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Backgrounding Desire

Philip Pettit and Michael Smith

Granted that desire is always present in the genesis of human action, is it something on the presence of which the agent always reflects? I may act on a belief without coming to recognize that I have the belief. Can I act on a desire without recognizing that I have the desire? In particular, can the desire have a motivational presence in my decision making, figuring in the background, as it were, without appearing in the content of my deliberation, in the foreground?

We argue, perhaps unsurprisingly, that yes, desire can figure in the background without figuring in the foreground: we call this the strict background view of desire. But we then show, and this is where the surprise comes, that the strict background view of desire has significant implications for contemporary moral philosophy.

The paper is in three sections. In the first section we set up the background-foreground question. In the second we argue for the strict background view of desire. And finally, in the third and longest section of the paper, we derive five propositions from that view. These all teach lessons of relevance to contemporary moral philosophy.

I. THE BACKGROUND-FOREGROUND QUESTION

The intentional conception of human beings is endorsed by philosophers on most sides, if not quite on all, and we start from the assumption that it is sound.¹ Under this conception every action is causally explained by the beliefs and the desires of the

¹Two philosophers who question it are Paul Churchland in *Scientific Realism and the Plasticity of Mind* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and Stephen Stich in *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1983). For a defense, see Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit, "Functionalism and Broad Content," *Mind*, 97 (1988) and "In Defence of Folk Psychology," *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming. However, that the intentional conception is sound need only mean, for our purposes here, that it is the sort of useful fiction which D. C. Dennett takes it to be. See his *Brainstorms* (Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1979).

agent: specifically, by beliefs and desires which rationalize it, and which causally explain it in virtue of rationalizing it: which causally explain it in the "right" way.²

The intentional conception means that every action issues from a motivating reason, from a reason in the sense in which the rationalizing beliefs and desires constitute a reason.³ But many philosophers maintain in addition that action usually involves a reason in another sense too. They say that the human agent always chooses among options, at least in part, on the grounds that the option preferred, or a state of affairs to which it is likely to lead, has some putatively desirable property: some property which, by the agent's lights, makes it a suitable action to choose; some property such that its presence entails, so the agent thinks, that the action is right or good or permissible or whatever. Thus they say that action usually issues from the belief that there is a justifying reason, though perhaps only a very weakly justifying reason, for that choice. In saying this they hold by what we describe as the deliberative conception of human beings.

Where the intentional conception says that every action issues from a set of beliefs and desires which rationalize it, the deliberative conception holds that somewhere in the process leading to action there is normally the belief that the option chosen has a property which provides some justification for choosing it: a property like that of being amusing or a change of style, promising pleasure for the agent or relief for the anxieties of a friend, conducing to better social order or the happiness of the human race. It is important to recognize that the two conceptions are not in any tension with one another. Suppose that an agent chooses the first of two options O_1 and O_2 , and does so because of believing that though other things are equal, O_1 is more likely to bring about a particular state of affairs S . The intentional conception will be borne out so far as the agent has a desire of some suitably intense degree for S . The deliberative conception will be vindicated so far

²See Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980), Essay 4.

³On this sense of reason see Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes," *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963), reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events*; and Michael Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," *Mind* 96 (1987).

as he is moved by the thought that S has a certain desirable property. Clearly both conditions can be simultaneously fulfilled.

As we start from the assumption that the intentional conception is sound, so we are prepared to assume that the deliberative conception is sound too.⁴ We do not hold that decision making is comprehensively controlled by deliberative reasoning—not all relevant considerations may be rehearsed, for example—but we think that there is normally enough control to allow us to represent the decision as in part the product of a practical syllogism. Somewhere in the decision making there normally occurs a thought of the kind “ Φ -ing has the property of being F, or of leading to a state of affairs that is F, so I should Φ .” We do not hold that that sort of thought is necessarily explicit, being a piece of deliberation formally conducted by the agent, but we think that there are always grounds for ascribing such a thought to the human decision maker. Bernard Williams expresses the point as follows: “What an individual does is often explained by the individual’s deliberation and, to the extent that his or her action is intentional, it can be explained in terms of a deliberation that the individual could have conducted.”⁵

The combination of the intentional and deliberative conceptions generates the background-foreground question about desire. If the intentional conception is sound, then desire is always present in the background of decision making. If the deliberative conception is sound, then there is always a question about whether that desire must also figure in the foreground. Suppose that I Φ because of believing that Φ -ing will bring about a state of affairs S and because of desiring S with sufficient intensity. The question raised is whether that means that I must have harbored the deliberative thought “ Φ -ing has the property of promising to satisfy my desire for S, so I should Φ .” The desire for S figures in the background if and only if it explains the agent’s choice of option. It figures in the foreground if and only if the agent reaches that

⁴For the makings of a defense see Philip Pettit, “Decision Theory and Folk Psychology,” in *Essays in the Foundations of Decision Theory*, ed. Michael Bacharach and Susan Hurley (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, forthcoming). See also Frank Jackson, “Internal Conflicts in Desires and Morals,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985).

⁵“Formal and Substantial Individualism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 86 (1985/86), p. 122.

choice via the recognition that he has that desire and that the option has the desirable property—the property justifying its choice—of promising to satisfy the desire.

More generally, a desire is present in the background of an agent's decision if and only if it is part of the motivating reason for it: the rationalizing set of beliefs and desires which produce the decision. A desire is present in the foreground of the decision if and only if the agent believed he had that desire and was moved by the belief that a justifying reason for the decision was that the option chosen promised to satisfy that desire. A desire may be in the background without in this sense figuring in the foreground. And equally a desire may be in the foreground without being in the background. Or so at least it seems. Suppose that an agent wrongly believes that he has a certain desire *D* and that he should therefore Φ ; and suppose that he is moved to act by the desire, meta-*D*, to act in the way that would satisfy *D*, if he had it: that is, to Φ . *D* figures here in the foreground but not in the background. And meta-*D* figures in the background but not, apparently, in the foreground.

We have defined what it is for a desire to figure in the background and the foreground of an actual decision. The definition extends quite naturally to potential decisions as well. The picture is then that a desire figures in the background of an agent's decision making if and only if it plays the sort of role suited to producing choice, whereas it figures in the foreground if and only if it plays the role suited to engaging deliberation.

The picture is probably clear enough but there are a number of points worth remembering. Notice that in speaking of a desire we always have a *type* of desire in mind, not a *token*; the desire need not be tokened to figure in the foreground, though it does have to be tokened to figure in the background. Notice too that the background-foreground distinction, being a functional one, has nothing to do with the divide between the conscious and the non-conscious. A desire may be in the background and be consciously possessed. And a desire may be in the foreground, as in implicit deliberation, without being consciously considered.

(Notice finally that we can admit a third way in which a desire type may be present apart from being present in the background or foreground of decision making. Suppose that desire is not present in the foreground, the only justifying considerations invoked by the agent being that the option chosen would be a lot of

fun or morally admirable. Just to assent to such a consideration, whether or not one acts on it—whether or not the desire comes to operate in the background—is by some accounts to give expression to a suitable sort of desire: perhaps a desire for the option, perhaps a desire for the relevant property. This latter will be a disposition, not necessarily to choose the option on offer, but with options between which you are otherwise indifferent to choose an option with the property rather than an option without.⁶ Similarly just to assent to a justifying consideration of the kind “This option promises to satisfy my desire that p” may be to express the desire to satisfy that desire, or the desire for the property of having that desire satisfied; indeed it may even be to express that very desire type itself. We are happy to admit, for present purposes, that assent to a justifying consideration may express desire in some such way, as we are happy to think that assent to “It is raining” expresses the belief type which has that proposition as content.)

We hope that enough has been said to make it clear what the background-foreground question about desire comes to. But there is still a substantial task remaining for this section. We would like to show that the framework that we are supposing, the framework that allows us to raise the background-foreground question, does not require any particularly contentious position on issues that are live in the area of moral psychology. The framework commits us to the intentional and deliberative conceptions of human agents but neither commitment is particularly contentious in this area.

The intentional conception may seem to be contentious in one respect. It may seem to beg the question against the cognitivist picture of motivation, a picture in which cognitive states alone are sometimes sufficient to produce intentional action.⁷ After all, the intentional conception has it that desires are always necessary for action.

The fact that the intentional conception makes desires essential

⁶On such property-desires see Jackson, “Internal Conflicts in Desires and Morals,” and Pettit, “Decision Theory and Folk Psychology.”

⁷On this debate see Michael Smith, “The Humean Theory of Motivation”; Philip Pettit, “Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation,” *Mind* 96 (1987); Michael Smith, “On Humeans, Anti-Humeans and Motivation,” *Mind* 97 (1988); and Philip Pettit and Huw Price, “Bare Functional Desire,” *Analysis* 49 (1989). See also Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, forthcoming).

in this way does rule out one sort of cognitivism: the sort which denies that desire is necessary for someone to act on a reason.⁸ But it does not rule out cognitivism as such. It leaves open the possibility that the desires which figure in the genesis of action are some of them cognitive states: say, they are states whose presence is entailed by the presence of certain beliefs.⁹ Thus the commitment to the intentional conception ought not to be unduly worrying.

(In this connection, we should also remark that just as the commitment to the intentional conception does not rule out cognitivism, so our concession that assent to justifying considerations may express desire—see the bracketed paragraph above—does not rule it out either. If the desires expressed are cognitive states, then the admission will not presuppose noncognitivism any more than the claim that assent to “It is raining” expresses the belief that it is raining.)

The deliberative conception of human agents may appear to be contentious, not because it engages with the issue between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, but because it may seem to beg the question against certain pictures of practical reasoning. In introducing the conception, we suggested that deliberation always involves a thought of the kind: “ Φ -ing has the property of being F, or of conducing to a state of affairs that is F, so I should Φ .” This suggestion will meet with at least two different sorts of objection and we wish to show that neither is well placed.

A first sort of objection will be that any piece of practical reasoning with just a premise of the form “ Φ -ing has the property of being F” is enthymematic: it lacks some necessary supplement. Thus prescriptivists will think that the premise must be supplemented by an imperatival premise such as “Let me do something with the property of being F.” And emotivists will hold that if it is

⁸For this cognitivist position see Mark Platts, *Ways of Meaning* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), Chapter 10; and S. I. Benn and G. F. Gaus, “Practical Rationality and Commitment,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986).

⁹For some recent discussions of the desire-as-belief thesis, as it is sometimes called, see David Lewis, “Desire as Belief,” *Mind* 97 (1988); John Collins, “Belief, Desire and Reason,” *Mind* 97 (1988); and Huw Price, “Defending Desire-as-Belief,” *Mind* 98 (1989). See too, I. L. Humberstone, “Wanting as Believing,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17 (1987); and D. H. Mellor, “Objective Decision-Making,” *Social Theory and Practice* 9 (1983).

not already a remark that expresses desire or approval, it must be supplemented by a remark that gives expression to approval of the F-property, such as "F-ness is good."

This objection need not worry us however, since nothing in the argument that follows depends on the falsity of such accounts of practical reasoning. All that the argument requires, and all that we mean to suggest, is that in reaching a decision the human agent adverts to a property of the option chosen which, whatever the required context, provides him with a justifying reason for his choice.

The second sort of objection to our suggested account of deliberation will focus on the conclusion rather than the premise. It will be that the conclusion is misrepresented by any statement of the form "I should Φ ." The statement should be of some other form, say, "I must Φ ," " Φ -ing is mandatory," " Φ -ing is best," " Φ -ing is *prima facie* good" or whatever. Or the statement should rather be an utterance in some other mood like "Let me Φ ," "I will Φ ," or " Φ -ing, it is." Or, finally, the statement should be replaced by a blank, the blank indicating that what ought to appear as conclusion is something expressive, not of belief or will, but rather of action or of the disposition to act: something with which our linguistic resources do not provide us.

This second objection however need not worry us any more than the first. Nothing in the argument that follows depends on a particular view as to the sort of conclusion involved in practical reasoning. The agent must focus on a property of the option chosen which provides him with a justifying reason, however weak, for his choice. But his being justified, his being moved by the practical inference, may lead him to endorse any of a variety of conclusions. There is no need to assume that the conclusion is well expressed in words of the form "I should Φ ."

We are being so ecumenical in this account of our commitments on the nature of deliberation that a question arises as to whether there is anything we rule out. The question is quickly answered. We are ruling out the view that referring to properties plays no essential role in an agent's decision making, in particular that they play no essential, justifying role.¹⁰

¹⁰If someone claims that they play an essential but not a justifying role, then we reject that view too. But we are not clear what it would involve.

Everyone who endorses the intentional conception must admit that properties normally have some part in an agent's thinking. After all, the agent probably identifies any option or outcome he considers by certain of its properties. But the view ruled out is that the agent uses such properties only as a means of picking out their bearers, and that for all that decision making ever involves he might as well have picked them out directly by demonstratives or proper names. The picture is that the agent directly picks out the options, directly picks out the different possible outcomes associated with these options and then, depending on his degrees of desire for those outcomes, and his degrees of belief about the probability of different outcomes given different options, is led to select one of the options. Nowhere in this picture is there any consideration of properties such as the deliberative conception postulates. Thus it represents a view which that conception rules out, however ecumenically we construe the conception.

II. THE STRICT BACKGROUND VIEW OF DESIRE

There are four salient positions on the place of desire in deliberative decision making. You may hold that desire is always present in the background or not always present in the background; and at the same time as holding either of those things you may hold that desire is always present in the foreground or not always present in the foreground. The following matrix maps the positions.

	Always in foreground	Not always in foreground
Always in background	1	2
Not always in background	3	4

Our commitment to the intentional conception, the conception under which every action is the product of belief and desire, eliminates positions 3 and 4 in this matrix. It means that we have to say that desire is always present in the background of decision making, so that the only question, that between positions 1 and 2, is whether or not desire is also always present in the foreground. We

ourselves hold that it is not always present there and so we adopt position 2; we describe this as the strict background view of desire. Our opponents, who would push us towards position 1, we describe as arguing for the foreground view. (The position to which they would push us is a loose background view, since it represents desire as being always present in the background, but for perfectly symmetrical reasons it can also be described as a loose foreground view.)

Before proceeding to the question of whether desire is always present in the foreground, it may be useful if we say something in favor of the view supported by the intentional conception, that desire is always present in the background. Otherwise we are vulnerable to those who would endorse the intentional conception but deny that the reference to desire is of its essence.¹¹

If we assume that the intentional conception is correct to ascribe intentional states to human agents, then a simple argument suffices to show that an agent acts, and more generally an agent has a motivating reason to act, only so far as he has an appropriate desire.

1. Having a reason to Φ , specifically a motivating reason to Φ , is having a goal: say, the goal that p .
2. Having such a goal is being disposed, given appropriate beliefs, to act so that p .
3. And being so disposed is desiring that p .

From (1), (2) and (3) it follows that having a reason to Φ necessarily involves the presence of an appropriate desire.¹²

Simple though it is, we find this argument compelling.¹³ The point at which it may seem vulnerable is in the third premise: the dispositional characterization of desire. But that characterization stands in for a functionalist account of desire of a kind which is

¹¹An example would probably be Platts's *Ways of Meaning*; see in particular Chapter 10.

¹²This is a version of the argument in Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," p. 55; specifically, it is a version that is neutral on the cognitivism issue. For the relevance of the original argument to that issue see Pettit, "Humeans, Anti-Humeans, and Motivation"; and Smith, "On Humeans, Anti-Humeans and Motivation."

¹³For an extended defense of the argument, in particular the third premise, see Smith, "The Humean Theory of Motivation," pp. 45–54.

now commonly endorsed: the desire that p is a state which plays the role of connecting belief patterns with patterns of behavior that generally serve, if those beliefs are true, to make it the case that p . The functional difference between the desire that p and the belief that p is then, *inter alia*, that only the belief that p tends to go out of existence in the presence of a perception that not p ; the desire that p endures, disposing the subject to bring it about that p .

An important merit of the argument given is that it is neutral, like the intentional conception, on the issue between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. This is because the argument, as stated, says nothing on the origin or nature of the desire in question. The desire may or may not have cognitive credentials of the kind postulated by the cognitivist. True, the argument rules out the cognitivist position according to which desire is not needed for someone to act on a reason. But it does not rule out cognitivism as such.

We return now to the question of whether desire must always be present in the foreground as well as the background. The argument just given for the background presence of desire certainly does not establish that it is also present in the foreground. For all the argument says, the foreground considerations which deliberatively move the agent may be of the kind: Φ -ing would be fun or would be rewarding or would be a morally fine thing to do. They need not direct the agent's attention to the fact that Φ -ing would satisfy his desire that p . Thus, for all the argument says, the agent's desire may be confined entirely to background.

It is hardly surprising that this should be so. After all, the evidence of intuition and introspection—the phenomenology of deliberation—is squarely against the hypothesis that desire always has a foreground presence. We are no more inclined to think that the deliberating agent always considers his desire-states than we are to imagine that he always considers his states of belief. In deliberating, and more generally in inference, the agent will consider alleged facts such as that p or that q without considering the fact about himself, if it is a fact, that he believes that p or that q . And similarly it seems that in deliberating the agent will consider the alleged fact that it is desirable in some way that r or s —it would be fun, it would be rewarding, it would be morally fine if r or s —without considering the fact about himself, if it is a fact, that he desires that r or that s or even that he desires the relevant property. The deliberating agent may sometimes consider the state of

his desire, as he may consider the state of his belief. He may take cognizance of the fact that he has this or that passion or yen or hankering. But such self-concern seems to be the exception, not the rule.

This evidence notwithstanding, there are theorists who explicitly hold by the view that desire is always present in the foreground of deliberation. Bernard Williams suggests in a comment on moral dispositions like generosity that their "basic representation in deliberation . . . is in the form 'I want to help. . . .'" Moreover, he suggests of such a representation that it "has the . . . advantage of not making it unintelligible how such moral considerations can be weighed in deliberation against quite different considerations";¹⁴ presumably, because they too get represented in deliberation in the form "I want that p." Here Williams suggests that the best representation of deliberation is one which always foregrounds desire; with both moral and other considerations the premises always ascribe desires to the agent. If this representation really is the best, then that argues that desire is indeed always present in the foreground of deliberation.

It is not clear what there is to be said in substantial support of Williams's suggestion. But in any case there is something fairly decisive to be said against it. The suggestion, and indeed any proposal of this kind, would force us to misrepresent what we might describe as the scope of many of our desires.

Suppose that I desire a certain state of affairs "p," where this may or may not constitute an action like Φ -ing. Does it matter whether I desire that p because, as I see it, the state of affairs promises to have a certain property F rather than a different property—one for which you may desire it—G? Yes, it does. Consider the state of affairs under temporal or modal variation; consider it as something that comes about now at this time, now at that, now in one possible world, now in another. Absent necessary equivalence, the variations under which it preserves the one property will not correspond with the variations under which it preserves the other. And so the scope of the F-grounded desire, as we say, will be different from the scope of the G-grounded desire. The one

¹⁴*Moral Luck* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 48.

will be a desire that p-at-any-time-or-world-where-it-realizes-F, the other a desire that p-at-any-time-or-world-where-it-realizes-G.

Under Williams's suggestion about deliberation, the desire formed in deliberation—the desire for the option chosen—is always grounded in the property of the option, that it answers appropriately to the agent's desires. If I deliberate in forming the desire to Φ , and if such deliberation is always guided by consideration of my antecedent desires, then I come to desire any option like Φ -ing because it promises to do best by those desires. This might mean: because it promises to do best by those desires I actually and currently have, whether or not they persist at the time or world of action. But that is an implausible reading. Why should I now be concerned that in my action at a future time I do that which satisfies what will then be a past desire, whether or not it survives as a then desire?¹⁵ The claim must rather be that I come to desire any option like Φ -ing because it does best by the desires which I not only have here and now; I also assume I will have them at whatever time, in whatever world, I Φ .

But even this claim is seriously counterintuitive. It casts the desires which I form in decision making in too procrustean a mold. Some of those desires certainly have a desire-related scope, being desires to Φ -at-any-time-or-world-where- Φ -ing-satisfies-such-and-such-a-desire. An example might be the desire formed when I decide to smoke because of a craving for a cigarette: I come to desire to smoke-at-any-time-or-world-where-it-will-relieve-my-craving-for-a-cigarette. But this is not true of the desires I generally form in decision making, as a couple of examples will show.¹⁶

Suppose that I decide to Φ because I conceive it to be my duty. On the Williams account, my reasoning must have involved the

¹⁵It will not do to say: the fact that as I now see things my current actual desire is aroused by the desirable property of the option, that it is F, whereas the future desires I envisage can only come of an insensitivity to that property. This observation would mean that the relevant premise is not "F-ing has the desirable property that it will satisfy my current actual desire to do something of an F-kind (even if that desire has gone when I F)"; rather it is "F-ing has the desirable property of being F." In other words, the observation would mean that the premises do not ascribe desire after all.

¹⁶In making the distinction between these two sorts of desires, we generalize the distinction marked in Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 151.

premise that I desire to do my duty and that Φ -ing is my duty, so that Φ -ing has the desirable property of promising to satisfy my desire to do my duty. The regimentation means that the desire engendered by deliberation is the desire to Φ only so long as I desire to do my duty; the relevant feature of the option prescribed is that it is my duty and that I desire to do my duty. And that is wrong. The desire is to Φ at any time or world where the alternatives remain unchanged—where Φ -ing remains my duty—even one where the desire to do my duty fails me. An adequate account of deliberation must preserve the possibility of such desires.

Suppose again that I decide to submit an article for publication, because it airs some new ideas. On the suggested regimentation one of the premises in my deliberation must have been that I have a present desire to air these new ideas. And in that case the desire engendered in the deliberation must be a desire to publish the article only at those times and worlds where I still have the desire to air the ideas. But this is not the sort of desire which seems to be formed in such a case. Suppose I act on the desire, submitting the article to a journal, but that the desire to air the new ideas vanishes before the article actually appears. Does that mean that the publication of the article at such a time was not desired by me? Surely not. At the time of submitting the article I may even have predicted that the desire to air the new ideas would vanish before the piece appeared, given that I tend to lose interest in ideas conceived more than a year previously. The prediction will not have stopped me acting on the desire to have the paper published, because what nourished that desire was not the prospect of relieving the desire to air the new ideas in the future but simply the prospect of airing them.

We believe that any claim to the effect that desire is always foregrounded in decision making will run into problems of this kind.¹⁷ Thus we are persuaded that although desire is always present in the background of decision making, it is not always present in the

¹⁷We have dismissed as implausible the claim that decision making foregrounds desire in the sense of current-and-actual desire, whether or not contemporary desire: desire at the time and world of action. But scope problems arise for that proposal too. It means that the universalized desire, the desire across variations in agent as well as in time and world, has a counterintuitive scope. See Pettit, "Decision Theory and Folk Psychology."

foreground. We hold by the strict background view of desire. In the next section we try to show that, however obvious that view may seem to be—we hope that it will seem clearly right—it has significant implications for some contemporary debates.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STRICT BACKGROUND VIEW

We turn in this section to the question of what difference is made by opting for the strict background view of desire. We think that a considerable difference is made, and in order to document that claim we shall point up five implications. These are all controversial, and in our view they constitute important lessons for practical and moral thought. The first two results bear on doctrines, specifically on cognitivism and utilitarianism. The last three bear on ideas, specifically on the concepts of integrity, autonomy and prudence.

III.1 PHENOMENOLOGY OFFERS NO ARGUMENT FOR COGNITIVISM

Mark Platts challenges the claims of non-cognitivists, and argues in support of cognitivism, in the following terms:

The crucial premiss . . . is the claim that any full specification of a reason for an action, if it is to be a reason for the potential agent for action, must make reference to that agent's desires. At first sight, it seems a painful feature of the moral life that this premiss is false. We perform many intentional actions in that life that we apparently do not desire to perform. A better description of such cases appears to be that we perform them because we think them desirable. The difficulty of much of moral life then emerges as a consequence of the apparent fact that desiring something and thinking it desirable are both distinct and independent. The premiss can, of course, be held true by simply claiming that, when acting because we think something desirable, we do indeed desire it. But this is either phenomenologically false, there being nothing in our inner life corresponding to the posited desire, or utterly vacuous, neither content nor motivation being given to the positing of the desire.¹⁸

Arguments of this general kind are also offered in support of cognitivism by David Wiggins and John McDowell.¹⁹ We believe

¹⁸*Ways of Meaning*, p. 256.

¹⁹See John McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 52 Supp. (1978), pp. 13–29; and

that such arguments suffer from a failure to distinguish the idea of a desire's being in the background from the idea of its being in the foreground.

When we act morally, the best *foreground* description of our deliberation is certainly that we do what we do because we think it has some desirable property other than that of being desired by us. That should not be surprising. After all, in the premises of our practical deliberations we are supposed to mention the characteristics of our actions that make them desirable and, in general, *our* desiring a certain course of action is not what makes that action *morally* correct. However, as we have seen, to say that a desire does not appear in the foreground of deliberation is consistent with the claim that it appears in the background. And the fact that it appears in the background tells us nothing about its status as cognitive or non-cognitive. So there is no support here for cognitivism.

Platts goes on to claim that insisting, as we do, that when we choose an option because we find it desirable, then we do in fact desire the option—in our terms, insisting that a desire always appears in the background—is “either phenomenologically false” or “utterly vacuous.” But though desires that appear in the foreground—say, my craving for a cigarette—may well have a characteristic phenomenology attached, there is plainly no truth to the claim that a desire that appears in the background must be phenomenologically salient. After all, as we said when we argued for the background presence of desires, a desire in the background is simply a disposition to realize what, in the foreground, is seen as desirable. It is an entirely contingent matter whether there is anything “in our inner life corresponding” to such a desire. This also explains why the positing of such a desire is not “utterly vacuous.” For it would be utterly vacuous to posit such a desire only if there were nothing for a desire to be but something that is phenomenologically salient: that is, only if there were nothing for a desire to be but a desire that figures in the foreground.

Platts is therefore wrong to claim that cognitivism gets support from the phenomenology of deliberation. Indeed, we believe that

David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1987), Essay 3. For a form of non-cognitivism which would not foreground desire see Simon Blackburn, “How to Be an Ethical Anti-realist,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12 (1987), especially p. 371.

he is wrong on a further point. For the argument given for the background presence of desires closes off the form of cognitivism that he apparently prefers, the kind that claims that there may be motivation in the absence of desires in the background. Importantly, however, it does not close off all forms of cognitivism. For, as we have already remarked, it remains open for the cognitivist to claim that the desires that are present in the background are such that their presence is entailed by the presence of certain of his beliefs. With regard to this form of cognitivism what we claim to have shown is not that it is unsound, only that it too gains no support from the phenomenology of deliberation. For the phenomenology of deliberation shows only that desires do not always figure in the foreground of deliberation.

III.2 UNIVERSALIZATION DOES NOT GENERATE UTILITARIANISM

One of the strongest extant metaethical theses is R. M. Hare's claim that if an informed and consistent agent universalizes a reasoned decision, then the decision will pass the utilitarian test of promising to maximize the preference satisfaction of all affected parties.²⁰ A reasoned decision is one based on universal considerations: considerations which do not essentially involve any particular people or other individuals. An agent universalizes such a decision if he prescribes the counterpart options for all other situations in which those considerations apply, including situations where he is someone affected by the action—perhaps even adversely affected—rather than the agent.

We believe that this thesis is false and that the strict background view of desire shows that it is false. We shall show that while the thesis is plausible under the view that desire always has a foreground presence in pre-universalized decisions, it loses all plausibility under the strict background view.²¹

Suppose that I am *a* and prescribe that $F(a, b, c)$, where this is an action done by me which adversely affects *b* and *c*. I may be Socrates, the action may be that of drinking the hemlock and *b* and

²⁰R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press of Oxford University Press, 1981), page 111.

²¹Here we draw on an argument in Philip Pettit, "Universalizability Without Utilitarianism," *Mind* 96 (1987), pp. 74–82.

c may be some adversely affected young friends. Consider now the difference between the scenario projected by the strict background view and that which appears if you relax the strictness and allow that desire is also always present in the foreground. Under the strict background view I will have decided for $F(a, b, c)$ on the grounds, say, that that option is the only virtuous one. Under the alternative I will have made my decision on the grounds that drinking the hemlock has the property of promising to satisfy a certain desire of mine: the desire to do the virtuous thing.

Under the scenario associated with the strict background view, I will be unmoved by the effect of universalizing and seeing, say, that were I in *b*'s position or *c*'s, I would desire that the agent not drink the hemlock. I will be unmoved at least, so long as the property in view of which I opt for $F(a, b, c)$ is that this is the virtuous option. I will say that I should discount what I would desire were I in one of the other positions because, clearly, I would not be sufficiently alert to the virtuous character of the action, were I situated there; otherwise I would continue to desire that the action be performed.

But if the strict background view undermines Hare's thesis, it is significant that the view that desire is always present in the foreground would lend it plausibility; this suggests that such a view is at the origin of the thesis.²² Under the scenario associated with this view, I am likely to be impressed if universalization shows me that while my desire in the *a* position is satisfied by the action, the desires I would have in positions *b* and *c* are not. That observation raises the question as to why position *a* desire should be weighted more heavily than the other desires. Suppose the three people were to take turns in the *a* position; this may not make sense with drinking hemlock, but it will in many cases. What the observation shows is that each will enjoy less desire satisfaction overall if each takes the *F*-option when he is the agent.²³ This ought to disturb anyone who thinks his reason for acting is always the state of his desire and who universalizes whatever decision he makes.

²²As argued in Pettit, "Universalizability Without Utilitarianism," Section II.

²³In Derek Parfit's terms, the view that they should each take that option is directly collectively self-defeating. See *Reasons and Persons*, Part 1.

III.3 INTEGRITY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

Bernard Williams has argued in a number of places for the value of what he calls "integrity."²⁴ Negatively cast, this is the property lacking in an agent who relates to his own desires, or at least to his own ground-level desires, in just the way that he relates to the desires of others; the agent's ground-level desires will be those he has prior to considering the desires of all others. Integrity then is the property that is conspicuously absent in the utilitarian agent who seeks to maximize desire satisfaction overall and who is indifferent as to how his own desires fare relative to the desires of others. As Williams puts it: "His own decisions as a utilitarian agent are a function of all the satisfactions which he can affect from where he is: and this means that the projects of others, to an indeterminately great extent, determine his decision."²⁵

The real challenge for someone who believes in the value of integrity, however, is to characterize it in a persuasive, positive fashion, and here is the point at which the strict background view of desire is relevant. On a foreground view of desire integrity is easily taken as an elusive and controversial value. On a strict background view it is something straightforwardly desirable.

Suppose you believe that desire is foregrounded in every act of deliberation and you wish to give a positive characterization of integrity. You wish to explain how it is that a person of integrity treats his own desires differently from the desires of others. The desires of others can be mentioned in the premises of an agent's deliberation, in just the way that his own current and actual desires are supposed always to figure there on the foreground view. Hence, at least if you continue to concentrate on the foreground, you will probably be driven to say that the person of integrity treats his own desires differently, or at least those of his desires that are important to him, by giving them a greater weight than the desires of others. You will be led to conceive of integrity in a manner which makes it into a controversial value: a value involving a questionable partiality to self.

²⁴See in particular Williams's contribution to J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and the first and third papers in his collection *Moral Luck*.

²⁵*Utilitarianism: For and Against*, p. 115.

We are not sure whether Williams endorses such a conception of integrity, though his remarks sometimes tend in this direction, as when he asks rhetorically how someone can be expected to regard the fulfillment of a deep-seated project of his own as one satisfaction among others.²⁶ But even if Williams is not guilty of understanding integrity in the manner suggested by the view that desire is always present in the foreground of deliberation, others certainly do understand his notion in this way. Thus, in arguing that the demands of integrity would be satisfied by giving each agent the prerogative of weighting his own projects more heavily than those of others, Samuel Scheffler indicates that he understands integrity in that way.²⁷ And, even more clearly, R. M. Hare shows that he shares such an interpretation of Williams on integrity when he criticizes him for giving that label to “the self-centred pursuit of one’s own projects.”²⁸

While such a view of integrity makes it look like a rather controversial value, the strict background view of desire suggests a much more compelling characterization. The strict background view means, after all, that there is an obvious answer to the question of how an agent is supposed to treat his own ground-level desires differently from the desires of others. An agent will treat his own desires suitably differently, and exemplify integrity, so far as he is sometimes prepared to act on his own ground-level desires without bringing them explicitly into the foreground of deliberation.²⁹ If somebody else desires that *p*, and he wishes to take this into account in his decision making, then he must foreground the consideration of that desire. But if he himself desires that *p*, assuming at least that this is not something like a craving, it will make perfect sense for him to act on that desire without explicitly focusing on it

²⁶Ibid., p. 116.

²⁷Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1982).

²⁸R. M. Hare, “Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism,” in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 29.

²⁹According to the strict background view, agents will always treat their own desires differently at *some* level; they can act only on their own desires, even if the desire they act on is the higher-order one that desire satisfaction be maximized overall. Integrity means being willing to act on some of one’s own *ground-level* desires without making them explicit in the foreground of deliberation.

in his deliberation; all he may focus on is the fact that it is desirable in some way that *p*.

Integrity comes on the cheap, under the conception of it that goes with the strict background view of desire. But it is a virtue; and it poses a problem for desire-based utilitarianism.

In order to see that integrity in this modest sense is a virtue, consider an analogy with belief. An agent who acts on his own beliefs will not normally foreground the fact that he believes the things in question, whereas he cannot act on the belief of someone else without doing this. Thus it would seem that as integrity with desires comes easily, so does the analogous trait with beliefs. But the trait with beliefs is still an excellence, as is obvious if we consider the specter of the wishy-washy liberal. He is the person, we may imagine, who inhibits his ground-level inclination to believe anything, at least anything of moment, refusing to take it seriously until he has established that it is an inclination present also in others. Now it is clear that there may be virtue in questioning your own beliefs if they clash with those of others. But it is equally clear that the wishy-washy liberal is grotesquely self-effacing, that he is culpable for failing to take a stand, for failing to let his own ground-level beliefs congeal firmly in behavior. We hold that just as the person who eschews wishy-washy liberalism is to be praised for the way in which he stands by his beliefs, letting his evidential and logical perceptions weigh with him, so the person who exhibits integrity should be praised for how he stands by his own desires. Integrity is simply the excellent habit of taking your ground-level desires seriously, not allowing your perceptions and your sensitivities to be undermined by the observation that others see things differently and desire other outcomes.

Is integrity a controversial form of partiality then under this interpretation? Surely not. Consider Socrates once again. When he sticks with his decision to drink the hemlock he does not let the fact that this is what he desires weigh more heavily than the fact that his friends desire him to do otherwise. What he weighs more heavily is rather the perceived fact, at the origin of his ground-level desire, that drinking the hemlock is the virtuous option. And that is no form of partiality to self; it is simply a case of remaining true to the perceptions which nourish his desires.

But not only does integrity, under our modest interpretation, seem a virtue; it raises all the problems for desire-based forms of

utilitarianism that Williams mentions. If someone goes for such a form of utilitarianism, then it does indeed seem that he refuses to be faithful to the desires occasioned in him by the properties he contemplates. It seems that he has to distance himself from his own ground-level desires and put them on a par with the desires of others in a manner which eradicates his own distinctive position. Utilitarianism does for desire what wishy-washy liberalism would do for belief. Wishy-washy liberalism would require an agent not to indulge his own spontaneous inclinations to believe this or that, but to determine what he should believe by some sort of aggregation over the credal inclinations of the total population. Utilitarianism requires, in parallel, that the agent should suspend his spontaneous inclination to desire this or that, allowing his desires to be determined instead by an aggregation over the desiderative inclinations of all the parties concerned.³⁰

III.4 AUTONOMY IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

We assume, in line with the standard tradition of thinking, that the autonomous person is someone who acts only on desires which he in some sense endorses: only on desires with which he identifies, claiming them as indeed his own and not just as visitations from outside. He is an agent, as it is often put, whose values are not subverted by his desires. If integrity requires that a person should relate to his own desires differently from how he relates to the desires of others, autonomy requires that he should relate to his own desires in a manner which leaves him master rather than slave. As Jon Elster puts it: “of an autonomous person we can say that he possesses the desire, rather than that the desire possesses him.”³¹

As with integrity, however, autonomy raises a serious question of interpretation, a question on which the issue about the place of desire in decision making bears. If desire is always present in the foreground of deliberation, then autonomy will probably assume

³⁰In suggesting that utilitarianism raises a problem similar to that which would be raised by wishy-washy liberalism, we do not mean to suggest that it is as crazy a doctrine. Desire-based utilitarianism has a lot to be said for it, wishy-washy liberalism has nothing.

³¹Jon Elster, *Explaining Technical Change* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 87.

one form. If the strict background view of desire is correct, then autonomy assumes another: as we think, a more modest and appealing form.

Suppose that desire is held always to be present in the foreground. What is it going to mean then for an agent to remain the master of his desires, not letting them undermine his values? It is going to seem that such an agent will be required to check every act of deliberation for the desire or desires it ascribes, allowing force only to those desires that he ratifies. The question to be raised in every deliberation is whether the agent in his heart of hearts really identifies with the desires mentioned. Autonomy is going to be at risk in every act of decision then; it is going to be a global ideal, challenging the agent at every turn.

Although variously understood, autonomy is thought by many recent philosophers to pose just such a challenge. In someone like Sartre it means the challenge of reconstructing your every desire from scratch, giving power only to those which you freely choose to be moved by.³² In more analytical thinkers it means the challenge of establishing which desires you have the higher-order desire to be moved by and giving authority in your life only to those desires.³³ Any such view of autonomy is beset with difficulties, for it is not clear how autonomy can be fully achieved without a potentially endless advance up the hierarchy of choice or desire: choice or desire at each level is autonomous, it seems, only if it is endorsed a level up.

The significance of autonomy shifts dramatically if we adopt the strict background view of desire, denying that desire always has a foreground presence in deliberation. The question of interpretation with which we began is, "What can it mean for an agent to be the master of his desires, not allowing them to subvert his values?" If we adopt the strict background view, then autonomy cannot require the interrogation of every act of deliberation for the desire it

³²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (London, England: Methuen, 1957), Part 4.

³³See for example, Gerald Dworkin, "Acting Freely," *Noûs* 4 (1970); and Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971). For a useful and congenial critique of that paper, though one that unnecessarily commits itself to cognitivism, see Gary Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975). See also Elster, *Explaining Technical Change*, p. 87.

foregrounds, since deliberation does not always foreground desire. If deliberation is subject to any one general form of interrogation, the question will not be "Do I really identify with the desire ascribed?" but "Is the crucial property which determines my decision really as desirable as I am assuming?" But that is not a question about whether I am master rather than slave in relation to my desires; it is not therefore the sort of question associated with the concern to be autonomous.

So what then does the ideal of autonomy come to on the strict background view of desire? We can think of only one plausible proposal. This is that autonomy consists in not being driven by what we might describe as pathological desires. Under the strict background view your values are naturally taken as the things you judge desirable, the properties you focus on in the course of deliberation. If your values are threatened in some way by your desires, as lack of autonomy is supposed to involve, then that can only mean that some of your desires are not properly responsive to the values you hold: the properties you judge desirable. Some of your desires, for example, are compulsive, or capricious.

Consider a desire I might have to keep my room tidy. While many of us will see tidiness as desirable, it is all too clear that my desire to keep my room tidy is capable of assuming a strength in the determination of my actions which is out of proportion to the value I ascribe to tidiness and in particular out of proportion to its value relative to certain other values: say, the value of getting down to work. If it assumes a strength which is disproportionate in this way, then it becomes a compulsive desire and, plausibly, it reduces my autonomy: it means that the desire takes on a life of its own in my mental world, making me slave rather than master.

Again, consider the sorts of desire I form if I am capricious, now being moved by this property, now by that. We all acknowledge that spontaneity is good, but were I capricious in the manner envisaged, I would be more naturally seen as enslaved rather than spontaneous. I would be the captive of present fancy and whim, a pawn in the service of every passing mood. With caprice of this kind, just as much as with compulsion, my desires take charge of my values, if indeed I can be ascribed any values.

Our interpretation of autonomy is very different from that which is sponsored by the foreground view of desire, since it means that autonomy is threatened only in fairly special circum-

stances, such as those associated with weakness of will, compulsions and the rule of whim, not in every act of deliberation. Under this interpretation, a better name for the virtue might be “orthonomy” rather than “autonomy.” It consists in forming your desires according to the right sort of principles rather than the wrong. It means being sensitive to the properties that count for you as values and not being disrupted by pathologies of desire. Like autonomy, orthonomy contrasts etymologically with heteronomy—as orthodoxy contrasts with heterodoxy—but heteronomy now has the sense, not of being ruled from outside, but rather of being ruled by inappropriate laws: the laws, precisely, of pathology.

We can be a little bit more precise on what orthonomy in this sense requires. It requires that the properties which the agent countenances as valuable—the properties which he desires—figure consistently in the determination of which options he comes to desire. The heteronomous person is moved by different properties at different times, without any relevant difference of circumstances, or he is moved by properties weighted differently against one another at different times. We cannot say of him that he is the more or less consistent executor of such and such a value system. We can say only that what he does, if it reflects his values, reflects equally the vagaries of gland and humor: it is a function of what he happens to find salient at any moment, whom he happens to be with, how he happens to feel.

These comments should help to show that our interpretation of autonomy is plausible and engaging. The interpretation also has the attractive feature of making autonomy into something that is as relevant for belief as for desire; here we see a parallel with our account of integrity. As autonomy in desire means having only desires that are sensitive to your values, so the counterpart virtue in belief will mean having only beliefs that are sensitive to whatever logical and evidential considerations you bring to bear on them. Dan Dennett conjures up a situation where that virtue is lacking.

Surely the following has happened to you—it has happened to me many times; somebody corners me and proceeds to present me with an argument of great persuasiveness, of irresistible logic, step by step. I can think of nothing to say against any of the steps. I get to the conclusion and can think of no reasons to deny the conclusion, but I don't believe it! This can be a social problem. It is worse than unsatis-

fyng to say: 'Sorry, I don't believe it, but I can't tell you why. I don't know'.³⁴

It is indeed a social problem and it is also a problem of a moral sort. It means that in regard to some of your beliefs you are slave rather than master.

Just as the strict background view of desire offers us an austere conception of integrity, so it provides us with a relatively modest interpretation of autonomy. The modest interpretation fits with the grand tradition from Aristotle to Kant but it is out of kilter with more modern ways of thinking. It makes autonomy an important trait of character but it does not give it the high-flown status which it enjoys, for example, in existentialist circles. More even than with integrity, autonomy is not what it generally seems.

III.5 PRUDENCE IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

Prudence, by all accounts, is the admirable trait of being disposed to take steps now, to fulfill desires which you foresee yourself having later. It is the virtue of not being a prisoner of the present: the virtue of being responsive to future as well as to present desires. Because prudence bears on the relationship between a person and his desires, as do integrity and autonomy, it is no surprise to find that its significance varies as we construe it in the light, now of the foreground view of desire, now of the strict background view.

Suppose you take the view that the desires an agent acts on are always present in the foreground. Imagine a prudent agent who, foreseeing that he will want hot chocolate at bedtime, buys milk now. On the foreground view of desire, that agent will deliberate on the basis of the desire which drives him to buy milk now: his present desire to satisfy his bedtime desire for hot chocolate. And so with such an agent you will have to say that prudence involves his being responsive to his now-for-then desires, in particular his present desires to have his future desires satisfied.

This however is a crazy view of prudence. It means that prudence makes a demand on a person only so far as he happens antecedently to have present desires for the satisfaction of his de-

³⁴*Brainstorms*, p. 308. See also pp. 248–253.

sires in the future. But prudence makes a demand even on someone who lacks such desires: it requires him precisely to form and act on desires of that type.

The scope observation rehearsed in earlier contexts enables us to say more exactly what is wrong with this conception of prudence. The conception involved means that the prudent person recommends to himself present action for the satisfaction of future desires only so long as he has a present desire for that satisfaction. But this implication conflicts with the observation that any prudent agent will recommend such action even for those worlds where he lacks the present desire; he will think that in those worlds too the thing for him to do would be to act with a view to the satisfaction of future desires.

The strict background view of desire suggests a different, and a reasonable, conception of prudence. On this conception the prudent agent is simply someone for whom the fact that an option will satisfy a future desire makes for its desirability. If such an agent chooses an option on this ground, then he will be driven by a present desire for the satisfaction of his future desires. But that present desire will belong in the background; it will not be mentioned in the premises that deliberatively guide him.

The agent envisaged will be moved by a consideration of the kind "I will want milk at bedtime, so I ought to buy some now"; "I will want a pension in retirement, so I ought to contribute to a pension fund now." Being moved by such considerations, he will desire the action he comes to choose for any time or world at which they continue to obtain, even times or worlds where his present desire fails. As he envisages himself failing at such times and worlds to act with a view to his future desires, he will be frustrated: he will see himself as imprudent. All of this is as it should intuitively be. Prudence involves the belief that a person's future desires make a demand on him at any time, even at a time when he has no desire to fulfill those future desires. It involves the belief that the property of an option that it will tend to ensure the satisfaction of these future desires is a valuable property, a property which he ought to desire in options.

We need not expand on this, our preferred view of prudence, since it will already be familiar from the work of Thomas Nagel.³⁵

³⁵Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1970).

But whereas our argument for that view of prudence presupposes just the strict background view of desire, a view that is uncommitted on the issue between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, his at times seems to presuppose cognitivism. He suggests that not only have present desires no foreground, deliberative role in the prudent agent; so they likewise have no background, motivational role. "Nothing is commoner than desires for what is future, but they are nearly always motivated by reasons which will obtain in the future, in which case the desires do not originate the motivation."³⁶ The lesson which we draw on prudence, like the other lessons derived in this section, is a lesson, we believe, that ought to impress cognitivist and non-cognitivist alike. It is part of an ecumenical, not a sectarian, doctrine.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it may be useful to draw the threads of our argument together in a theme which has not so far been made explicit. The theme is this: that short of adopting a cognitivist view of desire, there is room and need to see desire as a sort of state which closely parallels belief. We think that many philosophers see too great a divide between desire and belief and that this has occasioned error and misconception.

There are three important analogies between beliefs and desires. First of all, both states come in degrees and, at least if the intentional conception is sound, play a role in the genesis of reasoned action. Second, both make an impact in deliberation via truth-evaluable propositions: in the case of desire, propositions like "It is desirable that p" or perhaps even "I desire that p"; in the case of belief, "p" or "It is probable that p" or perhaps even "I believe that p." Third, and most importantly for our purposes, desires are like beliefs so far as the propositions which represent them in deliberation do not generally ascribe the states represented; as a half credence that p is generally represented by the proposition that it is probable that p to degree $\frac{1}{2}$, so the desire that p—and correspondingly perhaps its degree—is represented by the proposition that it is desirable in some way that p.³⁷

³⁶Ibid., p. 43.

³⁷It may be suggested that the appropriate form of such a premise is

The strict background view of desire amounts to little more or less than taking such analogies seriously. Given they hold, the five lessons drawn in Section III follow quite naturally. That is exciting news, for the lessons come in ecumenical garb. They can be countenanced by cognitivists and non-cognitivists alike.³⁸

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always "I have credence $\frac{3}{4}$ that p." But note that this will only allow me to endorse the conclusion for worlds and times where I continue to have that credence: these, as distinct from world-times such that my current actual credence that p-given-each-of-those is $\frac{3}{4}$. This scope observation tells against this suggestion in the way in which scope observation tells against foreground views of desire; the suggestion amounts to a foreground view of credence. In this connection, see Brian Ellis, "Truth as a Mode of Evaluation," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 61 (1980), pp. 85–99.

³⁸We are grateful for many useful comments received when versions of the paper were presented at Oriol College, Oxford; the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University; Department of Philosophy, University of Otago; and the New Zealand Division of the Australasian Association for Philosophy. We are particularly grateful for independent comments received from John Collins, Lloyd Humberstone, Frank Jackson, Peter Menzies, Graham Oddie, David Lewis and Huw Price, and for the comments of an anonymous referee.