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Can Desires Provide Reasons for Action?

Ruth Chang

On a widely accepted story of human agency, *all* reasons for acting, intending, and desiring are provided by the fact that the agent wants something or would want it under certain conditions. My reason for going to the store, for example, is provided by the fact that I want to buy some ice cream, and my reason for wanting to buy some ice cream is provided by the fact that I want to eat some.¹ According to these 'desire-based' accounts, all practical reasons are grounded in the present desires of the agent; justification has its source in the fact that *I do or would want it*.

Some philosophers, however, have been drawn to a starkly opposed story about practical reasons: *no* practical reasons are provided by the fact that one desires something.² On these 'value-based' accounts, reasons for acting,

¹ Perhaps in conjunction with my belief that going to the store will enable me to do so. I ignore the role of beliefs which I will take to be a constant background feature. The desires at stake are always present desires and may include counterfactual present desires, desires I would now have if certain conditions were met. Desire-based views have been defended by Bernard Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101–13, and Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). The reasons at issue here are normative or justifying as opposed to motivating or explanatory. They are considerations that 'count in favour of' something, and may be invoked to recommend action or give advice.

² Proponents of value-based views include Joseph Raz, 'Incommensurability and Agency', reprinted in *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 46–66; Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,

intending, and desiring are provided by facts about the value of something, where being valuable is not simply a matter of being desired. My reason to go to the store is provided by the value of what is in question—namely, eating some ice cream—and the value of eating some ice cream is given by the fact that doing so would be valuable in some way—for example, that it would be pleasurable. It is not the fact that I want ice cream that makes having some pleasurable; having ice cream might be pleasurable even if I don't desire it in the way that, to borrow an example from Thomas Scanlon, exercising might be pleasurable even if I have to be dragged kicking and screaming to the gym. According to 'buckpassing' versions of the value-based view, it is not strictly the evaluative fact that provides the reason but the facts upon which the evaluative fact supervenes. So, for example, my reason to have the ice cream might strictly be given not by the evaluative fact that it would be pleasurable but rather by the natural facts upon which its being pleasurable supervenes, such as that it would be pleasant or that I would enjoy it.³ Value-based views ground all practical reasons in evaluative facts or the facts that subvene them; justification has its source not in the fact that one wants something but in facts about what one wants.

The conflict between the two stories is striking because it is so stark; desire-based theorists think that *all* reasons are grounded in desires, while their value-based opponents tend to think that *none* are. As with many such conflicts, the truth may lie somewhere in the middle, and in this paper I argue that in the present case it does. Some practical reasons are provided by the fact that the agent wants something, while others are provided by the fact that what she wants is of value. Nor is one kind of reason rare or trivial; desires and evaluative facts each provide a large and important class of practical reasons.

1998); and Derek Parfit, 'Rationality and Reasons', in Dan Egonsson, Jonas Josefsson, Bjorn Petersson, and Toni Ronnow-Rasmussen (eds.), *Exploring Practical Philosophy: From Action to Values* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate 2001), 17–39, and in 'Rediscovering Reasons' (draft MS). I take both the desire- and value-based views to be 'pure'. Strictly speaking, however, Raz and Scanlon allow that there may be exceptional cases in which desires can in some sense provide reasons, but they think of these cases as aberrant in some way. I return to their qualifications later in the paper.

³ See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 1, and Parfit, 'Rediscovering Reasons'. According to Scanlon and Parfit, the property of being good or valuable is the higher-order property of having properties that are reason-providing. These reason-providing properties are typically subvening natural properties. Both Scanlon and Parfit are 'partial' buckpassers; they pass the buck from evaluative properties to subvening natural properties only in the case of *some* evaluative properties—namely, those that are most general or 'thin', like being good or being valuable.

My defence of the 'hybrid' view is in two stages. In the first stage, I argue that despite value-based arguments to the contrary, desires can provide reasons. This argument has a 'negative' and a 'positive' part. The negative part involves showing that what I take to be the leading arguments for the claim that desires cannot provide reasons—offered by Joseph Raz, Thomas Scanlon, and Derek Parfit—each trade on a view of desires that neglects or misinterprets what I believe is their essentially *affective* nature. I suggest that we should understand the desires in question as essentially involving an 'affective feel'. With respect to these value-based arguments, once desires are properly understood as affective states, it is an open question whether they can provide reasons.

The positive part of the argument attempts to show that 'affective desires' can provide a large and important class of practical reasons. I focus on one particular kind of affective desire, 'feeling like it', and argue that the fact that one 'feels like it' can provide a reason. More importantly, I argue, if 'feeling like it' can provide a reason, then any desire with an affective feel—for the most trivial object to the most significant—can provide a reason. Desires of the form 'I feel like it' are, I believe, the 'Achilles' heel' of all value-based views. With the right understanding of the nature of desires in place, the Achilles' heel becomes something of a Trojan horse.

If the arguments of the first stage are correct, then the pure value-based view must be rejected. This leaves us with either the pure desire-based or the hybrid view. Here we turn to the second stage of argument, which provides a coda to the first. I do not attempt to argue that the hybrid view is to be preferred to its desire-based rival; for my purposes, I can simply assume that the desire-based view is mistaken. My aim is rather to lay to rest what I take to be the main reason for rejecting the hybrid account: namely, that it is not compatible with a unified account of the 'source' of practical justification. I will suggest that, despite appearances, the claim that desires can provide reasons is compatible with the conception of the source of practical justification that underwrites the value-based view.

I

Suppose I have a reason to want or to do something. Can that reason be provided by a desire? This question must be understood in a way that does not rely on extraneous substantive assumptions. There is a sense in which all

reasons could be 'provided' by desires even on a value-based view if, for example, all reasons are provided by evaluative facts about what makes one's life go best, and those evaluative facts in turn reduce to facts about what one wants.⁴ But the claim that certain evaluative facts reduce to facts about what one wants is an extraneous substantive claim that holds independently of the thesis that those evaluative facts provide reasons. Put another way, when we ask whether a desire can provide reasons, we are asking whether a desire can provide reasons in virtue of being a desire, and not in some less direct way.

Philosophers who argue over whether desires can provide reasons have tended to employ one of two strategies. If they think that desires can provide reasons, they tend to emphasize the quasi-cognitive aspects of desires—desires aren't all that different from beliefs, and thus, just as beliefs can justify beliefs, the belief-like element of desires can justify action. If, on the other hand, they think that desires cannot provide reasons, they tend to emphasize the affective aspects of desires—desires just involve having certain 'feels' that assail us, and surely such feelings cannot provide reasons. If the arguments of this paper are correct, we turn these strategies on their heads. It is in virtue of the affective nature of desires that desires can provide reasons.

We begin with arguments offered by Raz, Scanlon, and Parfit for the claim that desires cannot provide reasons. All three arguments depend on views about desires that we will challenge. Raz thinks that desires must be either urges that are not 'ours' or states whose survival depends on the belief that one has reasons to have them. Scanlon rightly thinks that there are desires that occupy a middle ground, but his view of what these desires are, I suggest, fails to distinguish what is essential to desires from what is a commonly found disposition that is itself no part of a desire. Curiously, both Raz and Scanlon allow that although desires do not in general provide reasons, they may do so in exceptional cases. This nod to exceptions, I believe, indicates that their understanding of desires does not carve at the joints. Parfit does not countenance any exception, but I will suggest that he should.

II

Raz's argument can be seen to involve two steps: first, any desire that can in principle rationalize must itself be backed by value-based reasons for

⁴ See Thomas Hurka, 'Parfit on Well-Being and Personal Reasons' (draft MS). Thanks to Chris Meacham and Holly Smith for discussion on this point.

having it or its objects; and second, given that this is so, the fact that one also wants what one has value-based reasons to have cannot, on pain of double-counting, provide an additional reason to have it.⁵ Therefore, Raz concludes, desires cannot provide reasons.⁶

The argument for the first step turns on a view about the nature of desires.⁷ Desires are either 'urges' or what he sometimes calls 'philosophical' desires (he gives them this label to indicate that these are the desires he thinks are of interest to philosophers). Urges, Raz says, are not 'ours'; they 'attack us', are 'inflicted on us', and are 'not under our control'. As Warren Quinn has argued, urges understood as simple functional states that happen to be present in us, cannot 'rationalize'—that is, provide a reason for—action.⁸ The simple functional state of a coke machine according to which the input of a dollar results in the output of a can of

⁵ The locution 'to have what one wants' and its cognates should be understood as 'to take the appropriate action with respect to what one wants'. Since the appropriate action might take many forms—e.g., promoting, bringing about, respecting, and so on—I will sometimes use the neutral formulation of 'having' as shorthand for one or more of these actions. It should not be understood as implying that there might be a reason for there being a state of affairs in which one has the object one wants.

⁶ What follows is my attempt to codify Raz's very rich and complex discussion of this topic. Raz's most recent statement of his view about the relation between reasons and desires is in 'Incommensurability and Agency'. All page numbers are to this article. He also discusses various aspects of this view in *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and in 'On the Moral Point of View', in *Engaging Reason*, 247–72.

⁷ Raz actually gives two arguments for the claim that desires presuppose value-based reasons. The second is an improved version of the common value-based complaint that desire-based theorists cannot make sense of reasoning about 'final' desires—that is, desires that a desire-based theorist thinks are at the end of a chain of justification. Raz argues that even if desire-based theorists are right in thinking that one cannot reason about which final ends one should have, they still face the problem of accounting for reasoning about what to do when final ends conflict. And, Raz thinks, the desire-based theorist must appeal to values to account for such reasoning; without such an appeal, 'reasoning' would amount to no more than sitting back and seeing which of two conflicting final desires moves one to action (pp. 51–2). One might have two responses to this argument. First, it is not clear whether desire-based theorists must admit that 'reasoning' about final ends can consist only in sitting back and seeing what one actually does. When final ends conflict, one might sit back and see which one wants more, but it is not clear that this need consist in what one actually does. Second, and more importantly, many views of practical reason allow that practical reasons at some point run out; in cases of conflict that hit rock bottom, it is inappropriate to deliberate about what to do. If this view of practical reasons is right, it will not be surprising if there are cases of conflicts between final ends in which the appropriate thing to do is just to sit back and see what one most wants to do.

⁸ Warren Quinn, 'Putting Rationality in its Place', as reprinted in his *Morality and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 228–55.

coke cannot rationalize the dispensing of a can any more than a functional state (urge) of an agent according to which the input of some stimulus (the sight of a radio) results in the output of some action (turning on the radio) can rationalize the performance of that action. Someone who acts on the urge to turn on radios, paint potatoes green, or count blades of grass does not act on a reason; her action is the mental equivalent of a physical reflex.

Philosophical desires, by contrast, can in principle rationalize action because they are 'ours'; we 'endorse' them by believing that their objects are valuable in some particular way. Without believing that what we want is valuable, Raz thinks, we could not have a desire for it; our desire depends for its survival on believing that its object is good in some way. And unlike urges, Raz notes, philosophical desires 'do not have a felt quality' (p. 54). I might desire to hear a lecture on Kant or to finish my holiday shopping, but these desires do not involve my having any particular feeling towards their objects. Rather, Raz suggests, wanting those things involves believing that they are valuable in some way.

Now Raz thinks that the value of something provides a reason for having it, and thus the belief that what one wants is good is the belief that there is reason to have what one wants. Raz seems to think that the belief is not 'opaque' in this context. He writes, 'We cannot want what we see no reason to want any more than we can believe what we think is untrue or contrary to the evidence.' (p. 57). Thus philosophical desires, properly understood, are mental states that depend for their survival on the belief that there is a particular value-based reason to have their objects.⁹

If desires necessarily involve believing that one has independent value-based reasons to have their objects, there *must be* independent value-based reasons to have (or not to have) their objects. To think otherwise would be to hold the odd view that even though no rational person could ever come to see that he has a desire not backed by independent value-based reasons, he in fact may have such desires. The practical agent, no matter how rational he might be, would be incapable of coming to the correct

⁹ There is a question as to whether Raz understands philosophical desires as involving *only* the belief that what one wants is good in some way or also the belief—whose content is entailed on Raz's view by the content of the former belief—that one has reasons to want what one wants. I interpret him as making the latter claim because I can see no other way of making sense of his argument from the nature of philosophical desires to the conclusion that all desires are backed by value-based reasons.

view about such a desire; and rather than accept this untoward consequence, it seems we should accept that every desire is in fact backed by value-based reasons.¹⁰

Having concluded that our desires already presuppose value-based reasons to have their objects, Raz then suggests, in the second step of his argument, that desires cannot themselves provide reasons for having their objects above and beyond the reasons that they already presuppose (pp. 56–62). If desires depend in one way or another on value-based reasons for having their objects, what additional normative force could be provided by the desire itself? To think that the desire could provide a further, independent reason would seem to involve double-counting. As he writes, 'It requires too much by way of mental gymnastics' (p. 61).

While there are many intriguing questions raised by Raz's argument, its key point, that the only desires that could in principle rationalize action must be 'philosophical' desires, is far from clear. Surely we can have desires that do not depend for their survival on our believing that we have a reason to have their objects. And such desires need not thereby be urges beyond our control. A diabetic might want a piece of chocolate cake in a way that does not depend on his believing that he has any reason to have it; indeed, he might believe the opposite—he might believe that he has no reason since he knows that he doesn't like chocolate cake and that, were he to have even a single bite, he would fall into a diabetic coma and die. A teenager might want to play truant *because* she believes that she has no reason to do so and many reasons not to.¹¹ Sometimes, while walking down the sidewalk, I have a desire to turn a cartwheel—doing so just appeals to me. This appeal does not depend on my believing that I have any reason to turn a cartwheel. Such desires are not compulsions beyond

¹⁰ This paragraph fills a gap in Raz's argument in a way that I believe is supported by his writings elsewhere. One of the deep themes running throughout Raz's work, I believe, is a rejection at some level of the distinction between the subjective and the objective as regards the normative. Most of his claims about what 'objectively' holds in the normative realm are claims about what beliefs we would need to attribute to a rational agent engaged in normative discourse and deliberation. In general, Raz seems to think that we must understand the normative by taking as our starting-point what a rational agent would believe, intend, or do. See Raz, 'When We Are Ourselves' and 'Explaining Normativity: On Rationality and the Justification of Reason' in *Engaging Reason*, 5–21 and 67–89.

¹¹ See Michael Stocker's paper in this volume for a discussion of the related idea of someone wanting something *because* it is bad. See also his 'Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology', *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979), 738–53.

the agent's control; they are all too familiar states we often find ourselves in—or so I will argue in due course. While we have many of our desires only because we believe that we have reason to have their objects, not all of our desires are like this.

We now turn to Scanlon's argument.¹² Scanlon offers an account of 'the commonsense notion of desire' (p. 40) that occupies a middle ground between Raz's two extremes. He suggests that ordinary desires are what he calls 'desires in the directed-attention sense' (p. 39); they are not simple functional states that are not 'ours' but nor do they necessarily involve the belief that there is a reason to have the desire. Instead, desires in the directed-attention sense necessarily involve one's attention being directed 'insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favor of [having the object of one's desire]' (p. 39). To take one of Scanlon's examples, someone might have an attention-directed desire for a new computer; that is, he might find his attention being insistently drawn to the features of the computer that present themselves as reasons to buy it. At the same time, however, he might believe that the appearance of reasons is deceptive; he might believe that he has *no* reason to buy the computer—he doesn't need any of the new features, and his old computer functions perfectly well.

If ordinary desires are desires in the directed-attention sense, can they provide reasons? Scanlon argues no. Suppose I have an attention-directed desire for a new computer. If I believe I have no reason to buy the computer, then the fact that I have a tendency to judge that I have a reason to buy it provides no reason for me to go out and get one; after all, I believe that I have no reason to do so. How could the fact that I have a tendency to judge that I have a reason provide me with a reason to act in a way in which I believe I have no reason to act? (pp. 43–4). As Scanlon persuasively suggests, if I have a reason to buy the new computer, it will be provided by the fact that I will enjoy having it, that it will help me to write papers faster, that it will look nice on my new desk, or the like (p. 44).

This is not to say that desires in the directed-attention sense have no role to play in the reasons one has to do what one wants to do; some reasons have what Scanlon calls 'subjective conditions'. For example, there are many valuable ways I could spend my life, but I have good reason to

¹² His argument is to be found in *What We Owe to Each Other*, ch. 1. All page references are to this chapter.

choose only those pursuits that I am drawn to. My having an attention-directed desire to be a philosopher might be a subjective condition on my having good reasons to be one. But we should not think that my reason to be a philosopher is provided by the desire; I have a good reason to be a philosopher not because I want to be one but because being one is a worthwhile way to spend one's life that appeals to me (pp. 48–9).¹³ Moreover, the fact that I have an attention-directed desire to be a philosopher may provide evidence that I have a reason to be one without itself providing a reason to be one (p. 45).

Scanlon's argument that desires in the directed-attention sense do not provide reasons is persuasive. But is it so clear that desires in the ordinary sense need to be understood as desires in this sense? In defence of his account, Scanlon writes, 'This idea [of directed attention] seems to me to capture an essential element in the intuitive notion of (occurrent) desire. Desires for food, for example, and sexual desires are marked by just this character of directed attention. And this character is generally missing in cases in which we say that a person who does something for a reason nonetheless "has no desire to do it," as when, for example, one must tell a friend some unwelcome news' (p. 39). I think Scanlon is right to point out that the ordinary desires of interest have a quality of drawing our attention in certain ways. We can agree that when we want things in this sense, they

¹³ See also Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 121, and 'Rationality and Reasons', 19; Raz, 'Incommensurability and Agency', 64. After writing this paper, I came across several articles relevant to Scanlon's discussion of subjective conditions in the burgeoning literature on his views about reasons, including a reply by Scanlon himself. In their 'Desires, Motives, and Reasons: Scanlon's Rationalistic Moral Psychology', *Social Theory and Practice* 28 (2002), 243–76, at 269–72, for example, David Copp and David Sobel argue, among other things, that the putatively value-based reason provided by the fact that one would enjoy something is in fact a desire-based reason because *enjoyment* necessarily involves a concurrent liking of the experience or desire that the experience continue. This argument is further elaborated by David Sobel in his 'Pain for Objectivists' (draft MS). That there is this necessary connection does not, however, it seems to me, show either that the concurrent liking or desire connected to future enjoyment must itself be an 'original source' of reasons or that such future mental states are of the sort that desire-based theorists think can provide reasons. This is the line of response that Scanlon himself seems to take in his 'Replies', *Social Theory and Practice* 28 (2002), 337–40, at 339–40. I believe that Raz, Scanlon, and Parfit are correct in thinking that the dependence of some value-based reasons on subjective states of the agent—even where this dependence is conceptual in nature—does not itself undermine the value-based view of reasons. One's having a desire, for instance, conceptually depends on one's actually existing, but no one would think that the 'original source' of one's reasons is one's existence rather than one's desire.

appeal to us, we are attracted to them. But Scanlon seems to think that this attraction necessarily involves having the quasi-cognitive tendency to judge that one has reasons to have what attracts. I believe that the element of attraction essential to the desires of interest is best understood in terms of an 'affective feel', and that this affective feel does not necessarily involve any particular cognitive or quasi-cognitive state. This, of course, allows that there may be a causal or psychological story behind such affective feels, and that they may depend on various beliefs about their objects—for example, that they are edible, and so on. But such attractions do not require, *contra* Raz, a belief that there are reasons for what one wants or, *contra* Scanlon, a tendency to have such a belief.

In the next section, I shall provide some reasons for thinking that the desires of interest are neither the 'attention-directed' nor 'philosophical' desires favoured respectively by Scanlon and Raz. If we can show that such desires do not necessarily involve a *tendency* to believe that one has reasons, we will thereby presumably have grounds for thinking that they do not necessarily involve the *belief* that one has reasons. Thus, I focus on the question of whether desires involve this tendency. Arguing that they are not, however, is not straightforward. I suggest an analogy, present some examples, and offer a diagnosis of the temptation to think that they are.

III

Desires in the directed-attention sense are analogous to the perception of illusions, but the ordinary desires of interest need not be like such perceptions. When confronted with a stick partially submerged in water, our attention is drawn to features of the stick that present themselves as reasons to judge that the stick is bent. Our perception of the illusion necessarily involves a tendency to judge that the stick is bent, where this tendency persists even in the face of knowledge that the stick is straight.¹⁴ Desires in the directed-attention sense are like illusory perceptions in both regards. They necessarily involve a tendency to judge that one has a reason, and this tendency persists even in the face of the knowledge or belief that one has

¹⁴ Another example is the Müller-Lyer illusion which involves two lines of equal length, one with 'fins' pointing outward and the other with fins pointing inward. Our perception of the two lines necessarily involves a tendency to judge that the line with fins pointing outward is longer

no reason. But ordinary desires are not like this. Suppose we want some ice cream. Our response toward the ice cream is not like our response toward the stick in the water. Our attention is drawn to what about the ice cream appeals to us; we find ourselves with an attitude of attraction towards those features. But we do not necessarily have any tendency to judge that those features provide reasons to have the ice cream in the way that we have a tendency to judge, when confronted with the perceptual illusion, that its features provide reasons to think that the stick is bent. Instead, our desire simply involves our being attracted to what we want. Unlike perceptions of illusions and desires in the directed-attention sense, ordinary desires do not seem necessarily to involve a tendency to judge that we have reasons.

Now consider examples of ordinary desires that, on the face of it, do not seem to involve any tendency to judge that one has reasons. In these cases, it might nevertheless be true that the agent has such a tendency, but it would be otiose to appeal to this tendency in understanding her desire. As I've confessed, sometimes while walking down the sidewalk, I find myself with a desire to turn a cartwheel. It doesn't seem to me that I have any tendency to judge that I have a reason to do so; rather, doing so simply appeals to me. If someone were to insist that I can't be attracted to doing so without having this tendency, I would find their insistence idle. Or, when ordering in a restaurant, I sometimes find myself with a desire to order dishes of a certain colour. I am attracted to green, say. The question is whether this involves my having a tendency to think that its being green is a reason to order the spinach fricassee. It seems to me that I can be attracted to the greenness of spinach fricassee without thereby having a tendency to judge that its being green provides me with a reason to have it. Or, sometimes students in my classes end up dating one another. Everyone in the class can witness their mutual attraction. Appeal to a tendency on their parts to judge that they have reasons to be together seems superfluous to understanding their attraction. These cases can be easily multiplied. The point is that these desires are neither pathological urges beyond the agent's control nor quasi-cognitive states. They can be fully understood as ordinary desires without appeal to a tendency on the part of the agent to judge that she has reasons to have what she wants.

A different set of examples involves cases in which having the tendency to judge that one has reasons is in some sense 'impossible'. If one can have an ordinary desire in such cases, then it would follow that such desires need not be understood in terms of this tendency.

Start with a case in which there is overwhelming reason not to have any tendency to judge that one has reasons. This might loosely be called a case of 'rational impossibility'. Consider our diabetic who is squaring off against a piece of chocolate cake. Having the taste of chocolate appeals to him. He knows from experience, however, that he dislikes the taste of chocolate; moreover, he has just tested his blood sugar level and knows that if he has a single bite, he will go into a diabetic coma and die. Can he nevertheless be attracted to the chocolate cake without having a tendency to judge that he has reason to have some? The question is not whether a story can be told according to which his tendency is quashed by his belief that he has no reason to have the cake; it is rather whether it *makes sense* to suppose that he has an ordinary desire to have the cake without thereby having a tendency to judge that he has a reason to have it. I believe it does.

Now consider a case of psychological impossibility. A teenager raised by a strict disciplinarian has the deeply ingrained belief that cutting class is taboo. Suppose she is psychologically incapable of having the tendency to judge that she has reason to play truant in just the way that a religious fundamentalist might be incapable of having a tendency to judge that there is no God. Isn't it nevertheless possible that she wants to cut class? Why can't she be attracted to breaking the rules in spite of the fact that she is psychologically incapable of having a tendency to judge that there is a reason to break those rules? This psychological incapacity might reach her conscious and unconscious states. Or consider the case of Huckleberry Finn, who is psychologically incapable of having a tendency to judge that he has a reason to help Jim escape from slavery. Nevertheless, it seems that he wants to, and that he can have this desire even though he may have only the tendency to judge that he has *no* reasons.

There is also the case of conceptual impossibility. Take a young child who lacks the concept of a reason (of 'counting in favour of'). Can she have desires in the ordinary sense? Does it make sense to suppose that a young child might have a desire for mashed carrots even though she lacks the conceptual apparatus required to have a tendency to judge that she has a reason to want the mashed carrots? Why can't the child be attracted to mashed carrots in an ordinary way without her desire having to be understood as involving a tendency to judge that she has reasons?

Finally, there is the case of logical incoherence. Suppose an eccentric philosopher has a desire for what there is no reason to have. That is, he wants things under the description 'there is no reason to have this'.

Although the content of what he wants is peculiar, he can want it in a perfectly ordinary way—he is attracted to what he has no reasons to have; this feature appeals to him. According to Scanlon, such a person would necessarily have a tendency to judge that he has reasons to have what he has no reasons to have. But can we not understand such a person as having a desire in the ordinary sense, admittedly for a strange content, without thereby thinking that he has a tendency to logical incoherence? Perhaps Dostoevsky's author in *Notes from Underground* would be such a person. In so far as it makes sense to think that someone can have an ordinary desire for this content in the same way that he can have an ordinary desire for more mundane content *without* thereby thinking that he has a tendency towards logical incoherence, such desires do not necessarily involve a tendency to see reasons.

If any of these examples succeeds, then ordinary desires need not be understood as attention-directed. Although, I believe, ordinary desires are not attention-directed in Scanlon's sense, it is easy to see why there might be a temptation to think that they are. Many ordinary desires do, indeed, involve a tendency to judge that we have reasons to have their objects. But we should not think that this tendency is part of what it is to have an ordinary desire. Instead, the tendency to judge that one has reasons to have what one wants is better regarded as an independent disposition common among people we might call 'rationalizers'; if a rationalizer is attracted to something, she will tend to believe that she has independent reasons to have what she is attracted to. But this disposition of 'rationalizing' is not itself a component of ordinary desires. For one thing, not everyone has the disposition. For another, even if everyone did, the disposition is most plausibly explained *in terms* of the distinct state of being attracted to something; one has a tendency to judge that one has reasons for something *because* one finds it attractive.

If ordinary desires need not involve having a tendency to believe that one has reasons, then presumably they need not involve believing that one has reasons; ordinary desires are neither Razian 'philosophical' desires nor Scanlonian 'attention-directed' desires. They are rather 'affective' desires—non-cognitive states essentially involving attraction to their objects without reference to any particular cognitive or quasi-cognitive element.

Now it might be thought that if affective desires are neither 'philosophical' nor 'attention-directed', they must be the urges that Raz and Scanlon rightly deride as incapable of rationalizing action. But is there not concep-

tual space for desires between the cognitive and quasi-cognitive states that Raz and Scanlon propose, on the one hand, and urges, on the other? Both urges and affective desires essentially involve some phenomenological feel, but only affective desires are intentional states: that is, they involve having an *attitude about some content*, while an urge—e.g., feeling hungry, thirsty, or sleepy—is a phenomenological feel but not an attitude *about* anything. When I have an affective desire to turn a cartwheel, I have an attitude *about* the act of doing so; if I have instead an urge to turn one, I have a certain phenomenological feel that is merely a motivational impulse and involves no attitude *about* the act of turning one. Since affective desires are attitudes we have towards contents, they are 'ours' in a way that motivational impulses that 'attack us' are not. Of course, there is a sense in which affective desires may 'attack us', but this is the same sense in which beliefs, which can rationalize thought, can sometimes 'attack us'. Our relation to urges and the like is in this sense 'passive', while our relation to affective desires is one of 'active' engagement; we have those attitudes.¹⁵ This difference between affective desires and urges underwrites another. Affective desires are what we might call 'reasons-appropriate', while urges are not. While it is appropriate to ask what reasons I have to want to turn a cartwheel (even if in fact I do not have any), it is not appropriate to ask what (normative) reasons I have to be hungry; hunger is not the sort of mental state for which there could be reasons.¹⁶

If affective desires are neither cognitive nor quasi-cognitive conative states, on the one hand, nor urges, on the other, then, so far as Raz's and Scanlon's arguments go, it remains to be seen whether they can provide reasons.¹⁷ The common idea underlying both their arguments is that

¹⁵ This distinction between active and passive mental states can be found in Raz, 'When We Are Ourselves'.

¹⁶ Though of course we might have reasons to eat. Scanlon calls the attitudes for which we can ask for reasons 'judgement-sensitive', and glosses the idea as follows: an attitude is judgement-sensitive if a rational person would come to have it upon judging that she had sufficient reason to have it, and would cease to have it upon judging that she had sufficient reason not to have it. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 20. I believe this gloss leaves out likings and dislikings of states we have no independent reason to like or dislike. It *makes sense* to ask whether, for example, I have any reason to like cold showers even though my liking may be judgement-insensitive.

¹⁷ Copp and Sobel, among others, have articulated similar misgivings about Scanlon's 'over-intellectualized' account of desires. See Copp and Sobel, 'Desires, Motives, and Reasons', 254–64. In his reply to their article, Scanlon admits that his claim that all ordinary desires are attention-directed might have been 'overly broad', but suggests that even if some ordinary

desires already presuppose reasons to have what one wants independently of the want itself. For Raz, a desire necessarily involves a belief that one has independent reasons for what one wants; for Scanlon, it necessarily involves a tendency to judge that one has such reasons. On these understandings of desires, it is not altogether surprising that desires do not plausibly provide reasons apart from the independent reasons they already presuppose. If, however, we understand desires as essentially affective states that do not necessarily involve reference to independent reasons, it becomes an open question whether such desires can provide reasons.¹⁸

IV

Curiously, both Raz and Scanlon can be seen as admitting that there are affective desires in the sense we have suggested, and, moreover, that such desires can provide reasons. This is because both allow that there may be exceptions to their conclusion that desires cannot provide reasons, and these exceptions are best understood as involving affective desires.

After arguing vigorously that no desire can provide a reason, Raz ends his argument with the following unexpected concession:

There remains the simple point that if of two acceptable options one wants one thing and does the other, one is acting irrationally. If when offered a pear or a banana, I have reason to take one and it does not matter which one, then if I

desires do not fit his model, ordinary desires are *in general* attention-directed. See Scanlon, 'Replies', 338. My arguments attempt to show that ordinary desires are not in general attention-directed and that the temptation to think that they are can be explained by mistakenly assimilating to such desires a common but distinct disposition to see independent reasons for what one wants.

¹⁸ There is, of course, much more that needs to be said about affective desires. To my knowledge no one has yet provided a satisfactory account of them. I suspect that phenomenological accounts are inadequate because they end up treating affective desires as mere compulsions, and that dispositional accounts, according to which an affective desire involves a disposition to have an affective feel in certain circumstances, get the explanation front to back: there are 'one-off' attractions that cannot plausibly be explained in terms of a disposition. For a phenomenological view, see W. D. Falk, 'Ought and Motivation', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 48 (1948), 111–38, at 116–17; and for a dispositional account of phenomenological feel (and of desires generally) see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 114 ff. For a defence of the desire-based view that draws on the affective nature of desires, see Stephanie Beardman, 'Affective Deliberation: Toward a Humean Account of Practical Reason' (Rutgers University Ph.D. dissertation; Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 2000).

want the banana but take the pear, I have acted irrationally. Moreover, in situations of the kind just described, one can explain and justify taking the banana by pointing out that one wanted the banana, and not the pear. In such contexts we refer to what we want as we do to reasons. Here they function as reasons. In these circumstances, wants are reasons, though in being limited to this case they are very peculiar reasons. (p. 62)

As we have already noted, since Raz thinks that the only desires that are 'ours' are 'philosophical' desires—that is, desires necessarily involving the belief that one has a reason for what one wants—the want in this passage must be a philosophical want. But then it is hard to see how wanting the banana in this sense could rationalize taking it. For the case Raz imagines involves my believing that I have no more reason to take the one piece of fruit over the other; this is what Raz means when he says that both the pear and the banana are 'acceptable'. I believe that I have a reason to take the pear, but I do not want the pear. I believe that I have a reason to take the banana, and I want the banana. I also believe that neither reason is stronger than the other. If I take the banana, my belief that I have reason to take it cannot rationalize my action, for I also believe that I have a no less strong reason to take the pear. If my wanting to take the banana is to rationalize my taking it, it must involve some element beyond my belief that I have a reason to take it. This further element is very plausibly my *attraction* to the banana.

Raz's case, I believe, is better understood as showing that there is a kind of desire beyond urges and philosophical desires that can sometimes rationalize action. Suppose the desires at issue in his case are affective desires. I find myself attracted to the banana but not the pear. If I believe that the value-based reasons for having one over the other are 'evenly matched', then it would be irrational for me to go for the pear when I am attracted to the banana.¹⁹ My being attracted to the banana rationalizes my action of going for it. Note that this case can also be understood in a more objectivist vein. Instead of talking about what it would be *rational* for me to choose, we might ask what I would have *most reason* to choose. In this case, we have to ask whether my normative belief about the way the reasons shake out is true. If in fact there is no more value-based reason to have the banana

¹⁹ There are perhaps three ways in which the reasons might be 'evenly matched': they are equally good, 'on a par', or incomparable. 'On a par' is a term of art that holds of two comparable items that are not equal, yet neither is one greater, better, or stronger than the other. See my 'The Possibility of Parity', *Ethics* 112 (2002), 659–88.

rather than the pear, the fact that I want it seems to provide reason for me to go for it. Since most value-based theorists seem to recognize this distinction between what might be rational for me to do, understood as relative to my beliefs, and what I might have most reason to do, understood as relative to the facts, I will understand this exception in an objectivist vein. The exception so understood, then, is that affective desires can provide reasons when the value-based reasons for and against having what one wants are evenly matched.

Scanlon is somewhat more circumspect about the possibility of an exception to his claim that desires cannot provide reasons. He recognizes, however, that there are cases in which what one is justified in doing seems to be a matter of doing what one 'feels like'. He writes:

There is, however, a class of cases in which the fact that I 'feel like' doing a certain thing (have a desire to do it in the directed-attention sense) may seem to provide me with a reason. For example, when I am walking from my home to my office, I often choose one route rather than another 'just because I feel like it'; *that is to say, I choose it just because it is the alternative that presents itself as attractive at the time.* This may be because I take this direction of my attention as a sign that I will enjoy that route more or that it has any other specific benefits. But it is possible that, considerations of enjoyment aside, I simply let the matter be decided by what happens to appeal to me at the time. One might say that in such a case I act for no reason. But even if in some such cases the fact that I 'felt like' doing something is a reason in the standard normative sense, these are special, rather trivial cases, not central examples that provide the pattern on which all other cases of doing something for a reason should be modeled. (p. 48, emphasis added)

The important point for present purposes is that in this passage Scanlon seems to recognize that sometimes one's attention can be directed towards something in a way that essentially involves only one's being attracted to it, without there being any additional 'sign'—for example, given by a tendency to judge that one has reasons for it—that it will be enjoyable. He seems to allow, in other words, that 'feeling like it' is a mental state that involves attraction but not necessarily any quasi-cognitive tendency to judge that one has reasons. This is plausibly what we have identified as an affective desire. Moreover, he seems willing to allow that such a desire might provide reasons when 'I simply let the matter be decided by what happens to appeal to me at the time'. It seems, then, that when I make such a decision, my 'feeling like it' can provide a reason for doing what I feel like.

Now both Raz and Scanlon allow their exceptions somewhat grudgingly; the reasons these desires provide, if they do, will be 'very peculiar' or 'special [and] rather trivial'. But the fact that the desires they take as possible exceptions are of a unified sort—namely, affective—suggests that the views of desires on which their arguments rely neglect the possibility that desires understood as essentially affective states can rationalize action. If desires rationalize in virtue of their affective nature, then it remains to be seen whether such desires can in general provide practical reasons.

V

There is another exception to value-based views that can be extracted from an argument offered by Derek Parfit. In recent and forthcoming work, Parfit argues that *no* desires can provide reasons.²⁰ Parfit focuses on 'final' desires, desires that desire-based theorists think are at the end of a chain of justification. For reasons we need not go into here, Parfit thinks that all final desires are 'intrinsic' desires—that is, desires for something not as a means to something else but for its intrinsic features.²¹ He argues that for all final desires, the reasons to have what one wants are provided not by the fact that one wants it but either by intrinsic features of what one wants or by 'indirect' facts about what one wants. And if there are neither intrinsic nor 'indirect' reasons to have what one wants, there are *no* reasons to have what one wants.

The reasons to have what one wants in most cases of final desires, Parfit thinks, will be provided by intrinsic facts about what one wants. To illustrate that this is so, he invokes his case of the man with 'Future Tuesday Indifference'. At all times he cares in the normal way about pains and

²⁰ See Parfit, 'Rediscovering Reasons', especially the draft chapters 'Reasons and Motives' and 'Rationality and Reasons', and *idem*, 'Rationality and Reasons', esp. 20–7. Since some of what I want to take issue with in his argument is in unpublished work, the reader will have to rely on my summary of it. I am grateful to Parfit for illuminating conversations about his draft, much of the fruit of which is not included in my discussion here.

²¹ Parfit, 'Rationality and Reasons', 20–1. Final desires need not be intrinsic, however. They might be 'extrinsic', or they might be what I later call 'feature-free'. I might want an object for its extrinsic features, such as the fact that it used to belong to my mother or constitutes some other thing that I want; or I might want it *as such* and not for any of its particular features. See Christine Korsgaard, 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', reprinted in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249–74.

pleasures he is or will be experiencing, '[b]ut he never cares about possible pains or pleasures on a *future* Tuesday'.²² This man has true beliefs about all matters relevant to his desire; he understands that pain hurts, that Tuesday is merely a conventional calendar division, that it will be him suffering on future Tuesdays, and so on. Still, he is indifferent to his pain on future Tuesdays and consequently would always prefer to undergo excruciating pain on a future Tuesday than to suffer a minor pain on any other day—he would choose torture on a future Tuesday to a hangnail on Wednesday. Surely, Parfit argues, the fact that the torture is intrinsically painful gives him a reason to prefer the mild pain and to have it instead of the excruciating torture, and the fact that the torture occurs on a Tuesday gives him no reason to prefer it or to have it instead of the hangnail. And, Parfit goes on to claim, while the intrinsic fact that the torture is excruciatingly painful provides reasons for him to have the hangnail instead, the fact that he prefers the torture because it is on a Tuesday provides no reason for him to have it instead of the hangnail. Parfit extrapolates from cases of this kind to urge that, as a general rule, the reasons one has to have what one wants are not provided by the fact that one wants it but by intrinsic facts about what one wants.

Now Parfit allows that there may be some final desires for things whose intrinsic features provide no reasons to have them or not to have them. We might call such desires and their objects 'intrinsically neutral'. For instance, I might want to wear pink or to get a haircut or to turn a cartwheel. There is no intrinsic reason to do or not to do any of these things. But, Parfit thinks, in such cases there will be an 'indirect' value-based reason to have or not to have what one wants; or if there isn't, there will be no reason at all. 'Indirect' reasons are value-based reasons that depend in some way on the fact that one wants something; they are reasons with subjective conditions. Parfit gives two examples of such reasons. First, I might have a reason to have what I want because the thought of being in a state in which my desire is satisfied fills me with pleasure. If the thought of my wearing a pink jumpsuit fills me with glee, then I have a reason to take the steps required to get myself in that state. It is the fact that this thought is pleasant that provides a reason for me to wear pink, not the fact that I want to wear pink. Second, I might have a reason to have what I want because my not having it will distract me from

²² Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 124

doing other things.²³ For example, although I have no intrinsic reason to get a haircut, my not getting one will distract me from getting on with my work. It is the fact that I will be distracted that provides me with a reason to get a haircut, not the fact that I want to do so. If there is no indirect value-based reason to have what one wants, then, Parfit thinks, there are *no* reasons to have what one wants. Desires in these cases, according to Parfit, are merely urges or compulsions and do not themselves provide reasons to have their objects. In any case, the fact that one wants something does not provide a reason to have it; either one's reason is given by an indirect value-based fact or one has no reason.

There is one kind of intrinsically neutral desire, however, that I believe Parfit—and all value-based theorists—should admit as an exception to this claim. These are what Parfit calls 'hedonic desires', the likings or dislikings of *present conscious states* that 'make' those states painful, pleasant, or unpleasant.²⁴ Parfit gives as examples liking a cold shower, disliking the sound of squeaking chalk, and disliking the touch of velvet. Some people like the touch of velvet while others, such as Parfit, dislike it. Since there are no intrinsic features of the sensation that provide a reason to like or dislike it, those who like and those who dislike it are not making any mistake. Hedonic desires are neither rational nor irrational.

Can hedonic desires provide reasons? It seems clear that they can. Since desire-based theorists take only *present* desires to provide reasons, we focus on the question whether *present* hedonic desires can provide reasons.²⁵ If I now like the present sensation of touching velvet, my now liking it seems to provide me with a reason to continue to touch it; and if I now dislike the present sound of squeaking chalk, my now disliking it seems to provide a reason for me to remove myself from its vicinity. In general, it seems that my present likings and dislikings of (intrinsically neutral) present sensations can provide reasons to continue or cease having those sensations.

²³ Compare Stephen Schiffer, 'A Paradox of Desire', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1976), 195–203, who seems to think that the way a desire provides reasons is by being like a nagging itch waiting to be scratched. As value-based theorists might say, the reason to scratch the itch is not provided by the desire but by the fact that not scratching has unpleasant consequences. See also George Schueler, *Desire: Its Role in Practical Reason and the Explanation of Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 80–97.

²⁴ Parfit 'Rationality and Reasons', 26, and 'Reasons and Motives', draft p. 5.

²⁵ It is worth pointing out that the argument that present hedonic desires can provide reasons also shows that future hedonic desires can provide reasons; if I will tomorrow dislike the sound of squeaking chalk I will then hear, I have reasons now to take steps to avoid hearing it.

Now it might be thought that it is not the fact that I now dislike the sensation that provides a reason to stop having it but rather the fact that having it is painful. As Parfit says, however, the disliking 'makes' the sensation painful, and here the 'making' relation is most plausibly one of constitution: the fact that now hearing the squeaking chalk is painful just consists in the fact that I now dislike it. Indeed, since the sensation is not intrinsically painful, it is hard to see in what else its being painful could consist other than the fact that I dislike it. Thus, my reason to flee from the present sound of squeaking chalk is provided by the fact that I now dislike it. And so, if this is right, we have an exception to Parfit's claim that no desires can provide reasons.

To avoid this result, Parfit must think either that there are always 'indirect' reasons to continue or to cease having the objects of one's present hedonic desires or that such desires are like urges, which provide no reason to do what one has the urge to do. It is implausible to think, however, that there is always some indirect reason to continue or cease having a sensation one likes or dislikes. I need not always find the thought of continuing to have a sensation I like pleasurable. I like the sensation of rain against my face, for example; but while I am having that sensation I need not contemplate how continuing to have it would be pleasant; indeed, if I were to contemplate the matter, I might not take any pleasure in the thought. And when I put up my umbrella, the fact that I am no longer having a sensation I like does not distract me or impede me from carrying on with my day. Sometimes there are such indirect facts that provide reasons for me to continue or cease having a sensation I like, but there need not be. Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that because there are no value-based reasons to continue having the sensation one likes, one has *no* reason to continue to have it. It would be odd to think that even though I now intensely dislike the present sound of squeaking chalk, I have no reason to remove myself from it. Hedonic desires are not like urges to turn on radios or count blades of grass which provide no reason to have their objects.

If this is right, then Parfit must allow present hedonic desires as an exception to his claim that no desires can provide reasons. When I put this to Parfit, he agreed that he might have to qualify his claim that *no* desires can provide reasons, but he insisted, à la Raz and Scanlon, that even if he did have to allow an exception for hedonic desires, such desires are peculiar and cannot form the basis of a general argument that desires can provide reasons. This is because, he thinks, hedonic desires are crucially different

from desires proper, in that the former *must* be directed at present states while the latter need not be and are typically directed at future states—and desire-based theorists take as their paradigm present desires directed at future states. I cannot now like a sensation I will have tomorrow; my present likes must be directed at present states. And the disposition of liking a kind of sensation whenever it occurs is a different kind of mental state from an occurrent liking. Thus even if present likings and dislikings of present sensations can provide reasons, there is no reason to think that paradigmatic desires can.²⁶

Whether Parfit can effectively quarantine the exception provided by hedonic desires is a delicate matter, and an adequate examination of the possible ways in which he might attempt to do so would lead us too far afield. There are grounds, however, for thinking that his cited reason—that hedonic desires must be directed at present states, and ordinary desires need not be—will not do the trick.

If the exception provided by hedonic desires is to be harmless, Parfit must maintain that there is a relevant distinction between one's present liking or disliking of a present sensation and one's present desire that that sensation continue or cease. For if my liking the present sensation of touching velvet can provide a reason for me to continue to touch it, and if this liking is not relevantly different from the present desire that this sensation continue, then the present desire that it continue provides a reason for me to continue to touch it. In this case, we would have an example of a paradigmatic desire that provides reasons, and the value-based view would begin to unravel.²⁷

²⁶ There is an alternative, seemingly less concessive response available to the value-based theorist. Instead of conceding that present hedonic desires can provide reasons to have their sensations continue, he might argue that only *future*, and not present, hedonic desires can provide reasons. Since present likings of present sensations do not guarantee that one will continue to like that sensation, how can a present liking provide a reason to continue to have a sensation that one might detest in the next instant? Only *future* likings of concurrent sensations can provide reasons: if, for example, tomorrow I will like having the then-present sensation of touching velvet, that gives me a reason now to touch velvet at that time tomorrow. But allowing that *future* hedonic desires can provide reasons does not threaten to unravel the value-based view because, in so far as desire-based theorists want to keep the connection between reasons and motivation, *future* mental states are not the sort of state that they think can provide reasons. Compare Scanlon, 'Replies', 339–40. This line of response is, I believe, problematic in ways similar to Parfit's concessive response; detailed arguments might be developed to show that it is difficult to draw a line between the two kinds of states.

²⁷ Parfit calls desires about one's present and future pleasures and pains 'metahedonic desires'. (Although in 'Rationality and Reasons', 26, he defines them as desires about one's

The question, then, is whether there is some relevant difference between my present liking of the present sensation of touching velvet and my present desire that this sensation continue. Parfit cites the fact that the former must be directed at present states, while the latter can also be directed at future states. But the thought that this difference could account for why likings can provide reasons but paradigmatic desires cannot is bizarre. For suppose I have two conative states that differ only in that one must be directed at present states while the other can be directed at present or future states. Suppose too that only one of these conative states can provide reasons. It would be strange to think that the fact that the conative attitude might be directed at future states prevents that attitude from providing a reason. Indeed, given a choice between either being necessarily directed at present states and being possibly directed at future states as a condition that prevents a mental attitude from providing a reason, it would be natural to choose the former, not the latter. It is hard to see how the fact of being possibly directed at future states can block a conative state from providing a reason. Parfit may have identified a difference between present likings and present desires for future states, but this difference could not plausibly ground the claim that only likings can provide reasons and paradigmatic reasons cannot.

Moreover, there is a relevant *similarity* between the two states that suggests that if present likings can provide reasons, then so too can paradigmatic desires. If my now liking the present sensation of touching velvet can provide a reason for me to continue to touch it, it does so in virtue of the *liking* or attraction I have to the sensation. A present desire that the sensation of touching velvet continue, if affective, will also involve attraction to the sensation of touching velvet. In this case both my liking and my present desire that the sensation continue involve attraction to their objects. If the attraction rationalizes in the one case, why not in the other?²⁸

future pleasures and pains, he means to include desires about one's *present* pleasures and pains as well, such as the desire that one's present pleasure continue.) While he might allow that the present liking of a present sensation can provide a reason to continue to have that sensation, he must deny that the metahedonic desire that one's present pleasant sensation continue can provide a reason to continue having the sensation

²⁸ This is not to say that *all* present desires that a present sensation continue need involve having an affective feel. Some such desires might be 'motivated'; I might now want to stop taking a cold shower because I believe that I will catch a cold or that I have reasons to get back to work. My point is only that if I now like a present sensation, then I might plausibly have (perhaps I must have) an affective desire that this pleasant sensation continue; and if the attraction in the one case can provide a reason, why not in the other?

Although Parfit does not offer any explicit account of desires, his implicit account seems to assume, like Raz's and Scanlon's, that the affective feel of a desire cannot rationalize action. Indeed, the general form of his argument against desire-based views seems to assume that if there are value-based reasons to have what one wants, the fact that one wants it does not provide a further independent reason to have it. This assumption might have some plausibility if, like Raz and Scanlon, Parfit assumes that desires already depend on value-based reasons to have their objects; for in this case, there would seem to be double-counting. If, however, affective desires are independent of such reasons, then Parfit's arguments, like Raz's and Scanlon's, leave open the possibility that affective desires can in general provide reasons.

VI

Thus three leading value-based theorists each recognize that there may be an exception to their claim that desires cannot provide reasons. From Raz, we have the case in which an attraction to one option seems to provide a reason to go for it when the independent value-based reasons for the options are evenly matched (one has reason to go for the banana over the pear because one is attracted to the banana). From Scanlon, we have the case in which it seems that 'feeling like it' can provide a reason when one decides to let what one feels like determine what one will do (one has reason to take the route home one feels like taking). And finally, from Parfit, we have the case of being attracted to a rationally neutral present sensation; that attraction can provide a reason to continue to have the sensation (one has a reason to continue to touch velvet if one likes the sensation). Each of the desires, we suggested, is an affective desire.²⁹

I now want to outline a positive argument for thinking that affective desires can, indeed, provide reasons, and thus that the three exceptions are

²⁹ The three exceptions might be understood as successive restrictions on one another. Raz's is arguably the broadest: an affective desire for something can provide a reason to have it on the condition that the other reasons for having it and not having it are evenly matched. Scanlon's can be understood as a restriction on Raz's: affective desires can provide a reason only when one 'decides' to let what one does be so determined, and the cases in which it is appropriate to decide this are 'trivial'. Parfit's exception can be seen as restricting further the trivial cases to ones in which the choice is between otherwise rationally neutral present sensations.

instances of a broad class of cases in which desires can provide reasons. The argument begins by examining what I take to be the 'Achilles' heel' of any value-based views, the case of 'feeling like it' when all other relevant reasons are evenly matched. Once it is allowed that 'feeling like it' can rationalize action in these cases, there is good reason to think that affective desires generally can rationalize action.

We start by distinguishing two kinds of affective feel or attraction that one can have towards an object. Most attractions are to particular features of an object; one is attracted to the creaminess of the banana, the scenic beauty of a certain route home, the plushness of the touch of velvet. We might call these attractions 'feature-bound'. Some attractions, however, are not directed toward any particular feature of an object; one is simply attracted to the object *as such*. Affective desires with 'feature-free' attractions are desires for the object itself but not under any particular description. To distinguish feature-bound from feature-free affective desires, I will call the latter 'feelings like it'. (In common usage, 'feeling like it' covers both feature-free and feature-bound attractions.) If one 'feels like' wearing pink, there need be no particular feature of wearing pink that attracts one; one *just feels like* wearing pink. Or one might simply feel like tying one's shoelaces with the double-loop method or turning a cartwheel down the sidewalk or writing with a pencil instead of a pen, without being attracted to any particular feature of doing so.

'Feeling like it' can rationalize action when the other relevant reasons for or against having what one feels like are evenly matched. Consider Buridan's famous ass, poised between two equidistant and qualitatively identical bales of hay. There are, by hypothesis, no independent reasons for him to eat the one bale rather than the other. Now suppose that he 'feels like' the hay on the left, not because it is to the left or for any other feature of it—he just wants *that* bale. If he is attracted to the bale on the left but goes for the one of the right, surely he would not be doing what he has most reason to do. He has most reason to eat the bale on the left since all other reasons are evenly matched and he is attracted to that bale.

Now it might be conceded that the ass does have more reason to eat the bale on the left but that it is a mistake to suppose that his 'feeling like it' can provide a reason for him to do so. Rather, the value-based theorist might say, his feeling like it provides evidence for the fact that he would enjoy it more but does not itself provide a reason for him to eat that bale;

his reason for going for the left bale would then be that he would enjoy it more. Or perhaps what provides his reason to eat on the left is not that he 'feels like it' but that he has 'decided' to do so.

Given that the bales are identical, if he enjoys eating one bale more, his greater enjoyment must *consist in* the fact that he feels like eating that one, his attraction to the one bale is what makes eating it all the more pleasurable. Thus what provides the reason is his 'feeling like it', not some independent fact that he would enjoy it more.

More importantly, even if his 'feeling like it' does not constitute the fact that he would enjoy having it more—and thus he would enjoy having either bale equally—the fact that he 'feels like' the bale on the left can nevertheless provide a reason for him to go left. If he goes left, his action can be rationalized by pointing out that he felt like having the bale on the left. If he goes right, we would need some explanation for this puzzling act; what reason does he have to go right given that he would enjoy each of the two identical bales equally and feels like having the one on the left? What we would be looking for is a reason to go right that counteracts his reason to go left provided by the fact that he feels like it. The point here is that 'feeling like it' need not be cashed out in terms of facts about greater enjoyment; the fact that one is attracted to something can *per se* provide a reason to go for it when all other reasons are evenly matched. Finally, if the bales are identical and he 'decides' to go left, his decision can provide a reason only in so far as it is based upon some reason-providing consideration—for instance, that he feels like the bale on the left. In this case, it is not the decision, but the fact that he 'feels like it', that provides the reason.³⁰

In order to avoid the conclusion that his 'feeling like it' provides a reason to go left, the value-based theorist might deny that in going left the ass acts for a reason. Perhaps 'feeling like it' is just an urge; if, in going left, the ass is just satisfying an urge, he acts for *no* reason. 'Feeling like it', however, is not an urge. First, as an affective desire, it involves having an attitude towards something and is not a 'passive' motivational impulse like thirst. Second, it is a reasons-appropriate attitude, while an urge is not. Even though the ass may have no reason to feel one way or another, it is appropriate to ask whether he has reason to feel the way he does. Feeling thirsty, by contrast, is not the kind of state for which one can sensibly ask for reasons.

³⁰ See Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987; reissued by CSLI Publications, 1999)

Although 'feeling like it' is not an urge, perhaps going to the left bale because he 'feels like it' is, nevertheless, going to the left for no reason. (Recall that Scanlon suggests that his exception could be a case of this sort.) But doing something because one feels like it does not seem like cases in which one does things for no reason. I sometimes drum my fingers against my computer keyboard for no reason. Many people, while sitting in their car waiting for a red light to change, will start to hum for no reason. Doing things for no reason usually involves absent-mindedly not attending to what one is doing. Sometimes when one acts arbitrarily, one is acting for no reason. When one feels like something, in contrast, one has a definite phenomenological attraction to something that draws one's attention. The ass has his attention fixed on the two bales of hay; he finds himself attracted to the one on the left. When he moves to eat the one on the left, he does so in full awareness of his attraction. He does not act for no reason; on the contrary, he acts for the reason that he feels like having it.

Nor need there be any 'indirect' reasons that rationalize the ass's going for the left bale rather than the right. He needn't find the thought of eating the left bale pleasing, nor need it be true that he feels distracted or bothered if he doesn't get to eat the left bale but is stuck with the right bale instead. Not all affective desires need be 'nagging' desires; I might be attracted to the touch of velvet but not feel bothered or distracted if I don't touch it. Our ass feels like eating the left bale, but if he ends up eating the right one, he will just shrug his shoulders and happily munch away.

Therefore, if one is faced with a choice between two relevantly identical alternatives, 'feeling like it' can rationalize one's act of going for it. And this type of case is more common than one might think. Suppose you are at a supermarket and are confronted with row upon row of identical cans of soup. You might simply arbitrarily pick one for no reason. However, you might instead 'feel like' having a certain can—the one that catches your eye; for example. If you feel drawn to one can but take another, you fail to act on a reason you have.³¹ Or suppose that at dinner you are served a plate of three identical slices of beef. Where should you start? If you feel like starting with a particular slice, that provides a reason to do so. Or

³¹ Note that whether you deserve to be called 'irrational' depends on how irrationality is understood. If one thinks that in these cases the agent would not be irrational in not doing what she felt like doing, that would not by itself show that 'feeling like it' did not provide a reason.

suppose a magician friend asks you to choose a card, any card. The cards, fanned out, are identical in all relevant respects. But one might be drawn to a particular card, and that attraction provides a reason to choose it. In all of these cases, it would be puzzling if you did not do what you felt like doing. If, on the other hand, you did what you felt like doing, the fact that you felt like it would rationalize your action, and no further explanation would be required.

This conclusion can be extended to cases in which one is faced with a choice, not between identical alternatives, but between non-identical alternatives for which the independent reasons for and against are evenly matched. We then have a modified version of the Buridan's ass case, since the way in which the independent reasons are evenly matched does not simply follow from the fact that the alternatives are relevantly identical. But the way in which the independent reasons are evenly matched cannot make a difference to whether 'feeling like it' can provide a reason. Scanlon's two-routes-home case might be an example. The two routes home are different—one is scenic and long, the other is short and lined with strip malls—but the reasons for taking one rather than the other are evenly matched. Suppose that one has a feature-free affective desire for the longer route. If one takes the shorter route instead, one would fail to act in the way one has most reason to act. Being attracted to the longer route provides a reason to take it when all other independent reasons are evenly matched. Thus, 'feeling like it' can provide a reason to have what one feels like whenever the other independent reasons relevant to what one should do are evenly matched regardless of whether the alternatives are identical or very different.

Now this extended conclusion might be understood in a limited way; for perhaps 'feeling like it' can 'provide' reasons not in the deep sense of providing an independent reason in its own right but only in a *conditional* sense: when the A-team of reasons—that is, value-based reasons—have 'run out', the B-team of reasons, such as 'feeling like it', can take over. This would imply that 'feeling like it' is something like a coin toss, a consideration that operates as a decision procedure when all relevant reasons have run out. Perhaps 'feeling like it', like the outcome of the coin toss, 'provides a reason' only in this conditional sense.³²

³² Compare Raz, who thinks that although desires do not provide reasons, they 'become relevant when reasons have run their course'. After value-based reasons have run out, one

Although it may sometimes operate in this way, 'feeling like it' can also provide a relevant reason for choice in its own right. Whether it does depends on whether the consideration of what one feels like is relevant to what one should do in a given choice situation. In an ordinary choice between saving one drowning stranger or two, what one 'feels like' doing is not relevant to the choice. But it is hard to believe that what one feels like is not relevant in a choice between things to eat, places to go, and people to see. If I must choose between an Italian and a Chinese meal for dinner tonight, surely the consideration of what I feel like is relevant to the choice, even if my feeling like Chinese is an attraction to having the Chinese meal not under any particular description but simply to *that* cuisine. Given that what I feel like is relevant, the fact that I feel like Chinese provides a reason to have it. Thus if I feel like Chinese but have Italian, I act against my reasons. This is not necessarily because, having seen that the reasons for either sort of meal were evenly matched, I adopt a decision procedure according to which I will go for what I feel like. Rather, my attraction to *that* cuisine provides an independent reason for me to have it. Thus the cases in which 'feeling like it' can rationalize action are not restricted to ones in which the other reasons are evenly matched. Even if with respect to all the other reasons having Italian is better than having Chinese, the fact that I feel like Chinese provides a reason to have Chinese. In general, even if one option is significantly better than another, the fact that I 'feel like' the worse option can itself provide a reason to have it.

There is, however, another way in which it might be thought that 'feeling like it' rationalizes only conditionally. Perhaps 'feeling like it' can provide a reason only on the condition that nothing much of value turns on what one does in the choice situation. This may be what Scanlon has in mind when he suggests that 'feeling like it' can rationalize action if one 'decides' to let what one will do turn on what one is attracted to doing. Presumably, one's 'deciding' in this way can have its intended normative

might act on one's desire, which, according to Raz, is acting for *no* reason. None the less, Raz holds, one's desire can 'rationalize' one's action in the sense that, in such cases, not doing what one wants 'usually manifests an unconscious desire for punishment, self-hate, pathological self-doubt, or something else' which is 'irrational'. See Raz, 'Incommensurability and Agency', 63. I find this view unstable because it maintains that desires cannot provide reasons while at the same time maintaining that not doing what one wants when reasons have run out is irrational. How can one be irrational if one does something one has no reason not to do?

effect only if the relevant reasons sanction such a decision,³³ and, arguably, such a decision is sanctioned by the relevant reasons only in 'special, rather trivial cases'. Even if, for example, the reasons for taking one route outweigh the reasons for taking another, there is a higher-order reason (perhaps deriving from the values of spontaneity and variety in the way one chooses what to do) to let some of one's choices turn on what one feels like when nothing much turns on what one does. 'Feeling like it', then, might be a reason in virtue of a higher-order reason to take it as a reason in cases of trivial importance. The normative force of such a reason would then depend on the fact that 'first-order' reasons are of trivial importance.

It is not clear, however, that 'feeling like it' rationalizes only in cases of trivial importance. In choosing between two very different careers, for instance, the fact that one has an attraction to one *as such* seems to be of relevance at the first-order level. What one feels like seems relevant in choices between careers, loves, places to live, and so on. But even if 'feeling like it' can provide a reason only when it does not much matter which alternative one chooses, we should not be misled into thinking that it thereby has only conditional rationalizing force. In so far as doing what one feels like is relevant to what one should do, 'feeling like it' can rationalize as an independent reason in its own right, not as a reason that is conditional on the other reasons being of trivial importance.

'Feelings like it', I believe, are the Achilles' heel of value-based views of reasons. I do not know of any value-based view that can avoid admitting these cases as exceptions. Importantly, once we allow that 'feeling like it' can provide reasons, we must also allow that affective desires involving *feature-bound* attractions can provide reasons. Feature-bound attractions rely on certain features of what one wants that ground one's affective feel towards the object. Because they depend on features of an object, it is easy to recast such attractions as value-based facts about the object, such as that one will enjoy having it. But if feature-free attractions can provide reasons, then so can feature-bound ones. This is because such attractions differ only in their objects; being attracted to a feature of an object is being attracted to an object *as such*, where the object *as such* in this case is the feature. In being attracted to a feature, one need not be attracted to a feature of that feature. If being attracted to an object *as such* provides a reason to have that

³³ See Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason*, and Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 46-7.

object, then attraction to a feature (as an object *as such*) provides a reason to have that feature, and thereby provides a reason to have the object with that feature. The distinction between feature-free and feature-bound attractions, then, is not one that makes a difference to whether attractions can provide reasons.

If affective desires in general can provide reasons, then they provide a large and important class of reasons. For being attracted to features of objects is relevant to choices involving a great many important matters, such as choosing a career, a life-partner, or a place to live. Indeed, having an attraction towards something is in principle unlimited in scope; whether this attraction provides a reason depends on whether the choice situation is one in which one's attractions are relevant to the question of what one should do. Where they are and one has such an attraction, the attraction need not have great normative weight; the most weighty reason I have to spend my time thinking about philosophical issues is plausibly provided by the fact that doing so is worthwhile, but the fact that I am attracted to philosophy provides an independent reason to pursue it. Sometimes, however, one's affective desires provide the most important reasons to do something, for example, in choosing what to wear or how to spend one's leisure time. Regardless of their relative weight, such reasons can 'tip the scales' against one's value-based reasons. I might, for example, have most value-based reason to be a doctor, but the fact that I have an affective desire to be a philosopher may give me, all things considered, reason to be one. Having an affective desire for something, then, can make a significant difference to what we have, all things considered, reason to do.

VII

The conclusion that affective desires can provide reasons is consistent with the view that *all* reasons are provided by desires. But as I said, I am going to assume that this view is false.³⁴ Instead, I want to try to undermine what I take to be the most serious obstacle to thinking that the hybrid view is true.

³⁴ It may be worth noting that this assumption is not *obviously* unwarranted. Although desire-based views are the received orthodoxy, the reasons for preferring such views to value-based views are somewhat obscure. There are three general grounds commonly cited for such a preference, but they are in fact neutral between the two views. These are (1) that reasons

The conflict between desire- and value-based views can be understood at a deeper level as deriving from two competing conceptions of the source of practical justification. According to the *internalist* conception, all practical justification has its source in facts that are in some sense 'internal' to the agent, and according to desire-based theorists these facts are that the agent wants something. According to the *externalist* conception, by contrast, all practical justification derives from facts that are in some sense 'external' to the agent; and the only facts these could plausibly be, according to

must be naturalistically respectable and thus, it seems, must be provided by facts that the agent wants something, not by queer facts about the value of what she wants; (2) that reasons must be able to figure in motivational or causal explanations of rational action and therefore, it seems, must be provided by an agent's motivations; and (3) that reasons must be 'inescapable' in the sense that if one recognizes one has a reason, one must be motivated to do what one has reason to do, and thus it seems that the only kind of consideration that could guarantee this motivation would itself be a motivation.

On the first ground, whatever sort of facts provide reasons, there is a normative fact in virtue of which they do, and it is an open question on both desire- and value-based views as to whether this normative fact is natural. Of course it might be pointed out that value-based views are saddled with an additional queer fact: namely, the evaluative fact that provides the reason. But, as we have already noted, some value-based views 'pass the buck' from evaluative facts to their natural subvening facts; when describing one's reasons, then, one may eschew all mention of evaluative facts. In this way, a commitment to naturalism does not itself favour the desire-based as opposed to the value-based view.

On the second, as Thomas Nagel pointed out long ago, a rational agent might be motivated to do something, such as empty his sick relative's bedpan, not because he has an independent desire to do so but because he believes that it is his duty or that he has a reason to do it. His belief produces his motivation, which then leads him to act, or the belief itself motivates him to action via a disposition to do what he believes he has reason to do—the disposition of rationality. In either case, the reason can be provided not by his desire but by an external fact, belief in which provides the motivational link to rational action. Thus the thought that practical reasons must be able to figure in the explanation of rational action cuts across desire- and value-based views.

Finally, on the third, the 'inescapability' of reasons must be understood in the right way. Even desire-based theorists will allow that an agent with reasons might not be motivated to do what he has reasons to do. The inescapability at issue is *rational* inescapability; if I am rational, I must be motivated by the reasons I believe I have. And *any* theorist can secure inescapability in this sense simply by understanding what it is to be rational in terms of being motivated by what one believes are one's reasons. One's inescapable reason might be provided by the fact that something is good.

Many of the points of this note can be found in Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', 102, 106–7; Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and *idem*, 'Skepticism about Practical Reason', as reprinted in Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton (eds.), *Moral Discourse and Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 376–7, and Parfit, *Rediscovering Reasons*.

value-based theorists, are facts about the value of the action or its object. In the one case practical justification derives from the fact that the agent wants something, and in the other from facts about *what* she wants.

The debate about which considerations can provide reasons, then, involves a deeper debate about the source of justification—is it internal or external to the agent? Now one obvious way to defend the hybrid view is simply to insist that practical justification has dual sources; sometimes the justification of action derives from facts internal to the agent, and sometimes from facts external to the agent. But why should we think that practical justification, presumably understood in unitary fashion, is sometimes internal and sometimes external? The hybrid view faces a challenge not faced by its 'purist' rivals: it needs to demonstrate that its ecumenical spirit with respect to reasons is compatible with a non-arbitrary, coherent conception of the source of practical justification.

I want to end by explaining how the hybrid view is compatible with the *externalist* conception of practical justification. The core thought behind this conception is given by the question, How can what reasons I have be, in the end, *up to me*? The source of practical justification must lie outside the agent, in facts about the action or its object. I suggest that affective desires can provide reasons even on the assumption that all practical justification must derive from facts external to the agent. This may seem puzzling, for how can the fact that an agent wants something be a fact external to that agent? Seeing how this is possible depends on getting a better understanding of the appropriate sense in which a fact might be 'external' and of the different ways in which actions might be conceived.

As many philosophers of action have pointed out, an action is an action under many different descriptions. There is the flexing of the muscles, the pulling of the trigger, and the murdering of one's enemy. Now actions involving an object for which one has an affective desire can be conceived under two descriptions, either as a response to the world or as a response to the agent's mental state. If I have an affective desire for ice cream, my eating ice cream can be understood either as my having some ice cream or as my satisfying my affective desire for ice cream. If I feel like taking the long, scenic route home, my taking the long, scenic route home can be seen either as my taking that route home or as my doing what I feel like. And if I am attracted to the present sensation of a hot bath, then my continuing to soak can be conceived either as my continuing to take a hot bath or as my gratifying my attraction.

Actions described in these ways allow for two kinds of reasons—those provided by features of the action understood as a response to the world and those provided by features of the action understood as a response to an affective desire. Suppose, for example, that I am intensely afraid of cockroaches; the thought of touching one sends shivers down my spine. Now when I run away from a cockroach, my action is both a running away from a cockroach and an allaying of a state of fear. What reasons do I have for my action? Given that cockroaches are harmless creatures—they do not carry disease or bite, and are God's nimblest creatures, capable of changing direction twenty-five times in a single second—there are no intrinsic value-based reasons to run away from them. Perhaps there are indirect value-based reasons, but we can rig the case so that these are eliminated; if I do not run away, I will still be fearful of the cockroach but will not, for instance, be distracted from doing other things. Although there are no intrinsic or indirect value-based reasons for me to flee from the cockroach, the fact that I fear it provides a desire-based reason to run away. My desire-based reason derives from features of the action under its desire-responsive description as the allaying of a state of fear; and my lack of value-based reasons derives from features of the action under its world-responsive description as the flight from a cockroach. Nor does the example depend upon there being no value-based reasons. Suppose you are afraid of scorpions and I am not. We both have value-based reasons to avoid a creature whose bite is painful. But you have an additional reason based upon your fear that I lack, for even though both our actions can be described as a fleeing from a dangerous creature, only yours can be described and hence rationalized as a response to a conative attitude.³⁵

The fact that I want something (or fear it, respect it, etc.) is 'external' in the sense that it can be seen to rationalize *as* a fact about an action or its object. The act of fleeing from a cockroach is an act of allaying a fear and, as such, provides me with a reason to respond in the appropriate way to the object of my action: namely, my fear. Of course, there is in some sense

³⁵ It is perhaps worth noting that the question of when a consideration is 'relevant' to a choice situation—that is, when it is potentially a reason for choosing—cuts across the question of whether desires or value-based facts provide reasons. Just as the fact that I want something is not always relevant to a choice, so is the fact that something is beautiful not always relevant to a choice (e.g., between two candidates for a philosophy job). On the view under consideration, external facts would determine what is relevant to a choice, and it is plausible to think that these facts would determine relevance for types of action.

no real difference between my act of fleeing from the cockroach and my act of allaying my fear (and perhaps no difference at all). But, all the same, these two different ways of conceiving the action make a significant difference to whether the fear can be taken to rationalize the action under an externalist conception of the source of justification.

If this way of understanding reasons provided by desires is correct, there is a lesson for both value- and desire-based theorists. Value-based theorists are mistaken in assuming that the fact that one wants something cannot be a fact external to the agent that can justify action. Indeed, I suspect that resistance from most value-based theorists to the idea that desires can provide reasons derives from the mistaken assumption that the externalist conception precludes such reasons. And desire-based theorists are mistaken in supposing that if desires are to provide reasons, the internalist conception of practical justification must be correct—desires can provide reasons even under the externalist conception.

By accepting the hybrid view, we do not thereby sacrifice the unitary character of practical justification. Although there are two distinctive kinds of consideration that provide reasons, there is unity at a deeper level: all practical reasons are provided by facts with a single source—they are provided by facts about the action or its object that are appropriately external to the agent.³⁶

³⁶ My warmest thanks to Kit Fine, Derek Parfit, and Jacob Ross for very useful and incisive comments on earlier versions of this paper, and to John Broome and Sigrun Svavarsdottir for very helpful discussion of parts of an early draft. Although this paper is in some ways critical of the views of Joseph Raz, Thomas Scanlon, and Derek Parfit, anyone who knows their work will recognize their salutary influence throughout. The ideas in the paper were developed in response to a conversation I had with Joseph Raz many years ago while I was a graduate student at Balliol College. I am grateful to him for his continued philosophical friendship and guidance, and for his challenging and illuminating work which informs so much of my own.