accept the enactment of B as long as the majority accept it, but also try to get the majority to accept A (Moore 1994, p. 232).[27]

It should be clear that it is possible to have desires with contradictory objects, but still be rational, in virtue of the differences in the conditions on those desires. Bob desires to have a beer at *t* on the condition

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[25] See Goldstein (1992, p. 411) for a somewhat recent discussion of Wollheim's paradox.

[26] We follow Goldstein in making this further supposition about the case (Goldstein 1992, p. 412). This makes it clearer how conditional desire is relevant. Goldstein employs Buridan's account of conditional desire in solving the paradox. We think employing conditional desire here is a good idea, but we reject Buridan's account for reasons that have already been given.

[27] Moore correctly points out that the conditional desire for a policy given its being favoured by the majority does not become an unconditional desire when the majority in fact favours it, or when the desirer learns the majority favours it. Unfortunately, Moore also endorses Buridan's account of conditional desire.

that, at *t*, Bob still wants a beer at *t*. Bob desires to not have a beer at *t* on the condition that, at *t*, Bob does not want a beer at *t*. (Who wants to have beer while not wanting it?) It is obvious that one is not irrational simply in virtue of having both of these desires. One is rationally permitted to have desires with inconsistent objects, provided that the conditions of these desires differ.[28]

That is to say, one is *not* rationally permitted to desire that *P* given *Q*, and to desire that ¬*P* given *Q*, at least on the assumption that *Q* is contingently true. (Is it irrational to desire that *P* given that 2+2=5 and to desire that ¬*P* given that $2 + 2 = 5$? These are strange desires to be sure, and guaranteed to be cancelled.) But neither George nor Bob has a pair of desires that take this form. So neither George nor Bob desires irrationally.

No doubt much more could be said about the logic of desire—that is, the conditions under which collections of desires are jointly rational—but we leave this discussion for another occasion.

7. Hidden parameters

Suppose that Bob says, 'I want a beer'. According to (NSD), Bob's desire report is incomplete. There is an implicit parameter that has not been explicitly represented by the sentence that Bob used to express his desire. Is this a problem for (NSD)?

We think it is clear that the vast majority of our desires are conditional desires. Many of these desires are what we have called CP-desires. Other desires are conditional on other things besides their own persistence. Bob wants a beer. But he does not want a beer if it will kill him, or his family. He does not want a beer *no matter what*. His desire for a beer is conditional on many other things obtaining. And so forth for most other desires. Genuinely unconditional desires are very rare.

Since this is the case, most desire reports are incomplete. In general, a desire report will not capture the full content of the desire that it expresses. So even if you reject (NSD) and hold instead that conditional desires are desires that conditionals be true, you will have to say that desire reports are (strictly speaking) inaccurate.[29]

We claim that even a report of a genuinely unconditional desire has a hidden parameter. Suppose Jane unconditionally wants to be a good

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[28] As the editor pointed out, it is the commonest thing in the world to have such desires, and it is sometimes irrational not to have them.

[29] Persson agrees that on his view, 'the content of a desire may be partly implicit' (Persson 2005, p. 153).

person throughout her life. Suppose she says, 'I hope that I am a good person throughout my life'. Suppose we press her a bit; we want to see if her desire is genuinely unconditional. If her desire is genuinely unconditional, she will reply, 'I want that I am a good person throughout my life no matter how things turn out, no matter what occurs'. She wants to be a good person whether or not *P*, for any *P*. The hidden parameter of her desire (*P* or not-*P*) is made explicit by conversational pressure even though it is an unconditional desire.

Although often conditional desires are alluded to by sentences of the form *if P, then I want Q*, it very rare that the *P* in question expresses the full content of the condition of the conditional desire. Suppose Fred says, 'If it will make you happy, I want you to succeed at sports'. The object of Fred's desire is that you succeed at sports. The proposition that is the condition of this desire *entails* that you be will be happy when you succeed at sports, but probably this is not all that the condition entails. For presumably Fred's desire is not satisfied, but rather cancelled, if you are happy that you succeed at sports while your success causes the death of a billion innocent people. The full condition of a conditional desire is rarely explicitly stated. Rather, usually only the contextually salient part of the total condition is explicitly noted.

Suppose Fred says, 'I want to drink that beer if it is warm'. Fred has indicated to us that he has a desire, but he has not given us sufficient information for us to determine what that desire is. We know that Fred has a desire that is satisfied if he drinks that beer, and it is in fact warm. But what if the beer is cold and he drinks it? We are not yet in a position to tell whether his desire is satisfied or cancelled. Sentences of the form *I want P if Q* typically allude to a desire and make explicit a sufficient condition (or part of a sufficient condition) for that desire's satisfaction. But they do not express the full content of the desire.

8. Preferentism

There is one important extant account of conditional desire that we have not yet discussed. Some philosophers attempt to analyse the notion of conditional desire not in terms of desire, but in terms of *preference*. The preferentist analysis of conditional desire is:

(PCD):   S desires *P* given *Q* iff S prefers *P* & *Q* to ¬*P* & *Q*[30]

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[30] This view is articulated in Edgington 1995, p. 288, as well as Edgington 2006. Some remarks by Phillip Bricker (1980, p. 389) suggest a similar but non-equivalent view: to have a conditional desire for *P* given *Q* is to prefer ¬*P* & ¬*Q* to *P* & ¬*Q*. We think that Edgington's view is closer to the truth, and thus focus on it here.

(PCD) is initially plausible. Suppose you have a conditional desire for *P* given *R*. Suppose *R* is false. Then it probably does not matter to you whether *P* is true. You preferred *P* & *R* to ¬*P* & *R*. Neither conjunction obtained. From the perspective of your preference, it is as if the world has produced a neutral response. Suppose, however, that *R* is true. Now it seems that your preference is 'in play', and that the world fits your preference better if *P* is true than if not.

However, this analysis does raise a concern that conditional desire and regular desire appear to be treated as fundamentally different kinds of phenomena. We have implicitly assumed that desire is a basic psychological notion. However, some philosophers might think that preference is more fundamental than desire. The preference relation is standardly taken to be a three-place relation that relates a person to two propositions.

What then is *desire simpliciter*? A natural theory is this: one desires that *P* if and only if one prefers *P* rather than ¬*P* (Davis 1984, p. 45).[31] So the standard version of the preferentist account can explain desire in terms of preference. Moreover, one might hold that this is a theoretical advantage of preferentism, for how can one explain preference in terms of desire? One might try the following:

(DTP):   S prefers *P* to *Q* iff S desires that *P* to degree *n*, S desires that *Q* to degree *m*, and $n > m$[32]

But this account works only if it makes sense to assign numbers to a desire's intensity, and it is not at all clear that this does make sense. One must account for both preferences and desires, and the preferentist is able to do this. It is unclear how someone who takes desire to be more basic than preference is able to do this. This provides some reason to like preferentism.

Furthermore, it looks like the preferentist is able to analyse both desire and conditional desire in terms of the preference relation. Moreover, the preference relation has the adicity we always suspected it has: it is a three-place relation that connects a person and two propositions. The preferentist's story is systematically neat and non-revisionary.

Of course, one could believe (PCD) without endorsing preferentism full stop. But it is harder to see how (PCD) could be motivated unless one antecedently accepted something like preferentism. We believe that

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[31] Sometimes people have inconsistent desires: they desire that *P* and they desire that ¬P; in these cases though they also have inconsistent preferences that *P* rather than ¬*P* and ¬*P* rather than *P*.

[32] John Broome endorses DTP (2006, p. 196).

there are good reasons to prefer (NSD) to preferentism—or, as we would rather say, you should want to believe (NSD).

First, (PCD) is not extensionally adequate. Intuitively, it does seem that, if someone desires *P* given *Q*, then she prefers *P* & *Q* to ¬*P* & *Q*. At the very least, if she does not have this preference, then her wanting leaves something to be desired. But the converse does not hold. The claim that one desires that *P* on the condition that *Q* does not follow from the claim that one prefers *P* & *Q* to ¬*P* & *Q*.

Let us focus on desires that are conditional on their own persistence, which we have called 'CP-desires'. Consider the proposition that you get a beer at noon. You probably prefer wanting the beer and getting it to wanting the beer and not getting it. You are rationally required to have this preference. But you may not want a beer at all, not even conditionally. The conditional desire for a beer is not the same as this preference.

For many propositions *P* of this sort—such as the propositions that you get a chocolate at noon, that you get a hug at noon, that you get to take your dog for a walk at noon, etc.—you ought to prefer (*P* & at noon, you want that *P*) to (¬*P* and & at noon, you want that *P*). It is sad when you want a beer, a chocolate, a hug, or a nice walk with your dog, and you do not get these things. So your preferences for these sorts of things should go this way. But it is also obvious that frequently you do not want to have a chocolate, a hug, or a walk with your dog at noon at all, not even conditionally. (PCD) is mistaken: it tells us that we have conditional desires when we do not desire at all, not even conditionally.[33]

There are two other reasons not to like (PCD). First, unlike (NSD), it presupposes a tendentious view about the relationship between desire and preference. Second, and relatedly, the view that is presupposed seems wrong. Preference is not more fundamental than desire. One might prefer *P* to *Q* in virtue of wanting *P* given a choice between *P* or *Q*, or in virtue of believing *P* is intrinsically better than *Q*, or in virtue of being deathly afraid of *Q* while not being afraid of *P* at all, or … Preferences may be determined by any number of more fundamental mental states. It is a mistake to think that preferences form a unified psychological kind.

So we reject (PCD). For those who do not find our reasons convincing, in Appendix A we offer a way to define preference in terms of conditional desire. This enables the preferentist to help herself to our solutions to the puzzles and problematics discussed in the rest of this paper. We think that (NSD) is a better overall theory than this modified

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[33] We thank an anonymous referee for discussion here.

version of preferentism, and so prefer (NSD), but we recognize that not all will agree with this assessment.

9. Extrinsic and intrinsic desires

Susan is in prison. She wants it to be the case that she has a hacksaw. But she wants to have a hacksaw not because she values hacksaws in themselves. She wants to break out of jail. And she wants to break of jail because she values her freedom. But she does not want to be free because she thinks that her being free will lead to something else. She just wants to be free.

Cases like this motivate a distinction between two kinds of desires: desires one has because one desires something else and desires that one *simply has.* Call the former desires *extrinsic desires* and the latter *intrinsic desires* (sometimes called *final desires*).[34] Prominent among extrinsic desires are what we might call *instrumental desires* (sometimes called *means-end desires*). These are, roughly, desires one has for something because one desires something else that it leads to. Susan's desire for a hacksaw is an instrumental desire, as is her desire to break out of jail. But Susan might have another desire after she escapes: a desire to hear silence. She does not desire the silence because of what it leads to, nor does she desire it in itself. Rather, she desires it because it is a *sign* that her escape has not been discovered and that she is therefore more likely to remain free. We might call this desire a *signatory desire*.[35] Instrumental desire and signatory desire are two varieties of extrinsic desire; no doubt there are others.

We have a distinction between conditional and unconditional desires. We also have a distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic desires. It would be nice if we could understand one of the distinctions in terms of the other. We think a plausible account of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic desires can be provided using the resources of (NSD).

Gilbert Harman defines extrinsic desire in the following way: 'your desire for *D* is not an intrinsic desire to the extent that you desire *D* only because you desire something else *E* and you believe that having *D* would make it more likely that you have *E*, either because having *D* might bring about *E* or because *D* might be a sign of *E*' (Harman 2000,

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[34] David Chan (2004) argues that there really are no extrinsic desires. We will not discuss his arguments here.

[35] On non-intrinsic, non-instrumental desires, see Harman 2000, pp. 128–9.

p. 129).[36] This suggests the following account, the standard account of extrinsic desire:

(SAED): S *extrinsically* desires that *P* iff there is some *Q* such that S wants that *Q* and S believes that *P* raises the probability of *Q*, and this desire-belief pair *causes* S to want that *P*[37]

When we say that *P* raises the probability of *Q*, we mean that the conditional probability of *Q* given *P* is greater than the conditional probability of *Q* given not-*P*. This is compatible with signatory desire being a species of extrinsic desire.

One interesting and perhaps under-examined feature of (SAED) is that it implies that whether a desire is an extrinsic desire is itself an extrinsic feature of that desire. Everything has properties. Some of these properties are properties that things have in themselves, simply in virtue of their own nature. These are intrinsic properties. The other properties are properties that things have *in virtue of their relations to other things*. These are extrinsic properties. If (SAED) is true, the property of being an extrinsic desire is itself an extrinsic property. On (SAED), a desire is an extrinsic desire in virtue of its causal etiology.

This strikes us as the wrong result. Whether a desire is intrinsic or extrinsic should depend solely on the *content of the desire itself* and not on the relations that the desire bears to other mental states. But given (SAED), a desire is an extrinsic desire *in virtue of* its relation to some other mental state, namely its causal relations to other beliefs and desires. That a desire is an extrinsic desire is a fact that goes beyond any fact solely about the desire as it is in itself.

We think then that a good account of extrinsic desires will satisfy two closely related constraints. First, the account of extrinsic desires must imply that extrinsic desires are desires in the fullest sense. Second, the account of extrinsic desires must imply that extrinsic desires are extrinsic in virtue of their *content* and not in virtue of their relations to something else. That a desire is an extrinsic desire should be an intrinsic matter.

We will now propose an account of extrinsic desires that satisfies both constraints. Let us first note that conditional desires come in as many varieties as there are possible conditions. This suggests that a better approach is to identify extrinsic desires with a subset of conditional desires. We suggest the following account of extrinsic desires:

[36] For similar accounts see Audi 1986, pp. 20–1, and Davis 1986, p. 69.

[37] Nagel presents an account of 'motivated desires' that seems to be extensionally equivalent to (SAED) (Nagel 1970, pp. 29–30).

> (NSDEX): S *extrinsically desires* that *P* iff there is some *Q* such that S wants that *P* on the condition that *P* raises the probability of *Q*

(NSD) holds that all desires are attitudes that link a person to two propositions, one of which is the object of the desire, the other of which is the object's condition. There are propositions of the form '*P* raises the probability of *Q*'. So these are perfectly possible conditions of some person's desire. According to (NSDEX), extrinsic desires have as part of their content propositions of this form.

Note that (NSDEX) satisfies the two constraints. First, all desires are desires that some proposition be true given some other proposition. Extrinsic desires then are fully and truly desires, differing from other desires only with respect to the contents of their conditions. Second, (NSDEX) implies that being an extrinsic desire is an intrinsic feature. Desires are extrinsic desires because of the contents of their conditions. The content of a desire is part of the intrinsic nature of that desire: part of what it is to be *that desire* is to have *that content*. The content of a desire consists of the proposition that is the object of the desire and the proposition that is the condition of the desire. So that a desire is an extrinsic desire is a matter determined solely by the nature of the desire, and not the desire's relations to other things.[38]

There is an interesting worry about (NSDEX) that we must address.[39] Suppose that Susan desires a hacksaw on the condition that having a hacksaw will raise the probability of her escaping. Suppose that she acquires the hacksaw, but as things turn out, the bars on her cell are hacksaw-proof, so having a hacksaw does not in fact raise the probability that she will escape. One might think that since Susan gets the hacksaw, her extrinsic desire is satisfied. But, given (NSDEX), her desire is cancelled, not satisfied. (NSDEX), the objection goes, confuses Susan's *rationale* for the desire with a *condition on* that desire; what makes a desire extrinsic is its rationale, not its condition. That a hacksaw raises

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[38] An anonymous referee raised the worry that our account of extrinsic desires does not make it clear that, when one extrinsically desires *P* for the sake *Q*, *Q* is itself desired. We are not convinced that this is a problem for our account, but we would like to suggest a fix in case it is:

(FSO): S desires *P* for the sake of *Q* iff S desires *P* & *Q* on the condition that *P* raises the probability of *Q*

(NSDEX 2): S extrinsically desires *P* iff there is some *Q* such that S desires *P* for the sake of *Q*

On this account, when one desires something as a means, one necessarily desires the end along with the means.

[39] This worry seems to extend as well to (NSDEX 2). We thank Simon Keller, Mark Lukas, and the editor of *Mind* for pressing us with this worry.

the probability of escape is the rationale for Susan's desire for the hacksaw, but not a condition on it.

In order to assess this objection, we must consider what it means to say that a proposition is a rationale for a desire. In particular, we need to know, first, whether a desire with a rationale can be satisfied or frustrated when the rationale is false, and second, whether a rationale is part of the content of the desire for which it is a rationale.

First, suppose P is the rationale for S's desire that Q, and suppose P is false. It seems to us that the question of whether S's desire that Q succeeds or fails has been mooted. It no longer matters whether Q is true; S wanted Q only because P, and P is false. This seems like cancellation. Suppose, for example, that Ishani wants a new car, and her rationale for wanting the car is that it will make her popular. Suppose that the car will not make her popular. Then it looks like her desire is based on a false presupposition. That is, a condition on her desire has not been met.[40] Similarly, if Susan's rationale for wanting a hacksaw is that it will lead to her escape, but it will not lead to her escape, her desire is based on a false presupposition—it cannot succeed, because it is cancelled.

We can see why it would be tempting to say otherwise; after all, the object of Susan's desire is true: she does acquire a hacksaw. But this temptation should be resisted, since, as we have shown, the truth of the object of a desire is not sufficient for the satisfaction of the desire. It might also be tempting to say that her desire is satisfied because she is happy to have the hacksaw. But of course it is one thing to be happy because you think a desire is satisfied and another thing for that desire to be satisfied. This is so even on the received wisdom. One might be happy because one thinks one's unconditional desire that P is satisfied and yet that desire is frustrated none the less. Susan's happiness at getting the hacksaw is beside the point.

Second, is a rationale part of the content of the desire? Suppose it is not. Then if what makes a desire extrinsic is something to do with its rationale, the extrinsicness of a desire depends on extrinsic features of the desire. As we have asserted, this seems wrong; the extrinsicness of a desire must be an intrinsic feature of the desire.[41] So the rationale must be part of the content of the desire for which it is a rationale. In what way, if at all, does this additional content affect the satisfaction condi-

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[40] Recall that our account of conditional desires is modeled on Strawson's account of presupposition failure. It is natural to take a presupposition of a desire to be a condition on the desire.

[41] If the rationale is not part of the content of the desire, it must be part of the content of some other attitude, such as a belief. We have already given reasons, in discussion of (SAED), to reject any view according to which the extrinsicness of a desire depends on its relation to another attitude.

tions of the desire? If the desire can be satisfied even if the rationale is mistaken, as the objector suggests, then the rationale seems to have no effect on the satisfaction conditions of the desire. If it does not affect the satisfaction conditions, it seems like a mistake to say that it is part of the content of the desire. The best solution, we think, is to take a rationale to be one sort of condition on a desire. A rationale is part of a desire, and affects the satisfaction conditions of the desire in the way we have described.

For the reasons just given, we do not think the objection to (NSDEX) succeeds. We stand by the claim that Susan's desire for a hacksaw is cancelled instead of satisfied.

If (NSDEX) is the correct account of extrinsic desire, we ought to be able to define intrinsic desire in terms of extrinsic desire. This is indeed what we propose to do. But we have to be careful. As a first pass at defining intrinsic desire, we might try this:

> (NSDID-wrong): S *intrinsically desires* that *P* iff S desires that *P* and it is not the case that S extrinsically desires that *P*

The problem with (NSDID-wrong) is that it is possible for someone to have both an intrinsic desire and an extrinsic desire for the same thing. Someone might desire happiness both for its own sake and for the sake of its positive health effects. This shows something important: it is possible for a single person, at a single time, to have *numerically distinct desires with the same object*. In order to account for this, we propose the following account of intrinsic desire:

> (NSDID): S *intrinsically desires* that *P* iff S has a desire for *P* that is not extrinsic[42]

(NSDID) does not rule out the possibility that someone might desire the same thing intrinsically and extrinsically. The two desires will have the same object, but different conditions.

Given (NSDID) and (NSDEX), intrinsic desires need not be unconditional desires. Immanuel might desire that people be happy on the condition that they are worthy of happiness. This would seem to be an intrinsic conditional desire. Immanuel's desire for people's happiness is

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[42] Strictly speaking, this definition requires quantification over desires. This suggests that the fundamental desire-locution is actually *d is a desire of person S for P given Q*. If we take this as a primitive, we can define the propositional attitude ascription as follows: *S desires that P given Q* =df. there is a *d* such that *d* is a desire of person S for P given Q. A desire *d* of S for *P* is extrinsic just in case there is some Q such that *d* is a desire of S for *P* given that *P* leads to Q. A desire *d* of S for *P* is intrinsic if and only if it is not extrinsic. Thanks to Peter Simons for helpful discussion on this issue.

not conditional on that happiness raising the probability of any other proposition, so it is intrinsic. But it is not unconditional.

As far as we can tell, (NSDEX) and (NSDID) adequately account for the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic desire.

10. Desires, reasons, and well-being

(NSD) provides a nice explanation of a set of related puzzles about desires, reasons, and well-being. These are puzzles that arise only for a certain family of views: views according to which the fact that some action would satisfy a desire provides a reason to do that action, or according to which the satisfaction of one's desires makes one better off. These are *desire satisfactionist* views about reasons or well-being.

First, these views face a puzzle about *past desires* (Parfit 1984, Ch. 8). Is there any reason to bring about the object of a desire that is purely past, such as the childhood desire to be a poet? Can doing so affect one's current well-being? Given (NSD), we often do not have such a reason, and the past desire cannot affect one's current well-being. If the desire was conditional on its own persistence, and the desire is purely past, then the desire has been cancelled; it can no longer be satisfied or frustrated. So we have no reason to try to make true the objects of purely past desires that are conditional on their own persistence. We will not be made better off by making true the object of a cancelled desire, since that desire will not thereby be satisfied. Nor will it be frustrated, and so we will not be made worse off if the object of a cancelled desire is made false. The same goes for present desires whose conditions we already know will fail to obtain in the future; since such desires will not be satisfied, we have no reason to make their objects true. What is nice about the story told by (NSD) is that it does not require the desire satisfactionist to say that only some desire satisfactions are reason-providing or welfare-affecting (though of course there may be other, unrelated reasons to say this). One can say (if one desires!) that all desire satisfactions are equally reason-providing or welfare-affecting; it is just that some desires cannot be satisfied or frustrated because their conditions do not obtain.

Desire satisfactionists also face a puzzle about *ill-informed desires*.[43] Suppose Alice believes Jeffrey is guilty of murder, and so wants him to be executed. In fact, however, Jeffrey is innocent. After his execution, Alice finds out the truth. Intuitively, Jeffrey's execution did not make Alice better off. But since she got what she wanted, desire satisfactionism apparently entails, wrongly, that the execution did make her better

[43] Thanks to Eric Moore for suggesting this application of (NSD).

off. Some reply that desire satisfactions are good only when the desires would remain intact if the desirer had full information, and in this case her desire would not have survived full information (Brandt 1972). Others reply that although Alice got one thing she wanted, her getting it also caused her to have other frustrated desires, and so the execution was bad for her on the whole (Carson 2000, pp. 72–3; Heathwood 2005, pp. 491–3). (NSD) provides an third solution. Alice's desire was implicitly conditional: she desired that Jeffrey be executed *on the condition that he was guilty*. Many of our desires are likely implicitly conditional in this way. If this were truly her desire, and if (NSD) is true, then her desire was not satisfied at all; it was cancelled. Since her desire was cancelled, Jeffrey's execution did not contribute to her welfare.

To be sure, other examples may be better handled by one of the other solutions. For example, suppose Alice is thirsty and drinks from a stream that, unbeknownst to her, is poisoned. As a result she dies (Carson 2000, p. 72). This may be a case where Alice does in fact want the drink unconditionally—certainly she has the *urge* to drink, and that would not go away even if she knew about the poison—but she has a much stronger unconditional desire to live.[44] If she were to refrain from drinking, it seems best to say she would have at least one frustrated desire. Nevertheless, there are other cases, such as the execution case, where the outweighing proposal seems less plausible. Applying (NSD) to such cases may be helpful to desire satisfactionists.

11. Extensions

Other phenomena seem to be conditional in something very much like the way desires can be conditional. For example, consider *commands*. Bob might command his son to brush his teeth, if he has not already brushed them. This is a conditional command. It might seem to be a command to make true the following conditional: if Bob's son has not brushed his teeth already, then Bob's son brushes his teeth now. But if so, the command can be obeyed by Bob's son merely by it being the case that he has already brushed his teeth. In that case, it does not seem right to say that Bob's son *obeyed* his father's command by continuing to play video games. Nor does it seem right to say that he disobeyed.[45] It seems better to say that the command has been cancelled: it cannot be obeyed or disobeyed.

[44] Thanks to David Sobel and Liz Harman for discussion of this issue.

[45] Edgington makes a very similar point (1995, pp. 287–90). Here we disagree with what Dummett says about conditional commands (Dummett 1978, pp. 8–9).

Perhaps a desire can be thought of as a sort of internal command: when one desires that *P*, one has a state that commands oneself to make it the case that *P*. If so, then it would make sense to treat conditional commands in the same way we have treated conditional desires. But even if desires are not internal commands, it seems sensible to think of commands as having two distinct pieces of content: an object and a condition.[46]

The same goes for promises.[47] Suppose Cathy makes the following promise to Nina: I will meet you for tennis in the morning as long as it is not raining. Suppose Cathy forgets about her promise and sleeps in. But as it happens, it rains anyway. Cathy does not seem to have fulfilled her promise to Nina. Nor does she seem to have broken her promise (though this is merely lucky).[48] Rather, her promise seems to have been cancelled by the failure of the condition placed on it. Again, promises seem to have two components to their contents: objects and conditions.

Whether a promise is conditional cannot always be determined solely by the words used to make the promise. Suppose A and B have the following conversation:

> A: Do you promise to be at the party if you are feeling better?
>
> B: Yes, I promise.[49]

Given the conversational context, it is clear that B's promise is conditional: he has promised to be at the party on the condition that he is feeling better. Although the promise is conditional, B's statement does not make it explicit that it is conditional. In a different context, the very same words could have expressed an unconditional promise.

This provides a way to think about what is going on when commands are issued or promises are made. Disputes about commands often run like this: 'I told you to … ', 'But I didn't think you wanted me to do it even if … '. And disputes about promises often go like this: 'You promised to …', 'Yes, but I didn't promise to do that even if … '. In these cases, there is no dispute about *what was promised or commanded*. Rather, there is a dispute about the *conditions* placed on the doing of the promised or commanded action. As in the case of desires, such conditions are often, perhaps usually, left unstated. The promiser or the commandee

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[46] Gordon suggests that desires can be treated as demands (1986, p. 106).

[47] Buridan discusses conditional promises in discussion of the seventeenth sophism (Hughes 1982, pp. 118–123).

[48] See Edgington 1995, p. 288, for discussion.

[49] Thanks to Chris Heathwood for writing this dialogue for us.

takes the promise or command to have been cancelled; the promisee or the commander does not. The promiser or commander assumes that the promisee or commandee has in mind the same conditions he himself does. It is easy to see how this might lead to misunderstandings.

It is important to distinguish conditional promises with conditions that have been left implicit from unconditional promises that are permissibly broken. If someone makes a promise but is unable to keep it due to a catastrophe, we sometimes say that even though he acted permissibly, he nevertheless broke his promise. This means we are thinking of the promise as an unconditional promise. If the promise were conditional on there not being a catastrophe, then the promise would be cancelled. Since the conditions on promises are often left implicit, it is not always easy to tell whether the promiser broke an unconditional promise or merely failed to bring about the object of a cancelled promise. An upshot of our account of promising is that we should perhaps be more careful when we accuse people of breaking promises.

Intentions seem to be conditional in just the same way.[50] When a person intends to do something, he may intend to do it conditional on some state of affairs obtaining. In order to fulfil his intention, the condition must obtain. If it fails to obtain, the intention cannot be fulfilled, nor can it be frustrated; it is cancelled. Conditional intentions cannot be thought of as intentions with conditional objects, for the same reason conditional desires cannot be thought of as desires with conditional objects. Perhaps this is unsurprising, especially if intending to bring about that *P* entails desiring that *P*.[51]

Commands, promises, and intentions seem to admit of the same sort of account we have provided for desires. It seems unlikely that there are exactly four phenomena that have this feature. So it is worth exploring what else should be accounted for in the same way.

Of particular interest is *belief*. If you think that there is a genuine difference between the assertion of a conditional and a conditional assertion, and you think of *belief* as the mental analogue of assertion, you will probably think that something like our account of desire is also true of belief. For what it is worth, we are not convinced that conditional belief is best thought of as the mental analogue of conditional assertion. However, it is worth briefly mentioning that our account of desire might imply something interesting about the possibility of *besires*. A besire is supposed to be a unitary mental state that is belief-

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[50] For a brief discussion of the relevance of conditional intention to virtue, see Adams 2006, p. 157.

[51] See Davis 1984 for an example of this view.

like and desire-like (Altham 1986; Lewis 1988; Smith 1994, p. 118). We suspect that a case could be made that, given our account of desire, besires are impossible. But the issues here are large, and we obviously cannot address them here.

12. Conclusion

We have argued that to have a conditional desire is not to desire a conditional proposition (Sect. 3). Nor is it to have a certain sort of preference (Sect. 8). Rather, it is to bear the three-place desire relation to two propositions: an object and a condition (Sect. 5). We have proposed to extend this account to all desires, even unconditional ones (Sect. 6). We have shown a way to use our account to draw the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic desires (Sect. 9). We have shown how desire satisfactionists might use our account to reply to some objections to their view (Sect. 10). And we have suggested that our account may be extended to other related propositional phenomena (Sect. 11).

For other X it has long been understood that having a conditional X is not the same thing as X-ing a conditional proposition—recall, for example, Dummett's discussion of conditional bets (Dummett 1978, p. 8). Nevertheless, the prevalence of the received wisdom about conditional desire shows that these lessons have not carried over in the case of desire. Once it is understood that to have a conditional desire is not to desire a conditional, a positive account of conditional desire must be provided. We have provided one that is novel and plausible.[52]

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Appendix A: Reducing preference to conditional desire

In section eight we denied that desire can be reduced to preference. Our reason for holding that desire cannot be reduced to preference is that desires form a unified psychological kind whereas preferences do not. One can have preferences in virtue of one's desires, dispositions to desire, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, and other more basic psychological states. This same consideration also shows that the notion of preference will not be straightfowardly reducible to desire.

We are aware, however, that not every philosopher will agree with us. Those philosophers who insist that there is a tight connection between desire and preference might then think that they ought to prefer the preferentist's story about desire over our own. We think this is too quick: if you insist on a reducing either preference to desire or desire to preference, we suggest you consider the following view, which attempts to reduce the notion of preference to conditional desire.

Although we do not endorse this view, we see how it could be motivated. Suppose you prefer *P* to *Q*. On the preferentist story about preference and desire, this entails that all else being equal, *given a choice between P and Q*, you want that *P*. Thus we might think of preference as a kind of conditional desire. We first define the notion of an 'exclusive or' (EOR) as follows:

(EOR):   *P* eor *Q* iff either (*P* & ¬*Q*) or (¬*P* & *Q*)

(NSUP):   S (unconditionally) prefers *P* to *Q* iff S desires that *P* given that (all else is equal and *P* eor *Q*)[53]

(NSUP) is a definition of unconditional preference. But we often prefer one thing to another only given some other third thing. So we should also try to provide an account of a conditional preference:

(NSCP):   S prefers *P* to *Q* given *R* iff S desires that *P* given that *R* and (*P* eor *Q*)

Note that we have defined the notion of preference in terms of desire without assuming there is a function from the intensities of desires to real numbers that maps anything psychologically real. (NSD) also provides a new story about preference. The fundamental notion of preference given a contrastive notion of desire is presumably of the following four-place preference relation: *S prefers that P rather than Q given R.* This preference relation relates a subject to three propositions: the

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[53] (NSUP) resembles an account of unconditional preference given by G. H. von Wright (1963, pp. 31–2).

proposition preferred, the contrast proposition, and the condition on which they are contrasted. The preferentist can give an account of conditional desire in terms of this four-place relation as follows:

(CONTRAST):   S desires that *P* on the condition that *Q* iff S prefers *P* to ¬*P* on the condition that *Q*

Other notions that the preferentist can define are the notions of *unconditional preference* and *unconditional desire*:

(UP):   S prefers *P* to *Q* *unconditionally* iff S prefers *P* to *Q* on the condition that *R*, and *R* is a necessary truth

(UD):   S desires that *P* *unconditionally* iff S prefers *P* to ¬*P* unconditionally

Given that the preferentist can 'define' the notion of a conditional desire in terms of the allegedly fundamental four-place preference relation, the contrastivist can help herself to our solutions to the puzzles and problematics discussed in this paper. For the reasons given in section eight, however, we think (NSD) provides the superior story about conditional desire.

Appendix B: *De se* desires

We have agreed with the received wisdom that the objects of desire are *propositions* rather than *properties*. Our disagreement with the received wisdom consists of our holding that (i) there is more to the propositional content of a desire than its object: there is also its condition, which is a second proposition; and (ii) desires can be cancelled.

Many philosophers are attracted to the idea that the contents of desires are not propositions but are instead properties (Lewis 1979). Call this theory the *POD view* (short for: the view that properties are the objects of desire.) Suppose that Hillary Clinton is afflicted with amnesia right before the 2008 election for the US president. She watches one of her own campaign speeches, and forms the desire that Hillary Clinton wins the presidency. But because she has amnesia, she does not realise that she herself is Hillary Clinton. So, although she wants that Hillary Clinton wins, it is not the case that she wants that she herself wins. She might express these facts by saying, 'I desire that Hillary Clinton wins this election, but I do not care that I will not win'. Suppose Hillary suddenly regains her memory. Then it also seems that

she will gain a new desire: now she will desire that she herself wins the 2008 general election.

What is the content of this new desire? According to the POD view, the content of Clinton's new desire is not the proposition that Hillary win the 2008 election, but is rather the property of winning the 2008 election. According to the POD view, there is an irreducible attitude—call it *desire de se*—that connects a person to a property. Fundamentally speaking, all desiring is desiring *de se*. The friend of desiring *de se* accommodates the received wisdom by endorsing the following analysis of what it is to desire that a proposition be true:

(DS1):   S desires that *P* iff S desires *de se* the property of being such that *P*

Because the POD view implies that properties are the objects of desire, the received wisdom's account of what it is for a desire to be satisfied and frustrated must be revised. The standard revisions to the received wisdom are as follows:

(DS2):   S's desire *de se* for *F* is *satisfied* iff S instantiates *F*

(DS3):   S's desire *de se* for *F* is *frustrated* iff S does not instantiate *F*

It is clear, however, that (DS2) and (DS3) provide no more help with the problem of conditional desire than their counterparts (RW2) and (RW3). And it is easy to see why. Propositions are either true or false, and properties are either instantiated or uninstantiated. So (DS2) and (DS3) leave no room for a desire to be cancelled. And taking the objects of a conditional *de se* desire to be conditional properties will not help this problem. Just as there are conditional propositions (i.e. propositions that are conditionals), there are conditional properties. (Given (DS1), whenever someone genuinely desires that a conditional proposition be true—a rare occurrence, in our opinion, but not impossible—then that person desires to be such that the conditional proposition is true. So there are many conditional properties, at least as many as there are conditional propositions.) But these conditional properties are either exemplified by the subject or they are not. In neither case do we have room for the cancellation of a conditional desire.

Our recommendation to the friend of desiring *de se* will not surprise. We recommend that the friend of the POD view replace (DS1)–(DS3) with the following:

(DDS1): Desire *de se* is a *three*-place relation linking a person to two properties, one of which is the object of the desire, the other of which is the condition of the desire

(DDS2): S desires that *P* on the condition that *Q* iff S desires *de se* the property of being such that *P* on the condition that *S* has the property of being such that *Q*

(DDS3): S's desire *de se* for *F* on the condition that *G* is satisfied iff S instantiates *F* and S instantiates *G*

(DDS4): S's desire *de se* for *F* on the condition that *G* is frustrated iff S does not instantiate *F* but S does instantiate *G*

(DDS5): S's desire *de se* for *F* on the condition that *G* is cancelled iff S does not instantiate *G*

It seems then that one can accept our solution to the problem of conditional desires even if one accepts that properties (instead of propositions) are the objects (and conditions!) of desires.

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