

Desiring that p .

Sketching a Psychosemantic and a Metaphysic of Desire.

When Sam perceives the world, he does not merely see colours and shapes; he also seems to be sensitive to possibilities for his own actions or transformations of the world. His attention can therefore move from representations of the way the world *is* to representations of the way the world *could be* in the future. This can concern very close possible worlds as well as clearly further ones. Moreover, this variety seems to be revealed through the several concepts of our folk psychology including desires, hopes, expectancies, intentions, urges, yearnings, needs, preferences, wishes, volitions, wants, tryings, interests, efforts and so on.

The aim of this paper is to know how to make sense of such representations. Are these mental states to be conceived of in terms of pro-attitudes or conations? But if so, what are the peculiarities of these latter concepts? Or are they better cashed out in terms of the so-called *world-to-mind* direction of fit? In that case, what does it mean to have such a direction of fit?

In order to answer these questions, I will focus on desiring, assuming that this concept describes a specific attitude that is not reducible to any other (like perception, intention, wish, hope or whatever). I shall first determine the conceptual constraints regarding the intentional profile of desire (*) and will address three necessary conditions for a mental state to be that of desiring:

- (a) If a subject desires that p , p has necessarily to be viewed as a positive state of affairs (be it positive or not from a third-person perspective).
- (b) If a subject desires that p , p has necessarily to be viewed as a non-actual and future state of affairs.
- (c) If a subject desires that p , p can be specified by a proposition describing a state of affairs, i.e. not a relation nor an object nor a property *tout court*.

These conditions will help to grasp the distinction between desires on the one hand, and perception, expectancies, reactions towards the actual world and biological needs on the other. They also admit that we sometimes desire things regarding the past, because in that case we are actually viewing the past as a future state of affairs. However, (a), (b) and (c) are clearly not sufficient conditions, because they cannot grasp the distinction between desire and hopes, wishful thinkings, intentions and so on. In order to do that, we have to look further at what desiring *essentially* means.

I will then move to the specific functional role desires play in our psychology (**). I will claim that a desire towards p is essentially a disposition to act in favour of the obtaining – in the world – of a certain state of affairs, namely p . This will help to clarify the role desires play in the causation, justification and metaphysics of action, from an individual as well as a collective point of view. Moreover, such an account does not suffer from important problems that concern alternative views of desiring, namely the pleasure-view, the counter-factual or imaginary*-view and the satisfaction-view.

Indeed, desire cannot just be a tendency to feel pleasure, because several phenomena, imaginings for instance, can also consist in such a tendency. Moreover, the tendency to feel pleasure is not necessary in the case of instrumental desires, although such representations have to be viewed as partly positive in order to figure in the content of desire. Second, desire cannot just be a representation or imagination of a positive counter-factual. The main problem of this view is that it reduces desiring to a certain kind of belief. Finally, desire cannot just be a state whose content has to be satisfied or frustrated, because of the existence of expectancies, promises and any attitude towards the future, which can also be satisfied or not. For these reasons, it seems that an action-view of desire seems in better position to draw the boundaries of desiring.