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In What Sense is Desire a Propositional Attitude?

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Received wisdom is that *belief* is straightforwardly a propositional attitude; its object is a proposition, and the content of the belief that P is *that P*. Received wisdom has been and probably still is that the other mental states we call propositional attitudes follow belief in this way: they have propositions as their contents, but are psychologically different kinds of relations between their subjects and those propositions. A functionalist will tell you that the belief that P and the desire that P are directed upon the same proposition, but have characteristically different functional roles.

Hector Castañeda (1975) questioned the latter view of desire content, importantly but not as deeply as was to come later; also, as I shall argue, his point did not in the end show an interesting difference between desire and belief. Hanoch Ben-Yami (1997) takes the radical view that *neither* beliefs nor desires fit the received pattern. My own project in this paper is to accept only a small qualification regarding belief and then to evaluate some more recent attempts to show that desire content is of a different kind.¹ Perhaps a desire's object is in fact either not the proposition indicated in the desire's standard ascription; possibly it is not even a proposition at all.

"To"-complementization

Typically (not invariably), desires, intentions and other conative attitudes are ascribed using "to"-complements. But, Castañeda pointed out, the latter are not simply equivalent to ordinary propositional complements. "Carla wants/desires/intends to buy a boat" is not equivalent to "Carla wants/desires/intends that Carla buy a boat," since Carla may be amnesic and unaware that she herself is Carla. The equivalent would have to be, "Carla wants/desires/intends that she herself buy a boat." "She herself buy a boat" does not by itself express any ordinary proposition, and not just because it is ungrammatical. Castañeda proposed the new ontological category of "practitions," entities analogous to believed propositions, but not propositions.

However, as Castañeda himself (1966) had argued at length, the case of belief is sometimes parallel: For just the same reason, "Carla believes that she will be the next department chair" is not synonymous with "Carla believes that Carla will be the next department chair," so long as the first means she believes that she herself will be the next department chair. The "essential indexical," as Perry (1979) calls it, is there just as it is for desires and intentions.²

What that shows is not that the belief object is not a proposition, but that it is a proposition under a special mode of presentation. N.b., especially in light of

substitutivity phenomena such as Frege's Puzzle, there is now nothing unfamiliar about the idea that belief relates its subject to a proposition only relative to a particular mode of presentation. Two people believe what is in fact the same singular proposition but behave differently in regard to it; the difference is explained by the differing modes under which the proposition is psychologically presented. Obviously this idea needs unpacking, and it has been implemented in different ways—for my own version, see Ch. 4 of Lycan (1988)³—but even schematically it shows a parallel between belief and desire. Self-regarding belief is a relation to a proposition, but only as mediated by a distinctively first-person mode of presentation; the same holds of desire when it is “to”-complementized.⁴

In each case, the attitude relates the subject to a proposition, but there is a bit more involved. Below I shall consider views according to which although desire content is in part a proposition, it includes *still* more in a way that belief does not.

Truth and satisfaction

The belief that P is a true belief iff P. Desires are not said to be true or false at all (probably because of having a world-to-mind rather than a mind-to-world “direction of fit”), rather, they are said to be “satisfied” or “fulfilled.” It might be thought that this is merely verbal, a superficial convention of usage. But is the desire that P satisfied iff P? Not in the usual sense of the term. Stampe (1986) argues, and Lycan (2012) elaborates, that there is a temporal dimension: where the complement is time-indexed, containing “tomorrow” or “in 2019” or just “sometime or other,” the desire that P is not satisfied until it *comes* true that P. Gordon (1986) points out that for some desires, “appetitive” as he calls them, there are further conditions on satisfaction. Suppose I have a desire to eat. If I cause it to be extinguished by some means other than eating, say by taking a diet pill, but then (for whatever reason) do eat, the now extinct desire is not satisfied.⁵

These considerations show only that satisfaction for desires is not, after all, the exact analogue of truth for beliefs. That analogue is, rather, what Lycan (2012) stipulatively called “semantic satisfaction,” admittedly not a notion that plays a significant role in everyday life or thought.

The “grain” problem for specifying desires

(Lycan 2012 Fara, 2013). Suppose you desire to have lunch. I sit you down before a large piece of gross, moldy cheese excavated from the back of my refrigerator, and tuck your napkin under your chin. Says you, “Not *that* lunch! *Not* what I wanted!” Or you desire to be famous. You publish something, but it contains a fallacy so obvious and stupid that the news of your gaffe spreads to the entire English-speaking world, and your photograph appears on posters. “I didn't mean *that way* / famous for *that*.”

Following Bach (1997) on belief, Fara calls this the issue of *content specification*.⁶ The question now is, not whether desire relates its subject to a proposition, but rather whether it relates the subject to the proposition expressed by the

complement sentence of its canonical description; let us call the latter the “Content-Specification” property.

On the face of things, what is desired in the above examples is not precisely what was said to be desired. But, Fara and I agree, the desire ascription is not thereby falsified. It remains true in the context that you wanted to have lunch, or to be famous, despite the need for tacit qualification. That the qualifications are taken for granted is the reason the ascription is put categorically and is not overtly conditional.

Lycan (2012) surveyed a number of approaches to this phenomenon. My preferred one is this: The desires in question really *are* conditional desires. Consider the account of conditional desires put forward by McDaniel and Bradley (2008). Their opening examples: B wants to go out for a beer later, so long as he is not too tired, or unless C will be there.

Some of the desires in McDaniel and Bradley’s examples have only tacit conditions, and there is a hidden “condition” parameter in their ascriptions. McDaniel and Bradley portray conditional desire as a relation, not between a subject and a proposition, but between the subject and two propositions: the desire has both an “object” proposition and the relevant “condition.” The ternary relation is taken as primitive. The condition may be tacit and quite complex; it need not be fully represented, but it is normally the value of the contextual parameter. And a conditional desire in their sense is not an unconditional desire directed upon a conditional proposition; neither, of course, is it a conditional truth whose consequent is an unconditional desire. In that respect it is like conditional obligation.

Now we may add that, as a matter of fact, there are few if any genuinely unconditional desires. How often does someone desire that P *no matter what*? “Would you want P even if your child were to be murdered? Even if it were to bring on nuclear holocaust?” I suppose someone might desire permanent world peace at any price, but that would be irrational; there are other great goods that would be worth a little border skirmish somewhere. Likewise for an end to all disease, and any other grand outcome I can think of. That my own children be good people (McDaniel and Bradley, p. 267, cf. Persson, 2005)? Not at the cost of nuclear disaster. —Still, there might *be* such a desire, irrational or not. McDaniel and Bradley allow for unconditional desires a bit artificially, by letting such desires be “conditional on” the necessary truths.⁷

McDaniel’s and Bradley’s view of conditional desire seems right, but their ternary relation is left primitive and so does no explaining. To fill the gap, Lycan (2012) offered a possible-worlds treatment that accommodated the McDaniel-Bradley relation by appeal to a class of “compliant” worlds, = P-worlds where the tacit conditions are also met. But that in turn left the question of whether that treatment is indeed the right sort of semantics for a conditional desire.

As with any semantical issue, there is room for objections and adjustment, but what is relevant for the present paper’s purpose is that a class of worlds determines a proposition; so my (2012) treatment still related the subject to a proposition—just not to the proposition expressed by the ascription complement. It violates Content-Specification. But perhaps conditional desire should be even less conventionally understood.

Irreducibly conditional desire, on the model of conditional obligation

Suppose we follow McDaniel and Bradley farther, and consider conditional desire on the model of conditional obligation. Notoriously, the latter is not straightforwardly propositional at all; hence the paradoxes of deontic logic.

As noted above, conditional desire is like conditional obligation in that it is not a straightforward mix of a propositional attitude and a conditional. A typical example for obligation: “If you visit your grannie, you should take her flowers.” That sentence cannot be parsed either as “ $V \rightarrow O(F)$ ” or as “ $O(V \rightarrow F)$.” The apparent Modus Ponens inference from the sentence and “You will [in fact] visit your grannie” to “You should take her flowers” is valid in English, but although

$$\begin{array}{l} V \rightarrow O(F) \\ V \\ \hline \therefore O(F) \end{array}$$

is valid in any deontic (or other) logic, its conclusion should not hold: you are not unconditionally obligated to take your grannie flowers. And

$$\begin{array}{l} O(V \rightarrow F) \\ V \\ \hline \therefore O(F) \end{array}$$

is simply not valid.

Conditional desire works similarly. You want to take your grannie flowers if she is not allergic to them. The unconditional conclusion of

$$\begin{array}{l} \sim A \rightarrow D(F) \\ \sim A \\ \hline \therefore D(F) \end{array}$$

should not follow, and

$$\begin{array}{l} D(\sim A \rightarrow F) \\ \sim A \\ \hline \therefore D(F) \end{array}$$

is invalid.

Are there issues of desire parallel to the deontic paradoxes? Let us go straight to Chisholm's (1963) Contrary-to-Duty puzzle. In grandmaternal terms: (i) You ought to visit your grannie. (ii) If you visit her, you should tell her you are going to. (iii) If you do not visit her, you should not tell her you are going to. (iv) You will not [in fact] visit her. Those four assumptions are mutually consistent. But (i) and (ii) seem together to entail that you ought to tell your grannie you are going to visit her, while (iii) and (iv) entail that you ought not.⁸ (It is assumed that there are no contradictory unconditional obligations.)

There is, indeed, a parallel problem for desire. (i-d) You want to visit your grannie. (ii-d) You want to tell her you are going to visit, if you do visit. (iii-d) You want not to tell her you are going to visit, if you are not going to visit. (iv-d) You will not [in fact] visit her. (i-d)-(iv-d) are mutually consistent, but as before, they cannot be represented as consistent by any standard logic of conditionals and sentence operators.⁹

We could run through the standard solutions to Chisholm's puzzle and see how each fares when applied to desire, but the solution relevant to present purposes is the one based by Feldman (1986) on Lewis' (1973) proposal regarding conditional obligation. Like van Fraassen (1972), Lewis sees conditional obligation as irreducibly dyadic, and he offers a possible-worlds semantics based, not on a fixed set of deontically perfect worlds, but on a ranking of worlds with respect to "betterness."¹⁰ Ignoring some detail, $O(B/A)$ is true iff some $A \& B$ world is better than any $A \& \sim B$ world. Feldman (p. 98) applies the analysis to Chisholm.

Now, adapting fairly freely, here is the semantic account of conditional desire suggested to me by the Lewisian treatment: S desires that P given the condition C iff some $C \& P$ world is better by S 's lights than any $C \& \sim P$ world. (We may think of "better by S 's lights" as some version of preferring.)

This analysis removes the contradiction in (i-d)-(iv-d), first and foremost by blocking the inference from (iii-d) and (iv-d) to the unconditional "You want not to tell your grannie you are going to visit." All (iv-d) says is that in the actual world @, you do not visit. (iii-d) says that some not-visit-and-not-tell world is better_s than any not-visit-but-tell world; nothing follows about not-tell worlds' being better in general than tell worlds.

More formally: Let S 's ostensibly unconditional desire for A be represented as $(\exists w)([A]w \& (w')([\sim A]w' \supset (w >_s w')))$,¹¹ where "[...] w " means " w is a world in which ..." and " $>_s$ " means "better by S 's lights than." Then (iii-d) and (iv-d) are:

$$(\exists w)([\sim V \& \sim T]w \& (w')([\sim V \& T]w' \supset (w >_s w')))$$

$$[\sim V]@.$$

But $(\exists w)([\sim T]w \& (w')([T]w' \supset (w >_s w')))$ cannot be derived.¹²

The conditional obligation approach to Chisholm's puzzle, especially in its dyadic version, is disputed (Goldman 1977, Tomberlin 1981, Bonevac 1998). But it is plausible. *If* the dyadic version is accepted, then desire is not a simple relation between a subject and a proposition, but quite a complex relation between the subject and two propositions.

Richer content

Brewer (pp. 265ff.) argues that typically a desire has a richer content than is included in its canonical description: typically, the desire or desire complex in question goes beyond the latter content; the words, though accurate so far as they go, flatten the thing actually wanted. And Tal and Mal each want to go fishing. But Tal's conception of what he wants involves *catching* fish, while Mal's involves mainly the refreshing experience of a bright day's wading in the cool rushing waters.

So far, this phenomenon is open to each of several different interpretations. A skeptic may say that the desires themselves are straightforwardly propositional (under the first-person mode of presentation), the contrasting imageries being just that, accompanying imageries. Or we could say that those particular desires take the same proposition as object, but there are additional though closely allied desires. Or for some reason Content-Specification is violated and the desires incorporate the same proposition but more besides.¹³

Under that last heading, perhaps Brewer's example is just a further manifestation of the "grain" problem. Here is a further argument for his claim under that interpretation: Upon being brought lunch, I find that it is not only decent and pleasant but supplies a quality, such as tangy sweet&sour, that had appealed to me without my realizing so. I say, "This is *just* what I wanted."

I will not try to decide between those interpretations. Probably each answers to some real-world situation.¹⁴

Wishing and hoping¹⁵

Received opinion seems to be that each of those attitudes is a subspecies of desire.¹⁶ So previous claims about desire should apply, at least regarding satisfaction/fulfillment conditions and regarding "grain"; indeed, this is a partial test of the received opinion. Do they? It seems so. Fulfillment does obey Stampe's "coming true" rule. And regarding Gordon's example: I wish I could eat. But I cause the wish to cease by taking a diet pill. Then for whatever reason I make myself eat. Did my wish come true? Only ironically. And similarly for hoping.

The "grain" problem recurs as well. I wish/hope to have lunch, or to be famous. But not *that* lunch, and not *that* way.

These consiliences support the view that wishing and hoping are species of desire.

Must desires have propositional content at all?

Ben-Yami (1997), Thagard (2006) and Brewer (2006) have argued that, far from having propositional contents that parallel those of beliefs, desires can be simply for individual things, without predication. Ordinary usage supports that:¹⁷ "I want sleep"; "The rat wants a food pellet"; "Ron desires ice cream"; "Brad desires Angelina"; "Dorothy wants a Harley-Davidson"; "Dorothy wants this man."¹⁸

Standard procedure for dealing with those data is simply to take them as elliptical and to justify that by translating them into propositional form: “I want to sleep”; “The rat wants to be given a food pellet”; “Ron desires to eat some ice cream”; “Brad desires to partake in sex/romance/marriage with Angelina”; Dorothy wants to own a Harley-Davidson”; “Dorothy wants to be in a romantic relationship with this man.” But our anti-propositionalist or “objectualist” (Sinhababu, 2015) authors are dissatisfied. Ben-Yami calls such paraphrases “at best dubious English” (p. 85), a very strong claim; I think the worst they could rightly be called is, perhaps a bit stilted.

And, contra Ben-Yami, we do have some crisply propositional desires, typically existential ones, whose normal ascriptions are not translations from objectual originals: that the office refrigerator be kept cleaner; that there be no more war. (Admittedly, these complementize better with “to,” and admittedly, I do not see exactly how “to” there serves to express a first-person mode of presentation.) An opponent would have to show at least that they are somehow parasitic or derivative.

But Ben-Yami also reasonably asks why, even if the paraphrases are good English and sense-preserving, we should award them priority over the original. That is, why should we conclude that the desires are “really” propositional rather than “really” objectual? After all the propositional formulations *are* less natural.

A first obvious answer is an appeal to the uncontroversially propositional desires aforementioned. They do not paraphrase back into objectual form. If objectual formulations always paraphrase into propositional ones *but not vice versa*, that seems to show that the propositional formulations are more basic.

Now, it must be conceded that conversationally, even our squarely propositional ascriptions can be ellipsized in context. “We’ll get some cleaners in. Where do you want them to start?”—“I want the refrigerator.” Or, with the cleaners en route, the department chair comes in to the common room, sniffs the air, and barks “The refrigerator!” But this is *genuine* ellipsis, in which quite definite semantic material has been supplied by context. Recruiting posters used to feature Uncle Sam pointing at the viewer and saying “I want you!,” above the caption “for the U.S. Army”; the posters were so familiar that the explicit addition was hardly necessary and for all I know was later just omitted.

But Stainton (2006) documents at length that any sentence can be thus ellipsized¹⁹ given some conversational context, and in various ways. The conversational point does not count against the fundamentally propositional nature of the existential desires. Also and more interestingly, there is an obvious felt difference between a merely conversational ellipsis and an objectually formulated desire ascription: “What do you want?”—“Ice cream!” (“Ice cream” is not itself a one-word sentence like “Run!” or “Wolves!”), vs. the perfectly complete sentence “Ron wants some ice cream.”

So far, then, the propositionalist view is not threatened.

Thagard appeals to the case of nonhuman animals, which certainly desire things like *food* and *warmth* but, he contends, not propositional expansions of those. (a) The animals cannot represent themselves, as in “...that *I* eat food”; (b) they are not good at representing relations, as in “...that *I eat* food.”

(a) is true but does not show that the creature itself does not figure in the semantic satisfaction condition. (b) is true but does not show that the creature does not represent a

relevant relation in any way at all. Besides, even if animals' desires are not propositional, that shows at most that they do not have desires in the full-fledged sense we do. Still no threat.

Brewer argues that even human desires for things are often *genuinely indeterminate* in this way; thus, he considerably strengthens Ben-Yami's position: he maintains that although the paraphrases may be perfectly good English, they're often *inaccurate*, and inaccurate in principle. Dorothy wants a Harley-Davidson, but there *is no* particular verb V such that Dorothy wants to V a Harley-Davidson.

What Dorothy desires, it might be presumed, is that she possess this Harley. But the typical desire for a Harley Davidson is unlikely to boil down to the desire that one's name appear on the certificate of title and that one enjoy the legal incidents thereof. Dorothy might hope and expect that her desire for the Harley will continue after she comes to own it, not in the form of a running desire to continue to own it but in the form of a desire for the Harley—a desire that gives point to owning it. (p. 263)

Just so. It would be odd (though possible) for someone to want *only* legal ownership of a motorcycle, with no deeper motive if only to make some money by renting it out. But Brewer's point is far more general. Think of nearly any deeper reason or desire. To start with the obvious, does Dorothy want to *ride* the motorcycle? Not necessarily. To show it off in her front yard? Possibly but far from necessarily. To keep it for the entertainment of Harley-loving visitors, or more specifically for her father to use while he is in town? For any such reason, the answer may be a firm "no."

Brewer continues:

...[I]t seems possible that the obtaining of any relevant state of affairs at which Dorothy can plausibly be seen as aiming would serve only as the optimal condition for the intensification of a mesmeric attraction to the machine itself, and that this attraction to the machine might be essential to any adequate explanation of Dorothy's inclination to bring about some favoured relation between herself and the machine. (ibid.)

Dorothy may be just inchoately *attracted to* the Harley, and nothing else in her psychology determines any but the most broadly and vaguely disjunctive relation she might bear to one. Similarly, Brewer argues, she may want a certain man, in that she is in some way attracted to him, but there may not as yet be any particular relationship she wants with him—not a "relationship," not sex, not any other joint activity, though of course some such desires may soon arrive.²⁰

If Brewer is right, then although some desires are irreducibly propositional as I have maintained, some others are irreducibly objectual. There is no a priori reason to assume that all desires must be one or the other.

Objection by Sinhababu (2015): This objectualism gets the individuation of contents wrong. If Dorothy would be pleased mainly by riding a Harley-Davidson while

Sal hates the thought of riding but would be pleased mainly by just legally owning a Harley-Davidson, then it is misleading at best to say that Dorothy and Sal *want the same thing*.

I share the intuition, but do not accept it as decisive. Someone who knows the two's differing reasons would not *say* that they want the same thing, because to do so would be misleading by way of Grice's conversation Maxim of Quantity. But someone else who does not know Dorothy or Sal but who merely observes their respective efforts to obtain a Harley might perfectly well say it.

A neat objection by Searle (1983, p. 30): Consider "I want your house next summer." Grammatically, the modifier must attach to some underlying verb phrase; it does not modify "want." So there must be an underlying verb, undoubtedly expressing what relation the subject wants to bear to your house, and the desire is squarely propositional. Of course, Searle's argument applies only to cases in which the desire ascription contains an unattached modifier of this sort. But he would probably add that for innumerable many desire ascriptions, such a modifier *could* be added without ungrammaticality.

Now, Searle's argument offers no way of determining what verb it is that is underlying the original ascription. We might think that the verb is at least in the speaker's mind, but the speaker may have no particular intentions regarding the house, though certainly there are plenty s/he does not have. We might try some very general verb, such as "use," but it may not be true even that the speaker wants to *use* the house for anything.

Or, here and in the case of Dorothy's Harley, we may offer a dummy term such as "have," but that leads to ambiguity: "I will have your house next summer" does not express any single proposition. "Have" may mean some form of possession, de facto and/or temporary if not legal. Or it may be a complete dummy, as grammatically the possessive case is. (Given suitable context, "X's F" can mean just, the F that bears R to X, for any R.) Humberstone (1990) resists the ambiguity version, maintaining that the dummy "have" is merely nonspecific rather than ambiguous. But the point remains that it is vacuous and does not reflect any determinate psychological property of the subject. Also, if it is completely dummy, the objectualist will call that an empty victory; though the ascription has a grammatically sentential complement, there is no actual proposition, because one of its "components" is null.

Here is a possible solution for the propositionalist. Entirely out of context, the hidden verb is indeed "have" or the like and is dummy and empty. But that is nothing new; entirely out of context, *any* sentence with even one deictic element fails to express a proposition. In context, the verb may be completely obvious, even if the example is not one of the sort I called "ellipsized"; e.g., "Lloyd wants a can-opener" said while Lloyd is visibly holding a can containing soup he has just said he is going to have for lunch. Other cases, possibly Searle's or Dorothy's, are open-ended. The verb may be ludicrously disjunctive, but it is not dummy or empty, for most possibilities are ruled out, effortlessly and unconsciously. There are many things for which I might want your house next summer, but among them are not: eating it, brushing my teeth with it, or for

that matter planting California redwoods in it or dropping it on the Wicked Witch of the East.

In context, filling in the verb phrase is a case of what the Relevance theorists call “ad hoc concept construction.” The test question would be, what are the possible relations that would satisfy Dorothy’s desire?²¹ The ascription will be true iff Dorothy bears at least one of those to the Harley-Davidson. (N.b., the speaker need not know exactly which they are. Nor need Dorothy herself.) That vague set of relations would determine a vague set of worlds, hence a proposition.

Alternately, we might construe the sentence as a wide-scope existential quantification over relations: $((\exists R)Dd(\exists x)(\text{Harley}(x) \ \& \ Rdx))$. That could be too cheaply satisfied if the domain includes degenerate relations such as x is such that Dorothy eats ice cream. Intuitively, that existential formula will capture “Dorothy wants a Harley-Davidson” just in case its quantifier ranges over just the same vague set of relations identified in the previous paragraph—in which case it will be logically equivalent to the contextually filled-in ascription specified there.

Conclusions

(1) Satisfaction/fulfillment for desires is not the same as semantic truth. (2) I think it is clear that general Content-Specification fails: some desires’ objects/contents are not the propositions indicated in their usual ascriptions. (3) It is also clear that all or nearly all actual desires are conditional, and thus ill-behaved in whatever way(s) conditional desires are. (4) I am not convinced of objectualism for desires, but I remain open to it. With those qualifications—important ones, I believe—I remain a propositionalist about desire.

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Notes

¹ We must carefully distinguish this issue from each of several others that have come up in the past decade under labels containing the term “propositionalism.” First, there is the view attacked by Montague (2007) and Grzankowski (2012), that *every intentional* attitude has at bottom a proposition as its object. That view has been held by few if by anyone; it is certainly not by me. Second, there is the claim called “strong propositionalism,” discussed by Brewer (2006) and Merricks (2009), that “the real intentional object of a[n attitude] is always a proposition rather than a state of affairs to which a proposition might relate us” (Brewer, p. 264). I will not mean abstract propositions as opposed to concrete states of affairs designated by the corresponding propositions..

² Humberstone (1990) notes that “*a* wants to φ ” and “*a* wants *b* to φ ” “seem unproblematically renderable in the preferred [propositional] idiom, with sentential complements ‘that *a* φ ’ and ‘that *b* φ ’, as long as no fuss is made over the *de se* nature of [‘*a* wants to φ ’], which it had better not be on pain of not counting ‘*a* believes that he/she will φ ’ as a propositional attitude ascription” (p. 101).

³ In my own view, the “mode of presentation” proves to be a component of the functional role that the relevant representation is playing, a functional feature added to that already defined by the attitude type, (here, the representation’s being the realizer of a belief in particular); so belief remains a functional relation between a subject and the proposition expressed by the representation.

⁴ For interrogative attitudes such as wondering wh... , Jane Friedman (2013) argues convincingly that they do not have propositions as their objects or contents, not even relative to modes of presentation. Rather, they are directed upon *questions* in the ontological sense of Hamblin (1958) and Belnap (1983), proposition-like entities that differ from propositions.

⁵ (See also Parfit, 1984.) Gordon adds (p. 108) that if I eat but it fails to quench the desire, the desire is not satisfied. He takes his observations to show that the “object” (p. 109) of the desire is not simply *to eat*. He suggests that the object is that one eat *and by doing so* quench the appetite. That depends. In one obvious sense the desire would be satisfied, because what I wanted was to eat and I did eat; it’s just that now I want to eat more. But I agree that there is another sense in which the desire is not satisfied; see the next section of this paper.

⁶ But the problem she and I have raised for desire is much worse than that suggested by Bach for belief.

⁷ In that they follow standard practice in dyadic deontic logic, of representing unconditional obligation as obligation conditional on tautology.

⁸ For an excellent critical survey of responses of Chisholm’s paradox, see Al-Hibri (1978).

⁹ Here it is assumed, not that there are no contradictory desires, but just that no contradictory desire figures in the present setup.

¹⁰ Lewis (1974) goes into agonizing detail about such rankings.

¹¹ This is logically equivalent to making the obligation conditional upon tautology.

¹² Can unconditional “You want to tell grannie you’re going to visit” be derived from (i-d) and (ii-d)? No. All the better for resolving the paradox, but someone may think that D(V) and D(T/V) ought jointly to entail D(T); the corresponding principle for obligation holds. But I doubt the inference, even if it is maintained as a norm of rationality rather than a determiner of fact. It is not always irrational to have contradictory desires, much less to fail to desire a consequence of something else one desires. That is

because one may have a good reason for each of the conflicting desires, where the reasons are mutually unrelated.

¹³ I am sure Brewer had not seen the following passage from Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (London; Gollancz, 1953), or he could no more have resisted quoting it than I will:

As he stood in the badly lit jakes, he was visited again, and unbearably, by the visual image that had haunted him ever since he took on this job. He seemed to be looking from a darkened room across a deserted back street to where, against a dimly glowing evening sky, a line of chimney pots stood out as if carved from tin. A small double cloud moved slowly from right to left. The image wasn't purely visual, because he had a feeling that some soft unidentifiable noise was in his ears, and he felt with a dreamer's baseless conviction that somebody was going to come into the room where he seemed to be, somebody he knew in the image but not in reality. He was certain it was an image of London, and just as certain that [it] wasn't of any part of London he'd ever visited. He hadn't spent more than a dozen evenings there in his life. Then why, he pondered, was his ordinary desire to leave the provinces for London sharpened and particularized by this half-glimpsed scene? (p. 28)

¹⁴ Brewer further argues (sec. 4) that a desire can persist through deepening and enriching of its content over time. Some artistic desires are "fugitive" and "perfectible." Here again, the artist can come to say, "There, that's finally it; last week I thought I had got what I wanted, but I now realize I hadn't." The same cannot be said of beliefs; there we just speak of developing more beliefs. —But I do not buy this. I think even artistic desires are after all parallel to beliefs in this respect.

¹⁵ For the elderly (but, sexism alert!): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAdTsAKvVTU>.

¹⁶ See, respectively, Armstrong (1968) and Martin (2013).

¹⁷ Though, interestingly, if we want to extend that usage to wishing and/or hoping, we have to add a preposition: "wish for X," "hope for X."

¹⁸ It was Annette Baier who first put this view to me, and very forcefully. I am grateful to her for a valuable conversation on related issues.

¹⁹ Actually, not in the technical sense defined by linguists. Stainton is specifically at pains to argue that conversationally used "subsences" fail syntactic tests for ellipsis proper.

²⁰ And of course some context may have supplied ellipsized content, but obviously that is not the sort of example Brewer has in mind.

²¹ '[W]hen out of the blue someone says 'I want a pin' and denies wanting it *for* anything, let us suppose we give it him and see what he does with it' (Anscombe 1957, p. 70, though in connection with a somewhat different issue).