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## From Emotions to Desires

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### 1 Introduction

It is now widely accepted that beliefs and desires are to be conceived as dispositional mental states. This means that beliefs are to be understood as what may lead one to action given a desire, and that desire are what may lead one to action given beliefs. But this way of understanding beliefs and desires makes more obvious the difficulty there is to find an explanation of how we come to know that we have these mental states. The solutions that have been proposed in order to explain this access to our mental states tend in general to assume that the procedures through which we become aware of our beliefs can also be appealed to in order to explain how we are aware of our desires. Against this conception, I will argue here that the main access that we have to our desires is at least distinctive in that it relies on our emotions and experiences of pain and pleasure, a thesis that is not true of our access to our beliefs, or only in very marginal cases. More precisely, I will defend the view that our knowledge of our desires is inferential and based on the consciousness we have of our emotions, and on our experiences of pain and pleasure.

I will proceed in the following way: I will first briefly present the various solutions that may be proposed in order to explain the access we have to our mental states and show their difficulties. This will allow me to show that although they may provide us with a satisfactory account of the access we have to our beliefs, non-inferential solutions conflict more obviously

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with certain facts when we move to the access to our desires. I will then present my own account. In order to show its plausibility, I will first show that our sensations of pain allow us to know our desires. The obviousness of this fact will make it easier for us to accept a conception of our access to our desires according to which our knowledge relies on some phenomenology – without being observational – and is inferential but makes it possible that the knowledge of our desires appears immediate. Following this, I will come to the more difficult case of emotions. At this point, I will proceed in two steps. First, I will defend the claim that our emotions in being in themselves pleasant or unpleasant may make us aware of desires, just as pain and pleasure do. Yet, as I will show, the explanation already given for pain cannot apply to all the cases where it seems that an emotion leads us to know a desire. Hence, I will first argue that here again, our knowledge of our desires relies on the experience we have of an emotion. Second, I will try to explain how we come to know some of our desires through this second route. The solution I propose at this point is that once again this knowledge is inferential but also requires the use of our folk-psychological concept of desire. This is why I will work out/ sketch an analysis of this concept. Finally, I will try to refute the objection that these ways of gaining access to our desires through emotions are necessarily marginal and cannot explain how we know our most common desires.

## **2 Three types of access to our mental states**

It is in general agreed that three kinds of solutions are available to explain how we have access to our beliefs and desires: an observational account, an account that may be called, after Peacocke (1999), a no-reason account, and an inferential account. On the observational account, one knows that one has a mental state because one can have an experience of one's mental states similar to the experience we have of objects that we touch or see. But if our beliefs and desires are dispositions, we would have to say that these dispositions are observable. For on the observational theory, one knows that one has a desire because one can have an experience of one's desires similar to the one we have of objects that we touch or see. This is not impossible – the fragility of the glass may be directly seen when we look at it – but it makes the observational theory more difficult to defend because we don't know through which properties we may be able to see these dispositions. Moreover, as we don't perceive our desires through our senses, which are oriented either outwards or towards our own body, the observational theory seems to require another type of phenomenal experience, about which we

may wonder what it is like and why we never come across it<sup>1</sup>. Thus, this account seems very implausible.

A second option is to hold that we are able to know our dispositional mental states but that we are completely unable to produce any justification for this knowledge.<sup>2</sup> This explains why this account may be called a no-reason account since we are not aware of any reason that would allow us to justify this knowledge. On this account, if someone has a belief or a desire, then he is disposed in certain conditions to know that he has this belief or this desire. In particular, to have a desire would dispose one to know that one has this desire when one is asking oneself if one has it. One first difficulty with this account is that it requires a purely externalist epistemology. This creates a problem because we may ask on what basis we are going to know that we really know and do not merely believe that we have a desire. If we want to stick to an externalist epistemology, the answer can only be that we are disposed to know it, but this produces a regress. This regress may not be intractable, but we have at least to acknowledge that there is a difficulty there.

Moreover, it seems that it is possible to produce counter-examples to this purely externalist account, at least for our desires. If for instance, someone steps on my foot, the knowledge I have of my desire that one stops stepping on my foot is justified by the pain I experience. Contrary to what a strict no-reason account would say, I do not only know that I have a desire that my foot ceases to be crushed without any other justification. On the contrary, I desire that my foot ceases to be crushed because it hurts. That I feel pain in my foot puts me in an epistemic position that is notably different from the position in which I would have the same knowledge without feeling any pain. Moreover, we can even notice that this last epistemic position would be very strange since I would know that I have this desire without experiencing any urge toward its satisfaction. This fact may even lead us to wonder if this situation is really one of having a desire.

The final solution is to think that we become aware of our mental states through inferences. The major objection to this account is that the access we have to our beliefs and desires seems to be immediate. In order to know that we have a belief or a desire, we do not make complex inferences. In most cases, it is enough that one asks oneself if one has a belief or a desire to know immediately the answer. A possible response to this objection is to say that the inferences we make are implicit, and that they result from a kind

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman (1993) has defended a partly observational account in which he suggests that such a phenomenology exists. It seems however that he now rejects this part of his account.

<sup>2</sup> This position has been advocated by Shoemaker in his book, *First-person Perspective and other essays* (1996), and in many other articles.

of expertise for instance. But this response is not fully satisfying because it may lead to a dilemma. On one horn of the dilemma, this response could mean that we have no access at all to the inferences we implicitly make. But then, this response is nothing other than a version of the no-reason account and hence lends itself to the objection raised earlier. On the other horn of the dilemma, these inferences are at least partly accessible and this supposes that we are able at least sometimes to reconstruct them a posteriori even if on some occasions they are not conscious. But then the first objection raised reappears: we do not, at least for the vast majority of our beliefs and desires, go through a long chain of inferences to justify our knowledge of our beliefs and desires. Nevertheless, we may notice that the immediate access we have to our beliefs and desires is compatible with an inferential account of this access if the inferences that we make in order to know our mental states have very few steps – ideally, only one step – and are very straightforward. It is precisely an account of that sort that I am going to propose.

Before presenting my account of our access to our desires, I would like to show that there are two reasons to look for a different solution to this problem than to the problem of our access to our beliefs. The first reason comes from the fact that everyday language tends often to consider that desires are emotions. This point is manifest if we pay attention to the fact that some of the words or expressions which are employed to tell our desires imply that we have a phenomenological experience. For instance, one says that one is feeling a desire, that one has a yearning for something. This point is so remarkable that some authors working on emotions tend to consider that desires are emotions.

The second reason comes from the existence of a disanalogy concerning the possibility of rephrasing questions about our beliefs and questions about our desires. It has been often noticed after Evans (1982) that the question ‘Do I believe that  $p$ ?’ is reducible to the question ‘Is it the case that  $p$ ?’ The equivalence between those two questions shows, according to Evans, that in order to know what my beliefs are, I do not need to look inward at my internal states; it suffices that I turn my gaze toward the external world. Now, it is clear that we cannot envisage a parallel equivalence for the question: ‘Do I have the desire that  $p$ ?’ Where could I look in the world to know my desires if it is not in my head? Another way to put the same point is to notice that in order to give an answer about our beliefs we will have to appeal to memories of past experiences, judgments that we made, and things that we heard, which we may then use to draw inferences. But it does not seem that any appeal to memory will be of any use if we want to know our desires. The reason for this is simply that I am interested in my present desires and that it seems very unlikely that they can be inferred from my past actions or from my past behaviors. To claim that they can would be tantamount to

rejecting the idea that we have a privileged access to our desires, a position I take here to be indefensible. Thus, if we want to maintain that there is some analogy between the way we access our beliefs and the way we access our desires, then it would be interesting to find out what could, in the case of desires, play a role similar to the role memory plays for beliefs. The account I am going to propose is precisely that our emotions and our experiences of pain and pleasure play such a role. First, I am going to concentrate on pain in order to show how it allows us to know some of our desires.

### **3 From pains to desires**

We know at least sometimes and without doubt that we are hungry because we experience a certain pain that we are able to more or less identify and that is quite difficult to confuse with any other sensation. We know then that we are hungry, that we desire to eat something, by means of this specific painful sensation. It would seem absurd to say that, when I experience such hunger, I come to be conscious that I am hungry without relying on this specific pain. Here, it would be clearly inappropriate to claim either that we make complex inferences or that we come to know our desires without reason. It would be overly subtle to say that we are aware of a desire to eat when we are hungry because of aspects of our behavior which leads to food consumption and not because of the specific pain we feel in our stomach. Moreover, the fact that the word 'hunger' means at the same time the sensation of hunger and the desire to eat tends to confirm that we do not attribute hunger to ourselves without relying on some felt sensation of pain. Nevertheless, it should be noticed against a purely observational theory that a mere sensation cannot suffice to explain this double meaning of the word. Being aware of a pain  $x$  does not allow me to conclude that I desire to eat. At most, a sensation of pain is in itself unpleasant, undesirable, but it does not allow me to know that I desire to eat.

Now, if we want to explain how we come to attribute to ourselves the desire to eat on the basis of our hunger, it seems to me that the answer must be close to something like this: first, having a pain is intrinsically having a desire that this pain cease, a desire which manifests itself in our looking for food. Second, experience has taught us that we tend to eat when we are hungry and that this specific pain then ceases. Thus experience allows us to know that having this specific pain is intrinsically undesirable and is more precisely having a desire to eat. Hence, it suffices that we identify a pain as a pain of hunger to know that we have a desire that it stops, a desire which is in this case a desire to eat.

In order to fully defend this account, several points must be argued. The first is that every pain intrinsically implies a desire that the pain cease. The

second is that we are able to know that pain of type  $x$  is relieved when we perform actions of type  $\phi$  since this knowledge is necessary in order to know that we have a desire to  $\phi$  when we are in a state of pain  $x$ .

The first thesis seems to me difficult to deny. Rejecting it would imply that we could dissociate the experience of pain and the desire that the pain cease. This would imply that we could have a pain without wanting it to cease, which is absurd.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one can admit that we may be prepared to bear a pain if it is necessary that we do in order to realize some other desire. We may then say that we do not desire that the pain cease; but what this means is simply that we have some other desire that motivates us not to yield to our pain. This does nothing to undermine the claim that it is necessarily impossible that we may be indifferent to having pain, given the way we, human beings, are constituted. Let us suppose that one had pain and were informed that pressing a button would relieve this pain, without this changing anything else in one's life. I cannot see what, in such a case, could prevent one from pressing the button. Moreover, pain tends to trigger not only reflex behavior, but also actions aimed at escaping from the pain. Lastly, psychology understands pain as a sort of alarm signal that allows one to know that a part of one's body is in danger. But clearly, if this information did not involve a conative or a motivational element, it would not be able to play its role, which is to protect the part of the body that is in the course of being damaged. To conceive of pain as an alarm system makes sense from the point of view of evolution only if pain is in itself motivating.

We can also remark that if we can attribute a degree of intensity to our desire to escape from the pain we experience, this degree will correspond systematically to the degree of intensity of the sensation of pain that we experience. Now, such a contingent correlation would require an explanation if experiencing pain and having a desire that this pain ceases were not intrinsically linked.

The second element of our explanation aims to explain how it is that we know that this pain corresponds to a desire to eat. In other words, how do we come to have a desire to eat when we have a specific pain, and how do we *know* that this pain expresses a desire to eat? The answer to these questions is simply that we have learned that we can suppress this unpleasant

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<sup>3</sup> Aydede (2000) shows that actually a sensation may be identified as pain without being felt as undesirable as brain damaged cases indicate. Nevertheless, this does not conflict with my thesis because what I call pain can be recast as pain when it encompasses not only the sensory element of pain but also the affective, unpleasant element of it, which is present in normal cases. In fact, what Aydede shows is simply that pain in the usual sense is not a simple sensation but a compound sensation with some special sensations similar to other perceived qualities such as touch or warmth in addition to an affective element of unpleasantness.

state by eating. This may be learned at some higher or lower representational levels. At the lower level, this information may cause us to desire what stops our pain if this response is not innate, and to act according to this desire. At a conceptual level, firstly we acquire the general knowledge that having pain is intrinsically undesirable.<sup>4</sup> Secondly and more importantly, we also acquire the specific knowledge that pain  $x$  is usually relieved by action of type  $\phi$ . In other words, we will know that when we have a pain of type  $x$ , we will have a desire to  $\phi$ . Thus, whenever we experience the type of pain which hunger is, we will be aware that we have a desire to eat. In the cases in which we do not know what may relieve us from the pain we experience, or when the pain may be relieved using different means, then the pain indicates only that we have the desire that this pain cease.

To summarize, I defend the following two theses. First, I claim that having a painful sensation intrinsically involves a tendency to act in order that this pain cease. At the lower level, this fact appears in our innate dispositions to produce certain behaviors or actions when we experience such painful sensations. And second, I also claim that the actions which resulted from our innate dispositions, or the actions which happened to relieve our pain, allow us to acquire an instrumental knowledge which may be represented at a more or less elaborate level. At the lower level, this knowledge makes us perform actions of type  $A$  if this causal relation is not innate. The result is then that we desire to do  $A$  when we experience a pain of type  $x$ . At the conceptual level, the experience of these behaviors allows us to learn two things: first, that every pain involves a tendency to make it cease; second, that a pain  $x$  is relieved by an action of type  $\phi$ . Hence, we are able to conclude on the basis of a pain of type  $x$  that we have a desire to  $\phi$ .

It is important to notice that if one can describe the awareness of our desires as an instrumental reasoning whose major premise is a desire that the pain we experience should cease, in most cases we know that we have a desire without going through such a reasoning, or at least without it being explicit. In the case in which I have a pain in my stomach characteristic of hunger, I know immediately that I desire to eat. But in my view, although it seems to us that this knowledge is direct and non-inferential, our knowledge that we have a desire to eat is actually based of our previous experiences. Hence, it has to be acknowledged that we make at least an implicit inference. The same implicit inference also takes place when we perform an action  $\phi$  even without reflecting that this is what is going to relieve us of

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<sup>4</sup> It may be that this knowledge does not depend on our previous experience, and is intrinsic to the experiencing of pain. However, I am unable to discern which thesis is correct but this has no bearing on the general theory here defended.

our pain. For instance, if someone steps on my foot, my tendency would be to push this person so that she gets off my foot.

This instrumental reasoning may nevertheless sometimes be conducted explicitly. It may happen that one experiences a completely new pain, for instance in some illness, in which case one explicitly looks for the means which will relieve one by consulting a doctor. Notice also that when we engage in such a reasoning, we never think explicitly that pain is undesirable. And the reason for this is simply that, for any non-philosopher, it goes without saying that pain is undesirable.

In short, it seems to me correct to say that whenever one experiences a pain  $x$  and comes to be aware at the same time of a desire to perform an action  $\phi$ , then this awareness is grounded on an element that is phenomenological if not observational<sup>5</sup>, namely the experience one has of a sensation of pain of type  $x$  in a certain part of our body. To this initial premise, two further premises may be added. The first is that we already know that this pain stops with an action of type  $\phi$ . The second is that we know that having a pain is inseparable from desiring for this pain to stop. From all three premises, we can infer, at least implicitly, that we have the desire to  $\phi$  because we experience a pain of type  $x$  in a certain part of our body. I will defend the view that the awareness we have of our desires in these cases is grounded on a phenomenological experience. Moreover, this phenomenological experience is nothing unusual. Finally, this awareness comes from at least an implicit inference although it may appear as direct either because of the triviality of the inference or because it is processed at a low level of representation to which we have no conscious access.

I believe that all of this can be applied to pleasure when it is triggered by sensations even if some differences between pain and pleasure must be acknowledged. In particular, recent work<sup>6</sup> has shown that whereas there can be sensations of pain that are not experienced as painful, no such dissociation can occur in the case of pleasure. The reason for this fact seems to be that there is no specific sensory submodality devoted to inform us of pleasurable sensations, a fact that might be explained in evolutionary terms by saying that there is no reason to alarm us of the good functioning of our organs. Hence, pleasure is only an affective feeling that may be triggered through different routes, and that may in particular be associated with various sensations even though this route is not as direct as it is for pain. Nevertheless, it seems clear that a current pleasant sensation, or a current physical sensation

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<sup>5</sup> Recent philosophical works tend to view pain as a normal case of perception, the difference being that the object which is perceived is inside or part of our body. See for instance Dretske (1999), Dokic (2000). However this point has no bearing on my thesis.

<sup>6</sup> For a survey, see Aydede (2000).



which comes with an experience of pleasure, disposes us to know that we desire for it to last, and I see no reason not to offer here the same explanation as the one just given for pain. Our past experience shows us that we tend to act so as to make this pleasure last, or that we are unhappy if it is interrupted. Hence, when we experience some physical sensations accompanying pleasure, we are allowed to infer that we desire that this pleasure last.

#### 4 How could emotions tell us our desires?

Before beginning to expound on my thesis, let me offer some remarks about the distinction between positive and negative emotions.<sup>7</sup> The natural way to make this distinction is simply to say that positive emotions are pleasant and negative emotions are unpleasant. It should be noted that acknowledging this divide does not force us to contend that there is a unique sensation of pleasure that is common to all our positive emotions and even to the pleasure we may experience from physical sensations. It suffices to say that what all our positive emotions have in common is that they are desirable in and of themselves and that all our negative emotions are undesirable in and of themselves.

This simple distinction will allow us to draw a close analogy between the knowledge of our desires that we get from pain and the knowledge we get from our negative emotions. For instance, it seems clear that anguish is in itself an unpleasant emotion and that we would desire *prima facie* whatever would free us from this suffering. The same can be said of weaker emotions such as boredom. Although it is clear that this emotion may not be conscious, it seems that if we are conscious that we experience it, then we are disposed to think that we have a desire to escape this boredom. We can also see that the same claim applies to positive emotions. When we enjoy the pleasant experience of success, we may easily think that we would like to always feel so well, etc. Therefore, it seems undeniable that our emotions allow us to be aware of some desire; more precisely of the desire that this emotion ends if it is a negative emotion and that this emotion lasts if it is a positive emotion. Moreover, because the explanation given for pain and pleasure relies simply on the undesirable nature of pain and the desirable nature of pleasure, this explanation is fully applicable to any desirable or undesirable state. And this is precisely the case for our negative and positive emotions. Hence, for example, when we have a negative emotion, we also know that we have a desire that this emotion cease.

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<sup>7</sup> This distinction is quite widely accepted in recent literature and it can be found for instance in Frijda (1986) and Elster (1999).

However important this kind of emotional access to some of our desires, it must be acknowledged that this explanation does not apply in all the situations where we come to know a desire through an emotion. For instance, let us suppose that it is the fear of being eaten by the wolf that leads me to know that I do not want to be eaten by the wolf. However, it seems at least strange to say that we have a desire not to be eaten because it will be a means to escape the negative emotion of being frightened. Although fear is certainly undesirable in and of itself, it seems completely wrong to say that what we desire is simply to get rid of this emotion of fear and not that we desire for the situation that we fear not to happen.

The point is even clearer for some cases of positive emotions. For instance, it seems plausible to say that when I feel excited because I hear that some event is about to happen, this tells me that I desire for this event to happen. An argument for this explanation is that this may come as a surprise to me; now this excitement clearly indicates that I have this desire contrary to what I thought. But here again the positive emotion I experience does not seem to indicate my desire in a way analogous with the case of pleasure. On this last account, my excitement would indicate that I desire that this pleasurable excitement last. But once again, this is not my desire. Rather, my desire is that this feeling of excitement in anticipation of an event end as soon as possible because I actually want the event to happen. I may also have a desire to remain in excited anticipation as long as possible but clearly this is not what we come naturally to think in most cases.

It seems then that we can infer a desire from our emotions in two different ways. In the first way, it is the knowledge of the desirability or undesirability of the emotion from which we infer that we desire that such an emotion lasts or ceases. I will call this way of acquiring knowledge of desire the simple route. The second way is more complicated and directly involves the content of the emotion. For instance, when I experience pleasure when someone tells me that a friend is coming over, the desire that I come to know then is toward the object of the emotion, the proposition that a friend is coming. Something similar can be said of negative emotions. For instance, if I experience a negative emotion when I think that I may fail my exams, I do not usually conclude that I would like this painful emotion to cease. Rather I would conclude that I desire to pass my exams. I will call this second route the content route. I will also call the desire that we become aware of through this route the content-related desire.

I will say nothing more about the desires we infer in the first manner since the explanation is exactly the same as the one for pain and pleasure already stated. From now on, I will only concentrate on the second route to knowledge of our desires which requires a more complicated explanation. There are at least two reasons for this greater complexity.

The first reason results from the fact that one cannot infer that one has a content-related desire because of the simple fact that we experience a desirable or undesirable emotion. Here, something must be added to explain our move from the awareness of an emotion to the knowledge of a content-related desire.

The second reason stems from the fact that not all of our emotions, or more precisely not all instances of emotions, lead us to acquire some knowledge of desire along this route. For instance, I may despise Peter without any precise reason, and in this case, this may not make me aware of a desire toward Peter, the object of my emotion. It seems possible to say then: "I have no particular desire toward Peter, I just despise him." Similar examples may be found with boredom and sadness. Once again, I do not think that boredom and sadness always reveal any desire that we could come to know through the content-route. But these emotions may not have any determinate object and in this case it appears hard to see what desire we could come to know through the content-route. True, this still allows us to know that we desire that these emotions cease, but we come to this knowledge through the simple route and not the content-route.

Among the emotions that could be called aesthetic, even if they do not form a specific class of emotions, we may also find some difficult cases. The difficulty of these cases may come from the fact that people want, surprisingly, to see plays or movies which are sad or terrifying<sup>8</sup>. Here, two types of cases should be distinguished. I may experience fear when watching a fictional movie and it seems here that the emotion I experience goes along with a self-attribution of desire. Of course, this emotion is not about reality. But does that mean that this emotion does not have a real underlying desire? Indeed, we do not want to get up and leave the cinema because we are not experiencing an emotion that has anything to do with ourselves<sup>9</sup>. Rather we are experiencing an emotion that concerns a fictional character. Therefore, if I am afraid for this fictional character when he faces danger, I am aware of my desire that he escapes. In these types of cases, the emotion goes along with the consciousness of having a desire along the second route. However, there remain the cases in which I experience an emotion while listening to music, or looking at an abstract painting. It seems that in these cases we do not think that we have a desire along the second route.

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<sup>8</sup> This point has been underlined by Aristotle and often since discussed. For a recent discussion, see Levinson (1982).

<sup>9</sup> This point has been forcefully insisted upon by Walton (1978) and different explanations have since been provided for this fact. For a discussion of Walton, see chapter 5 in Currie (1990).

Similarly, if some of our positive emotions lead us to know some desires along the second route as I have demonstrated, this is not always the case. For instance, when I am amused by a joke, this does not tell me that I had an underlying desire even if in some cases the amusement requires that there must be an underlying desire. It does not seem impossible that the amusement triggered by a pretentious person slipping on a banana peel makes me laugh because I hate him. But this does not immediately lead me to know that I have an underlying desire. At most, I will be led to such knowledge in an indirect manner if I agree for instance with the Freudian theory of witticism.<sup>10</sup> In any case, some jokes which rely on more formal elements do not seem anyway to imply an underlying desire. Moreover, it is obvious that we do not attribute to ourselves any desire when we are amused by these types of jokes. In an even more obvious manner, the admiration we feel does not lead us to know that we have any desire toward the person that we admire. One does not even see what would be the object of that desire. If I feel some admiration for someone whom I find exceptional for one reason or another, this does not make me think that I desire that this person be as she is, or that she would act as she did, or that I would like to be such a person. Thus, the idea that our emotions can always lead us to know our desires through the content-route is too strong. Nevertheless, we may still defend a weaker thesis that says that most of our emotional experiences may lead us to know our desires according to the content-route. But this will require us to explain why only this weaker thesis is true; that is, what makes it that the thesis is not applicable to all of our emotional experiences.

A partial explanation may be given if we give consideration to the different kinds of content emotions may have. For instance, if we take cases where emotions have no object as with anguish and maybe in the case of boredom, it seems quite plausible to say that we cannot know through these emotions a content-related desire, because there is no content that could become the content of the desire. A similar approach can be applied where the intentional content of the emotion is a single object as when I admire Paul. The reason this emotion does not lead me to know a desire may be that a desire needs as its aim a proposition and that no proposition can be produced from a single object. Hence, the thesis that I propose to defend may be presented in the following manner for our negative emotions:

- (1) If a person A feels a negative emotion  $x$  having as its object a proposition  $p$ , then this leads her to know that she desires that not- $p$ .

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<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Freud would agree on this point since witticism makes us laugh without being conscious that we have the desire to harm the person we are laughing at. This is precisely the benefit of witticism.

And as nothing prevents us from proposing a parallel thesis for positive emotions, I would like to defend also the following thesis:

(2) If a person A feels a positive emotion having as its object a proposition  $p$ , this leads her to know that she desires that  $p$ .

Clearly, these formulations have already the advantage of being restricted to the emotions from which it seems that we gain knowledge of desire along the content route. Nevertheless, it does not seem that this restricted thesis has no counter-example. For instance, I may be surprised by an event, and this emotion may in some cases be counted as a positive emotion, or I may admire a deed, although I may not be disposed to think at the same time that I desired that this event or that deed happened. Similarly, as I have already argued, listening to music may trigger various emotions, emotions whose intentional objects may be understood as events and described under propositional forms. However, experiencing these emotions never goes with the awareness of a content-related desire. At most, we sometimes desire and know that we desire that a painful experience cease but this is a desire known through the simple route. It is clear then that the formulations just given of the thesis I would like to defend are not sufficiently determined as long as we do not know on what criteria we are going to distinguish which emotions give us access to a desire and which do not, but I'll leave this point aside for the moment.

Apart from that, this formulation supposes, in agreement with the position defended by most of the authors who work on emotions<sup>11</sup>, that emotions have intentional objects and hence are not reducible to purely phenomenological experiences. There are, nevertheless, diverging opinions concerning how this intentionality is to be understood. Some claim that the intentional content of an emotion can be reduced to the content of underlying mental states, while others claim that this content is specific to the emotion itself and thus irreducible to the content of underlying mental states. What is important for my thesis is that this intentionality is not reducible to the intentionality of an underlying desire because it would follow that knowing the object of my emotion would require previously knowing my desire. Hence, emotions themselves would not give us access to our desires. But this extremely reductive view seems clearly false since even those of our emotions which have no underlying desire have an intentional object of which we are fully aware.

It is important to see that this formulation holds whatever the tense of the proposition  $p$  is. The proposition  $p$  may be in the present, in the future, or even in the past. I may be frightened by the tiger in front of me, and my

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance among others Frijda (1986), de Sousa (1987), Elster (1999).

desire is then to be somewhere else; I may be worried about failing my examination in a week; I may even be ashamed of what I did a week ago and know from that that I would like not to have done what makes me so ashamed today.

One can also notice that (1) and (2) seem also applicable if the proposition  $p$  is considered in the context of a fiction or is only posited hypothetically. For instance, it suffices sometimes to mentally evoke something that disgusts us in order for us to feel effectively disgusted. Emotions can also be felt when we read a fictional story or watch a movie, or even when we mentally envision a situation. The fear that we experience when watching a movie seems to be also experienced if we imagine that someone is breaking into our house to kill us, and this tells us something about our desires. Similarly, one can experience strong positive emotions by mentally representing to oneself a hypothetical or fictional situation. This is maybe even more obvious than for negative emotions. For instance, I may imagine that I am accomplishing a deed and at the same time be elated in imagining this, the whole process leading me to know that I would really like to accomplish such a deed.

## 5 Most of our emotions have underlying desires

Now that I have outlined more precisely the thesis I would like to defend in the remainder of this paper. In order to defend it, I must show, first, that most of our emotions are systematically accompanied by an awareness of a desire, and, second, that when this correlation occurs, the knowledge we have of our desire is grounded in our emotion. I will further discuss the second point at some length in the next section. As for the first point, it seems that the different examples I have proposed when I presented my thesis, support it. However, a defender of an evaluative theory of emotions may have an objection to my thesis. In this section, I examine and try to rebuke this objection.

On this evaluative theory, our emotions do not require an underlying desire; they rely only on an evaluative judgment or an evaluative perception.<sup>12</sup> Thus, adopting this conception of emotions makes it impossible to assert that our emotions allow us to come to know some underlying desire, because our emotions have no privileged relation to our desires. On this conception, anger, for instance, results only from the fact that we judge an ac-

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<sup>12</sup> Among psychologists, this thesis has been recently defended in Ortony, Clore and Collins (1985), and among philosophers, de Sousa (1987) argues that “emotions are a kind of perception – perception of the axiological level of reality” (p 332) and Tappolet (2000) defends that our emotions imply at the non-conceptual level a value judgment.

tion or an individual to be blameworthy or insulting, and has no special link to our desires.

A first response to this objection could be to defend an internalist position for evaluative judgments, to the effect that making an evaluative judgment cannot go without having a desire or a motivation in accordance with this judgment. This position on moral evaluative judgments seems quite plausible even if it is challenged. However, one can criticize more directly the purely evaluative conception of emotions by stressing that even if an underlying evaluative judgment is necessary, that does not exclude that a desire may also be necessary. In the case of anger, it could be, for instance, the desire to be respected. After all, a behavior that we judge blameworthy does not systematically trigger our anger. Yet, we still make the same judgment. It may happen for instance that we understand all too well why a certain person exhibits insulting behavior and that, as a consequence, we are not personally affected by this attitude. Therefore, there are cases where we cannot explain an emotion without appealing to a desire, even when we can concede that an evaluative judgment may also be involved.

Moreover, we very often enjoy the satisfaction of our desires, and we are sad when they are not satisfied. In order to account for these facts, a defender of the evaluative theory of emotions must hold that we also judge in all these cases that the object of our desire is valuable. Therefore, one is led to defend the view that whatever is desired is of some value, an affirmation that seems redundant with regard to the fully sufficient explanation that says that our emotions stem from our desires. Finally, if the defender of the evaluative theory asserts, which he must, that any evaluative judgment is either correct or incorrect, then he will have to admit that some people deserve love and others do not, that some things deserve to be enjoyed but other things do not. This would mean that any pleasure taken in an activity would have to be either appropriate or inappropriate, which is an unacceptable theory. It seems more correct to say that some pleasures are innocent, neither correct nor incorrect, and in a more simple manner to say that we have pleasure in these activities which harm no one. I have pleasure playing dice, and Robert has pleasure playing cards. This difference simply results from the fact that I like to play dice and that Robert likes to play cards. There is no point in asking who is right and who is wrong.<sup>13</sup> The evalua-

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<sup>13</sup>An answer could be to say that we are both right because each of us possesses dispositions which allow us to see what is pleasant and of value in one game and not in the other. However, it seems to me that the value we attribute to each game results from the fact that we experience some pleasure in one of these games. The value judgment is then based on our pleasure, not the contrary. The opposite view which states that I experience pleasure because I judge that the game is pleasant seems to me convoluted.

tive theory of emotions is thus impossible to defend if it is meant to apply to the totality of our emotions. Hence, this leaves us sufficient margin to acknowledge that a large part of our emotions imply an underlying desire.

## 6 Emotions as a ground to know our desires

The second step of my argument is to show that when we have an emotion and are aware of a content-related desire, this coincidence results simply from the fact that we attribute to ourselves this very desire on the basis of our emotion. It seems to me that we can find at least two arguments in favor of this thesis.

The first relies on the fact that this correlation is systematic for some of our emotions. Moreover, there is also a strong correlation between the intensity of the emotions we experience and the force of the desires that we attribute to ourselves. The question is then to know what link between our emotions and our attributions of desire can correctly explain these systematic correlations. Several options are available.

One option is to say that we have emotions because we attribute desires to ourselves. But this hypothesis is not at all plausible. Once this option is put aside, two possibilities may be envisaged. We can either say that our emotion and our knowledge of our desire are derived from a unique source, or that the knowledge of our desire is derived from our emotions. Notice that the two possibilities are compatible. Thus, in order to refute the second possibility, we would have to contend that the knowledge of our desires and our emotions come out independently even if they come from the same source. But if this were possible, then it would be conceptually possible for us to attribute to ourselves desires of a certain degree without any regard to the emotion we are experiencing. But this seems impossible. It seems completely absurd to think that a small fear can come with the knowledge of a very important desire and vice-versa if we do not have other strong reasons to explain this fact.

True, we sometimes and under certain circumstances experience emotions that are much stronger than the related desire. But these cases do not show that there is a real independence of the force of our desire from the intensity of our emotion. It merely shows that we are able to reevaluate the importance of our desires by taking into consideration elements other than the force of our emotions. This is why we can attribute to ourselves a desire weaker than our actual emotion would suggest. For instance, even if I feel a strong emotion in thinking that I could buy an object, I may still think that my desire to buy this object is not that important since I know that if I do not buy it, I will have no regrets. Therefore, even if the strength we attribute



to our desire is weaker than the strength of our emotion, it is still on the basis of the latter that we evaluate the former.

Moreover, if you imagine beings who are in every way similar to us, except that they have no emotions, then if awareness of our desires is indeed independent of our emotions, these beings would have access to their desires. These beings would be in every circumstance deprived of emotions; they would feel no emotion, for instance, in the absence of a lover, while still being capable of saying that they desire that person's presence. They would be totally indifferent to the thought that they may fail their exams, but they could still say that they strongly desire to succeed or that they mildly desire to succeed. All of this does not seem plausible. It even seems absurd if we bear in mind that if our emotions have no part in revealing our desires, then we are almost identical to these beings, since our emotions would then be simply epiphenomena.

Finally, if we emphasize that one of the functions of emotions is to communicate to others our desires - for they are manifestations of our desires on which we have only a very indirect influence - then we do not see why they could not inform us about our desires. And we can remark that such information about our desires is all the more reliable since we are more apt to notice all of the small variations of our emotions and also more apt to identify the objects of these emotions. Therefore, we are more able to know our desires through our emotions.

The other major argument in favor of the idea that we derive the knowledge of our desires from some of our emotions is that we mentally evoke situations in order to know if we desire these situations and with what intensity. This point was put forward by B. Williams in his famous paper 'Internal and External Reasons' (1980). There he defends as a marginal point that imagination is able to help us know if we might have a desire to achieve the imagined situation. He does not explain how the imagined representation allows us to evaluate our desire toward the imagined situation. However, it is relatively clear that we can effectively attribute to ourselves desires by imagining situations. But imagining a situation is certainly not sufficient in itself to tell us that we desire such a situation. We need therefore another element to understand how we come to know that we have a desire. And it seems that emotion can be this element, since it is independently true that the evocation of situations can lead us to have emotions. After all, if the representation of a fictional situation in a movie is able to prompt an emotion, we don't see why we would not be able to provoke this emotion on our own by mentally representing the same situation. In favor of this possibility, one can notice that we say such things as: 'merely thinking of it makes me angry, or sad, or joyful...', an expression that we have no reason not to take at face value. It seems then extremely probable that we

attribute desires to ourselves on the basis of emotions that we have indirectly triggered, as testified again by the fact that we can say about a possible plan, hence about a situation that we evoke: ‘no, it does not tell me anything’, meaning that the representation of this situation does not arouse any affective reaction, from which we can conclude that we do not desire to realize this plan.

Lastly, we could emphasize that if someone wants to persuade us to perform an action, the most appropriate way is to stir up some emotions which will then convince us that we have the desire that the person wanted us to have. Is not the best way of selling my book of recipes to make you salivate by telling you one of these recipes? Or, if I want to convince you that you should make a donation to a charity, the best way to succeed will certainly be to describe to you the situation of those who could benefit from your contribution in such a way that you will be moved, and thus conscious that you have the desire to help them.

## **7 Where our concept of desire enters the picture**

I hope to have established that we self-attribute desires on the basis of some of our emotions along what I called the content route and I would like now to try to explain how we proceed to acquire this knowledge. As the mere experience of an emotion of fear that  $p$  is certainly not the same thing as the knowledge that we desire that not  $p$ , an explanation of how we can come to this knowledge on the basis of this emotion is required. And if this explanation is plausible and complete, this will reinforce the thesis I wish to defend.

As I have stressed earlier, the difficulty of such an explanation is that not all of our positive and negative emotions lead us to know a content-related desire. The solution to such a difficulty may come, in my opinion, from an analysis of our concept of desire. In brief, I am going to propose that our concept of desire is built in such a way that it allows us to attribute to ourselves desires on the basis of some of our emotions and not others. To do this, I am first going to give an account of how we construct this concept, and I will show that it encompasses, at its core, links to emotions. I will deduce from that the criteria that will allow us to say in which situations it is appropriate to say that an individual has a desire. In particular, we will see that some emotions constitute precisely one of the elements that allow us to apply the concept of desire, hence to attribute desires to an individual.

The reason our concept of desire involves considerations about our emotions stems from the fact that we observe correlations between our different emotions and the events which trigger or stop them. If someone expresses a

negative emotion, this may be a basis on which we may attribute to him a desire, in particular if we know that this negative emotion would stop or become positive when a situation changes. Thus, a child observes that his brother cries when his mother leaves, and he knows also by experience that his brother would stop if his mother were to return. More generally, we observe that people may have negative emotions when a situation takes place or when it appears that this situation is going to take place. We also observe that these negative emotions do not disappear except if the situation changes or if it does not take place. Conversely, we sometimes note that when people have a positive emotion because a situation is about to happen, or because they think that it will happen, they experience either a positive emotion when the situation does occur or a negative emotion when actually the situation does not occur. In all of these cases, we thus observe a tight relation between emotions and actions, or emotions and situations. Therefore, it seems to me that the concept of desire is at least partly constructed in order to give an account of these relations.

An interesting aspect of this concept of desire, or at least of the core of this concept, is that it is a simple dispositional concept. According to this concept of desire, to say that someone possesses a desire would be to say that she feels a negative emotion which would cease under certain conditions, or that she feels a positive emotion when she is going to do something or when something is going to happen, or that she performs an action which will make him happy if the situation actually takes place and unhappy if it does not. Note, however, that this concept of desire would not be applicable to an agent who experiences no emotion. Hence, according to this concept, an agent having no emotion and performing no action would have no desire. This concept has the advantage of being easier to master and could constitute a step toward the mastery of our more complete dispositional concept, a concept which will allow us to attribute desire also if the agent were only disposed to experience emotions.

Now, do we make use of the same concept when we self-attribute a desire? I do not see why it would be otherwise. The child feels negative emotions when objects are not within reach as she tries to grab them. Conversely, she feels positive emotions when his mother reappears or when she knows that certain objects are within reach or that she is going to be able to grasp them. Whether our concept of desire is constructed on the basis of our own experience or by observing others, and whether it is from the outset the complete dispositional concept or the core dispositional concept that I have suggested, our concept of desire must embody the dispositional relations stated by the core dispositional concept. This is because emotions are a central and conspicuous aspect of what it is to have a desire. Hence, our concept of desire must refer to them.

Let us see now in which situations we are going to attribute a desire to someone. The answer obviously follows from what we have just said: we will attribute to someone a desire when we are in a situation where our concept of desire can find application. But what are these situations? They are precisely the situations from which the concept of desire has been constructed. We then attribute to someone a desire that  $p$  if she satisfies at least one of the following conditions:

- (a) She is disposed to experience a negative emotion, or she experiences a negative emotion having  $q$  as its object as she believes or simply imagines  $q$  to be the case, and she would experience a positive emotion if she believed or imagined  $p$  to be the case; where either  $q$  is *not-p* or  $q$  implies that *not-p* or  $q$  simply makes it very probable that *not-p* and she is aware of these relations between  $p$  and  $q$ ; or,
- (b) she experiences a positive emotion toward  $p$  as she believes or imagines  $p$  to be the case, and she would experience a negative emotion if she believed or imagined that *not-p*, or
- (c) she is disposed to produce  $p$  or she produces  $p$ . (In this latter case, we will attribute to him a desire in the past.)

Similarly, these conditions explain how we attribute desires to ourselves. We will attribute to ourselves a desire that  $p$  if we take ourselves to be fulfilling one of these three conditions. For example, if I experience a negative emotion in thinking that  $q$  is going to happen and if I believe that we would experience a positive emotion if  $p$  were to happen, and I know that  $p$  and  $q$  are somehow incompatible, then I can attribute to myself the desire that  $p$ .

Are we now able to solve the difficulties posed by the emotions that do not make us aware of any desire? I remarked earlier that it is possible to have a negative or a positive emotion while listening to music without this leading us to identify any desire. But now we can explain this fact from what we have just said if we notice that when I experience sadness when listening to a musical piece, it does not occur to me that I would feel better leaving the concert hall. On the contrary, leaving the concert hall would only frustrate me.

Moreover, this sadness does not encompass the perspective of what would relieve the sadness, as was the case with fear. This seems to be an aspect of our expectations when listening to music. For instance, if a joyful melody comes after a sad passage it would be strange to say that I was expecting to hear this melody. I can only observe that after a moment in which I am sad there is another one in which I am happy. I cannot say that I hoped that it would happen. That makes no sense because I cannot envisage that I would have been disappointed if this melody had not come. But certainly I may, in some cases, anticipate a well-known passage in a Beethoven Sonata

because it deeply moves me, and then be disappointed if I do not hear the passage. But this would not be an expectation particular to music. However, because in this case my desire is linked to the expectation of a negative emotion, one might argue that it presents a problem in applying my theory. I acknowledge this point. Nevertheless, because it is a general point<sup>14</sup> concerning our desires for negative emotions in art, I am not obliged to address it here<sup>15</sup>.

We also noticed earlier that we may experience positive emotions such as surprise, amusement or admiration without being disposed to attribute to ourselves content-related desires. Now, it seems that this can be explained by my theory. Being surprised that  $p$ , if this surprise is neither a good nor a bad surprise, does not seem to imply the perspective of some pending positive or negative emotion. Hence, there is no basis to attribute to oneself a desire when one is surprised. It seems that a “neutral” surprise specifically shows that, what produces my surprise, has no relevance to my desires. Similarly, when I am amused by a situation, my emotion does not depend on any consideration of time, or even of reality, and it depends even less on whether that situation will happen or not. What amuses me is the situation, or event, itself.

Moreover, we can notice that the desire to laugh does not manifest itself through amusement, whereas when we are afraid, the desire to escape what frightens us does manifest itself through fear. Similarly, the desire to have some positive emotion in producing  $p$  manifests itself through a positive emotion such as an excitement in thinking that  $p$ . And the desire to laugh, in particular, manifests itself in the excitement that children may have when they go to see a funny movie.

Similarly, one may understand why admiration sometimes does not allow us to know our desires. We can admire that  $A$  is going to  $\phi$  and believe that this emotion will be reinforced if she actually  $\phi$ 's even if we don't have at the outset any desire that  $A \phi$ . For instance, we may admire whoever climbs or envisages to climb a very high mountain. Thus, we may come to admire someone who is about to climb this mountain and believe that we would admire her more if she succeeded although we will not necessarily think that we desire that she succeed. It may seem then that we face here a case in which my theory would predict the self-attribution of a desire whereas there is actually no such self-attribution.

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<sup>14</sup> Once again, we may cite a long tradition of answers to this problem. See note 8.

<sup>15</sup> It seems even that the acknowledgement that there is a difficulty in understanding that we sometime desire negative emotions proves that we conceive the satisfaction of our desires as a positive emotion or at least the relief of a negative emotion.

But here, as is the case with amusement, it seems that our admiration is never for an event which is to occur, but only for an event which is being considered in and of itself. The case of admiration is nevertheless more subtle since we also admire people who intend to do something admirable. But we never admire someone who might intend to do something admirable. At most, we can admire the attempt to do an action without consideration of time. And in my mind, this proves that the situations we admire are considered in and of themselves and not in a temporal perspective even if what is admired in and of itself is an intention or an ability. In other words, admiration is never the anticipation of a positive event. Hence, admiration cannot be the basis for the self-attribution of a desire. As the condition (b) states, in order to attribute a desire on the basis of a positive emotion, it is necessary that event *p* which is the object of the emotion is seen as possibly happening, which implies that it is not only considered in and of itself. It seems then that whenever admiration is not tied to a desire, my theory fits the fact that we will not tend to infer from it that we have a desire.

Let us summarize now how we become aware of our desires through our emotions. I have contended that two possible routes may lead us from emotions to the knowledge of desires. The simple route is always available but the content route is not. Both routes are inferential or involve a categorization, and both routes have as a starting point the conscious experience of an emotion. The first route starts from the fact that unpleasant emotions are undesirable in and of themselves and pleasant emotions are desirable in and of themselves and from the knowledge of this fact. From this, it is always possible as soon as we are conscious of experiencing an emotion, to conclude that we have a desire that this emotion last if it is positive or that this emotion stop if it is a negative emotion. The content route is more complex and is not always available; its availability depends on the intentional object of the emotion. For this inference to be possible, the intentional object of the emotion has to be a proposition. If the intentional object is only an object or if the emotion has no determinate object at all such as anguish, it will not be possible for me to infer that I have a certain desire. Apart from this, the important element in this content route is that the inference from the awareness of an emotion to the awareness of a desire relies on our commonsense concept of desire, a concept that links emotions to events or actions. It is only when this concept has been acquired that we are able to self-attribute desires along this content route. To come to know then that we have a desire, one of a series of conditions has to be met by an emotion. If the emotion is negative, we must be able to envisage a situation such that *p*

in which this emotion would cease, in which case the proposition  $p$ <sup>16</sup> is the object of our desire. If, on the contrary, the emotion is positive and if for instance it is about a situation which may happen, it must be possible to believe either that we would have an experience of pleasure if the situation were to take place or that we would have a negative emotion otherwise. Conversely, if none of these conditions is satisfied, that is if we have an emotion without there being such a perspective, then we do not attribute any desire to ourselves.

Our belief that we have a certain desire is then justified, since we infer that we have a desire from the awareness we have of either a positive or a negative emotion toward a proposition together with a belief about the circumstances which may influence this emotion. This inference may also be presented as the categorization of a particular situation under a concept of desire, given the criteria that allow us to identify what is an instance of this concept. Finally, these beliefs about our desires are reliable, because our emotions are themselves reliably caused by our desires. Therefore, these beliefs constitute knowledge since we believe that we have a desire by inferring it from the awareness of an emotion which is itself reliably linked to the existence of a desire. However, this knowledge is not infallible for it is always possible that these emotions may be causally produced in an abnormal manner, that is, without there being an underlying desire.

## 8 What scope for this access to our desires?

Before concluding, I would like to discuss two objections. The first is directed against the content route and could be stated as follows: it is well known that emotions are uneasy to classify as shown by the difficulties that psychologists still encounter. Hence, if our knowledge of our desires necessarily relied on some knowledge of our emotions, this would make it difficult to know our desires. The thesis defended here seems also to rely on a developmental thesis which is probably false since it requires that we have knowledge of our emotions before we have knowledge of our desires. But this argument has no force because the thesis I propose does not require that we have an acute understanding of our emotions. Actually, the only thing that is required is that we be able to distinguish between our negative and positive emotions. When I say that our awareness of our emotions is the ground from which we infer that we have desires, this awareness has to be

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<sup>16</sup>  $p$  may even be not- $q$ . Nevertheless, even in this case, not- $p$  must be a situation which would be a relief to us. As the case where we are listening to sad music shows, one may be experiencing a negative emotion related to this music which would be replaced by sheer frustration if we ceased listen to it, a case in which a negative emotion does not allow us to know a desire.

distinguished from two other forms of knowledge or of awareness. On the one hand, I am not saying that we observe that we have a certain emotion. This is why even if the basis on which we come to know our desires is experiential, it cannot be said to be observational. The intentional content of an emotion is not something that can be observed. On the other hand, being aware of an emotion is not the same as knowing that we have an emotion of a certain precise type. It is simply the awareness that we have a certain phenomenological experience which as a whole is understood to be pleasant or not. And it is also the awareness that this phenomenological experience is linked to an intentional content that is the object of the emotion.

The second objection is more threatening and will allow me to specify the extent to which we rely on our emotions to have access to our desires. The objection is that my account is not perspicuous as an account of our awareness of most common desires and, thus, will have to be supplemented by another account for these cases. But then, we may come to suspect that this latter account might be generalized and render superfluous my own explanation. It can be pointed out that when I am asked whether I want a coffee at the end of a meal and when I answer that I actually do desire to have one, it is very unlikely that the idea of having coffee has triggered an emotion on which my answer is based. Hence, it could be said that if I am aware of my desires when I have emotions, it is only because I know them beforehand in a more direct way. To answer this objection, it seems that we have to take into account a series of considerations.

First, I agree that in most cases we know our desire in advance of the emotion that it prompts. However, this is far from being incompatible with the fact that we originally come to know our desires through our emotions.

Second, in numerous cases we are able to make hypotheses based on our actual desires, the desires we experienced earlier, or based on the situations which pleased us.<sup>17</sup> From our past experience, we can then extract beliefs about our tastes, about what we like and when we like what, and about what we are disposed to desire in given situations. But these beliefs based on our past experiences may be wrong since what pleased us earlier may not please us now, and even may not be desired for reasons that may not yet be apparent to us. Conversely, the experience of falling in love shows that we can desire an object, a situation without this being possibly anticipated by any induction, except if we were some omniscient psychologist, but this is not usually the case. Therefore, even if these beliefs may be true in numerous situations, and even useful, it must be emphasized that they will never form knowledge because they do not depend systematically on the existence of

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<sup>17</sup>Millgram defends a close idea in *Practical Induction* (1997). In my mind, what follows also shows the main limitation of his view.



our desires. For this reason, this inductive path to our desires cannot be seen as a theory that accounts for first-person knowledge of our desires. Nevertheless, we may rely on these beliefs when the outcome is not important, because it may be a faster way, and a sufficiently reliable way, to have an idea of our desires. Moreover, it might be in some circumstances the only way to grasp our desires, because the idea of having a coffee may not prompt any emotion at all.

Third, even if the characteristics of emotions on the basis of which we initially self-attribute desires are quite limited, the clues on which we may rely to self-attribute desires may become ever more varied and subtle and less conspicuous. And this indicates that a form of expertise may appear, an expertise about our affective reactions and about the thoughts which accompany them. This would allow us to self-attribute desires on the basis not only of the positive or negative aspect of our emotions but also of other elements that testify to the presence of emotions, or that point to signs or even premises of these emotions.

Fourth, an idea proposed in Peacocke (2000) seems plausible to me. He defends a general account of self-knowledge that is actually mainly directed at solving the problem of self-knowledge of our beliefs. In his view, knowledge of our beliefs is grounded on actually having a memory. But he acknowledges that the basis on which we acquire self-knowledge may become unconscious through the automatization of the procedure, because this is something which happens frequently in other tasks when they are done frequently. In the context of my theory, this would suggest that if we must have an emotion in order to be able to self-attribute a desire, this attribution might rely on aspects of the emotions which may not be conscious but may have been linked with a well-entrenched practice of attribution of desires. Moreover, Peacocke's idea may be linked to my third point. We can suggest that the effect of expertise and automatization goes along in such a way that we are finally able to tell that we have a desire on the grounds of more and more refined aspects of our emotional life, which may be eventually out of conscious reach.

Finally, that our emotions are one way to have knowledge of our desires does not imply that they are the only way. It seems possible that we may become aware of our intention to act when we are about to act, as we may be when we act, or if an action is prevented for some reason.<sup>18</sup> But even if this route to our desire does exist, this route would lead us only to become aware of desires which we are about to achieve, which we are achieving, or are prevented from achieving. Thus, it is impossible to know

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<sup>18</sup>This idea would be in line with ideas defended by Jeannerod (1994). It has also been proposed, quite plausibly, by Frijda (1986: 256).

through this latter route that we have the desire to go on holiday in China, for example. And then, the fact that such another mode of access to our desire exists cannot be an argument against the fact that we are aware of our desires through our emotions.

## 9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the awareness that we have of our desires when they are based on pain or on emotions is inferential, and these inferences take as premises our knowledge about our present pains, pleasures, and emotions, implying some kind of phenomenological awareness of ourselves. Moreover, these inferences are straightforward – they are nothing other than operations of categorization – and this is why they are not explicit and conscious even if we are conscious of the basis of these inferences. Thus, this account of self-knowledge about our desires seems to me to have the advantage of conceiving access to our desires as something that appears immediate. Nevertheless, this does not lead to the thesis that our self-knowledge is not grounded, a thesis which is always somewhat obscure. Moreover, it gives sense to the Cartesian idea, which seems close to common sense, that we have access to our desires by some kind of introspection. In saying that we have access to our desires through pain, pleasure and some of our emotions, it seems to me that I remain close to the common sense idea that we are aware of our desires through something which has a phenomenological dimension, while avoiding the difficulties that an observational theory of first-person knowledge presents.<sup>19</sup> Finally, while there are analogies between awareness of our desires through pain and pleasure and awareness of our desires through our emotions, we have to emphasize that we may come to know our desires from emotions along two routes. On the first route, the analogy is complete since the unpleasant aspect of our emotions plays the same role as pain and similarly for pleasure and positive emotions. It is the intrinsically known undesirable - respectively desirable - aspect of these experiences that makes us aware of a desire. But on the second route, our emotions play the role of an expression of an underlying desire. Thus, it is a bit more complex to infer from the emotion experienced that we have a certain desire. This explains why the knowledge we acquire of our desires by means

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<sup>19</sup> In this sense, what I describe as the content route has an important similarity with the account Goldman (1993) gave of our access to our mental states even if in my view such a phenomenological basis is only available for our desires. The similarity lies in the distinction made in both accounts between the content of the desire which is something perceived or the content of a thought and something which has a phenomenological character and which is required in order to know that we have a desire toward this content.

of our emotions requires first the constitution of our concept of desire, a concept that makes reference in its core to our emotions.<sup>20</sup>

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