

Oddie's Desires

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What is a desire?

According to Graham Oddie (2017):

Desire = The fitting response to the good.

On the way to this destination, Oddie defends an evaluative theory of desire – whereby to desire something is to evaluate it as being good. This, he argues, has two main options:

There are two possibilities within this approach: that desires are value judgments (doxastic value seemings) and that desires are value appearances (non-doxastic value seemings). I defend the second of these, the value appearance thesis. To desire something is for it to appear, in some way or other, good.

Of these, Oddie defends the second option.

We can further divide this second option into two sub-options.

Desires are value-perceivings: A desire that P perceives 'P' being true a value as an end in itself, which motivates the agent to act so as to realize states in which 'P' is true.

And there is the assignment option.

Desires are value-assignments. A desire that P assigns a value as an end to 'P' being true and, thereby, motivates the agent to act so as to realize states in which 'P' is true.

I am going to be seeking to defend the second option. To do this, I would like to run the assignments option through the same obstacle course that Oddie set up for the appearance option generally to show that it can handle these problems, as well as list some additional advantages for the former.

I do not want this thesis to be confused with the theory of projectivism. Projectivism holds that we project qualities onto an object as if the object has those qualities. This assumes that the projection is some type of error or mistake. The situation is more like that which happens when you are in a car that is supposedly stopped. You see a vehicle in the next lane move backwards relative to your car and, for a moment, you are confused. Both descriptions are equally accurate, and the situation can only be resolved by calculating movement relative to some third thing, such as the Earth. Similarly, when something appears to have value all we see is that it has value.

All we perceive is that something has value. We do not see that it has value as an intrinsic property, nor do we see that it has value in virtue of it being assigned. If the value seems to be an intrinsic property, it is because the perceiver is adding assumptions that are not found in the appearance. To work out these answers, we must look at other facts to determine which explanation makes the most sense.

Value Assignings

So, something appears to have value. Is this value perceived or assigned?

I find it difficult to match the perceivings options to my understanding of how the rest of the world works. It seems to require that there is a good independent of desire that is either known through reason alone or seen directly. It is a property of things that commands that people have a particular reaction (motivation) towards that good. J.L. Mackie (1977) labeled this “objective, intrinsic prescriptivity” and argued that it is such a strange entity that there is reason to doubt that there is such a thing.¹

Sharon Street (2005) adds strength to Mackie’s objection by pointing out that that the theory of evolution creates problems for any theory that places values “out there” to be known about or perceived. Evolution has molded our motives to whatever produces biological fitness. Our biological ancestors had more to gain by being disposed to act in ways that produced evolutionary fitness than to correctly perceive some good independent of fitness.

The assignment view would have it be the case that evolutionary pressures selected assignings of value that promoted genetic fitness. Our aversion to pain evolved to cause is to avoid states of affairs that would result in the types of injuries that would have prevented our ancestors from having and raising children. The desires for sex, for food and drink, our food preferences, all came about because the random genetic mutations and survival of the fittest selected some candidates over others.

If our genetic history had been different, if we had evolved in different environments, and if the fortunes of fate had worked out differently, we would have evolved into creatures that assign values differently.

We see evidence of this in the fact that animals, too, assign values to certain states. A dog’s aversion to pain and a cat’s desire to hunt and catch anything that flitters about are examples of natural selection creating brains that assign value to these ends. Evolution has caused different species to assign different values to different states. The rabbit’s evolution in an environment containing hawks may evolve an assignings of value to resting under the low boughs of a tree or in a hole. A bird may evolve an assignings of value to building a nest high on a cliff.

Experience creates different assignings by individuals within a species. Each preference that we find in nature is a preference that we could have had if we had evolved along the same lines and had the same experiences.

Oddie will confront the issue of animals and infants having desires later in his paper, so we will get back to this issue.

¹ Among philosophers, this would make the view a “subjectivist” or “anti-realist” account of value. However, I object to this use of these terms. These assignments exist as a matter of fact. They are real, and they help to explain and predict observations made of the real world. We would not be able to understand how the world works without them. Consequently, they are as real, and statements about them are as objective, as anything studied in science. Somebody may raise the objection that these objections are not valid since none of these are implications of how philosophers use the words. However, they are implications of how non-philosophers use the words and I wish to avoid the practice of making things confusing to non-philosophers. Consequently, I will not be using the philosophers’ “realist” versus “anti-realist” distinction here.

Of course, not all assignments of value are genetic. In fact, among humans in particular, many are learned.

We know some things about how values are learned and they, too, seem to support the assignments view over the perception view. Rewards and punishments (including praise and condemnation) act on the mesolimbic pathways in the brain – the reward system – to encode rules of behavior in, primarily, the pre-frontal cortex. Our experiences cause us to like that which produces a positive reward, and to form aversions to that which produces a negative reward or, in psychological terms, a punishment.

Another potential impact on assignments come from environmental impacts on the brain other than through the reward system. This may include such things as the presence of certain chemicals in the mother's blood stream during fetal development or a traumatic blow to the head (e.g., the famous case of Phineas Gage's accident where a tamping rod went through his prefrontal cortex).

In effect, this system takes as input the experiences of the agent and produces as output alterations in the value assignments that the brain makes, thus altering behavior.

In this way, a person can come to like philosophy or opera, can hate sushi or card games. The different experiences of different individuals results in different assignments of value for different agents.

In contrast, the perceivings theory seems to require that different agents should all perceive the same value in things – the value that it actually has. Those who do not perceive something correctly has a perversion or some other sort of defect. Mackie (1977) argued that the different assignments among individuals and among cultures is evidence against objective intrinsic prescriptivity. Though there are ways in which it can allow two different people can assign different values to the same thing and neither be wrong, these are far more complex than the simple explanation of the assignments view – that people with different histories (evolutionary and experience) simply come to assign different values to things.

These give reasons to support the assignments view over the perceptions view. The next question that I want to address is: assign value to what?

Objects of Evaluation

I have argued that desires are assignments of value.

Assignings of value to what?

Oddie considers two options: propositions vs. states of affairs – thought they are closely related.

Despite the apparent diversity of types of widely presumed that the objects of desire, like the objects of belief, all hale from some uniform ontological category. And the prevailing view is the objects of desire (and of belief) are propositions, or closely related entities like states of affairs.

Yet, he asserts that the difference between these are not relevant to his thesis, but chooses *states* as the ultimate object of evaluation.

I am inclined to go along with this. More specifically, I would argue that a “desire that P” assigns value to a state of affairs in virtue of ‘P’ being true. Thus, a person with an aversion to pain (a desire that I not be in pain) attaches a value to any state of affairs in which ‘P’ (I am not in pain) is true.

However, there is a point that seems a bit confusing that I would like to clarify. Oddie writes, “Whenever a desire seems directed at something non-propositional—like a hokey-pokey ice-cream, Kyoto, or happiness—what makes it true that one wants this or that is that one wants to stand in some appropriate relation to this or that.”

This is certainly true for a large and important set of desires. Yet, this seems to be saying that this is true of all apparently non-propositional desires. On that interpretation, the statement would not be true. A person who cares about another person, a species, or an ecosystem often has no interest in her relationship to that object of evaluation. Rather, she desires that the person is well, that the species not go extinct, or that the ecosystem persists in its current state.

This is not an objection to Oddie’s thesis. What matters is that there some proposition that serves as the object of the desire. THAT the person is healthy and happy, THAT the species not go extinct, and THAT the ecosystem be preserved in something near its current state are adequate propositions for the propositional account. These go along with desires such as a desire THAT I am eating hokey-pokey ice cream, THAT I am in Kyoto, or THAT I am happy.

Ultimately, I would argue that the desire assigns a value to some proposition being true. That proposition could (and quite often does) describe a relationship between the agent and something else (that I am eating hokey-pokey ice cream). It could simply describe some state of affairs without referring to the agent (that Antarctica be preserved). The desire motivates the agent to make or keep the proposition true.

What else does a good theory of desire? Oddie lists three desiderata. I will turn to those three next.

Desiderata of a Theory of Desire

Oddie claims that there are three things to ask for from a theory of desire. He argues that such a theory must be non-belief entailing, desire entailing, and ubiquitous.

Not Belief-Entailing

One of the “desiderata” that Oddie defends for desires I’d that they not be belief-entailing. One of his arguments for this is that, analytically, it simply seems to be the case that it is possible to believe that something can appear good without being good. In an analogy to other types of perception, he compares this to the way in which something can appear round but not be round or appear red and not be red.

The assignment thesis would meet this standard. In fact, I would argue that we have no special access to our own desires. Instead, we theorize as much about our own desires as we do the desires of others. Consequently, we can be mistaken about what we desire – about what our brains assign value to – just as we can be mistaken about what other people desire.

Granted, we have much more information about our own desires. We have not only a long and continuous history of observations to draw upon, but we also have access to additional information such as the emotions stirred within us upon contemplating and realizing certain states of affairs. Consequently, we usually know our own desires better than we know the desires of others. But that knowledge is not without error.

At the same time, our awareness of our own desires can be muddled by the fact that they are ours. There are certain desires that we do not want to have, and others that we do. This encourages us to favor interpretations of our own conduct that allows us to assign the best possible motives to ourselves and blind us to our faults.

This gives us both sides of Oddie's non-belief entailing claim. Our brains can be assigning values to states of affairs without our believing that they are good, and we can believe that something is good even though our brains assign no value to it.

Desire-Entailing

To be desire-entailing it would have to be the case assigning a value V to the realization of proposition P entails desiring that P. There would not be a case in which the brain assigned a value to the proposition 'P' being true where the agent did not have a desire that 'P'. Nor would there be a case in which the agent had a desire that P where the brain did not assign a value to 'P' being true.

Of course, this is exactly what needs to be shown. In looking at the various objections that Oddie addresses to such theories, I hope to bring out this fact.

What is needed here is an example of some state of affairs that meets the conditions described here that would not fit the common-sense account of an agent having a desire. My inability to think of one can just be my inability to think of the account I am defending being false.

Though, even if somebody finds one, I still have a response. I could counter with the claim that the counter-example includes a false assumption and that we would be better off modifying our concepts than rejecting the thesis. This would be a reductionist/revisionist response.

Ubiquitous

We have evolved with dispositions to assign value to many things that sustain life and promote evolutionary fitness. From the aversion to pain to hunger and thirst, to what tastes good and tastes bad, to the comfortable of a room, to the company of friends, to the desire for sex and concern for our offspring, assigned values to ends govern our lives.

We also have a reward system whereby we acquire new desires and aversions, and mold existing ones, based on our experiences. This is how we come to like or dislike philosophy, Jazz, poetry, and pushpin. Here is where we learn our prejudices and, I would argue, many of our moral sentiments such as a disapproval of slavery and a fondness for virtue.

All of these involve assigning values to ends.

Summary

When it comes to meeting Oddie's desiderata for a theory of desire, the assignment theory can hold its own. It is not belief entailing, since the fact that the brain has assigned a value to a proposition 'P' being true implies nothing about what the agent believes. It is desire-entailing directly from the fact that if the mind attaches a value to a proposition 'P' being true does imply that the agent desires that P. And it is ubiquitous since the whole of our intentional behavior is directed to realizing propositions 'P' to which our minds have assigned value.

Radioman and Radiowoman

The story of Radioman and Radiowoman is used to argue for an evaluation theory of desire as opposed to a disposition-to-act theory of desire.

An evil demon has given Radioman a disposition to act. By means of a chip planted in Radioman's head, every time he walks near a radio he will reach out and turn it on. It is something like a habit – something the agent simply does in a given circumstance. A radio is within reach, out goes his hand, on goes the radio. If we ask him if he wants the radio to be on, he would say he does not. He has no interest in the radio being on and, in fact, he hopes that there is no radio nearby so that he will not end up turning it on.

Radioman has no desire to turn on radios.

The purpose of this example is to illustrate that our concept of desire is not a concept that attaches itself merely to a disposition to act. Here is a disposition to act, but it is not associated with a desire, so the concept of a desire points someplace else. It is a mistake to associate the concept of a desire with a mere disposition to act.

Radiowoman represents the evaluative theory of desire. She also reaches out and turns on a radio when one is near. However, she does so because she sees the radio being on as something good.

She has the same behavioral disposition as Radioman, but this is because the radio's being on seems good to her, she feels drawn to the prospect, it is alluring. And when she hears the radio come on she feels satisfied by that.

Radiowoman, in contrast to Radioman, has a desire to turn on radios. Thus, demonstrating the merits of the evaluative theory of desire.

Now, we are asked to consider what would be the case if Radiowoman discovered that she has these sentiments about turning on radios because a demon put a chip in her head.

Suppose Radiowoman were to find out about the etiology of her desires. Then she would know that they are not reliable indicators of goodness. Rather, they are systematic illusion of goodness. They are like the Mueller-Lyer illusions that, once you know about them, give you no reason at all to believe that the lines that appear unequally really are unequal. And even if she knows nothing of the peculiar etiology of her desire, Radiowoman's desires are defective.

This is one way to look at it, but I think it runs into problems.

The aversion to pain can quite accurately be described as a chip in the head foisted on me, not by an evil demon, but by evolution. The wiring that causes me to assign negative values to certain sensations caused by damage to my body was not an intelligent designer. Rather, the wiring came into existence because that wiring kept my ancestors alive and helped them to produce viable offspring. Random mutation, natural selection, and luck dictated the specifics of the wiring. None of this requires any mention of an external 'good' (or 'bad') of which the pain is a reliable indicator. The only thing it is a reliable indicator of is that which was a part of an evolutionary package that caused my ancestors to have viable offspring.

It does not follow from this that, upon recognizing this fact, and denying the existence of any type of 'good' for this aversion to pain being a reliable indicator of, that I lose my reasons to avoid pain. The aversion to pain – the awfulness (the negative value) assigned to states of affairs in which the proposition 'I am in pain' is true – simply is a reason to avoid pain all by itself.

My hunger and thirst have a similar etiology. Not only did evolution plant in my brain hunger and thirst chips, those chips are programmed with preferences for those kinds of food that helped keep my ancestors alive. That was a function of their environment – which foods were healthy, which were poisonous, which provided enough calories to survive, and which provided other necessary nutrients. A different evolutionary history would have resulted in different tastes. However, knowledge of this etiology and that there is no “good” out there for it to be a reliable indicator of does not make a pumpkin pie with Cool Whip heaped on top lose any less delicious or remove my reason to eat a slice if I can.

One can still postulate an external good for these evolution-designed brain chips to be reliable indicators of. The problem is that they are not needed. As Street (2005) argued, the best scientific theory has evolution modifying these brain chips – modifying their assignments of value – using only random mutation and natural selection.

Whether there is an external good for our desires to be a reliable indicator of is an important philosophical question. However, like some other philosophical questions such as the existence of God or free will, some people strongly desire that the “reliable indicators of the good” hypothesis is true. Radiowoman sounds like a person with a particularly strong desire that her desires track some sort of external good. If this is true, she may be very upset to discover that this is not the case – as upset as others are when confronting arguments against the existence of God or of free will.

At the same time, maintaining the idea that our desires are reliable indicators of some external good has its own undesirable consequences. Some people get the idea that their value assignments match up with some external good. From this, they infer that those who do not perceive this goodness are defective. They denigrate such people, calling them “sick” or “perverse,” and dismiss their interests as concerns that cannot only be ignored (since they are interested in no real external good), but intentionally frustrated (since, in their perversion, they are motivated to realize that which is bad). Such has been the fate, for example, oh homosexuals whose brains simply attach positive value to same-sex relationships. This is a problem.

At this point, somebody may be tempted to accuse me of an inconsistency. In the previous paragraph, I wrote about “undesirable consequences”. These appears to be saying more than that these are consequences that some people do not desire. This seems to be offering a reason not to maintain a fiction of an external good that would be substantially independent of the value assignments an individual may actually have. The critic may point that this seems inconsistent with the idea that there is no truth for desires to reliably refer to – no “ought to be desiredness” in the universe for our desires to track. If this criticism was sound, this would be a problem.

I will look at that question next.

[Desirable, Admirable, and Delightful](#)

A key focus of Oddie’s paper is an idea of “fitness”.

The fitting attitude account tells us that the delightful is not just what people happen to take delight in or what people typically take delight in, but in what it is fitting to delight in.

Oddie provides us with three conceptions of this which he generated by “commandeering” a similar topology presented by Topplett (2011):

(Deontic FA) X is V if and only if one ought to take attitude F(V) to X.

(Axiological FA) X is V if and only if it is good to take attitude F(V) to X.

(Representational FA) X is V if and only if it is representationally accurate for one to take attitude F(V) to X.

In these sentences, FA stands for a fitting attitude such as admirable. We can read Deontic FA as saying, for example:

Honesty is admirable if and only if one ought to take an attitude ‘admiring’ to honesty.

Oddie does not specify any preference for either of these three formulations here. He saves that task for when he discusses objections, where he sides with the representational view. I fear that I am going to have problems with the representational view because I do not know how to cash out the phrase “representationally accurate.”

At this point, he seeks only to specify the options. I will do the same. However, I want to say a bit more about these formulations as seen from the assignments perspective.

Again, there is nothing here that we can see as an objection – just a clarification.

For illustrative purposes, allow me to take Deontic FA.

The initial examination of the assignments theory of desire would seem to suggest that honesty is admirable if and only if people admire it. However, this is clearly problematic. There have clearly been cases in the past where at least some people have admired cruelty or ruthlessness in getting what one wants, yet that did not make these admirable qualities. However, there is a way of getting something that fits more closely to what Oddie has in mind out of the assignments theory.

Consider a hypothetical community whose members have an evolved aversion to pain; evolution planted wiring in their brains such as to assign a negative value to states of being in pain.

Let us further assume that the beings in this community have what we may call a “mesolimbic pathway” – a reward system. By means of reward and punishment (including praise and condemnation) inflicted on agents, people can create in those agents an aversion to causing pain. In addition, people can acquire these aversions by observing others being rewarded or punished, or even hearing about them in a story where those who avoided causing pain were praised and those who did not were vilified.

Now, we have this fact: People generally have a reason to promote in others universally an aversion to causing pain. Nobody at the start of this community has an aversion to causing pain. However, this does not prevent it from being true that they have a reason to create such an aversion. In fact, it may be the

case that nobody has even yet figured out, "You know, if we all were to reward and praise those who refrain from causing pain, and punish and condemn those who do not refrain, we can promote universally an aversion to causing pain." Yet, this will not change the truth of the claim.

We can understand honesty in this way.

Honesty is admirable if and only if people generally have on balance many and strong reasons to promote an attitude of 'admiring' to honesty.

For the same types of reasons that the people in my hypothetical community have for promoting an aversion to causing pain, we can make an argument that people generally have many and strong reasons to promote, universally, an admiration for honesty. In this sense, honesty ought to be admired, even where the fundamental desires are evolutionary designed "brain chips" that assign values to such things as avoiding pain, caring for one's offspring, hunger, thirst, sex, and environmental comfort.

This gives me a way of making sense of the claim I made in the previous section that maintaining a fiction of independent goods is a bad thing. People generally have many and strong reasons to promote, universally, an aversion to promoting the fiction of independent goods. The reasons come from the fact that people get criticized for having brains that make value assignments different from those of others. Recall that the problem is that those others see these value assignments as reliable indicators of a type of goodness that does not exist. This is true even though many of those reasons come from the "brain chips" evolution and experience has planted in people's brains.

Nothing here so far provides a reason to Oddie's fittingness thesis. It provides a useful analysis of terms like "admirable". Oddie considers two objections – one of which will lead him to "Representational FA" defined above. I will look at these considerations next.

The "Admirable" Demon

In a universe apparently filled with demons, Oddie postulates that, "an evil demon threatens the world with some terrible outcome unless you admire him." In this case, there is a sense in which you ought to admire him, but that the demon is not admirable.

This creates a problem for "Deontic FA", which Oddie defined as:

(Deontic FA) X is V if and only if one ought to take attitude F(V) to X.

Because, here, one ought to admire the demon (to prevent the terrible outcome), but the demon is despicable. The right side of the biconditional is true, but the left side false, so the biconditional does not hold.

Oddie identifies a similar problem for "Axiological FA" where, "the demon threatens to bring about the worst outcome unless you desire that outcome," thus, "it is clearly better for you to desire the worst outcome than not." Yet, it is still the worst outcome.

To answer these problems, Oddie considers a type of response that comes from Olson (2009) and Ewing (1959) that suggests that there are multiple definitions of 'ought'. It is like the claim that "Georgia is one of the United States" is true when talking about the region north of Florida, but false when talking about the country on the east side of the Black Sea bordering Russia. The biconditional does fail under the

definition of “ought” that appears in the objection, but there is another definition where the biconditional still holds.

Ewing presented some additional detail by claiming that one sense of “ought” refers to what people generally have reason to condemn (they have reason to condemn the person who fails to admire the demon). He distinguishes this from the ‘ought’ that is fitting to admire. It is in the first sense that the biconditional is false, while it remains true in the second.

As Oddie argues, “Representational FA” does not have this problem since, regardless of the merits of what an agent ought to do or it would be good for the agent to value, it remains true both that the demon is not admirable, and that it is not representationally accurate for one to take the attitude of admiring the demon (though it may be prudent or even obligatory to do so).

However, I still do not know what “representational accuracy” is.

We could be working under an assumption that representational accuracy requires representing the admirable quality as an objective, intrinsic property of “deserving-admirationness”. This could make the most sense of how we use the term, but it could lead us straight into an error theory. All claims of admirability would then be false since we are representing things as having a property that nothing actually has.

The tension found in Deontic FA and Axiological FA would be minor compared to this error.

I am not saying that representational accuracy requires this and that we must reject Representational FA as a result. I am saying that this is one way it can go. Another alternative is that representational accuracy is found precisely in Deontic FA – that to accurately represent admirability one represents it in terms of what people ought to admire.

Furthermore, I do not see reason for concern in the responses from Olson and Ewing mentioned above. The fact that the word “Georgia” refers to both a state and a country may generate some confusion, but it does not provide a reason to prefer a theory of “Georgia” that holds that some propositions are true of “Georgia” in the one sense and false of “Georgia” in the other. That is not a problem – it is simply a fact about the language we have invented.

Given uncertainty over what “representational accuracy” consists in and that the ambiguity of a term like “ought” need not be much of a problem, I would like to look more closely at what Oddie called “Deontic FA”.

In the previous section I described a community containing individuals who all had an aversion to pain and a capacity to create in others an aversion to causing pain by using rewards such as praise and punishments such as condemnation. The members of this community have reason to call “admirable” those who go out of their way to avoid causing pain to others, and to call “deplorable” those who do not. These are terms of praise and condemnation and, as such, are useful in creating a community where individuals have this aversion to causing pain that people generally have reason to promote universally.

Let us add the admirable demon to this community. He apparently has a desire to be admired. To get what he wants he is threatening to harm others unless they admire him. Given that others have an

aversion to pain, he threatens to cause others pain unless they admire him (and not necessarily limit that pain to those who do not admire him).

This demon does not have a trait that people generally have reason to promote universally. To admire this demon is to promote universally the trait of being willing to harm others unless he is admired. In fact, the agent (not the demon) in holding that such a trait is admirable would have to also believe that she herself should adopt this trait – that she should also be disposed to cause pain if she is not admired. The same can be said of all her neighbors.

At this point, I need to admit to a shift in what I have called “admirable”. In the original example, we were talking about admiring a demon who wishes to inflict pain if he was not admired. Here, I am talking about admiring a trait. More precisely, we can combine the two by saying that one is admiring a person in virtue of a trait. We cannot simply admire the demon. We must have a reason to admire him – something we admire him for.

The demon’s demand, if not carefully worded, would leave us with a loophole. While the demon is deplorable in virtue of his being willingness to inflict pain unless he is admired, perhaps he is also an extremely gifted painter who can be admired for what he can put on a canvas. Thomas Jefferson owned slaves and raped Sally Hemmings repeatedly – her non-consent being grounded both on the fact that she was a slave and, at the start of the affair, a young teenager. Insofar as this was true, Jefferson was not admirable. Yet, he may still be admired for his skill at eloquently presenting principles of and enlightenment.

In terms of examining Deontic FA, this would be cheating. The counter-example assumes that there is no other trait for which the demon can actually be admired. However, the fact that our admiration is focused on traits, and on individuals only in virtue of the fact that they exhibit admirable traits, does require that we specify what is going on with the demon.

With these considerations, I would offer an alternative to Deontic FA as follows:

(Deontic FA) X is V in virtue of X having trait T if and only if people generally ought to promote universally T by taking attitude F(V) to X in virtue of X having T.

To have a genuine counter-example to this version of Deontic FA, one would need a case in which the demon exhibited a trait that would not be counted as admirable, and yet for it to be a trait that people ought to promote universally by praising those who exhibited it and condemning those who did not. The demon’s trait of being disposed to cause pain unless he is admired is both despicable, and not a trait that people ought to promote universally. It is not a counter-example.

This defense of a form of Deontic FA does not defeat Representational FA. Recall that the objection raised against Representational FA concerned its lack of specificity when it came to cashing out “representational accuracy.” We can now cash out representational accuracy in terms of representing a person as having a trait that people generally ought to promote universally using praise and condemnation. The demon is deplorable, and it is representationally accurate to deplore the demon.

We can apply the same analysis to “delightful.” There are things we have reason to want people to take delight in – the laughter and the accomplishments of one’s children. There are things we do not want

people to take delight in – the suffering and failure of one’s children. People generally have reason to encourage delight in some states and not in others.

At the same time, people sometimes use the term to refer to things that people do not have reason to promote delight in – a delightful meal or concert where there is no fault in others who not only take no delight in the but find them horrible. The use of “delightful” in these cases generally represents an error. In some cases, it may be an exaggerated compliment, “This is so good that those who do not delight in it are somehow defective.” In some cases, it is snobbery and prejudice, “Though there is no reason to promote a delight in this universally, those who do not delight in it are inferior beings – defective in some way.” These uses of the term do not obligate us to come up with a theory in which these uses report facts.

Oddie ends his discussion by drawing some lessons for the theory of the good.

This delivers a constraint on fitting attitudes (namely that they be capable of being representationally accurate) that will narrow the range and nature of the fitting responses to evaluative attitudes in general and to the thin evaluative attribute of goodness. The fitting response to a state’s being good must be a presentation of that state as good.

I have not given any reason to reject Oddie’s analysis of goods for which there is a fitting response – a response that people generally have reason to encourage universally. However, I am including under the concept of “goodness” those states that fulfill desires – the aversion to pain, hunger, thirst, certain food preferences, basic environmental comfort (temperature preferences), and the like – that evolution, environment, and experience have planted in our brains. In fact, I am using these desires as the foundation for the fittingness of such things as the aversion to causing pain.

, and that evolution and experience has planted in the brain. am using a broader definition of desire, and of good, than Oddie. I am including as desired the value chips planted in our brains by evolution and the regular course of biological development. In my description of the community of individuals with an aversion to pain, the evolutionarily acquired brain chip of aversion to pain, the admirability of honesty, and the delightfulness of a child’s achievements.

In the sample community seeded initially with people who have an evolutionarily acquired aversion to pain and a reward system, these are what make the aversion to causing others pain admirable. Without the evolutionarily acquired aversion to pain, promoting admiration of those who avoid causing pain would be pointless. Without a reward system, it would be useless.

Unexperienced Value

The “admirable” demon example, discussed in the previous section, showed that it was possible for it to be the case that people ought to (or that it would be good to) admire someone (who otherwise threaten to do great harm) to prevent great harm even though that someone was not admirable. At least, this was true in the “Deontic” and “Axiological” versions of FA - but not in the Representational version.

(Representational FA) X is V if and only if it is representationally accurate for one to take attitude F(V) to X.

The “solitary goods” problem is meant to show that the left-hand side of such a biconditional is true, then statement cannot be state-entailing or belief-entailing.

The biconditional we are going to work with here is Oddie's conception of "good".

S is good if and only if favoring S is fitting.

Oddie wants to show that this is false if "S is good" is state-entailing ("S is good" implies "S exists"), or belief-entailing ("S is good" implies "Agent believes 'S is good'")

He will then show that the appearances thesis meets these criteria.

So, what are these “solitary goods”?

Solitary goods are those that exist without anyone's being around to respond to them fittingly.

I mentioned that I found this difficult to understand. Does this mean that nobody exist who can respond to them fittingly? Or does this mean that such a person exists, but is unable to respond to them fittingly (e.g., because the object is at the center of the Sun where nobody can experience them)? If the former, then does the person have to exist at the same time as the object that has value? For example, what would we say of a situation where I respond fittingly to something that will not exist until 10 years after I die?

In this biconditional, “favoring” is to S being good what “admiring” is to X being admirable or desiring is to D being desirable.

So, the solitary goods case asks whether it is possible for “S is good” to be true, and “favoring S is fitting” to be false.

I would say “yes” to this and present as my examples the object of every desire that evolution, the environment, and experience has planted as a chip in my brain. The awfulness of that sore throat that results when my body is fighting off a flu, the taste of pumpkin pie with cool-whip, sex, Jimmy Buffett music, and a long, hot shower. All of these are good. Favoring these are not fitting – they are simply what the chips that evolution, the environment, and experience have planted in my brain.

However, for the sake of discussion, let us limit our focus to the same types of goods we discussed in the previous section – the admirable, the desirable, and the moral. These are goods that people generally have reasons to promote universally. I will bring forth my example from the previous section – the aversion to causing others pain (under the assumption that everybody has an aversion to pain).

Does this have a problem with solitary goods?

Oddie gives us an example:

Consider an apparently good state, E, that happy egrets exist. Conjoin E with the state F: that there are no past, present, or future favorers. Suppose that the conjunctive state E & F is also good.

Well, when I am asked to suppose that there are no past, present, or future favorers, I have to ask, “What about the happy egrets?” If happy egrets exist, then there are present favorers. If there are no

present favorers, then happy egrets do not exist. Imagining such a universe in which E & F are good is like imagining a married bachelor named Jim or a round square that is pink.

Perhaps I think I can make this work if I consider an apparently good state – that G.E. Moore’s beautiful planet exists. Though it is beautiful, it contains no evaluative creatures. It has flowers and rainbows clean mountain streams, but no animals. In fact, in this universe, no evaluative creatures exist, have existed, or will exist.

Now we have a situation in which E (a beautiful world exists) & F (there never has been, is, or will be an evaluative creature) are both true. Combining E and F does not create a contradiction.

I would argue that it would be false to say that E & F (or E alone, for that matter) is good. For it to be good, there must be a creature with a reason to bring it about – an evaluating creature. However, this is not a logical requirement. It is a contingent fact about how value actually comes about. I can imagine – even if it is not real – an intrinsic value property attached to E alone and E & F combined that makes this combination logically possible.

However, this clearly does not entail a state in which somebody favors E & F. I already stated that we are imagining that value is an intrinsic property, and value as an intrinsic property does not imply an evaluator. Only value as a relational property between objects of evaluation and valuers requires a valuer, and this is not logically necessary. It is only metaphysically necessary.

So, “good” is not state-entailing.

And, if we can do without the evaluator, “good” is not belief entailing either.

I can agree that “S is good” is not state-entailing on the grounds that much of what we are concerned about in evaluating something as good concerns reasons for bringing it about – and bringing it about might not even be possible. For example, it would be good to be 30 years younger. However, my being 30 years younger does not obtain. So, “my being 30 years younger” is good does not imply “I am 30 years younger”.

To support Oddie’s claim that goodness is not belief-dependent, I can return to our village filled with people who have an aversion to pain. For them, a universal aversion to causing pain would be good – they certainly have reason to bring about such an aversion. However, it is good regardless of whether anybody in the community believes that this is the case. They may be totally in the dark concerning the merits or even the possibility of promoting an aversion to pain. Perhaps a malevolent demon has falsely informed them that condemning those who cause pain will bring divine wrath or bad luck. Yet, given the facts of the case (they have an aversion to pain and a reward system that makes it possible to promote an aversion to causing pain in others) this universal aversion to causing pain is good.

I am not certain that anything I wrote here makes sense of the original argument. I struggled with it. I have given it my best shot and this is what I came up with. Something can be good without anybody believing that it is good. Something can be good without anybody favoring it (though, perhaps, like “causing pain”, it may be something they should favor or, in this case, disfavor). Nothing can be good without somebody valuing something, but this is not a logical entailment. This is just how the universe works.

Yet, I am rejecting the claim, “S is good if and only if favoring S is fitting.” This makes sense for a certain kind of goodness, but not for all goodness. There is still the goodness that evolution, environment, and experience simply assigns to certain states, where there is no fittingness.

The Death of the Death of Desire Principle

The “Death of Desire” principle notes that a desire, once fulfilled, ceases to exist. Another way in which it is phrased is to say that a person cannot desire that which they know to be the case.

Here, I must admit, this simply seems wrong. It is easiest to see with respect to aversions. My desire that I not be in pain does not cease to exist simply because I am currently in a state in which I am not in pain. My fear of deep water does not vanish when I am not in deep water. In fact, the persistence of these “desires that not-P” even when not-P is true provides the motivation to make sure that not-P does not become true. It is my aversion to pain when I am not in pain that causes me to make sure that I avoid future pain. It is my fear of deep water even when I am not in deep water that keeps me out of deep water.

In the case of positive desires – desires to realize a state rather than to prevent the realization of a state, it makes sense that evolution would equip us with desires that fade when they are realized. After all, desires command action. It makes sense that evolution would equip us with desires that fade when they are fulfilled so that we can move on to the next project. We eat until we have obtained the nourishment we need, then we go on to do something else. We are thirsty until that point at which we have consumed enough water to restore a healthy balance. We desire sex until we have reached an end that makes reproduction possible (at least males do), and we explore until we have discovered whatever it is we were exploring to discover.

This provides some understanding of where the idea that a desire ends when that which is desired has been realized. However, it is a mistake to attribute this to all desire.

Even in the case of some desires persist. The desire that one’s offspring is healthy and happy persists even when one knows that one’s offspring are healthy and happy. One’s desire to be a novelist persists through the writing of several novels.

Oddie brings up as an example Hillary Clinton’s desire to become president. Then (in his hypothetical alternative universe) Hillary does become the first female president of the United States. She can no longer become the first female president of the United States because she is the first female president of the United States. The desire disappears. However, being the first female president of the United States still appears good to her. This argument creates an objection to Oddie’s thesis, since this is an example where an agent can no longer desire that P (to become the first female president of the United States), but this still appears good to her. If a desire is an appearance of something as good, then there can be no appearance of good if the desire is dead.

Oddie answers this objection by stating that there is a thin desire that persists through the election, but we give different names to the different parts. At the start, Clinton has a perspective desire (a desire for a perspective state) of being the first female president of the United States. Then, she wins the election, and the perspective desire becomes a satisfied desire that she is president of the United States. Indeed, if the desire did not continue to exist, then she could not be experiencing the satisfaction of the desire the day after the election – not if the desire no longer existed to be satisfied.

The fact that Clinton can be satisfied with winning (if she wins) and disappointed with losing (if she loses) suggests that something of the desire survives the election. It does not, in fact, die. It simply changes its name.

The assigned value theory of desire would have the same response. The brain assigns a particular value to being the first President of the United States. This motivates the agent to make or keep the proposition true. When Hillary wins the election, the desire changed from making the proposition true to keeping it true. The desire did not die. It simply shifted to a new, appropriate object.

The Desires of Young Children and Animals

Young children and animals have desires. They have hunger, thirst, and an aversion to pain at the least. Cats have a desire to chase and catch things that are like prey. Herd animals have an aversion to cats.

Oddie addresses a concern that says that this is a problem for his “appears to as being good” thesis of desire. “Appears to as being good” seems to be beyond the cognitive capacities of infants and animals – which would leave them without desires. Specifically, it is unlikely that any animal or infant has an understanding of the concept “being good” that would be necessary for anything to appear as being good.

In response to this, Oddie suggests two possible answers.

For his first possible answer, Oddie notes things can appear a certain way to us even though we do not have a concept to describe it. He uses color as an example, noting that, “We experience a far richer palette of colors, for example, than we have the conceptual tools to characterize.” In fact, we cannot even ask the question, “What is that?” unless we had a prior ability to pick “that” out so that we can investigate and think about it.

The second possible answer, he draws on the ideas of Friedrich and Lauria that something can “appear round” in many different ways. It can look round. It can feel round. Using the example of a bat he claims that something can also sound round – though he could also use the example of rolling a marble around in a box.

Similarly, one can argue that there are different modes of presentation of a state of affairs. In the perception of S, S is presented as being the case. In the desire for S, S is presented as being good. One and the same state can be presented in these two different ways. The perception that S and the desire that S take the same object but present S in different ways. (p. 51).

This defense still leaves me with two questions.

The first question springs from noting that, nowhere in this section, did Oddie mention “fittingness”. It is possible for something to “appear good” without its goodness being, in any way, fitting, in the same way that something can appear round or appear red without any claim of roundness being a fitting shape or redness a fitting color. The idea that the brain, in assigning a negative value to “I am in pain” makes it “appear bad” can simply be a basic description that this is how the brain works. From here, survival of the fittest will determine if this particular assignment of value (or this particular way of drawing an assignment of value out of the environment and experience) will get passed to the next generation.

The second question deals with the fact that I do not know what “appears good” is supposed to mean. Specifically, rather than introspecting on my own desires, I am curious to know how I understand that somebody else has a desire. I cannot see how some particular thing “appears” to them. All I can see is their observable behavior and, from that, try to infer whether a desire provides the best explanation.

With respect to colors, such as red, I cannot tell how “redness” appears to other people. However, I can look at what other people point to and call “red” and, from that, make predictions regarding what other things people will call red. I can get pretty good at it – predicting what other people will call “red” with exceptional reliability, without having the slightest idea of how “red” appears to them.

When it comes to desire, I have a problem. People are in substantial agreement concerning what they call “red.” There is no such substantial agreement with respect to what they desire. It would make my job easier if everybody pointed to the same thing and called it “good” or “desired,” but they do not. This is in spite of the fact that, when two people point to the same thing and give it two different evaluations, every other appearance is (quite nearly) the same.

When I turn that knowledge inward, that is where I learn to explain and understand my own behavior as the pursuit of certain ends. I may discover that those ends have something in common, but the word is attached not to this appearance, but to what I can know that I share with other creatures who have desires – a disposition to pursue certain ends or goals. We may not have the same goals, but we do have goals.

This is now I know that young children and animals have desires. It is not by knowing how things appear to them – something I cannot know. It is because the best method I have for explaining and predicting their behavior is to understand them as agents who are disposed to perform goal-directed action. They act with a purpose – an end – to realize (or to prevent the realization) of certain states of affairs. This represents more than just a disposition to act. It represents a disposition to plan – to alter one’s behavior in ways that will realize an end even in environments that provide different means.

Conclusion

Graham Oddie defended an “evaluative” theory of desire. This type of theory is typically offered in contrast to “dispositional” theory of desire – whereby a desire is simply a disposition to act in a particular way. The evaluative theory, in contrast, says that a desire somehow evaluates its object – it is not just a disposition to bring it about.

Evaluative theories are further broken down into two types; doxastic views and perception views. The doxastic view says that a desire is a belief that something is good. A perception view says a desire is a perception that something is good.

I introduce a third option – an assignment view. A desire is an assignment of a value to a proposition being true. It could be a positive value or a negative value. I argue that this is more compatible with evolution (where the demons of evolution, environment, and experience conspire to cause us to assign particular values to ends, and governs our lives accordingly).

In the bulk of this paper, I examined Oddie’s theory and tried to draw implications from it for the assignment theory. I actually did not provide any objection to Oddie’s theory that a desire is a fitting response to the good, other than to argue that it is too narrow. It does not apply to the basic desires that come from evolution, environment, and experience. It is a theory about how those desires fit

together. There is a truth to the matter with respect to how desires fit together. Thus, there is a truth that one can respond fittingly to. However, we get to those truths by building on our basic desires – desires simply handed to us.

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