

The Content of Desire

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Abstract We here talk about human desire. We study (Schroeder, 2015), (Pinheiro, 2016), and (O'Connor, 2010) in order to draw some basic sets of premises. Because of real-life elements, such as Brooke Shields, undergraduate psychology courses, and well-known definitions, we reach the conclusion that the theory presented in (Schroeder, 2015) is still incomplete: We would need at least some reference to the levels of the human psyche, and a proper descriptive function of the human desire (entity that desires, entity that is desired, scientific description of the relationship, perhaps in terms of senses) to believe that we finally have a satisfactory theory. Frankfurt brings interesting novelty, since it refers to basically classifying our own will as free or not-free. The sources seem to combine in favour of a more complete theory on human desire in the end. Some of the tools we use are analysis, synthesis, and application.

Keywords Desire, Psyche, Schroeder, Pinheiro, Frankfurt

1. Introduction

There is a simple, conservative theory of desire according to which having a desire is a matter of having dispositions to act. According to this theory, dispositions to act are the only essential feature of desires; the tendencies a person has to feel certain ways or think in certain ways when she has a desire are interesting but inessential tendencies. If Nora desires tea, this is because she is disposed to get herself some tea, and her dispositions to feel good about tea, think positively about getting tea, or to keep having her thoughts turn toward getting tea are merely associated effects of her desire. The simple, conservative theory has a number of competitors, each emphasizing something different from, or in addition to, dispositions to action.

(Schroeder, 2015)

According to the source we have just mentioned, there are theories that are pleasure-based, action-based (the one above), good-based, attention-based, learning-based, and holistic in what comes to desire.

A pleasure-based theory could state that

For an organism to desire p is for the organism to be disposed to take pleasure in it seeming that p and displeasure in it seeming that not- p .

(Schroeder, 2015)

A good-based theory, on the other hand, could state that

For an organism to desire p is for it to believe p is good.

(Schroeder, 2015)

An attention-based theory could state that

For an organism to desire p is for the thought of p to keep occurring to the organism in a favorable light, so that its attention is directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of p .

(Schroeder, 2015)

A learning-based theory, on the other hand, could state that

For an organism to desire p is for it to use representations of p to drive reward-based learning.

(Schroeder, 2015)

A holistic theory would have to comply with a set of items according to (Schroeder, 2015). See:

A list of desire-like features for a holistic theory is rarely provided in full, but certain desire-like features are commonly mentioned and can be expected to play a role in most holistic theories. These are the features just considered as candidates for the essential feature of desires.

1. A creature typically desires p if and only if it is disposed to take whatever actions it believes are likely to bring about p .
2. A creature typically desires p if and only if it is disposed to take pleasure in it seeming that p , and to take displeasure in it seeming that not- p .

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3. A creature typically desires p if and only if it is disposed to believe that p is good.
4. A creature typically desires p if and only if it is disposed to attend to reasons to have p .

Additional features that might well play a role in a holistic theory include any platitudinous observation about desires. A few follow, though platitudes about desire are so numerous that the list could be quite a bit longer than it is.

5. Creatures tend to desire what is good.
6. Creatures tend to desire what they need to survive and reproduce.
7. Creatures normally desire pleasure and do not desire (better: are averse to) pain.
8. Creatures that desire p tend to have their attention captured by information that bears on whether or not p .

Holistic theories of desire come in two main forms: functionalist and interpretationist. In the functionalist form, a desire is an internal state-type that plays enough of the causal roles suggested by (1)-(8) etc. (e.g., Lewis 1972). In the interpretationist form, desires are not treated as internal state-types found in a causal network. Rather, desires are treated as states of the whole organism, states that exist in virtue of the organism's displaying enough of the sorts of behaviors suggested by (1)-(8) etc. to be legitimately interpreted (in accordance with general principles of interpretation, such as requirement to interpret creatures as means-end consistent) as having desires (e.g., Davidson 1980).

In this essay, we will attempt to criticize the theory we have just presented, but we will also make use of a few other sources in an attempt to expand on the idea of human desire.

In (Pineiro, 2016), we see the appearance of some interesting new concepts, which help us express ideas. Two of those are Inner Reality and Outer Reality. Outer Reality can be used to explain the interpretationist sense and Inner Reality can be used to explain the functionalist sense of desire better. We then do just that here.

Frankfurt seems to have come up with a parallel notion: That of free will. In reality, this notion can be easily associated with the human psyche. One of the most obvious examples would have to involve the id and the superego: Desire exists in a functionalist, but not in an interpretationist, form in this case. Another way of putting it is that only Inner Reality will contain this desire, like if we call it d_1 (desire that occurred to individual x in the situation y), d_1 is part of Inner Reality but not of Outer Reality.

2. Development

(Schroeder, 2015) is an attempt to describe the human desire by means of logical jargon and symbols.

Yet, the *sigmatoid* desire has not been specially created for Logic, and therefore suffers from the same faults we study in

(Pineiro, 2015).

Let's read the definition found in a good lexicon:

desire

(dɪˈzɑːrɪə)

vb (*tr*)

1. (Psychology) to wish or long for; crave; want
2. to express a wish or make a request for; ask for
n
3. (Psychology) a wish or longing; craving
4. an expressed wish; request
5. (Psychology) sexual appetite; lust
6. a person or thing that is desired

(desire, 2014)

We have at least six senses for this sigmatoid. That basically means that this sigmatoid is a poor candidate for inclusion in the scientific jargon. We must attempt to use sigmatoids that are created especially for Science, and that have at most one sense attached to them. Six sounds like a bit too much, so that all we mean is that the logical jargon and symbols are inadequate and should not have been used to explain this theory.

The first source we mention talks about desire that is experienced in Inner Reality (Pineiro, 2016), and desire that is expressed by means of actions that will lead to interpretation in others (in their Inner Reality) that means *to have desire*, and therefore to things experienced in Outer Reality (Pineiro, 2016) by the individual who supposedly desires.

Inside of both Inner Reality and Outer Reality, we would have the tags pleasure-based, action-based (the one above), good-based, attention-based, learning-based, and holistic in what comes to desire according to the same source.

It is interesting observing that, first of all, the amount of senses we find in the lexicon does coincide with the amount of tags we are told exist.

It seems however that only the sense number 3 from the lexicon we here chose is dealt with in (Schroeder, 2015).

Therefore, the source fails to address all possible senses of the sigmatoid, first of all.

Sexual appetite, which is the sense number 5 in our list, the one from the lexicon, could however be a result of thinking that that is good for the individual or a result of learning via reward that that is a good thing, so that the individual would, for instance, experience the sensations of eating a wonderful dessert because he had sexual appetite even without eating it, just from having learned that, or it could be a result of seeing sexual appetite under a favourable light, so say it is better than stealing and other things that he feels like doing, and so on.

If the individual keeps that desire inside of themselves, in Inner Reality, we have a functionalist sort of desire. If he goes and, for instance, touches the rear of the woman he feels sexual appetite for, Outer Reality will include *he has sexual appetite* in its list of truths, making his desire become a desire of the interpretationist type.

We would like to state that other types of desire exist, such as the shared-ego one (Pinheiro, 2014): The individual does not desire anything. Who desires is the other. They however may even act upon that feeling for experiencing a shared-ego episode.

There is a joke that was told at the Universidade Santa Ursula in Rio de Janeiro in the year of 1986: The psychology professor said that if a man were in a deserted island with Brooke Shields he would perhaps not have sex with her until there were another man there, and he could then brag, like, do you know who I had sex with today?

That is obviously because he himself did not desire Brooke, but the fact that the other man would make him even give his genitalia to Brooke, so that the other man could share his pleasure after he, the one to have sex with Brooke, shared the ego of the mentioned man with him.

Of course one could argue that that is not desire, since the guy actually never wanted to have sex with Brooke Shields. Notwithstanding, desire is defined as something that could be interpretationist, and, for all purposes, Outer Reality did include *he desires Brooke* in its set of truths. Besides, there are several theories that we saw here that could be applied to explain the processes involved: good-based, since that will make the male fellow happier, like somebody had sex with her, and that is good, or could make Brooke happier, like she is appreciated by men; attention-based, since that could be seen as less worse than not having it; learning-based, since all the other times he had sex with women who were desired by male fellows who were around him, when those women did not desire those fellows, he got praised to highest degree, got paid nice beers and all.

In this way, according to (Schroeder, 2015), this man did desire Brooke. According to us, however, he experienced a shared-ego episode, and never actually desired Brooke himself. He could easily be after the beer from the mate as a consequence of having sex with her. He then had desire for the beer, not for Brooke. What is missing in the analysis we see in (Schroeder, 2015) therefore is talking about the object of the desire.

The lexicon we selected brings senses that favour the thinking of (Schroeder, 2015). If we selected another lexicon, however, so say (desire, 2012), we would read:

desire

Desire can be a noun or a verb.

1. used as a noun

A **desire** is a feeling that you want something or want to do something. You usually talk about a **desire for** something or a **desire to do** something.

...a tremendous desire for liberty.

Stephanie felt a strong desire for coffee.

He had not the slightest desire to go on holiday.

2. used as a verb

If you **desire** something, you want it. This is a formal or literary use.

She had remarried and desired a child with her new husband.

Everything you desire can be found in India.

That basically means that (Schroeder, 2015) should have built a theory based on the object of the desire, not the desire itself.

We should mention Frankfurt as well. We will then talk about how free our will is, something that has nothing to do with the origins of desire: It has to do with degrees of freedom experienced by our will, as if the will were an entity that existed in separate, like we are one entity and our own will is another. See (O'Connor, 2010):

Harry Frankfurt (1982) presents an insightful and original way of thinking about free will. He suggests that a central difference between human and merely animal activity is our capacity to reflect on our desires and beliefs and form desires and judgments concerning them. I may want to eat a candy bar (first-order desire), but I also may want *not to want* this (second-order desire) because of the connection between habitual candy eating and poor health. This difference, he argues, provides the key to understanding both free action and free will. (These are quite different, in Frankfurt's view, with free will being the more demanding notion. Moreover, moral responsibility for an action requires only that the agent acted freely, not that the action proceeded from a free will.)

On Frankfurt's analysis, I *act* freely when the desire on which I act is one that I desire to be effective. This second-order desire is one with which I *identify*: it reflects my true self. (Compare the addict: typically, the addict acts out of a desire which he does not want to act upon. His will is divided, and his actions proceed from desires with which he does not reflectively identify. Hence, he is not acting freely.) My *will* is free when I am *able* to make any of my first-order desires the one upon which I act. As it happens, I will to eat the candy bar, but I could have willed to refrain from doing so.

In this way, we could perhaps say that, for Frankfurt, if we have forces that originate in our superego or soul, for instance, forces that come to oppose the instinctive desire, and, because of that, we don't express our desire in practice, our will is not free, like it is contained or stopped because of that action that comes from a desire that is of rational order, and therefore a weaker desire if we consider the forces of the body, which must then be the reason for him to call that second-order desire.

By acting in such a way however, we act freely, for we do what we really intend to do.

Perhaps this could be a problem: How wanted is a choice of this type? We can envisage three levels of distance from the instinctive being, let's say: id (closest), Frankfurt's second-order desire (could perhaps be said to originate in the Outer World, what is reasonable for others, or even in the World of God, what is reasonable for God), and the ego of others (shared-ego situation).

It should be possible to classify the shared-ego episode, involving sexual desire for Brooke Shields, as a second-order desire following the same logic: It is almost as if a second layer of the being, more external to it, commanded their body, so that it acts in direction x , which was initially perceived by the individual as unwanted.

Here one must recall the example provided in (Pinheiro, 2014), since the individual died from living a shared-ego episode in reality.

3. Conclusions

Theories on desire can be built from more than one perspective. A theory that is close to being called complete should analyse things from the perspective of the feeling (World of God (Pinheiro, 2016)), the perception of others in what regards our feelings (Outer Reality), and the object of desire from at least three perspectives (Inner Reality, Outer Reality, and World of God).

(Schroeder, 2015) presents a pretty good theory, but it is missing an analysis of the object of the desire. Such a fault became evident after we analysed the example involving Brooke Shields and beer.

It is a good progress that we can think of feelings in the way we are doing (interpretationist and functionalist approaches), but it is missing connecting these feelings to entities. When (Schroeder, 2015) talks about functionalist vision, there is reference to Inner Reality, but a function, in Mathematics, has domain, counter-domain, and image. If we talk Science here, we should perhaps use the mathematical jargon. In this case, it is missing the object and attaching these feelings we refer to to a couple of entities (that who feels and that who makes them feel).

Only in this way can we start thinking of desire as a studied item.

It seems that it is also missing talking about desires and parts of the human psyche, so that it may be that desires that are connected to the human id, for instance, are under the umbrella learning-based, but it may be a bit hard to imagine how we connect those things. If a baby sucks whatever comes to its mouth, would it have been previously rewarded by that action? Then we go, yes, it was breastfeeding that he learned that: The mother made it do it. What about when it poos? Would that be a desire or a mechanical thing? Would parts of its body hold desire of their own, so say the intestine feels like moving the thing to outside, so say it is feeling a bit dirty or something?

An analysis that connects to the levels of the human psyche on top of the object of the desire should then be even more complete, and (Schroeder, 2015) is certainly not doing this.

As another point, if we insist in studying the sigmatoid *desire*, we should never make use of logical jargon or symbols, since this sigmatoid does not belong to computational logic, which is the logic that has jargon and symbols.

The will seems to be free if we simply express it but contained or restrained otherwise: An instinctive desire that gets to become action is an instance of our free will.

Free action however is precisely the opposite: If our superego tells us not to eat lollies because they harm our teeth, and we succeed in doing that, not eating lollies was a free act.

Shared-ego desire situations end up being something difficult to deal with: This sort of situation can cause death, as seen in (Pinheiro, 2014).

In this case, we could have a second-order desire, but of a type that is not positive. Frankfurt talks about a type that is helpful, therefore positive instead.

Perhaps this could be a problem: How wanted is a choice of this type? We can envisage three levels of distance from the instinctive being, let's say: id (closest), Frankfurt's second-order desire (could perhaps be said to originate in the Outer World, what is reasonable for others, or even in the World of God, what is reasonable for God), and the ego of others (shared-ego situation).

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