

Title: Reason and Desire: The Case of Affective Desires

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Abstract. The paper begins with an objection to the Desire-Based Reasons Model. The argument from reason-based desires holds that since desires are based on reasons (first premise), which they transmit but to which they cannot add (second premise), they cannot themselves provide reasons for action. In the paper I investigate an attack that has recently been launched against the first premise of this argument by Ruth Chang. Chang invokes a counterexample: affective desires. The aim of the paper is to see if there is a way to accommodate the counterexample to the first premise. I investigate three strategies. I first deal with the idea that the motivation for the premise may be the thesis that an action is intentional if and only if it is done under the guise of perceived reasons. This offers us a way of defending the premise: by showing that actions prompted by affective desires are not intentional. I, however, argue that this strategy is unworkable. This brings me to the second strategy. Here I consider the idea that the premise does not require a conscious normative thought on the part of the agent; in fact, it may not require any such thought, conscious or unconscious. I claim that this strategy too is a failure. Finally, the third approach builds normative judgment in the desire. This is the approach that I think works; in particular, recent work by Jennifer Hawkins may help us accommodate affective desires. The challenge of affective desires, I conclude, can be tackled.

Keywords Ruth Chang, affective desires, reasons for action, intentionality, responsiveness to reasons, Jennifer Hawkins

Reason and Desire: The Case of Affective Desires

I. Against the Model: reason-based desires

In the theory of normative reasons one popular approach is the Desire-Based Reasons Model (henceforth: the Model). The Model purports to give us an account of normative practical reasons (henceforth: reasons) in terms of desires. In Mark Schroeder's (2007, p. 193) most recent formulation the Model claims the following:

“For R to be a reason for X to do A is for there to be some p such that X has a desire whose object is p , and the truth of R is part of what explains why X 's doing A promotes p .”

The idea is this. Take Schroeder's example (Ibid, p. 29). If Ronnie (X) likes dancing (p), then the fact that there will be dancing at the party (R), helps explain why Ronnie's going to the party (A) would promote Ronnie's desire to dance. ‘Explanation’ here is meant in the metaphysical sense: explanations are facts about “what is true because of what” (Ibid: note 19). Hence this particular feature of Ronnie's situation, i.e. that there will be dancing at the party becomes a reason for Ronnie.¹

This is a simple and powerful idea, which is both epistemologically and metaphysically attractive. Nevertheless, several contemporary philosophers are critical of it holding an alternative view of reasons, which is often called valued-based (e.g. Dancy 2000: 29; Parfit 2001; Quinn 1993; Scanlon 1998, Chapter 1; Raz 1999). In this paper I will not flesh out this idea, nor will I defend it against possible attacks. Instead, I will consider one particular attempt to refute the Model, which advocates of the valued-based view often appeal to: the argument from *reason-based desires*.

The argument is built up from two premises. The first claims that when we desire something we desire it for reasons. That is, when we desire an object we take it that features of this object are reason-providing: they give us reason to pursue, have or in some other way relate to the object of the desire. In short, desires are had under the guise of reasons (Raz 1999, pp. 5, 52-62; Scanlon 1998, pp. 39-44; Quinn 1993, p. 247; Dancy 2000, p. 35). The idea appears in different forms, however, so some interpretation is needed.

¹ There are other versions of the Model, depending on e.g. whether all desires are admitted, or only those that pass a certain test, or whether only actual desires of the agent matter. The argument that I deal with is designed to tackle all of them; hence details do not matter.

Let us start with some remarks of clarification. First, the term ‘normative’ I will understand narrowly as making reference to ‘reasons’. Of course, in a broader sense, terms like ‘good’ or ‘right’ are normative too. But this is not the sense I employ in the paper. Second, the premise is often put in evaluative terms; instead of the thesis that desires are had under the guise of reasons, we get the thesis that desires are had under the guise of the good. Joseph Raz and Warren Quinn, for instance, both present the premise in this way. In what follows I will nevertheless assume that those who make this claim would also endorse the normative version insofar as they want to make claims about reasons for action by employing the present argument.

Turn now to possible interpretations of the first premise. I suggest two. The first interpretation sees *two* mental states present, a desire and a belief, and connects the two in some way. The strongest form of the connection is the biconditional version:

“*X* desires that *p*, if and only if, *X* judges that *p* is supported by reasons.”

However, the argument against the Model does not require that we take a position on the controversial matter whether such normative judgments necessarily entail desires. Therefore I rest this side of the biconditional. Thus we get:

“*X* desires that *p*, only if, *X* judges that *p* is supported by reasons.”

That is, whenever there is a desire present, there is also a normative judgment present. Although this is an interpretation on which we could proceed, let me note that even this may be too strong for some advocates of the premise.

They typically make a distinction between desires that allegedly provide us with reasons and *urges* that do not, but it is not clear whether they think that urges are desires (cf. Quinn 1993, pp. 246-7, 247, 250; Dancy 2004, pp. 144-5; Raz 1999, pp. 50, 54; Scanlon 1998, pp. 38-40; 2002, pp. 337-8, 340). The reason why they can be ambiguous about this is a further thesis that they seem to endorse (cf. Raz 1999, Chapter 1, 2; 53-7; Quinn 1993, pp. 236, 241-2, 246-7, 252; Scanlon 1998, pp. 20-1, 38; Dancy 2000, pp. 36, 85-6). The idea is rooted in a particular theory of action, which says that unless one acts on the basis of one’s normative judgments, one is not acting intentionally, i.e. one is not acting for reasons.² Hence

² In the paper I go along with the generally accepted view that there is a conceptual connection between intentionality and acting for reasons. Nothing, though, turns on whether this is indeed so. The problematic cases

urges do not prompt intentional action, whether or not they qualify as desires; consequently they are not states that can provide reasons for action. Although desires may not be had under the guise of reasons, action is always carried out under such guise.

The second interpretation differs from the first in that it only sees *one* mental state present, the desire, and builds the relevant normative judgment *in* the desire. In its strongest form the claim is that:

“To desire that *p* is to judge that *p* is supported by reasons.”

However, the same remarks apply here as above. Thus, for the purposes of the argument against the Model we need not claim that a normative judgment entails the presence of a corresponding desire. And even the resulting weaker thesis that desire always involves a normative judgment, i.e. that it is an attitude towards a normative proposition, may be too strong. For, again, it is not clear whether urges, i.e. mental states that do not involve normative judgment, are desires or not. But in either case, due to the normative theory of action mentioned above, urges cannot give rise to intentional action; hence they cannot provide reasons for action.

Since I do not want to get entangled in disputes about which is the right interpretation, I do not choose between these two versions of the premise.³ Except for the last section, which deals with the third response to Chang’s counterexamples, the difference between the two interpretations will not be important. Although I will often speak of normative beliefs and thoughts, these can be taken merely as expressions of the judgment involved in the desire.

What the first premise establishes is that there is circularity in the analysis of reasons the Model offers. Take Schroeder’s definition. He sets out to analyze reasons in terms of desires, but if the first premise is true, we must conclude that desires themselves must be analyzed in terms of reasons. The conceptual circularity is obvious: we must have an account of reasons at hand before we can make claims about the connection between reasons for

either do not involve affective desires (such as the expressive actions of Hursthouse 1991), their intentionality too can be doubted (the same expressive actions), or they are not in fact problematic (the intrinsically motivated actions of Mele 1988). In the third section I will deal with these cases, and explain why this is so.

³ There are admittedly many issues that I disregard in the paper that also influence the choice between the interpretations as well as certain of their details. For instance, it matters whether it is held that desires are sufficient for action because then, of course, urges cannot be regarded as desires. Also, once views on the theory of motivation would inevitably influence which interpretation one endorses. In particular, the first interpretation fits those who are willing to give a motivating role to beliefs, whereas the second interpretation goes well with the views that desires are the motivators.

action and desires. Our account of reasons must then come from elsewhere; the value-based theory is here to help us. The Model is refuted.

However, this is too quick. Desires can get back in the picture, if they can add to the stock of reasons they are based on. This is what the second premise of the argument denies. If the first premise is true and we desire everything for reasons, the fact that we desire something provides no reason over and above the reasons for desiring it. Desire is nothing else but the endorsement of the reasons it is based on. Hence to claim that it could add to these reasons would lead to double counting of these reasons, and this is unacceptable (Raz 1999, p. 61; Dancy 2000, pp. 36-7). The premise has two applications (Dancy *ibid.*). The primary application claims that desire is not an additional reason to do the thing desired; the secondary application holds that desire is not an extra reason to do what promotes the desire. Note that since one way of promoting a desire is just to do the thing desired, if we accept the secondary application, we also affirm the truth of the primary application.

Together the two premises entail the following conclusion: desires are based on conceived reasons, which they transmit but to which they cannot add. Desires are merely channels for these conceived reasons, which may or may not turn out to be real reasons. The Model's picture of desires as setting ends and thereby providing reasons for action as means to those ends is false. For there are reasons to have those ends and these reasons are our reasons to take the means to those ends, i.e. to act.⁴ Desire serves no normative role in this scheme: it only transmits the reasons for the ends to the means to those ends. The argument thus paints a two-faced picture of the field of allegedly reason-providing mental states: there are desires that only transmit reasons they are based on, and there are urges that neither transmit reasons nor do they provide reasons in their own right. No desires provide reasons; value-based reasons are all the reasons there are.

This is no doubt a controversial argument; especially the first premise, which invokes a version of what is known as the 'guise of the good' thesis, has come under fire both in the present and in the past. In the present paper I discuss one particular strand of this criticism. I proceed in the following way. I will first present Ruth Chang's argument against the first premise. It uses several groups of counterexamples that all come together under the label 'affective desires'. Then I will turn to the ways advocates of the first premise may cope with

⁴ However, as we know from the toxin puzzle and recent discussions on Scanlon's buck-passing account of value, reasons for having desires may not be the same as reasons for action. In particular, if there are reasons provided by the *state* of desiring, it might be the case that one has reasons to desire something, but no reasons to act on this desire. See Scanlon (1998, p. 97), Parfit (2001, pp. 21-4), Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) for influential discussions.

these examples. I will consider three ways of accommodating them; ways that Chang does not discuss or not in sufficient detail: the first relies on the above-mentioned view of intentional action, the second and the third attempt to extend the premise in different ways. I will claim that the first and the second response are ultimately unsuccessful, but the third offers a way out. The challenge of affective desires, I will conclude, can be tackled.

II. The counterexample: affective desires

Recently Ruth Chang (2004, pp. 58, 64-5) has argued against the first premise by invoking the counterexample of what she dubbed *affective desires*. She describes these desires as cases when the agent wants something just because a particular object appeals to her. She just ‘feels like’ doing (or pursuing, or attaining) the thing in question. Her attraction is often immediate and spontaneous and its object can be trivial as well as complex. But there is one common feature that all these desires share: that the element of attraction, the ‘affective feel’ they come with cannot be brought under any ‘normative category’. It is only a phenomenological feel that may have a belief-involving causal or psychological story behind it, but that requires no further normative thought on the part of the agent.⁵

Chang illustrates her case with examples.⁶ They come in four groups, but I will only present the first group and parts of the second. This is because these examples are both the least controversial and are equally damaging for the first premise. The other examples Chang mentions draw upon substantive positions in other fields or relate to existing discussions that Chang herself does not engage with. Hence I chose not to present them in any detail and use them in any way.⁷

⁵ At one point Chang (2004, p. 70 note 18) signals that this simple phenomenological account of affective desires is inadequate, but notes that no one has so far provided a fuller account of these desires.

⁶ There is no denying that these examples are not original in the sense that similar examples have been put forward by others. The next footnote gives references to some of these, and even the ones that I will ultimately stick to are not unprecedented in the literature (similar examples are Quinn’s (1993, p. 236) radio man case, Davidson’s (1963, p. 4) paint drinking case, or Rawls’ (1999, p. 379) grass counting man case). I prefer to focus on Chang because she gives a good description of her cases, and hers is a recent and focused attempt, which further facilitates discussion.

⁷ Here is a brief recapitulation. The left-out impossibility cases deal with children who do not possess the concept of a reason and with a philosopher who consistently desires only what he thinks he has no reasons to desire. For relevant discussions of the latter see Raz (1999, pp. 33-4, 68-75); Stocker (1979), (2004), (2008), Velleman (2000), Gert (2004, p. 207); Tenenbaum (2007, Chapter 6) all on the possibility of desiring the bad; for discussion of the former case see Velleman (1992, p. 22 note 12); Audi (1993, p. 156); Scanlon (2002, p. 340); Tenenbaum (2007, Chapter 6). The third group of examples concerns cases of tie-breaking, that is, situations when the available value-based reasons are tied and the agent invokes her desire to break the tie. For discussion, see Dancy (2000, p. 36); I deal with this question in [Author’s published article]. Finally, the fourth group of examples deal with hedonic desires, which are desires where the only value to appeal to would be the pleasure satisfaction of the desire brings. For discussions of relevant theories of pleasure see Katz (2006), (2008), Sobel (2005), Scanlon (2002), Rachels (2000), (2004). I deal with these issues in [Author’s published article].

Turn now to the examples I am interested in. In the first group we find desires when we can, but *need not* suppose any normative thought on the part of the agent (Ibid, pp. 62-3, 66-7). Sometimes, Chang says, when she is walking down the sidewalk, she finds herself with a desire to turn a cartwheel. Or, when ordering in a restaurant, she finds herself with a desire to order dishes of a certain color; she is attracted to green, say. Or, she reports, sometimes students in her class end up dating one another; everyone can witness their mutual attraction. In none of these cases, Chang claims, need we attribute normative thoughts to the agents. When she suddenly finds herself with a desire to turn a cartwheel, she need not think that there is anything good about doing so. Similarly, when she orders spinach fricassee in a restaurant, she need not think that she has reasons to desire the fricassee for any particular reason (that it is green, say). And the same is true of her students' mutual attraction toward one another: they need not have any thoughts about why they should be attracted to one another. The idea then is simple: even if there are conceivable reasons to have affective desires, often this is not how we, the agents *experience* them: we do not have corresponding normative thoughts. Agents in these examples do what they feel like doing, what they are attracted to; there is no further reference to (perceived) reasons in these cases. And this is just what the first premise claims - falsely, as the examples demonstrate.

The second group of examples Chang considers is more radical. In these cases it is not only superfluous to attribute normative thoughts to the agents but it is *impossible* (Ibid, pp. 67-8). Chang cites four impossibilities: rational, psychological, conceptual, and logical. I will use the first two. In the first case a diabetic is squaring off against a piece of chocolate whose taste he is attracted to, even though from previous experience he knows that he does not like the taste of chocolate and, having just tested his blood sugar level, he knows that eating the chocolate would put him in a diabetic coma. In the second case a teenager is attracted to breaking the rules in spite of the fact that, being raised by a strict disciplinarian, he has the deeply ingrained belief that cutting class is taboo, which in turn makes him incapable of thinking that he has reason to play truant. It is important to note that these are not cases of desiring the bad: both agents desire something they think they have no reason to desire, but they do not desire it under that description, that is to say, because of that.

Chang takes these examples to establish a hybrid theory of reasons on which a subset of reasons is provided by affective desires. How large this subset is depends on how significant the range of cases affective desires can cover. However, Chang also signals that the counterexamples may have more radical consequences. Her idea is that if affective desires provide reasons, then in those cases when desires are based on reasons in the way the first

premise claims them to be, this may just be the *consequence* of the agent's affective attraction to the object of the desire (Ibid, pp. 68, 78). Her argument, if successful, shows that in the case of many ordinary desires any kind of normative thought on the part of the agent is better regarded as an independent disposition that is the *result* of the agent's attraction. Thus, perhaps even more hangs upon the success of Chang's argument making our evaluation of it even more necessary.⁸

III. First response: intentionality

The first response is familiar to us from the first section. Take the following view of intentional action: for an action to qualify as intentional the agent must take it that there are reasons in favor of it. From this it follows that whenever desire is present in the case of intentional action, it must be reason-based in the way the first premise claims it to be. Hence if affective desires are not based on reasons, they cannot prompt intentional action. They are urges that cannot provide us with reasons. Consequently, the fact that affective desires are not based on reasons is not a problem; they pose no threat to the first premise. They are not counterexamples to the premise because they were never meant to be covered by it.

However, this normative view of agency is widely disputed. Recently several arguments have been offered against it, which, besides pointing to weak points of the account, also offer substantive alternatives to it (Gert 2004, Chapter 9; Setiya 2007, Part I). There are also arguments that endorse the normative view, but claim that it can be made compatible with the Model (Schroeder 2007, Chapter 8). Most of the arguments in favor of the normative view, thus a large part of the above debate, is taken up by discussions about how certain general constraints on intentional action, such as intelligibility and control, support or do not support the view.⁹ Due to limitations of space, however, I cannot discuss these theories and arguments here. Instead, I will focus on considerations that I take to be occupying neutral ground in that both sides would accept arguments based on them.

The first such idea comes from Raz (1999, pp. 43-4). It is that intentionality has several aspects and some of these aspects come in degrees. Accordingly, it is possible and it does

⁸ This may be so for two further reasons. Hybrid views are controversial. First, it can be claimed that a hybrid account relies on a duality in the sources of normativity, one internal to the agent, the other external, and that this is unacceptable. However, Chang (2004, pp. 88-91), and Scanlon (2004, pp. 238-240) disagree. Second, if the first premise is taken to be a necessary (and, perhaps, sufficient) condition for desires, as the its stronger readings suggest, one counterexample does the job: the premise is not merely compromised, but is proven to be false.

⁹ On intelligibility see Raz (1999, p. 24); Quinn (1993, p. 250); Tenenbaum (2007, esp. Chapter 1); Setiya (2007, p. 63); Smith (1994, pp. 139-140); Wallace (2003, p. 433). On control see Raz (1999, pp. 6, 11, 16, 20-1, 32, 76); Copp and Sobel (2002, p. 262); Chang (2004, pp. 69, 81). In addition Wallace (1999, p. 219) introduces what I take to be a further constraint, which he dubs the 'guidance condition'.

happen in some cases that what we are dealing with is not lack of intentionality, but *diminished* intentionality in some respect. However, the thought continues, this much is enough for our purposes: such actions are not properly speaking done for reasons. Now the question is what this aspect might be and whether we find diminished intentionality in this aspect in the cases Chang discusses. The aspect Raz refers to is control. The idea is that there are elements of control that both sides endorse as necessary constraints on intentional action. Thus even in the absence of a proper master argument in favor of the normative account, we might still be able to rule out affective desires as mere urges that cannot prompt intentional action.

Raz discusses one case when he thinks we can meaningfully doubt that the action involved is fully intentional. It is the case of expressive actions, actions done out of emotions (moods), such as when out of anger - not *in order to* express anger - I kick the door. The intentionality of these actions is diminished, according to Raz, due to the agent's (slightly) diminished control over the initiation of these actions. The emotion swells within the agent and then explodes signaling the agent's diminished control over the initiation of her action (Ibid, pp. 41-4). The underlying idea is that in fully intentional action the agent controls the initiation, i.e. what she does, and the manner of execution of the action, i.e. how she does it (Ibid, pp. 39, 40; Audi 1993, p. 167; cf. Setiya 2007, pp. 57-8). In the case of expressive actions, however, this is not the case; hence these actions are not fully intentional, and therefore not done for reasons.

It seems clear, however, that none of Chang's examples need be described as cases of expressive actions. They can be, but they need not be, and this is all she needs. The next idea is to draw an analogy with cases where intentionality is absent in at least one aspect. One such case is provided by pathological desires; Raz (Ibid, pp. 6, 42) also mentions them in passing. These cases are more radical in that these desires often function as irresistible impulses resulting in irreversible actions. Typical examples are obsessive-compulsive disorders such as the boy who could not stop washing his hands, people suffering from phobias like the kleptomaniac or the pyromaniac. The agent in these cases have no control over the initiation of action, i.e. what she is going to do, but can, though may not always, control the manner of the execution of the action. For instance, the shoplifting kleptomaniac can display much skill and dexterity in shoplifting, while at the same time whether she shoplifts or not is not under her control. The same can be said about cases of hypnosis: one's desire can be induced by hypnosis, and do just what the induced desire bids one to do, but at the same time retain control over one's way of doing it. What these two cases add are two further elements of

control (Audi 1993, pp. 159-167). The first is that control requires *reversibility*: whether the agent, via her motivational system can resist the force of her desires, hence alter their direction, thus creating the possibility of alternative actions. The second is that control requires the exclusion of *alien interference* with agency such as the invasive inculcation of desires by hypnosis or by a mad neurosurgeon, or the effecting of the causal link between desires, beliefs and actions by similar means.

However, Chang's examples do not invoke alien interference of any kind, so we can set this option aside as well. Perhaps the remaining impossibility cases can be compared to pathological desires, though. But here too we may hesitate. Take the case when one is attracted to something one admits to be disgusting, repulsive, or not something one thinks one should be attracted to: such as news about a natural catastrophe illustrated with pictures of suffering people. Or consider the smoker who wants to quit, but nevertheless wants to smoke this last cigarette. These cases are very similar to Chang's examples. And they do not seem to involve pathological desires because the agents involved can suppress their urge, can resist to act on them.

However, it might be claimed that emphasizing reversibility gives us a false picture of compulsive actions. There are alternative explanations. First, it can be claimed that compulsive actions are prompted by desires the agent cannot *integrate*: the agent, via her motivational system cannot reduce the force of these desires, thus ensuring the possible influence of opposing reasons. Arguably, integration is a better candidate as a necessary condition for control (Audi 1993, pp. 165-7). However, it is unclear whether it is indeed an essential element in these cases that the motivational force of the desire is unperturbed by other elements of the agent's motivational system. But what is really troubling about this interpretation is that once we accept that the agent can resist acting on these desires, we also seem to accept that she retains at least some influence over them via his motivational system. And if this is so, the appeal to the lack of integration is not a workable alternative in these cases. The idea behind integration is exactly that some cases of irreversible action are under the agent's control due to the possibility of integration. But the reverse cannot be true.

The third interpretation of compulsive action argues that compulsive acts are not the results of the operation of irresistible desires in the agent, but instead of what we might call the 'fatigue of the will' (Zaragoza 2006, pp. 257, 259-262). The idea is that compulsive desires, though resistible, create a continuous stream of impulses that with varying speed wears down the will that functions as the main inhibitory, i.e. controlling system, a gatekeeper to the implementation of action. This happens because the agent via her will tries to suppress

her urge, and though she can succeed, the price of her success is more and more psychological discomfort. For the will needs episodic rest, but the continuous struggle for resistance makes this impossible. This overexertion of the will is thus like muscle fatigue and the result is the same. Increasing psychological discomfort raises the cost of resistance until the stress becomes unbearable and the agent succumbs: the action takes place. However, while this may be the best available account of compulsive actions, it is again unclear why this description would hold for the desires we are dealing with. Ultimately, it is an empirical matter whether ‘fatigue of the will’ plays a role in the cases Chang describes. In the absence of empirical proof, however, it is hard to find any reason to think that such fatigue would be an essential characteristic in Chang’s cases.¹⁰

Turn now to the first group of examples. I see three explanations here. First, it might be that actions prompted by these desires are absent-minded actions or routine movements. But, as I see things, it would certainly be stretching things to interpret Chang’s cases either way (cf. Chang 2004, p. 82). Moreover, some regard routine or habitual movements as well as absent-minded actions as intentional (e.g. Ginet 1990, pp. 88-9). I will say more about such actions in the next section; I will also claim that these actions are intentional, in fact, they are responsive to reasons. But, to repeat, there is no reason to interpret Chang’s cases in this way.

Second, one can claim that these actions are of diminished intentionality due to the diminished awareness of the agent. The agent does not need to attend to them in order to perform them. But the notion of awareness or attention used here must be sufficiently thin. It is typically interpreted as non-inferential, non-observational awareness that one is acting (Chan 1995, p. 142; Setiya 2007, p. 24). The idea is that when an agent acts she is able to tell non-inferentially and without recourse to observation that she is acting. And when her action fails, she is still able to tell what she was trying to do; she thus has foreknowledge that she will perform that particular action.

However, if we understand awareness in this way, even basic bodily movements, such as shrugging one’s shoulder or mannerisms such as tugging one’s ears while speaking can satisfy the above criterion of awareness (Chan *ibid*). And Chang’s examples are obviously instances of action that go beyond basic bodily movements; they can be complex, requiring

¹⁰ This point has a parallel in a different interpretation of these cases. One can claim that these desires have a ‘nagging’ character: their very existence creates a tension in the agent by, for instance, making her wonder insistently what it would be like to satisfy the desire. Hence these desires come with indirect reasons: actions satisfying these desires help the agent relieve the tension generated by the desire. These agents, however, overall disapprove of their action. So this is just a case of *akrasia*, but due to their overall disapproval, these agents are not willing to admit the reason provided by relieving their urge, even though they know that there is such a reason. But this is all very speculative. It does not seem to be an essential element in the impossibility cases Chang describes that the desires involved are like ‘nagging itches’. Cf. Chang (2004, pp. 74-5, 82).

sequences of actions and coordination. As such they are hard to interpret as lacking the kind of non-inferential, non-observational awareness that is under consideration here.

The third explanation points out that even on accounts of the explanation of action that are in line with the Model we need a belief that identifies the agent's action as conducive to the achievement of the wanted item. Otherwise we cannot speak of intentional action (Davidson 1963; Mele 1988, p. 723; 2003, pp. 71-2). However, in Chang's cases there is no appropriate instrumental belief that connects the want to the action. The only connecting belief could be the belief that doing the act is doing what is desired: that e.g. the desire to turn a cartwheel is best served by turning the cartwheel. But, Alfred Mele (1988, p. 726; 2003, p. 73) points out, such a belief "seems [causally] otiose; it lacks an evident explanatory function and smacks of being a device whose only function is to save a theory". This is why the agent's explanation is that she felt like doing the action in question. These actions, as Mele puts it, are intrinsically motivated: the agent does what she does for its own sake. She does not, however, do this intentionally, i.e. for a reason - even by the theory's own lights.

However, Mele (Ibid, pp. 727-8) has a solution.¹¹ His idea is that we can do without the belief because the desire itself has a representational element. It is an action plan, or an element of an action plan, for achieving some pertinent goal or sub-goal and perhaps, but necessarily, of the steps leading to achieving this goal or sub-goal. Thus, when the agent is turning a cartwheel just because she feels like so, her desire has a plan element that represents the steps to be taken to turn a cartwheel and the goal-state, her turning a cartwheel. Such plans, moreover, guide actions, just as proper connecting beliefs do: they identify the steps as well as the goal the steps lead to (Ibid, p. 730). Consequently, when the agent says that she has done her action for no reason, she means that she has not done it for any *further* reason. Her reason is a desire, and not a desire/belief complex. But she has done the action for a reason and her action is intentional.

IV. Second response: responsiveness to reasons

The previous section has shown that arguing for the alleged absence of intentionality leaves the first group of examples as well as the remaining impossibility cases intact. In this section I will focus on another way of tackling the challenge of affective desires.

Chang's argument centers on the claim that agents need not and in some cases cannot, have any normative thoughts concerning the objects of their desires. This may suggest that the

¹¹ For another response that is equally helpful with affective desires see Smith (2004, pp. 101-4) who argues for the view that at least the belief 'I can do A [the action]' should be present in intentional action.

first premise requires agents to represent to themselves the object of their desires under the guise of reasons: that they have explicit normative thoughts. This is not so. Several philosophers, among them Raz (1999, pp. 72, 232; 2004, pp. 175-6), Scanlon (1998, pp. 23-4, 47) and Sie (2009; forthcoming), have pointed to the existence of background structures and higher-order processes that guide our habitual, automatic, and spontaneous actions, i.e. actions without explicit normative thinking, while at the same time ensuring that this guidance has a normative content. This gives us the first extension of the first premise of the argument from reason-based desires.

The problem with this interpretation and subsequent response, however, sits on its face. Chang can simply hold that what causes the relevant impossibility in the two impossibility cases can just as well affect the agent's unconscious, higher-order processes (cf. Chang 2004, p. 67). And though the first group of examples may look as a better candidate, here, again, the 'contingency card' can be played. Chang can say that these are one-off occasions, as whims often are, not habitual, routine acts, or immediate, spontaneous reactions. Assuming their governance by higher-order processes and background structures is therefore superfluous in giving an account of these cases.

Raz, however, goes further than the unconscious operation of reason in human thinking and action. He notes that there is a more 'radical' capacity we possess: the capacity to respond to reasons that altogether bypasses reason. "It is a capacity to respond to facts that are reasons, in the way appropriate to their being reasons, *without* recognizing them or thinking of them as reasons (nor in analogous terms)" (Raz 2004, p. 176; emphasis is mine). Nomy Arpaly (2003, pp. 51-9) draws attention to the existence of a similar capacity in the instinctual playing of (sports) games, in perceptual belief formation, and in the process she calls dawning: when people change their minds, without ever representing the mounting evidence as reasons, as a result of a long period of exposure to new evidence.

Further elaborating, Raz adds that the power of reason is the power to identify reasons and this requires recognition. But the capacity to respond to reasons is different. It need not and does not always depend on the capacity to recognize reasons as reasons. And this is because we may be "hard-wired to respond to reasons of some kinds and culturally conditioned to respond to others" (Ibid). He gives the example of pain. We can and do respond to pain as a reason, i.e. we retreat from it without thinking of the pain-causing feature or of the fact that some action will avoid the pain as a reason. In fact, for certain creatures this is all there is: they can only respond to these kinds of reasons. Moreover, Raz notes in ending

his discussion, “given that the response is hard-wired, it is not accidental. It is fairly reliable and regular” (Ibid).

There are two ways to interpret these claims. One stays within confines of the idea that we are dealing with the agent’s awareness of reasons. The existence of the capacity Raz and Arpaly mention just shows that responsiveness to reasons does not require the support of higher-order processes or background structures. Yet these reasons are still within the agent’s reach, if only in the sense that the agent would cite her reasons after the action and perhaps only in appropriate conditions (cf. Raz 1999, pp. 233-4; Bedke 2008, pp. 88-9, 91).

The second interpretation is more radical. Being responsive to reasons, the idea goes, does not require awareness of any kind; there is no need for any kind of identification test. Although agents may often be aware of their reasons, or unaware but later nevertheless cite them as reasons, this need not happen in every case: agents need not be able to recognize reasons as reasons, nor posthumously cite them in order to have desires and actions for reasons. According to Raz, the capacity to respond to reasons is the capacity to respond to reasons *as to* reasons. He certainly allows that this can happen without recognizing a consideration as a reason at the time of acting. The present extension is that this can happen without *ever* recognizing it as a reason.

The two interpretations give us two further extensions of the first premise. Start with the first (which is the second extension in the row). The impossibility cases fail the recognition test by construction, and there is no reason to think that the first group of examples would not fail the test too. True, it can be claimed that the counterfactual conditions might actually be such that this does not happen (e.g. by removing the causes of the agent’s psychological inability to recognize relevant reasons). But this claim cannot be got for free; the advocate of the first premise must argue for it.

The same holds for another possible response. Sie (forthcoming) argues that certain scientific experiments she deals with are also proof for the lack of agential transparency: that agents do not always have introspective access to their reasons. They cite reasons when there was no reason they acted for, they misjudge their reasons, and they deny to have acted for reasons when they actually did. Raz (1999, pp. 231-2) and others (e.g. Audi 1993, p. 151) agree. Thus the test is not decisive. Perhaps the counterfactuals can be so tailored that we can successfully filter out these mistakes (cf. Raz *ibid*: 234), and then it becomes an open question whether Chang can simply so configure her examples that they fail the test. However, to

repeat, it is not Chang's task to describe the proper test and produce the right results; the burden of proof lies on the other side.¹²

Consider finally the second interpretation (our third extension). This reading looks effective. The first group of examples can be interpreted as responses to reasons the agent does not recognize (and would not even cite later). True, the reasons involved, such as, say, the greenness of spinach fricassee, are not particularly significant but, as Raz (1999, p. 30) notes, small values are still values. The same, it seems, can be said of the child who is psychologically incapable of thinking that he has reason to play truant. He is like Huckleberry Finn (this is Chang's analogy), responding to moral reasons that exist, which he cannot recognize but can still respond to. Finally, as to the example of the diabetic, we should remember that our hard-wired responses to reasons, although reliable and regular, are nevertheless defeasible. Just as there can be misperceptions and false beliefs, so can exist misdirected desires. The diabetic can respond to the taste of chocolate as a reason, even if it is not really a reason and even if he does not recognize it as a reason.

There are two worries here, though. Surely, we cannot just *say* that any desire that escapes the scope of the unextended first premise is nevertheless a response to reasons in this weak sense (or it is an urge). At least this would require further proof, an explanation of why this would be so. But neither Arpaly nor Raz gives us an adequate explanation. Raz speaks of hard-wired responses in the context of responses to pain and it is much more plausible that we are, for instance, evolutionary hard-wired to respond to such reasons than that we are in the same way and for the same reason responsive to the greenness of spinach fricassee. Raz also mentions cultural conditioning, but even though this can broaden the circle of reasons that we can in this weak sense respond to, it still does not cover everything. For instance, is the child in Chang's example morally or culturally conditioned to respond to moral reasons? Not necessarily. If she is like Huckleberry Finn and has his kind of background, his moral education and cultural conditioning might actually be in line with, in fact, as Chang presents the case, might be the condition for his psychological incapacity. Finally, Arpaly's reference to certain processes of belief formation and to certain 'instincts' that are employed in sports, are also of no help here. What all these examples establish is that a capacity to reasons directly exists, but does not show that it is in play in the case of affective desires.

¹² Unless it is argued that agents *never* have such introspective access, that they merely *post hoc* rationalize their actions. It is this conclusion that many draw from the experiments Sie deals with (e.g. Haidt 2001). However, this radical move would put an end to agency understood as responsiveness to reasons, and this is certainly not a result advocates of the first premise would welcome.

The second worry concerns the content of this capacity. What exactly is involved in responsiveness to reasons in this sense? What Raz says is that responding to reasons in the present sense involves responding in the way *appropriate* to their being reasons. But it is left open what appropriateness consists in. There is one further clue we get from Raz, though. Michael Stocker (2008, p. 125) reports that Raz made the following response to him concerning these matters:

“Stocker is mistaken to think that I attribute a kind of higher-order reflectiveness to people: for example that they not only think of their actions as pleasurable or thrilling or beneficial to X or Y, etc, but also think of them as good in virtue of possessing those properties. All I ever claimed is that people act for considerations which we classify as a belief in the possession of a good making property”.

Clearly, however, it just cannot be that any ordinary belief of the agent would do the job.¹³ Then even undisputed urges would pass the test: they are all reactions in one way or another to the world, thus are responsive to ordinary beliefs. Take the kleptomaniac’s desire from the previous section. She too has beliefs about the world to which her desires are reactions. She thinks for instance that there is a shiny jewel in front of her, that she is in a shop, and that it would be easy to steal this jewel. Surely, we do not want to claim that this is enough for her desire to be reason-based. Nor is Raz saying this. He says instead that the belief must be such that we can *classify* its object as having a good making property. But how do we do this? We cannot just employ our, perhaps even correct, theory of goodness since there are desires that are based on mistaken evaluations. And though we can try to approximate these evaluations, this is a very unpromising strategy. The problem is that this puts us in the role of the interpreter, and then we are bound to get many things wrong; we are bound to find desires (and actions) unresponsive to reasons just because we cannot make sense of those reasons. Affective desires, or at least some of them, would, I submit, be good candidates.¹⁴

¹³ There is the further issue whether agents would in fact cite relevant good making facts. This is not obvious for instance in the cases we are dealing with. The greenness of spinach fricassee, or the taste of chocolate or anything about turning a cartwheel may not be why the agent would report having the desire for. However, in my discussion, I assume that this is not a problem. This condition too can be relaxed. We can for instance generalize the analysis Arpaly (2003, pp. 76-7) gives of the Huckleberry Finn case, and hold that not even beliefs about mundane facts need ever make it to the surface of the agent’s conscious awareness.

¹⁴ There is also the issue of how this reading would fit the normative account of agency Raz advocates. Now that the link to the agent’s cognition of goodness is severed, it becomes mysterious how goodness helps us with

At this point we might turn to certain dispositional and phenomenological features attitudes that are responsive to reasons allegedly share, and appeal to the absence or presence of these features in cases when we are uncertain in our interpretation (cf. Bedke 2008, pp. 88-9, 91-2). Thus we could say that for a desire to be reason-based it must be an attitude that would engage the agent's decision-making processes when they are functioning properly: it would engage with the agent's plans, projects, or intentions to produce behavior that would accomplish the relevant reasons. Thus having a desire involves not only the disposition to act on it, but also to think about ways of acting on it, to object when obstacles are in the way of acting on it and so on. As a result, the agent does not merely feel impelled to act, but she experiences a genuine attraction to the object of the desire, which serves as its intentional object.

However, this characterization also fits affective desires as their advocates describe them in line with the Model (cf. Chang 2004, p. 69; Copp and Sobel 2002, pp. 259-263). Ordinary beliefs about the world can play a role in the causal or psychological story behind the desire (e.g. its formation and even its persistence), and there is also no problem with characterizing desires as involving a bundle of dispositions and certain phenomenological features (or the lack of such features as above). Hence all these claims can be endorsed by Chang while maintaining that there is no responsiveness to reasons involved.

However, if we reject these proposals, we are back with the first two extensions. Notice that these extensions are also in line with what Raz says. For they allow that the agent has no 'higher-order reflectiveness' when she acts on her desire. Yet, as we saw, in some way they do smuggle in this element, and this provides enough room for affective desires to pass their test. To sum up, the three extensions cannot accommodate affective desires. The first extension can be set aside as superfluous. The second extension leads to open questions about the right kind of identification test. The third extension is vague lacking both an account of the grounds of the relevant capacity as well as an account of its content.

V. Third response: proto-concepts

We have so far not found a plausible interpretation of reason-based desires that can accommodate affective desires. Drawing on the work of Jennifer Hawkins in this last section I would like to present an approach that I think has at least the potential to do the job. Hawkins' idea as well as my response that builds on it are both versions of the first interpretation I

giving an account of intelligibility and control Raz builds his theory on. See Stocker (2004, pp. 308-10) for this point.

presented in the first section; what they do is to extend that interpretation by weakening it. Reference to the presence of normative judgment, even if it is somehow built into desires, reproduces all our problems. Hence the idea is to do without normative judgment while retaining reference to reasons somehow.¹⁵

Hawkins (2008) argues that we can accommodate counterexamples, she is dealing with children who do not possess evaluative concepts and with the case of desiring the bad, if we could provide an alternative conception of evaluative mental content. Her suggestion for this alternative content is what she calls *proto-conceptual* mental content.

The idea is inspired by an analogy with José Luis Bermúdez's work on infants' perception of the physical world. Referring to Bermúdez, Hawkins (Ibid, p. 258) reports that recent research in empirical and developmental psychology shows that infants react to objects *as objects*. Experimenters recorded looks of surprise and shifts in the infants' attention patterns in response to physical objects that behaved in ways they have not been previously habituated to experience (Ibid, p. 255). Experimenters took this to be evidence of infants' sensitivity to what Bermúdez calls 'object properties', which by any account constitute part of our concept 'physical object'; for instance, the property of following a continuous trajectory through space-time, of having a determinate shape, of being impenetrable, etc (Ibid). However, for Bermúdez this sensitivity does not show that infants possess the concept 'physical object'. Instead, infants have *concept-like* capacities, which give rise to *proto-beliefs* about their environment.

The reason why these perceptual states qualify as beliefs is that they in many ways behave like mature beliefs with conceptual content. Thus, they give rise to a limited number of inference-like mental transitions that respect object properties: their content, in combination with other mental attitudes, requires or allows the development of new mental attitudes (Ibid, p. 253). They also create new dispositions (such as surprise), and in conjunction with other mental states or dispositions, influence behavior (Ibid, p. 258). But this is as far as they go; other characteristics of mature conceptual thought are not present in the case of infants. In particular, infants do not have the capacity to reflect on the correctness of these transitions, to consciously reflect on the grounds and reasons of their responses and

¹⁵ This interpretation may have further reserves for accommodating affective desires. Two accounts deserve particular attention; both appear in some form in Stampe (1987). One utilizes the distinction between judgment and appearance. For more recent employment of the distinction see Scanlon (1998, pp. 39-44), Hurley (2001, pp. 11-5), and Tenenbaum (2007, Chapter 1). Another account works out the idea of constitutive dependence and is advocated by Hurley (2007) who claims it to be the best interpretation of Davidson's work on the subject. I prefer Hawkins' account because it offers a favorable reinterpretation of the central aspect of the counterexamples I am concerned with: their affective character. It is moreover a less discussed, partly because recent, idea.

behavior. They do not possess the capacities that are needed for this: a certain degree of self-awareness, especially awareness of one's thought processes, and the capacity for abstraction (Ibid, p. 255). Finally, and perhaps most importantly from our perspective, although proto-beliefs and the proto-conceptual capacities they rely on are developmentally prior to mature conceptual capacities, they remain in operation *even when* the latter capacities are in place (Ibid, p. 256). For example, although the concept 'physical object' emerges from the proto-conceptual object-sensitivity of perceptual experience, our visual experience continues to be structured in proto-conceptual ways even once we become capable of thinking thoughts about objects.

Hawkins' idea is that something analogous happens in the case of desire. This is because the *affective* aspect of desire can receive an analysis that parallels the above description of proto-beliefs. Hawkins first gives up the neutrality we have so far presupposed in the debate concerning which is the primitive: reason or value. Instead, she endorses the fittingness analysis of goodness: what is good is what is fitting to have some kind of positive response to. And this fittingness can just as well be expressed as that it makes sense to make the requisite response; ultimately, to say that there are reasons to make the response (Ibid, p. 257).¹⁶ Then she hypothesizes that the affective experience of desire (and, presumably, of other mental states, Ibid, p. 260) is primitively structured in ways that allow for affective presentations *as of* the world being a certain way or having certain properties (Ibid, p. 258). These presentations, however, are at best proto-conceptual. What happens is that at a particular stage of their mental life, infants experience some of their responses as fitting particular objects. That is, just like in the perceptual case, a certain sensitivity to objects emerges. This time, however, this sensitivity takes the form of a feeling *as of* certain responses *making sense* or *feeling right*. What emerges, then, is a primitive awareness of, feeling about, the relation between object and response. And this relation, the relation of making sense or fittingness is the most primitive experience of *as of there being a reason*. Therefore what we have here is the emergence of the proto-concept 'good' together with the proto-concept 'reason'. Hawkins calls these experiences "evaluative impressions" (Ibid, p. 259).

Both mature evaluative content and affective mental content, then, are evaluative contents. The difference is that the first is conceptual, the second is not. Both present subjects

¹⁶ Admittedly, this choice may not sit well with some advocates of the argument from reason-based desires (Raz is a good example). But at some point this choice must be made, and since there is disagreement concerning this question among advocates of the argument, it is inevitable that some will disagree no matter which side one takes in the debate.

with a reason-giving fit between an object and a response, but the fit in the latter case is *felt* as reason-giving, whereas in the former case it is *judged* to be reason-giving (Ibid, p. 262). Borrowing, from Richard Wollheim, a distinction between the subjectivity and intentionality of occurrent mental states, Hawkins points out that this is why these desires *qua* evaluative impressions have certain amount of *subjective intelligibility* (Ibid, p. 259). The subjectivity of these states is what it is like to experience them and, unlike mere urges that for the agent feel, from the inside, mechanical and alien, evaluative impressions feel as making sense. In fact, the intentionality of these states is also secured through their subjectivity: they involve proto-thoughts *about* responses to objects, thoughts that depend on the fact that certain responses to objects are subjectively experienced as making sense (Ibid, p. 260). Finally, these states, just like mature thoughts, have an effect on mental life: they give rise to inference-like mental transitions and dispositions, and together with other mental states influence behavior (Ibid).

Just like proto-beliefs, evaluative impressions are also developmentally prior to mature evaluative capacities. Hawkins goes to some lengths in presenting how the mature concepts ‘good’ and ‘reason’ emerge from evaluative impressions. What is more important for us is that just like proto-beliefs, evaluative impressions also stay with us even once we acquire mature conceptual capacities. They constitute a semi-autonomous mental system that often interacts with cognition but can also conflict with it (Ibid, p. 262). Hawkins’ examples for this characteristic of evaluative impressions are moreover reminiscent of Chang’s affective desires. This suggests that her reasoning can be applied to the affective desires we are concerned with as well.¹⁷

What happens in the case of affective desires is that the developmentally prior evaluative impression does not disappear with the emergence of mature conceptual capacities. Instead, in the form of the *affective character* of the desire, i.e. in the form of its peculiar phenomenology, it stays with the agent. Thoughts like ordering something green in the restaurant, turning the cartwheel while walking down the road, breaking the rules or eating chocolate acquire impressive salience for the agent. They present themselves as things the agent feels she has reason to do; they have some amount of internal intelligibility: they feel like making sense or fitting to be done, had or pursued. This explains why the agent does not experience this feeling as being merely impelled to act. In fact, in the given moment this may be the dominant experience of the agent even though she might judge it not to be worth

¹⁷ Hawkins (Ibid, p. 262-3) discusses certain whims that are very similar to the first group of Chang’s examples. Her other main example is what she calls desiring the bad; yet, these desires look more like those of Chang’s impossibility cases that we are concerned with. The agent who has these desires do not desire the object of the desire *because* it is bad. She thinks that the object is not good, but does not desire it because of this.

satisfying her desire (as in Chang's impossibility cases). At the same time, these desires are also intentional: they are feelings about responses to particular objects. That is, they secure their intentionality through their subjectivity, i.e. their affective character. Finally, just like proto-beliefs and other evaluative impressions, they give rise to certain inference-like mental transitions, influence behavior in tandem with other attitudes of the agent and so on. And since the mature conceptual capacities are now in place, this influence can extend to full-blown participation in the agent's decision-making mechanisms. In other words, affective desires appearing in mature subjects can come with the bundle of dispositions described earlier.

This is then how I propose to accommodate affective desires. The account has several advantages. First, it accommodates affective desires exactly through that aspect which makes them special: their affective character. This also explains why they are not merely feelings of the agent's being impelled to act. At the same time, the account, placing affective desires in the agent with mature conceptual capacities, can allow for other presumed characteristics of these desires, in particular, that they come with a bundle of dispositions. Most importantly, all this is put in a developmental framework that gives us at least a rudimentary account of how mature evaluative concepts emerge from proto-concepts. This helps avoid the charge that beset other accounts: that all what goes on here is metaphorical talk that invokes 'good' and 'reason' as mere placeholders.

This latter point should be stressed further, also to avoid the charge that the idea put forward here is empty, postulated simply to save the thesis that all desires are based on reasons.¹⁸ This charge can be understood in two ways: either as directed at Hawkins' account as well as my application of it, or as directed only at my application. The latter option, however, is not available. For Hawkins explicitly and deliberately presents her idea as an account of affective experience, and it is hard to see why the affective experience Chang talks about would differ from the affective experience Hawkins discusses (a point that is further reinforced by Hawkins' use of examples that are very similar to the ones Chang puts forward). Hence the charge must be that Hawkins' own account is already empty, i.e., that it is a mere postulation to save her position on the evaluative content of desire.

This is true in one sense, and false in another. It is true that the account is postulated in order to prove her views on desire, and that, unlike in Bermúdez's case, there is, as yet, no empirical evidence drawn from empirical and developmental psychology to support the

¹⁸ This and the following charge were put to me by an anonymous reviewer for this journal. I thank the reviewer for forcing me to clarify my thoughts on these points.

position. Hawkins (ibid, p. 263) herself admits this explicitly treating her account as a hypothesis (Ibid, p. 259). But I do not see why this would make her account empty philosophically at this stage of our inquiry (cf. Ibid, p. 263). What we are doing here, after all, is to put forward (a sketch of) a theory that can compete with other explanations of the same phenomena. And Hawkins' suggestion has many virtues. It can explain the functional and behavioral characteristics of affective desires as well as their peculiar phenomenology; it can provide a developmental framework in which these desires figure prominently; and it can appeal to the fact that analogous accounts can be found in the philosophy of perception. Surely, for this account to win over the simpler explanation provided by Chang and others, it must ultimately have the support of the relevant sciences. But the virtues just listed should be enough to make the account a sufficiently attractive candidate that should be taken seriously and not be discarded prematurely.

These considerations also help us to answer another, final charge. Even if we go along with Hawkins' suggestion, one might argue, it still remains to be shown that her account would apply to *all* cases of affective desires. Presumably, that would be an empirical hypothesis to be settled by empirical means. Criteria would have to be stated for the presence of the proto-conceptual content of affective desires and evidence would have to be provided that they are present in all cases which lack conscious reasons. That would be a formidable task. This charge, however, collapses into the previous one. Hawkins explicitly presents her theory as an account of the *affective* aspect of desires, which, just like Chang, she understands along phenomenological lines. Thus, in this respect the idea to apply Hawkins' theory for Chang's cases is fairly natural; it is certainly not arbitrary. And given that it is this aspect *as such* that gets analyzed, it is reasonable to claim that if the idea is workable, it will hold for *every* instance of affective desires. To argue against this, one would have to claim that Chang and Hawkins are talking about different affective experiences. I see no reason why this would be so, and in any case, to support this claim requires argument, and this is not provided. Alternatively, one can return to the rejection of Hawkins' account on grounds that it lacks empirical support (what would presumably be needed for it to hold in every case it claims to apply to), but that would be a different charge: the one I have just discussed and found indecisive.

VI. Summary and concluding remarks

In this paper I have considered and defended an influential attempt to refute the thesis that reasons for action are provided by desires. The argument from reason-based desires holds that

desires cannot ground reasons for action because they are themselves based on reasons and they do not add to these reasons. Ruth Chang has recently attacked this argument by providing several counterexamples under the heading ‘affective desires’. In the paper I have discussed three attempts to accommodate affective desires. The first two, I have claimed, fail because there is no good reason to think that affective desires would qualify as urges that do not prompt intentional action, whereas the idea that desires are responsive to reasons is very difficult, if at all possible, to substantiate. The third attempt, however, raises hopes of a successful defense; or so I have argued. Jennifer Hawkins’ recent work on the proto-conceptual content of affective desires invites natural extension to Chang’s counterexamples. Of course, as noted, much empirical and conceptual work needs to be done to flesh out and properly defend this account. But this is the task for another paper.

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