Getting what you want

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1 Introduction

A widely shared sentiment, articulated by Dennis Stampe, is that desire
satisfaction is 'truth by a different name' (1986, p. 154). The sentiment can
be sharpened by appeal to two principles, one about belief and the other
about desire:

> *Truth-is-Truth Principle*
> If A believes p, then A has a belief that is true in exactly the worlds
> where p is true.[1]

> *Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle*
> If A wants p, then A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds
> where p is true.[2]

The Truth-is-Truth Principle is true. But, we will argue, the Satisfaction-is-
Truth Principle is not. An agent may want p without having a desire that is
satisfied in exactly the worlds where p is true—in particular, without hav-
ing a desire that is satisfied in every world where p is true. Such an agent
has a desire whose satisfaction conditions are what we call *ways-specific*:
it is satisfied only when p obtains in certain ways.

(The Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle presupposes that desire is a propo-
sitional attitude.[3] Whether this presupposition is true is orthogonal to our
argument, which works just as well against a version of the Satisfaction-is-

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[1] Though widely accepted, Bach (1997) questions a principle in this vein.

[2] See e.g. (Searle, 1983, ch. 2), (Whyte, 1991), (Stampe, 1994), (Heathwood, 2006).
Condoravdi and Lauer (2016) give a contextualist take on the principle. Braun (2015) en-
dorses a similar principle, which he calls 'The Weak Content-Specification Version of the
Relational Analysis of Desire Ascriptions' (on which more in §10): 'If N is a proper name
and S is an infinitival phrase (with or without explicit subject), then: if $\ulcorner N$ wants $S \urcorner$ is true,
then the referent of N has a desire that is satisfied in exactly those worlds in which the
proposition that S semantically expresses is true' (p. 149).

[3] A presupposition contested by e.g. Montague (2007) and Moltmann (2013).

Truth Principle that doesn't mention propositions: if A wants to φ, then A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she φs.)

Consider a case. Millie says that she wants to drink milk. Suppose (and we'll revisit this supposition later) that she is right. Intuitively, Millie nonetheless does not have a desire that is satisfied when she drinks spoiled milk. Millie wants to drink milk, but, intuitively, not just any old milk will do.

To show that a case like Millie's is a counterexample to the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle, we need to establish two claims. First, agents like Millie do want what they say they want—e.g. Millie does want to drink milk. Second, Millie indeed does not have a desire that is satisfied when she drinks spoiled milk, and similarly for agents like her.

Fara (2003, 2013) and Lycan (2012, ms) accept similar claims on the basis of similar cases.[4] We provide new arguments for both claims. Our arguments for the first go beyond those offered by Fara and Lycan for analogues of our first claim.

The only support they offer for claims analogous to our second claim is intuitions about when agents get what they want—e.g the intuition that Millie doesn't have a desire that is satisfied when she drinks spoiled milk.[5] As you might expect, these intuitions have been contested (by Braun (2015) and Prinz (ms), as cited in (Lycan, 2012, pp. 205–6)). These contested intuitions about getting what you want play no role in our argument. Instead, we argue by appeal to the *dispositional role* of desire. Because agents are disposed to satisfy their desires, an agent's dispositions provide important evidence about the satisfaction conditions of her desires. That evidence, we argue, shows that desire satisfaction is indeed ways-specific.

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[4]Fara (2013) rejects a principle closely related to the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle, which she calls the 'content-specification version of the relational analysis' (p. 254) of desire ascriptions. She gives only an instance of the principle: ' "Lora wants to be in London" is true just in case Lora has a desire that is satisfied in exactly those possible worlds in which she is in London' (p. 254) (in her (2003), she rejects a similar principle). The left-to-right direction of the principle—the direction that she objects to—is an instance of the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle if we accept, as we should, that if Lora wants to be in London, then 'Lora wants to be in London' is true. See more in §10. Lycan isn't explicit about just what principles he objects to. We read him (2012, pp. 206–7; ms, pp. 2–3) as committed to the possibility of cases that would falsify the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle. And in his (ms), he cites Fara's (2013) and seems to side with her (pp. 2–3).

[5]van Rooij (1999) and Persson (2005, ch. 10) also discuss these intuitions.

2   The argument

Here is our argument at a high level: agents are disposed to satisfy their desires; desire-based dispositions are ways-specific; so, desire satisfaction is ways-specific.

To begin, let's fill out the case of Millie and the spoiled milk. Millie is eating a chocolate chip cookie, and says out loud to no one in particular, 'I want to drink some milk, but the milk in the refrigerator is spoiled.' Although her path to the refrigerator is clear, Millie does not drink the spoiled milk. We'd like to suppose that Millie really does want to drink milk, and that she is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk. In §3–5, we'll discuss whether these are legitimate suppositions—whether the case as we suppose it to be really is possible. For now, we'll assume that the suppositions are legitimate: Millie wants to drink milk and she is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk.

Millie wants to drink milk, but she isn't disposed to drink the spoiled milk—she isn't disposed to drink the only milk that she believes is available to her. It's not that she isn't disposed to drink any kind of milk at all. She is. It's rather that her disposition to drink milk is discriminating. It is *specific* to certain kinds of milk. Not just any old milk will do.

Millie has what we call a *ways-specific desire-based disposition*. If an agent has a ways-specific desire-based disposition, then for some p, (i) she wants p; (ii) there are ways for p to obtain that she is disposed to bring about; but (iii) there are other ways for p to obtain that she is not disposed to bring about, even if she believes that she can only bring it about that p obtains in those ways. Because Millie's disposition is specific to certain ways of its being the case that she drinks milk—ways in which she drinks certain kinds of milk—it is ways-specific in just this sense.

To run our argument, we need to state carefully the thesis that agents are disposed to satisfy their desires. Here's how others have stated the thesis:

> [T]he primitive sign of having a desire is trying to satisfy it. (Humberstone (1990, p. 107), riffing on Anscombe)

> [T]he actions a desire is a disposition to perform are those that would

satisfy that desire provided the agent's operative beliefs were true. (Stampe, 1994, p. 246)

[A] desire is manifested in…behaviour aimed at satisfying the desire. (Hyman, 2014, p. 85)

In stating the thesis ourselves, we commit only minimally on further questions concerning how desires relate to dispositions. We do not assume, for example, that desires *are* dispositions. And, as far as we're concerned, the principle can be contingent, or restricted to certain kinds of agents.[6] We propose:

> *Satisfaction–Disposition Principle*
> If *A* has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where *p* is true, then *A* is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that *p* obtains.[7]

Now the argument.

P1.   If Millie has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks milk, then Millie is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks milk.   (instance of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle)

P2.   Millie wants to drink milk.

P3.   Millie is not disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks milk—she is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk .

C1.   Millie does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks milk.   (by P1 and P3)

C2.   Millie wants to drink milk and Millie does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks milk. (by P2 and C1)

C2 is a counterexample to the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle, which entails that if Millie wants to drink milk, then she has a desire that is satisfied in

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[6]It needn't apply, for example, to agents incapable of action, like Strawson (1994, ch. 10)'s "Weather watchers."

[7]A weaker version of this principle that employs an 'other things equal' clause to accommodate troublesome cases would work just as well for our purposes, as we explain in §6.

exactly the worlds where she drinks milk.[8]

In its basic form, our argument then is this: agents are disposed to satisfy their desires (P1); desire-based dispositions are ways-specific (P2 and P3); so, desire satisfaction is ways-specific (C2).

Now we'll defend the premises.

3   In defense of P2: on saying something false but helpful

In defending the premises, we claim first that *a certain principle is true*—the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle (P1). We claim second that *a certain kind of case is possible*—one where Millie wants to drink milk (P2) and isn't disposed to drink the spoiled milk, despite believing it's the only milk available to her (P3).

In arguing for P2 and P3, then, we are arguing for the possibility that P2 and P3 are true together. In this section and the next, we are concerned with defending P2. We'll assume that P3 is true and maintain that it's possible for P2 to be true as well. In §5, we'll assume that P2 is true and maintain that it's possible for P3 to be true as well.

Turn now to the argument for P2. Millie, recall, asserts that she wants to drink milk. Suppose that Millie speaks sincerely and is as good as anyone at knowing what she wants. The default position here should be that Millie does want to drink milk. That is, after all, how things would seem if you were faced with someone like Millie, who gives a sincere, well-informed report of what she wants.

(To be totally clear: in maintaining that it's true that Millie wants to drink milk, we don't mean to implicate that it isn't also true that Millie wants to drink *fresh* milk. Indeed, we think it's both true that Millie wants to drink milk and true that Millie wants to drink fresh milk!)

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[8] The Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle says that if *A* wants *p*, then *A* has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where *p* is true. So, strictly speaking, C2 is a counterexample to the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle just in case the proposition denoted by the complement of 'want' in 'Millie wants to drink milk' is one that's true in exactly the worlds where Millie drinks milk (for more see §10). Of course it seems to be such a proposition that's denoted! (It is not, for example, the proposition that Millie drinks milk or stubs her toe.) You might worry, though, that in fact it's a different proposition. We defer here to Fara (2013), who argues extensively that the complements of desire ascriptions like 'Millie wants to drink milk' do denote the propositions that they seem to.

An imaginary interlocutor might resist our claim that it's possible that Millie wants to drink milk (while not being disposed to drink the spoiled milk). The interlocutor would then need a hypothesis about why it's so natural to think that Millie does want to drink milk. Below is one such hypothesis; in the next section we consider another.

Often we say things that are false because a falsehood is most helpful for what we're trying to communicate (see e.g. (Lasersohn, 1999)). Take a case adapted from (Sperber and Wilson, 1985). Brigitte lives in Issy-les-Moulineaux, which is just outside the city limits of Paris. At a party in London, Brigitte is asked where she lives. She replies:

(1)   [Brigitte:] I live in Paris.

(1) is false, since Brigitte lives just outside the city limits of Paris. Nonetheless, (1) serves its communicative purpose perfectly well.

The hypothesis is that when Millie asserts (2) she is just like Brigitte: she says something false but helpful.

(2)   [Millie:] I want to drink milk.

Millie is *un*like Brigitte though. Here's why.

Brigitte must *retract* (1) in the face of the truth. Suppose that you hear Brigitte and say:

(3)   [You:] Actually, Brigitte doesn't live in Paris. (She in fact lives in Issy-les-Moulineaux, which is outside of Paris.)

If Brigitte is pressed—which is it, in Paris, or just outside the city limits?—she'd be under pressure to retract:

(4)   [Brigitte:] You are right; I don't live in Paris.

Brigitte must retract her original statement because one can't both live in Paris and outside of Paris (assuming one lives in just one place).[9]

But Millie does not need to retract (2) under pressure. Suppose that you hear Millie and say:

(5)   [You:] Actually, Millie doesn't want to drink milk. (She in fact wants to drink fresh milk.)

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[9]Yablo (2014, ch. 5) makes a similar point.

If Millie is pressed—which is it, milk, or fresh milk?—she isn't under pressure to retract. She does *not* have to say:

(6)   [Millie:] You are right; I don't want to drink milk.

While it can't both be true that one lives in Paris and true that one lives outside of Paris, it *can* both be true that one wants to drink milk and true that one wants to drink fresh milk. And, again, that is exactly what we say about Millie: it's true that she wants to drink milk, and it's true that she wants to drink fresh milk.

We can further bring out the dissimilarity between Millie's and Brigitte's cases by considering a third case, one in which the speaker says nothing false. Suppose that Yannick lives in the Marais, which *is* in Paris. At a party in London, Yannick is asked where he lives.

(7)   [Yannick:] I live in Paris.

Suppose that you hear Yannick and say:

(8)   [You:] Actually, Yannick doesn't live in Paris. (He in fact lives in the
       Marais, which is in Paris.)

This is nonsense! Yannick is under no pressure at all to retract (7). It's true that he lives in the Marais *and* it's true that he lives in Paris. Yes, Yannick could give you more information about where he lives by saying (9) instead of (7):

(9)   [Yannick:] I live in the Marais.

But just because the one statement is more informative than the other does not make the first false.

The same goes for Millie. Yes, she could give you more information about what she wants by saying (10) instead of (2):

(10)   [Millie:] I want to drink fresh milk.

But, again, just because the one statement is more informative than the other doesn't make the first false.

To summarize. Brigitte says one false but helpful thing (she lives in Paris) and one true thing (she lives just outside of Paris). Yannick says *two* true things, one of them (he lives in Paris) less informative than the other

(he lives in the Marais). We say that Millie is more like Yannick than like Brigitte: Millie says two true things, one of them (she wants to drink milk) less informative than the other (she wants to drink fresh milk).

The analogy between Yannick and Millie is imperfect. While living in the Marais entails living in Paris, it's controversial whether wanting to drink fresh milk entails wanting to drink milk.[10] However, our point remains: saying that Millie wants to drink milk doesn't specify everything about what she wants, just as saying that Yannick lives in Paris doesn't specify everything about where he lives. It's nonetheless true that Yannick lives in Paris. Likewise, we claim, it's nonetheless true that Millie wants to drink milk. A desire report need not be maximally specific in order to be true. Millie doesn't fully specify what she wants, but nevertheless what she says is true.

The dialectic in this section has been this. Supposing that Millie is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk, we've argued that it's possible that P2 is true—that Millie wants to drink milk. Our imaginary interlocutor contested this, hypothesizing that it must be that Millie said something false but helpful. As we've seen, though, this hypothesis fails.[11]

Millie's case could of course be filled out so that she does not want to drink milk. But it clearly makes sense, and in fact seems most natural, to take Millie at her word.

4   In defense of P2: on saying and asserting

In this section we consider a different hypothesis about why it's so natural to think that Millie wants to drink milk even if, as our imaginary interlocutor argues, Millie doesn't in fact want to. This hypothesis co-opts a distinction made by Braun (2015) between what one *says* and what one *asserts*.

According to Braun, you can say a certain proposition while at the very same time asserting various other propositions. Suppose you say p and p is false. When you say p, you may at the very same time be asserting some other proposition that is true. In such a case you said something false while

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[10]Heim (1992), for example, says that it doesn't, while von Fintel (1999) says that it does (see more in footnote 27).

[11]As we noted in the introduction, Fara (2003, 2013) and Lycan (2012, ms) also argue that seemingly true desire ascriptions, like (2), are indeed true.

asserting something true. In Braun's terminology, you have *spoken truly while saying something false* (see e.g. his p. 157).[12]

If Braun is right, then the following case is possible. Millie does not want to drink milk but says that she does. When saying that she wants to drink milk, she asserts some other proposition that is true—say, the true proposition that she wants to drink fresh milk. Our imaginary interlocutor could hypothesize that *this* is why it's so natural to think that Millie says something true when she says that she wants to drink milk, even if she does not in fact want to.

There are two ways resist this thought. The first would be to deny Braun's distinction between saying and asserting. Some may deny this, but we won't try to adjudicate the issue here.

The second way is to grant Braun's distinction, but resist our imaginary interlocutor's hypothesis. This is what we'll do, maintaining that Millie's case as we've described it is unlike the kind of case that Braun cites as a 'plausible example' (p. 157) of an agent using a desire ascription to assert something true while saying something false.[13]

Braun gives the following example (p. 157):

(11)   [Suppose that Sara is teaching a philosophy seminar and suppose she has noticed that many of her students in her seminar arrived late. So she utters:] I want everyone to arrive on time for the next meeting of this seminar.

Braun invites us to suppose, following Bach (2000) and Soames (2005, **?**), that 'everyone' is never contextually restricted, that it always quantifies over all people in the universe. According to Braun, what Sarah *says* is the proposition that she wants every human in the universe to arrive on time for the next seminar meeting, but she *asserts* all at once various

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[12]As precedents for his view, Braun cites similar distinctions made by Bach (**?**, **?**, 2005) on saying and implic-*i*-ing; Soames (2005, **?**) on semantic content and asserting; and **?** on locuting and asserting.

[13]We should emphasize that Braun is *not* committed to saying that Millie's case, as we've described it here in §4, is like his plausible example. More generally, we are not objecting to Braun's views about language: we neither object to his saying–asserting distinction (as we noted), nor do we object to the argument in which he puts that distinction to use. Rather, what we object to is the argument of an imaginary interlocutor who co-opts Braun's distinction. (See more in footnote 15 on the relationship between Braun's argument and our own.)

other propositions—among them the true proposition 'that Sarah wants everyone *to whom she is speaking* to arrive on time for the next meeting' (p. 158; emphasis in the original).[14] What she says is false (she does not want every human in the universe to arrive on time for the next meeting), but she nevertheless asserts a true proposition.

On our interlocutor's hypothesis, Millie is like Sarah. When Millie's dispositions are as we have supposed and she says that she wants to drink milk, she says something false but nonetheless asserts a true proposition, the proposition (say) that she wants to drink fresh milk.

But Millie is unlike Sarah, and retraction data again provide key evidence. Consider that if you insisted that Sarah doesn't really want *everyone* to come, she would be under pressure to retract, to disavow the proposition that she said. Take the following exchange, for example:

(12) [You:] Sarah doesn't want *everyone* to come to the next meeting on time! She just wants those to whom she was speaking to come to the next meeting on time!

(13) [Sarah:] Okay, fine. I don't want *everyone* to come; I just want those to whom I was speaking to come.

But as we saw in the last section, if you insisted that Millie doesn't really want to drink *milk*, she wouldn't be under pressure to retract.[15]

To summarize: we've claimed that it's possible that P2 is true—that Millie wants to drink milk, while assuming that she is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk. Our imaginary interlocutor contested this possibility, claiming that Millie said something false while nonetheless asserting something true. And while we may be able to imagine a version of our case in which this is in fact so, our interlocutor is committed to saying that if Millie is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk, she *must* be saying something false. This is what we deny.

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[14]This is a slight simplification. Braun suggests that Sarah may say more than one proposition in uttering (11).

[15]Now, if we were to stipulate that Millie does not want to drink milk—Braun makes such a stipulation in an analogous case in his §8.1—then she *should* be under pressure to retract. But that is not what's stipulated here in §4; rather, it's what's at issue.

5 In defense of P3: against the other desires hypothesis

Now P3: Millie is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk. In this section, we assume that P2—Millie wants to drink milk—is true, and argue that it's *possible* that P3 is also true. Suppose that you wanted to deny this possibility. Your claim would be that, given that Millie wants to drink milk, it *must* be that Millie is disposed to drink the spoiled milk. You'd then need a hypothesis about why Millie doesn't drink the spoiled milk, despite being disposed to drink it.

Here is such a hypothesis.

Start with something that everyone should agree on. How an agent acts depends not just on whether she has a certain desire and associated disposition, but also on what else she wants.[16] For example, suppose that Portia wants to buy a Porsche, and that she is disposed to buy a Porsche. She doesn't buy one, though, and that's because in addition to wanting to buy a Porsche, there's something else she wants: not to spend so much money that she is financially ruined. Her disposition to buy a Porsche isn't manifested because she wants this other thing.

According to the *other desires hypothesis* of Millie's inaction, Millie is like Portia. The hypothesis has two parts: (i) Millie *is* disposed to drink the spoiled milk, but (ii) she wants other things, preventing her disposition from manifesting.

Let's grant that Millie does want other things that bear on drinking the spoiled milk—e.g. she wants not to drink something sour, and she wants not to be sick to her stomach. The question is then whether her wanting these other things is interfering with the manifestation of a disposition to drink the spoiled milk—as the other desires hypothesis says. We think Millie has no such disposition.

To see why, contrast Millie with Portia, who, in being disposed to buy a Porsche, sees something in buying it: driving fast and making her friends envious. It makes sense that Portia would have a disposition to buy a Porsche— even though the disposition doesn't manifest itself—because a Porsche is alluring to her. But Millie sees nothing appealing at all in drinking the

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[16]Ashwell (2017) develops a theory on the interactions among desire-based dispositions.

spoiled milk. What would the appeal even be? Everything that is normally appealing to Millie about milk is absent in the spoiled milk. Millie enjoys the mild flavor and smell of fresh milk; the spoiled milk is overpoweringly sour. Millie likes the smooth mouth feel of fresh milk; in the spoiled milk, the protein has separated from the whey, forming unpleasant clumps. Spoiled, separated milk doesn't even have the nice creamy look of fresh milk. Given that the spoiled milk has no appeal for Millie, why *would* she be disposed to drink it?

Even if you're not convinced by our argument against the other desires hypothesis in Millie's case, there are other cases relevantly like Millie's where the other desires hypothesis clearly fails. In these cases, the agent does not want any other things that could explain her inaction.

Consider Trina, whose neighbor has, much to Trina's dismay, just installed a full-scale plastic replica of Michelangelo's David. The sculpture is all too visible from Trina's kitchen window, and her view of it needs to be blocked tonight. Having a tree planted in between the sculpture and the window seems best: Trina wants to have a tree planted in her backyard by the end of the day. It so happens that Trina believes that the only trees available to her today are bonsais, which are too small to block her view of anything. Further, bonsais don't have the majestic look that Trina has always admired in trees of the size that could block the statue. Nothing that appeals to Trina about having a tree planted is present with a bonsai. The day ends without Trina trying to have a bonsai planted.

The other desires hypothesis would say that (i) Trina is disposed to have a bonsai planted, but (ii) she wants other things, preventing this disposition from manifesting.

But we can easily suppose that Trina doesn't want any such things. Imagine that you go to Trina's backyard with a bonsai in hand, dig up a few inches of dirt, and tell Trina that you might plant the bonsai—how does she feel about it? Trina says that she doesn't care. As we know, nothing appeals to her about the bonsai. But neither is there anything unappealing. Having it planted comes at no cost to her. You are proposing to plant it for her, so she wouldn't have to get her hands dirty. And you wouldn't put the bonsai in a place that would stop Trina from planting a tree that could block the

statue. Nor would you plant it in a place that would impede the route that she normally takes when she walks across her yard, or...Even if Trina did want not to get her hands dirty or to have her normal route unimpeded, her desires would have no impact on whether she has a bonsai planted.

As far as Trina is concerned, it's fine if the bonsai is planted, and fine if not. Trina is *indifferent*. There's nothing she wants either way about the bonsai. In particular, there's nothing that she wants about the bonsai that would prevent the manifestation of a disposition to plant a bonsai. This contradicts the other desires hypothesis.

Consider Portia for contrast again. Portia is *ambivalent*. She is at once both attracted to buying a Porsche (it would mean fast driving and envious friends) and repelled by it (she'd surely go bankrupt). The unappealing features of buying a Porsche overwhelm the attraction, which is why Portia does not buy a Porsche. The other desires hypothesis makes perfect sense of the situation. Given that Portia is both attracted to and repelled by the prospect of buying a Porsche, it's natural to think that she is both disposed *to* buy it, and that she wants other things that speak in favor of *not* buying it—things that prevent the disposition to buy it from manifesting. Not so with Trina. She is indifferent, neither attracted to nor repelled by the prospect of having a bonsai planted. It is her indifference that explains her inaction.

The other desires hypothesis fails with Trina. The point of the hypothesis is to explain why an agent does not act despite having a (hypothesized) disposition to act. No doubt Trina's case could be filled out so that Trina is disposed to have a bonsai planted, yet does not do so for some reason or other. But it clearly makes sense to fill it out in the way we have. If you want to maintain that Trina *must* be disposed to have a bonsai planted, you can't merely give a way of filling out the case so that Trina has an unmanifested disposition to have a bonsai planted; you must show that there is no possible way of filling it out as we have just done.

If you prefer Trina's case to Millie's, run our argument with Trina. Either way, P3 stands: the agent (Millie, Trina) is not disposed (to drink the spoiled milk, to have a bonsai planted).

6 In defense of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle: on an 'other-things-equal' clause

The final premise of our argument to defend is P1, which is an instance of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle. We'll dispel one potential worry about the principle in this section and then others in §7 and §8.

When in a bold mood, philosophers state connections between desires and dispositions in the same form that we've stated the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle: if an agent is in such and such a desire state, then she is disposed to act thus-and-so-ly, given certain beliefs. When in a cautious mood, philosophers add an 'other things equal' clause: if an agent is in such and such a desire state, then, *other things equal*, she is disposed to act thus-and-so-ly, given certain beliefs.

You might worry that Millie's case calls for a cautious mood—that it calls for a version of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle with an 'other things equal' clause. If things were *un*equal with Millie, then our argument wouldn't go through.

Consider some ways for things to be unequal—ways for you to lack a disposition to do what you believe will satisfy your desire. You might be unaware of your desire, or have false second-order beliefs about your first-order beliefs about how to bring it about that your desire is satisfied, or be simply unable to bring it about that your desire is satisfied.

We can simply suppose that things are *not* unequal for Millie in these ways—that she is aware of her desires, that she believes that she believes that drinking the spoiled milk will bring it about that she drinks milk, and that she is perfectly able to drink the spoiled milk. Although there are many more ways for things to be unequal, we don't need to canvas them. Millie's case can be filled out so that things are not unequal in any of these additional ways. That's because her case, as already described, looks like a paradigm case where other things are equal. Everything is running smoothly: Millie isn't confused about her beliefs or desires, she's capable of drinking the spoiled milk, and the world is cooperating.

Using a version of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle with an 'other-things-equal' clause doesn't make a difference to our argument, since it makes perfect sense to think that other things are equal with Millie.

Zoom out for the moment and consider the broader dialectic. We have claimed that a certain case is possible, one where both P2 and P3 are true—where Millie wants to drink milk and is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk. Now we've added the supposition that other things are equal with Millie. But recall that for our argument to go through, we only need that there is *a* case where P2 and P3 are true and other things are equal. Our imagined interlocutor, on the other hand, must show that such a case (and all relevantly similar cases) is *impossible*.

7 In defense of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle: on agent satisfaction vs. desire satisfaction

Another kind of worry about the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle doesn't concern the details of Millie's case, but rather the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle itself. You could grant the possibility of Millie's case as we've described it (that is, you could grant that it is possible that Millie wants to drink milk and is not disposed to drink the sour milk), yet deny that this shows anything about the satisfaction conditions of her desires. In this section we'll consider one objection to the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle; in the next section, another.

In arguing that desire satisfaction is *not* ways-specific (although they don't put it in those terms), Braun and Prinz distinguish desire satisfaction from what they call *agent satisfaction*. Desire satisfaction is a matter of whether some one or other of an agent's individual desires is satisfied; agent satisfaction is a matter of whether the agent herself *feels* satisfied.[17]

With this distinction in mind, you might worry that the thesis that agents are disposed to satisfy their desires has been misunderstood: the thesis should *not* be understood in terms of individual desire satisfaction, (as it has been standardly (see e.g. §8 and the quotes on page **??**)), but rather in terms of agent satisfaction. So the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle gets it wrong when it says that if you have *a* desire—an individual desire—that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where *p* is true, then you are disposed

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[17]Unlike Prinz, who identifies agent satisfaction with an agent feeling satisfied, Braun does not explicitly say what he means by 'agent satisfaction'. We read him as having the same thing in mind as Prinz. Fara (2003), Persson (2005, ch. 10), and Lycan (2012) also discuss something like this distinction.

to what you believe will bring it about that *p* obtains. Rather, you are disposed to do what you believe will make yourself feel satisfied.

The worry is misguided. No doubt agents are in certain cases disposed to do what they believe will make themselves feel satisfied (although that doesn't mean they're not also disposed to do what they believe will satisfy their desires). But sometimes agents have desire-based dispositions that are *not* dispositions to do what they believe will make themselves feel satisfied. In such cases it's clear that desire satisfaction, not agent satisfaction, is what's at play.

Consider such a case: suppose that you want your name to live on after you die, and you do what you can to make it so. Suppose further that you don't in general feel good about merely *attempting* to reach your ends; rather, you feel satisfied only when you believe that your ends have been reached. (You're not one to hand out participation trophies.) As you work to make your name live on after your die—as you attempt to reach your end—you are unsure of whether you will succeed, and so you do not feel satisfied. And neither would you feel satisfied if you made your name live on after you die—if you in fact reached your end—since you don't feel anything at all after you die. You know all of this. So, as you do what you can to make your name live on, you neither experience nor anticipate any feeling of satisfaction.

You are disposed to do what you believe will make your name live on after you die. But your disposition is *not* to do what you believe will make yourself feel satisfied, since, again, you neither experience nor anticipate any feeling of satisfaction. Rather, your disposition is to do what you believe will satisfy one of your individual desires. The Satisfaction–Disposition Principle gets it right.

8   In defense of the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle: why accept it in the first place?

The final worry we'll consider about the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle is more general: why accept the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle in the first place?

The flat-footed answer is simple: the thesis that agents are disposed

to satisfy their desires is true, and the Satisfaction–Disposition is a way of making this thesis precise. The subtler answer tells us why the Satisfaction–Disposition principle is a good way of making the thesis precise.

Recall how others have stated the thesis:

> [T]he primitive sign of having a desire is trying to satisfy it. (Humberstone (1990, p. 107), riffing on Anscombe)

> [T]he actions a desire is a disposition to perform are those that would satisfy that desire provided the agent's operative beliefs were true. (Stampe, 1994, p. 246)

> [A] desire is manifested in…behaviour aimed at satisfying the desire. (Hyman, 2014, p. 85)

We can tease out two claims that are common among these quotes. The first is that from each desire, we can infer a disposition (or a trying, in Humberstone's case). The second is that this disposition is connected to the agent's desire in a certain way—it is a disposition to satisfy the desire. The Satisfaction–Disposition Principle, restated below, exemplifies both claims. It also allows us to make concrete predictions in a given case about whether an agent is disposed to do a certain thing, given her desires—something the above formulations don't allow us to do.

> *Satisfaction–Disposition Principle*
> If A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where p is true, then A is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that p obtains.

The crucial thing to establish is why this principle, and not some nearby principle, gets the connection between desires and dispositions right. Why would it be that it is exactly—i.e. all and only—the worlds where the desire is satisfied that matter to the disposition to satisfy it? Imagine that the principle were different.

Imagine, for example, that the principle were this: if A has a desire that is satisfied in *only* (but not necessarily all) worlds where p is true, then A is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that p obtains. Then we would have a problem of disjunction introduction. Suppose Millie has

a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks fresh milk. She thereby has a desire that is satisfied only in worlds where she drinks fresh milk *or sprains her ankle*. She is not, though, disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks fresh milk or sprains her ankle.

Alternatively, imagine that the principle were this: if A has a desire that is satisfied in *all* (but not necessarily only) worlds where p is true, then A is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that p obtains. Then we would have a problem of conjunction introduction. Suppose that Millie has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks fresh milk. She thereby has a desire that is satisfied in all worlds where she drinks fresh milk *and poisons her mother*. But Millie is not disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks fresh milk and poisons her mother.

The Satisfaction–Disposition Principle avoids both of these problems. Does it follow from the principle that Millie is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks spoiled milk or sprains her ankle? No, because she does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she does. Does it follow from the principle that Millie is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks spoiled milk and poisons her mother? No, because she does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she does.

9   Upshots: the dispositional role of desire satisfaction, revisited

We now have the premises, and so the conclusion: desire satisfaction is ways-specific. An agent may want p without having a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where p is true.

This is a welcome conclusion: the thesis that desire satisfaction is ways-specific *explains* why agents are disposed to act as they are. Millie is not disposed to drink the spoiled milk *because* she is disposed to satisfy her desires and *she does not have a desire that is satisfied when she drinks the spoiled milk*. She has a desire-based disposition that is specific to certain ways of its being the case that she drinks milk because she has a desire

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whose satisfaction conditions are specific to certain ways of its being the case that she drinks milk. More generally, agents have ways-specific desire-based dispositions *because* they are disposed to satisfy their desires and *desire satisfaction is ways-specific*. (This prompts a question for the defender of the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle: if desire satisfaction were *not* ways-specific, why would our desire-based dispositions be ways-specific, given that we're disposed to satisfy our desires?)

In addition to leading us to the conclusion that desire satisfaction is ways-specific, our argument gives us a new perspective on the dispositional role of desire satisfaction.

Consider, for example, that the following canonical principle connecting wanting and dispositions is false:

> *Want–Disposition Principle*
> If A wants p, then A is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that p obtains.[18]

Millie wants to drink milk, but she not disposed to drink the spoiled milk—not disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that she drinks milk. Millie has a ways-specific desire-based disposition, which the Want–Disposition–Principle says is impossible. Recall that if an agent has a ways-specific desire-based disposition, then for some p, (i) she wants p; (ii) there are ways for p to obtain that she is disposed to bring about; but (iii) there are other ways for p to obtain that she is not disposed to bring about, *even if she believes that she only can bring it about that p obtains in those ways*. If an agent has a ways-specific desire-based disposition, then the antecedent of the Want–Disposition Principle may be true of her, but the consequent not.

The Want–Disposition Principle is false, but in it is a kernel of truth. To see the kernel, consider that the Want–Disposition Principle is entailed by the conjunction of the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle and the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle, repeated here.

> *Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle*
> If A wants p, then A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds

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[18]Audi (1973, p. 4), Davidson (1976, p. 243), and Stalnaker (1984, p. 15), among many others, advocate principles in this spirit.

where p is true.

Satisfaction–Disposition Principle
If A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where p is true, then A is disposed to do what she believes will bring it about that p obtains.

Think of the Want–Disposition Principle as factored into these two principles that entail it. Once we remove the false part, the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle, we are left with the kernel of truth, the Satisfaction–Disposition Principle. Agents are disposed to satisfy their desires.

Another flaw in the Want–Disposition Principle sheds further light on the dispositional role of desire satisfaction. If the Want–Disposition Principle were true (and remember, we don't think that it is), we should be able to determine, just on the basis of certain of an agent's beliefs and whether she wants p, whether she is disposed to bring it about that p obtains in some certain way. But we can't do this. If all we know about Millie is that she wants to drink milk and that she believes that the only milk that's available to her is the spoiled milk, we can't determine whether she's disposed to drink the spoiled milk. What we need to know is whether drinking the spoiled milk is a way for her desire to be satisfied. Only then will we be able to pin down Millie's disposition.

10   Upshots: wanting, desires, and the Fara–Braun debate

Readers familiar with the debate between Fara and Braun may wonder how our argument relates to the locus of that debate: a set of three principles on which Fara and Braun disagree. The first principle is a version of the influential Relational Analysis of attitude ascriptions (e.g. Stalnaker (1988), Schiffer (2003)) as applied to desire ascriptions. The second two concern wanting, desires, and how they're related to each other.[19]

First, some terminology. We assume that at the level of logical form, the complement of 'want' denotes a proposition, a standard assumption

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[19]There is a further question about what the noun 'desire' denotes—i.e. what desires are (as opposed to *wanting* or *desiring*). This question, discussed by e.g. Schroeder (2004) and Braun (2015), is, we believe, beyond the scope of our paper.

among semanticists (see e.g. Heim (1992) and von Fintel (1999)).[20] Let 'p' range over terms that denote propositions; let 'p' range over the corresponding propositions (ignoring any context-dependence in p); let 'A' range over the names of agents; and let 'A' range over the corresponding agents.

In stating the principles ourselves, we diverge slightly from Fara (2013)—she states all three principles as biconditionals, but her objection just concerns the left-to-right directions,[21] which is how we state them (and why we call them weak).

> *Weak Relational Analysis*
> If ⌜A wants p⌝ is true, then A stands in the relation denoted by 'wants' to p.[22,23]

> *Weak Content Component*
> If A stands in the relation denoted by 'wants' to p, then A has a desire with p as its content.[24]

> *Weak Specification Component*
> If A has a desire with p as its content, then A has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where p is true.

Fara rejects the conjunction of the principles; Braun accepts it.[25]

How do the three principles relate to what we've said? Their conjunction, plus the following overwhelmingly plausible quotation principle *entail the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle*.

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[20]This assumption is compatible with the thought that at the level of *surface form*, the complement of 'want' may not seem to denote a proposition—contrast e.g. 'Millie wants to drink milk' with 'Millie believes that she will drink milk'.

[21]Braun makes the same point about the one of the principles, the Weak Specification Component, which we state just below.

[22]Stated more precisely, the principle is as follows. For all A, A, p, and p: if A denotes A and p denotes p, then if ⌜A wants p⌝ is true, then A stands in the relation denoted by 'wants' to p.

[23]Fara (2013) gives an instance of the principle: ' "Lora wants Rudy to be in London" is true just in case Lora bears the relation expressed by "wants" to the proposition that Rudy is in London' (p. 250). Braun states the principle as follows: 'If N is a proper name and S an infinitival phrase (with or without explicit subject), then ⌜N wants S⌝ is true iff the referent of N bears the relation expressed by "wants" to the proposition that S semantically expresses' (p. 144).

[24]For this principle and the next, see Fara's (2013) p. 253.

[25]More accurately, Braun accepts the latter two principles in conjunction with a different statement of the Weak Relational Analysis (see footnote 23).

Quotation

If *A* wants *p*, then ⌜A wants p⌝ is true.[26]

We repeat the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principe again for reference:

Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle

If *A* wants *p*, then *A* has a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where *p* is true.

We accept Quotation and thus side with Fara in rejecting the conjunction of the three principles.

Though we reject the conjunction of these principles, our argument is silent on which principle or principles should be rejected (our argument is compatible with rejecting any given one or combination of them). Determining which should be rejected requires settling broader questions in the philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, questions beyond the scope of this paper. We will, however, suggest a way to proceed.

Each principle links a certain fact about wanting, desires, or desire ascriptions to another. The Weak Relational Analysis, for example, links the proposition denoted by the complement of 'want' with a proposition to which the agent stands in the relation denoted by 'wants'. In particular, it says that the proposition denoted by the complement of a 'wants' ascription *is* a proposition to which the agent stands in the relation denoted by 'wants'. The Weak Content Component similarly says that the proposition to which the agent stands in the relation denoted by 'wants' *is* a proposition which is the content of one of the agent's desires. In turn, the Weak Specification Component says that the truth conditions of the proposition that is the content of the agent's desire *are* the satisfaction conditions of the agent's desires. All of the principles link various facts about wanting, desires, and desire ascriptions by saying that the propositions that figure in these facts are identical.

Our argument shows, though, that not all of these propositions can be identical. 'Millie wants to drink milk' is true, but Millie does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks milk. 'Millie wants to drink milk' is true but the truth conditions of the proposition

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[26]Stated more precisely, the principle is as follows. For all A, *A*, p, and *p*: if A denotes *A* and p denotes *p*, then if *A* wants *p*, then ⌜A wants p⌝ is true.

denoted by the complement of 'want'—the proposition that Millie drinks milk—*are not identical to* the satisfaction conditions of any of Millie's desires. Rather, the relevant one of Millie's desires has satisfaction conditions that are *more specific* than this. That is to say, the satisfaction conditions of that desire are identical to the truth conditions of some proposition—perhaps the proposition that Millie drinks fresh milk—that *entails* the proposition that Millie drinks milk. Millie does not have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks milk, but she does (say) have a desire that is satisfied in exactly the worlds where she drinks fresh milk. Millie has a desire whose satisfaction conditions are ways-specific.

What we know, then, is that in attempting to link wanting, desires and desire ascriptions, at least one of the principles *underspecifies*—to use Fara's term—at least one of the relevant propositions. For example, it could be the Weak Content Component that goes wrong in this way. Then the proposition that is the content of the agent's relevant desire is more specific than the relevant proposition to which the agent stands in the relation denoted by 'wants'. If this is the case, we would propose replacing the Weak Content Component with the following principle: if *A* stands in the relation denoted by 'wants' to *p*, then, *for some proposition q that entails p*, *A* has a desire with *q* as its content.[27] Here, the proposition that is the content of the relevant one of the agent's desires is not identical to the relevant proposition (*p*) to which she stands in the relation denoted by 'wants'. Rather, it is a more specific proposition (*q*). It needn't be, of course, that the problem is with the Weak Component Component. One of the other two principles could be the culprit instead. In that case, we would propose to replace those principles with alternatives that capture the specificity of the relevant propositions.

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[27]Fara (2003, p. 159) advocates a similar principle: 'A desire (or related attitude) ascription of the form "*A* wants *C*" is true just in case *A* has a desire (or hope, etc.) with proposition *Q* as its exact content for some *Q* that entails the proposition expressed by the embedded clause *C*.' (For a related view, see what Condoravdi and Lauer (2016, p. 31) call the 'Quine-Hintikka' analysis of 'want' ascriptions.) We believe that this is on the right track, but it's incorrect as it stands. It wrongly predicts that if ⌜*A* wants q⌝ is true, and *q* entails *p*, then ⌜*A* wants p⌝ is true. For example, it wrongly predicts that 'I want to die quickly' entails 'I want to die' (the example is from Anand and Hacquard (2013, p. 19)).

11 Conclusion

Our argument has been this: agents are disposed to satisfy their desires; desire-based dispositions are ways-specific; so, desire satisfaction is ways-specific. The Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle, which entails that desire satisfaction is *not* ways-specific, is false. In reaching this conclusion, we sidestep concerns about the probative value of intuitions about when people get what they want—intuitions on which Fara and Lycan rely—appealing instead to principles concerning the relation between desires and dispositions to act.

Our argument opens up certain questions. Satisfaction is not truth, so what is it? Desire satisfaction is ways-specific, but to which ways? We must reject one of the three principles at issue in the debate between Fara and Braun, but which? Finally, is the satisfaction of other attitudes—hoping, dreaming, fearing—also ways-specific? We've given a template for how to answer: look first to the attitude's dispositional role, and then work your way back to satisfaction.

Whatever the answers to these questions are, our argument shows that there's an important disanalogy between desire and belief. The Truth-is-Truth Principle is true but the Satisfaction-is-Truth Principle is false. Desire satisfaction is not truth by another name.

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