

More on de Sousa

Points made in class

1. Contra de Sousa's rhetoric, there's nothing *paradoxical*, not even faintly contradictory, about his "paradox," though perhaps the phenomenon of semantic satisfaction without "phenomenological satisfaction" (= "actual enjoyment," p. 83) could use some explaining.

2. There is, de Sousa says and Al Mele agrees in his review, an Aristotelian issue of "false desire," i.e., of mismatch between the aspectual features of the desire's content and those of its "object": "Some events have an intrinsic organization in time; if desire represents them as having another, there will be a mismatch between the desire and the event" (p. 84). De Sousa's modest project here is to explain or at least reveal the nature of at least some such mismatches, and thereby explain some cases of phenomenological nonsatisfaction.

And/but, that raises the issue of a kind of desire content other than the desire's canonical semantic/propositional content. Supposedly, de Sousa is talking about *getting what you want* but being dissatisfied. But if in the semantic sense you get what you want, there's no mismatch between your desire's semantic content and what you got; your desire didn't "misrepresent" *that* object, viz., its semantic content. So, if it misrepresented anything, it misrepresented something else, from which it follows that it *represented* something other than its semantic satisfaction condition.

Likewise, when he says (p. 95) that a desire is "capable of a kind of fit or failure of fit analogous to truth and falsity," he's clearly not talking about the truth or falsity of the (semantic) content proposition. More on this below.

3. Desire contents do indeed have aspectual features, at least so far as they are expressed in complement clauses that, being (linguistic) clauses, have aspect as well as tense.

4. The T-/I- distinction is pretty rough, and very likely not an important distinction in psychological kind; there are two semantically different but not vastly different kinds of desire *content*.

5. There are (indeed) discernible conceptual relations between desire aspect and "object types," as displayed in the table on p. 90.

6. The distinction between "objective" and "subjective" desires is not very clear. De Sousa's official line is that "a presumption of objectivity [is] made by a certain class of desires" (p. 92). But "objective" desires may be only ones that have values or beliefs accompanying them. The "disagreement" criterion is not official; de Sousa switches to the "second-order" test. But then he admits that positive second-order desires aren't

always “objective” either. Nothing he says shows that there’s anything about any desire *itself* that “makes a presumption of objectivity.”

Further comments

7. “The mark of a consummatory desire is that *its end is its end*” (p. 92). I don’t suppose de Sousa could have resisted that bon mot, but if taken literally it generates a little paradox of grounding: The desire’s content is that the desire itself cease. (INTERVIEWER: “What’s your main desire right now?” SUBJECT: “That it itself cease.”) I don’t see how there could be a “pure case” (p. 93), “in which there is nothing more to the object of desire than its own annihilation.” Presumably the sort of thing de Sousa is talking about is an “appetitive” desire in Davis’ sense, whose content is rather that one eat, have sex or whatever, and one also has a second-order desire that that desire cease. De Sousa admits that on the next page.

I endorse his critique of Schiffer (pp. 94-95). He might have added that Schiffer’s opening sentence in effect begs the question.

8. Back to the idea of a desire’s misrepresenting its own object: “In the case of the chocolate craving...the discrepancy arises because of a mistake in the desire as to the character of its own object,” viz., all that is “actually desired” is *to have eaten* the chocolate, not to do the eating (pp. 95-96). The desire, I think de Sousa means to say, has represented its own object as an activity when actually its object is an achievement.¹ But why should we say *the desire* itself does that? Isn’t it more natural to describe the case as one in which I thought I wanted to do the eating, but really wanted only to have done it? (Or possibly as one in which I did want to do the eating, but lost the desire as soon as I started the eating.)

9. I have no quarrel with the article’s concluding section, but why is it entitled “Time and Rationality”?

¹ I am baffled by de Sousa’s remarks on the concept of a vice. Compare: “The nature of *chess* is frequently misunderstood. People assume that chess is a game, whereas in fact it is a dog eating pizza.”