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Dead Sea Apple Cases of Disappointment

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Abstract

Paradigm cases of disappointment occur when we fail to attain the object of our desire, or when doing so frustrates some of our other desires. However, some non-standard cases seem not to fit this pattern. We occasionally find ourselves disappointed despite perceiving that our desire has been fulfilled. Experiences of this sort are sometimes called 'Dead Sea apples'. Such cases threaten the viability of theories that claim that fulfilling our desires always makes our lives go better for us. This paper considers what reflection on the nature of Dead Sea apples can teach us about the structure of desire and its relationship to well-being. I argue that this type of disappointment often occurs when we have a frustrated conjunctive desire that contains some satisfied conjuncts. The fact that the desire contains some satisfied conjuncts explains why we are prone to misidentifying it as fulfilled.

1 Preliminaries

There are two distinct species of disappointment (van Dijk and Zeelenbeg 2010). The first is an attitude directed towards persons (Menges 2020, 173–174; Fricker 2010). The second is an attitude directed towards outcomes. This paper concerns outcome-related disappointment.

Outcome-related disappointment comes in three varieties.

Disappointment type 1: Occurs when we have a desire for P, and we perceive that our desire for P is frustrated.

Disappointment type 2: Occurs when we have a desire for P, we perceive that our desire for P is fulfilled, and we perceive that fulfilling our desire for P has resulted in the frustration of some of our other desires.

Disappointment type 3: Occurs when we have a desire for P, we perceive that our desire for P is fulfilled, and we perceive that fulfilling our desire for P has frustrated none of our other desires.

Disappointment types 1 and 2 are simple. In such cases, disappointment is a reactive attitude that emerges when we perceive that our desires have been frustrated. Perhaps such cases also involve thwarted expectations.[1] Disappointment type 3 is more mysterious. It emerges despite us not perceiving a frustrated desire.

This paper is about type 3 disappointment. This phenomenon is neglected by the moral psychology literature.[2] However, it is discussed in the well-being literature under the nomenclature 'Dead Sea apples' (Lauinger 2011; Heathwood 2005, 493; Sidgwick 1907, 110). I will adopt this terminology going forward. I argue that many purported examples of Dead Sea apples describe cases where we have a frustrated conjunctive desire that contains some satisfied conjuncts. The fact that the desire contains some satisfied conjuncts explains why we are prone to misidentifying it as fulfilled. Residual cases of Dead Sea apples are accounted for by existing explanations in the literature. There are three interesting findings from this analysis. Firstly, theories that take the fulfilment of desires to necessarily improve well-being are not undermined by the existence of Dead Sea apples. Secondly, we should divest ourselves of the idea that we always have transparent access to the content of our desires. Thirdly, conjunctive desires play an important role in our mental lives that extends beyond the role that they play in disappointment.

The paper has the following structure: Section 2 outlines the problem of Dead Sea apples for desire theories of well-being. Section 3 considers existent explanations of the moral psychology of Dead Sea apples within the literature. Section 4 introduces a new way to account for Dead Sea apples based on observations about the structure of desire. Section 5 concludes with a summary.

2 The problem of Dead Sea apples

Well-being is the value that determines how well a subject's life goes for them. A prominent family of views locates a subject's well-being solely in the fulfilment and frustration of their desires. According to these views, fulfilling your desires improves your well-being, while frustrating them diminishes it. The extent to which you are made better or worse off by a desire for fulfilment or frustration is dependent upon the strength of your desire. The existence of Dead Sea apples poses a challenge to views of this sort. This is because it is implausible that the fulfilment of desires that give rise to Dead Sea apples improves well-being. Yet, this seems to be exactly what these theories entail.

Calotropis procera is a type of flowering plant with fruits so rancid that they have inspired poets, musicians, and philosophers. There is a stark incongruity between the appealing aesthetics and the noxious taste of these fruits. They are sometimes called 'Dead Sea apples', or 'Apples of Sodom'. John Milton alludes to them when narrating the fall of humanity in his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667):

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[1]Standard definitions of disappointment incorporate thwarted expectations (Brady 2010, 182–184; Roberts 2003, 241). However, while these may be required for disappointment to be a fitting response to our circumstances (Draper 1999, 392), they do not strike me as required for disappointment to exist. Nevertheless, the discussion that follows does not hinge on this intuition.

[2]The standard definition of disappointment precludes the existence of Dead Sea apples by requiring that disappointment involves frustrated desires (Brady 2010, 182–184). Consequently, defenders of the standard view need to explain why, despite appearances to the contrary, purported examples of Dead Sea apples do not describe actual desire fulfilments. The arguments advanced in this paper can be used to do so.

'[. . .] greedily they pluck'd

The Frutage fair to sight, like that which grew

Neer that bituminous Lake where Sodom flam'd;

This more delusive, not the touch, but taste

Deceav'd; they fondly thinking to allay

Thir appetite with gust, instead of Fruit

Chewd bitter Ashes, which th' offended taste

With spattering noise rejected: oft they assayd,

Hunger and thirst constraining, drugd as oft,

With hatefullest disrelish writh'd thir jaws' (Book 10, lines 560–568).

The clash between the alluring appearance and foul taste of Dead Sea apples makes them a ripe candidate for philosophical analogy. Henry Sidgwick critiques desire theories of well-being by pointing out that sometimes fulfilled desires resemble Dead Sea apples. He writes:

'It would still seem that what is desired at any time is, as such, merely apparent Good, which may not be found good when fruition comes, or at any rate not so good as it appeared. It may turn out a 'Dead Sea apple,' mere dust and ashes in the eating' (Sidgwick 1907, 110).

This paper reserves the use of the term 'Dead Sea apples' for cases of fulfilled desires that leave us disappointed and bereft of feelings of satisfaction.[3] Upon fulfilment of these desires, we are left with the impression that our well-being has not been advanced.

Not all desires that fail to produce feelings of satisfaction when fulfilled qualify as Dead Sea apples. For instance, depression sometimes prevents these feelings from emerging (Tully 2017, 4). We also do not experience feelings of satisfaction when we fail to perceive that our desire has been fulfilled. Yet, it is plausible that the fulfilment of such desires does benefit us (Parfit 1984, 495). Consequently, for something to be a Dead Sea apple it must also give rise to a sense of disappointment. There is a strong intuitive case

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[3]William Lauinger defines Dead Sea apples as simply desire fulfilments that leave us disappointed (2011, 325). However, this definition is too broad. After all, we can be disappointed to receive smaller than expected amounts of something good. And we can be disappointed that getting what we wanted led to bad consequences down the line. Yet, such cases do not pose a challenge to desire theories of well-being. Chris Heathwood defines Dead Sea apples as desires for objects that are 'no longer wanted once they are gotten' (2005, 493). However, this definition is too narrow. There are cases where we retain a desire for the very thing that leaves us disappointed (Lauinger 2011, 331–332). Consequently, I have opted to give my own definition of this phenomenon.

that our desire has not improved our well-being when its fulfilment elicits both disappointment and no feelings of satisfaction.

The existence of Dead Sea apples is a problem for desire theories of well-being. They are alleged counterexamples to the thesis that fulfilling desires always improves well-being. Consequently, if these theories are to remain viable, then their proponents must have something to say about this problem. I will refer to this as 'the problem of Dead Sea apples' throughout the remainder of this discussion.

3 Three existent responses

I consider three existent responses to the problem of Dead Sea apples. These either characterise Dead Sea apples as not involving fulfilled desires or identify something in the nature of those desires that removes them from the class of desires that affect well-being. The first approach claims that Dead Sea apples are never produced by desires that temporally overlap with their objects. The second claims that Dead Sea apples only emerge from the fulfilment of instrumental desires. The third claims that Dead Sea apples emerge when we mistakenly think that we desire an object, but instead only desire aspects that we falsely believe the object to contain. I argue that these approaches have only limited success in accounting for the moral psychology of Dead Sea apples. Consequently, we need a supplementary explanation to account for further instances of this phenomenon.[4]

3.1 The concurrentism response

Perhaps Dead Sea apples happen when our desire ceases immediately prior to its object occurring. This gives us the impression that we are left disappointed by the fulfilment of a currently held desire. However, this impression is mistaken. The fact that currently held desires typically produce feelings of satisfaction when we perceive their fulfilment lends credibility to the idea that Dead Sea apples do not involve the fulfilment of such desires.

Some versions of the desire theory of well-being claim that only those desires that exist at the same time as their objects improve well-being (Heathwood 2005, 490). This view is often called 'concurrentism' (Lin 2017; Sarch 2013). One of the benefits of concurrentism is that it can put forward a proposed solution to the problem of Dead Sea apples. Chris Heathwood argues that this problem does not apply to these views. He writes that:

> 'Genuine desire satisfaction is had only when the desire remains once its object is gotten. The concurrence requirement ensures that the getting of Dead Sea apples

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[4]This paper does not consider idealisation versions of the desire theory of well-being. These views claim that only the fulfilment and frustration of those desires that we would have under ideal circumstances affect our well-being (Brandt 1979, 113; Sidgwick 1907, 111). It is possible that we would not desire things that turned out to be Dead Sea apples under such circumstances. Views of this sort constitute a fourth response to the problem of Dead Sea apples. However, they risk alienating individuals from the things that improve their own well-being (Rosati 1996, 309–311). This is because our actual desires may look very different from those hypothetical desires which we would have under ideal circumstances. Moreover, it is unclear that Dead Sea apples would never emerge under ideal conditions (Bruckner 2016, 12). Finally, idealisation views face complex structural problems that may undermine their viability (Risberg 2018). For these reasons, I set aside this family of views.

doesn't improve welfare, since the very reason the thing is a Dead Sea apple is that the desire for it has vanished' (Heathwood 2005, 493).

According to concurrentism, if a desire does not temporally overlap with its object, then it does not improve well-being.[5] It is worth noting that the concurrentism response requires that there is no overlap whatsoever between the desire and its object. Any overlap means that the desire is fulfilled. Consequently, according to desire theories of well-being, the person with the desire is benefited. Yet, this implication is precisely the counterexample that the concurrentism response is supposed to address.

There is a large and expanding literature critiquing concurrentism (Bruckner 2013; Dorsey 2013; Vorobej 1998). Here is not the place to relitigate this debate. Nevertheless, if accepting this view is the best way for desire theories of well-being to explain why Dead Sea apples do not benefit us, then this seems to be a point in its favour.

However, this view relies on an implausible conception of the moral psychology of Dead Sea apples. Sometimes our desires persist despite giving rise to disappointment (Lauinger 2011, 331–332). This is a distressing and disorienting experience. Yet, it does not seem to be particularly uncommon. Take, for instance, the experience of binge watching an inane television series. In this case, we continue to desire the very thing that is leaving us disappointed and dissatisfied. William Lauinger calls this 'the overlap problem' for the concurrentism response. The existence of overlap has significant phenomenological support. It gives us good reason to think that this response cannot explain the full breadth of experiences of Dead Sea apples.

Moreover, there is something unpersuasive about the concurrentism response more broadly. It provides no explanation as to why the desire ceases immediately prior to its object occurring. Without such an explanation, the view risks being implausibly *ad hoc*. For this reason, I am unsympathetic to this way of explaining Dead Sea apples.

3.2 The instrumental desires response

Perhaps Dead Sea apples occur when we fulfil an instrumental desire that we misidentify as intrinsic. Perhaps only intrinsic desires affect well-being. In this view, a Dead Sea apple signals that our fulfilled desire was not intrinsic (Sobel 2009, 350). If this is right, then our resultant theory has no problem explaining why such experiences do not improve well-being.

A desire is instrumental when its existence is entirely dependent upon another desire. It is often taken for granted that desire theories of well-being should exclude instrumental desires from affecting well-being. Most contemporary commentators, proponents, and critics of these theories incorporate this restriction in their definitions (Bruckner 2016, 19–20; Sarch 2013, 223; Heathwood 2005, 489).[6] There are good

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[5]Proponents of concurrentism can reach this conclusion in two ways. They can claim that part of the definition of desire fulfilment is that a desire must temporally overlap with its object to count as fulfilled. Alternatively, they can claim that only those desires that do temporally overlap with their objects are relevant to well-being. The first claim entails the second, but the second claim does not entail the first. In this discussion I remain neutral on which of these two approaches is most plausible.

[6]One reason to reject this restriction is due to the difficulty in distinguishing between instrumental and intrinsic desires (Parfit 1984, 117). Moreover, it may be that some intuitions militate in favour of the view that fulfilling instrumental desires can be relevant to well-being (Heathwood 2019, 669). I set aside these issues here.

reasons for this. It has been pointed out that, without this restriction, these theories are committed to a counterintuitive double-counting problem (Mendola 2009, 149; Murphy 1999, 253). The unrestricted view entails that the more instrumental desires that we fulfil in pursuit of an intrinsic desire, the better it is for our well-being. Given that the existence of instrumental desires is entirely dependent upon the intrinsic desires that they are related to, this seems implausible.

However, this restriction fails to solve the problem of Dead Sea apples. Unfortunately, Dead Sea apples do not solely blossom from the fulfilment of instrumental desires. Take, for instance, this apocryphal portrait of Alexander the Great in his moment of triumph, 'When Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer'.[7] In my interpretation, Alexander's fulfilled desire has left him disappointed and bereft of feelings of satisfaction. I interpret Alexander's tears to be tears of sorrow at his realisation that he has achieved his desire for total conquest. They serve to underline the intrinsic nature of his desire. And yet, the fulfilment of this desire seems to have made him no better off. We need not be despots or warlords to relate to Alexander. The emotions ascribed to him exemplify something that we are perfectly capable of introspectively detecting. Dead Sea apples can emerge from even our most fundamental desires. Consequently, an appeal to instrumental desires cannot explain all cases of Dead Sea apples.

It may be thought that proponents of this approach can simply reiterate the claim that Dead Sea apples emerge solely from fulfilled instrumental desires. They can do so by claiming that, despite appearances to the contrary, Dead Sea apples indicate that our desire was not really intrinsic after all. There is a rich history of writers claiming that our introspective endeavours are an unreliable guide to distinguishing between instrumental and intrinsic desires. There seem to be few, if any, desires that are immune to this line of argument. For instance, Aristotle can be interpreted as claiming that all reasons for action are instrumental in service of the single end of achieving eudaimonia (1094a20–25). John Stuart Mill is sometimes interpreted as claiming that all of our desires are instrumental in the pursuit of the intrinsic desire for pleasure (1861). Given these precedents, proponents of this approach can claim that we are incorrect when we attribute an intrinsic nature to those desires that produce Dead Sea apples.

Nevertheless, this approach demands a drastic revision of our intuitions about the sorts of things that count as intrinsic desires. We should be willing to revise aspects of our moral psychology in light of the problem of Dead Sea apples, but the idea that these desires are always instrumental is implausible. Picture again the crestfallen Alexander: Ashen and lachrymose at the apex of his success. There is no obvious further desire at which his conquest is in service of. Postulating further hidden intrinsic desires is an implausibly *ad hoc* manoeuvre solely made to rescue desire theories of well-being from the problem of Dead Sea apples. For this reason, this is not an adequate explanation all cases of Dead Sea apples. Nevertheless, the theory provides a convincing characterisation of some cases.

3.3 The fine-grained response

Perhaps Dead Sea apples emerge when we mistakenly believe that we desire an object, but instead only desire aspects that we falsely believe the object to contain. If this is right,

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[7]This quote is sometimes misattributed to Plutarch. However, it appears to originate from the antagonist in the movie *Die Hard* (1988), the villainous Hans Gruber.

then perhaps we find ourselves disappointed and dissatisfied when we attain an object that lacks those desired aspects. William Lauinger considers and rejects a potential solution to the problem of Dead Sea apples that he terms the 'fine-grained response' (2011, 327–329). He writes that:

> 'People never desire things like having such-and-such a job or being in such-and-such a romantic relationship. All that people ever desire are certain aspects – indeed, certain positive aspects – of having such-and-such a job and of being in such-and-such a romantic relationship' (Lauinger 2011, 328).

Lauinger rejects the fine-grained response because he thinks that it requires us to revise our everyday notion of desire by postulating that we always have a series of individuated desires for specific aspects of objects. He takes this to be intolerably revisionary of our moral psychology. However, this is not a necessary commitment of the fine-grained response. The view could instead claim that our desires are only occasionally fine-grained in the way that Lauinger describes. For example, perhaps we occasionally have fine-grained desires for financial security, the admiration of our peers, and creative problem-solving that we mistake for a single desire for a specific job. On this view, when our new job turns out to be a Dead Sea apple, it is because we have failed to get the things that we actually desired. This approach claims that Dead Sea apples do not involve desire fulfilments at all. Rather, they involve a misperception of desire fulfilment. If this is right, then the problem of Dead Sea apples does not undermine desire theories of well-being. This is because Dead Sea apples are no threat to the thesis that fulfilling desires always improves a subject's well-being.[8]

The fine-grained response accurately explains some examples of Dead Sea apples. For instance, it seems correct that we sometimes mistakenly believe that we desire a specific job when, in fact, we only desire aspects that we falsely believe the job will contain. However, this response fails to account for other cases. Consider, for instance, the desire that you have to form a friendship or romantic relationship with a particular person. It is implausible to think that this is explicable by desires for only aspects of that relationship. Nevertheless, such desires are not immune to becoming Dead Sea apples. The fine-grained response cannot explain how this happens. Attempting to do so requires postulating an implausibly large epistemic gap between the content of our desires and our perceptions of that content. Indeed, it is often not possible to introspectively identify aspects of Dead Sea apples which we formerly desired, but which failed to materialise (Telfer 1980, 7). This suggests that not all cases of Dead Sea apples are well explained by this response. Therefore, we need a supplementary explanation to account for further cases.

4 The conjunctive desire response

The existent approaches in the literature fail to solve the problem of Dead Sea apples. The concurrentism response fails because Dead Sea apples can occur while we retain a

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[8]This approach requires accepting the instrumental desires response. This is because when we pursue an object for its aspects, we have an instrumental desire for the object that we anticipate will contain those aspects (Marino 2009, 279). Were we not to accept the instrumental desires response, then the fine-grained response would implausibly entail that the fulfilment of the instrumental desire for the job would indeed benefit us.

desire for an object that is leaving us disappointed, and because the view does not explain why we sometimes lose desires moments before they are fulfilled. The instrumental desires response explains some cases, but is unable to account for fulfilled intrinsic desires that lead to Dead Sea apples. The fine-grained response explains some cases, but is unable to account for desires for specific objects that lead to Dead Sea apples.

To account for residual cases we need a supplementary explanation. The view that I propose claims that we sometimes mistake purported examples of Dead Sea apples for fulfilled desires because we have an oversimplified understanding of the content of those desires. On this view, Dead Sea apples are frustrated conjunctive desires that contain some satisfied conjuncts in their content. A conjunctive desire is one that can be accurately represented as having multiple propositions in its content which are conjoined by an "and" logical operator.[9] For a conjunctive desire to be fulfilled, all of its conjuncts must be satisfied. The fact that Dead Sea apples do contain some satisfied conjuncts gives us the false impression that our desire has been fulfilled. This argument explains some examples of Dead Sea apples as not describing actual desire fulfilments. Consequently, desire theories of well-being have no problem explaining why they fail to improve well-being. Call this the 'conjunctive desire response' to the problem of Dead Sea apples.[10]

Conjunctive desires are commonplace. Desires for enjoyment are perhaps the most abundant example of this type of desire. These desires have two distinct propositions in their content. They specify an object, and they specify that the subject with the desire takes pleasure in the existence of that object. If pleasure does not emerge, then the conjunctive desire for enjoyment is necessarily frustrated. This is the case irrespective of whether the other conjunct specified in the desire's content is satisfied. Desires for enjoyment are a precedent for the view that purported examples of Dead Sea apples describe frustrated conjunctive desires with some satisfied conjuncts. Indeed, it strikes me that the canonical description of the Dead Sea apple turning to ashes when eaten is best characterised as a desire to enjoy the fruit, rather than a desire merely to eat it.

This approach is made clearer when applied to other purported examples of Dead Sea apples. William Lauinger provides one such example: 'Dennis wants to work at a certain law firm and then gets the job, only to find that he hates it. Here his desire is fulfilled, but his well-being is not advanced' (2011, 327). We can characterise Dennis' predicament in my terms in the following way: *Dennis has a conjunctive desire to work at a law firm and take pleasure in this work. He gets the job, only to find that he does not take pleasure in it. Here his conjunctive desire is frustrated, and his well-being is not advanced.* This characterisation differs from Lauinger's by redescribing Dennis' desire as conjunctive and containing some satisfied and some frustrated conjuncts. Nevertheless, this strikes me as an intuitive account of Dennis' psychology. After all, many people desire to enjoy, rather than simply get, a new job. For those who do not have a desire of this sort, it seems unlikely that its fulfilment would give rise to the feelings of disappointment that are characteristic of Dead Sea apples.

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[9]Evan G. Williams briefly notes that some desires are conjunctive before discussing a different issue (2016, 213). I briefly discuss the role that conjunctive desires play in depression elsewhere (Mariqueo-Russell 2023, 1987).

[10]The conjunctive desire response is premised on the idea that the desires involved in Dead Sea apple cases are propositional attitudes (Sinhababu 2015; McDaniel and Bradley 2008, 268). For a desire to be a propositional attitude it must be possible to accurately represent its content in propositional terms.

A similar recharacterisation can be given of the fictionalised reimagining of Alexander the Great weeping at the fulfilment of his desire for conquest in Section 3.2. In my view, Alexander did genuinely desire conquest. It is simply that the desire was conjunctive. For instance, perhaps his desire contained the conjunct that there remained more worlds left to conquer. In this view, Alexander desired the process of conquering, rather than the outcome of having achieved total conquest.[11] If something along these lines is correct, then Alexander's desire was indeed frustrated. This seems more accurate than postulating that he simply lost his desire moments before fulfilling it, that the desire was merely instrumental, or that he only desired aspects of what he anticipated his conquest would contain. The conjunctive desire response has a greater respect for Alexander's desire as described than rival explanations.

The conjunctive desire response can be fruitfully contrasted with the fine-grained response considered in Section 3.3. Both arguments involve redescribing purported examples of Dead Sea apples in order to paint a picture of frustrated desires that we mistakenly identify as fulfilled. The fine-grained response does so by claiming that our desires in some examples of Dead Sea apples are only for aspects of objects. Conversely, the conjunctive desire response claims that our desires are sometimes for those objects. Whereas the former approach often fails for implausibly claiming that Dead Sea apples do not emerge from our desires for things such as certain jobs or relationships, the latter captures the intuition that this can happen. In this way, the conjunctive desire response is often better placed to explain the complexity of our mental lives. Moreover, it postulates a smaller epistemic gap between the content of our desires and our perceptions of that content than the fine-grained response. We are not wrong when we think that we desire an object that turns out to be a Dead Sea apple. We are just failing to perceive the other conjuncts of that desire.

A possible objection to the conjunctive desire response is that it may be that it is impossible to desire P & Q conjunctively without independently desiring P and independently desiring Q. If this is right, then the conjunctive desire response cannot solve the problem of Dead Sea apples. This is because desire theories of well-being would entail that the fulfilment of the independent conjuncts benefits us. Consequently, the theory would be unable to capture the intuition that purported examples of Dead Sea apples are of no benefit to us. However, it is relatively common to desire a conjunction without desiring either of its conjuncts separately. For instance, it is possible to desire salt and tequila conjunctively without desiring either conjunct separately. Examples of this sort illustrate that to desire P & Q conjunctively does not entail a desire for either P or Q independently.

According to my argument, we sometimes misapprehend the content of our own desires. One reason to think that this happens concerns what Delia Graff Fara calls 'the problem of underspecification' (2013). She points out that sometimes our verbal reports of the content of our desires fail to specify the full range of conditions under which our desire can be fulfilled. For instance, if I say that 'I desire to eat fruit', then in ordinary cases, verbal reports of this sort underspecify the desire's content. This is because it is not the case that any type of fruit in any quantity is capable of fulfilling the desire expressed. For instance, mealy tomatoes would not fulfil it. Nor would a single blueberry. One way of responding to this problem is to claim that this verbal report implies that only certain fruits in only certain quantities are capable of fulfilling the desire (Fara 2013, 255–256).

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[11]Desires for processes share this form. When we desire a process, as opposed to an outcome, we conjunctively desire an activity and that the activity continues over time.

However, this is not a convincing explanation in all cases of verbal underspecification. This is because we sometimes fail to introspectively identify the full range of conditions that are required to fulfil a desire. Consequently, it seems unlikely that our verbal reports imply conditions that we do not ourselves introspectively detect. The conjunctive desire response can explain what is happening in cases like this. In this view, our desires do specify the range of conditions required for their fulfilment. However, we sometimes have an oversimplified understanding of the content of these desires. Consequently, sometimes our verbal reports reflect our own oversimplified understanding of this content.

It is sometimes thought that we have relatively transparent access to the content of our desires (Haybron 2008, 13). However, there are reasons to think that this is not always the case. Xiang Yu points to several types of desire that we often fail to introspectively detect, such as certain second-order desires, and the desire to live a meaningful life (2022). Alex Gregory discusses cases of forgotten desires that also fit this pattern (2021, 34–35). And Nomy Arpaly points out that we usually lack access to the content of our desires when we are asleep (2022, 368). There are also precedents for misapprehending the content of our own desires. This can happen when we find ourselves surprised that we miss something that we did not realise we desired, and when we find ourselves mistaking an instrumental desire for an intrinsic desire (Arpaly 2022, 368). More broadly, expressions such as 'I don't know how I feel about that' reveal that sometimes the content of our mental states is opaque to us. Furthermore, some therapeutic practices seem geared toward helping us better decipher the content of our own desires. Consequently, the conjunctive desire response is not premised upon a novel view about self-knowledge and desire.

It is worth noting that there seem to be cultural phenomena that obstruct how efficient we are at identifying the content of our own desires. For instance, Chris Heathwood has observed that there appears to be a relationship between advertising and the emergence of Dead Sea apples (2005, 493–494). This seems right. An insidious effect of advertising is its ability to obscure the content of our desires to us and thereby motivate us to acquire things that we do not really want. We should strive to understand the psychology behind this phenomenon. The argument advanced in this section can be extended to supply an explanation. In this view, an effect of advertising is that it leads us to oversimplify the content of our own desires. Consequently, we are beguiled into pursuing outcomes that turn out to be disappointing and unsatisfying. This is because advertising has led us to selectively attend to only part of the content of our conjunctive desire. Reflection on the structure of advertisements supports this theory. Advertisers frequently associate their products with wider senses of comfort, wealth, and acceptance. In doing so they conjoin our desire for their product with a desire for those other things portrayed in their advertisement. Consequently, we pursue something destined to disappoint us when one of its conjuncts is left unattained. Of course, this is not to say that this is the only, or even most pernicious, way in which advertising immiserates us. Nevertheless, the conjunctive desire response allows us to explain this effect of advertising.

I have argued that the conjunctive desire response allows us to better understand the moral psychology of Dead Sea apples. When supplemented with the approaches considered in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, it seems likely that we have sufficient conceptual resources to explain the phenomenon of Dead Sea apples. Moreover, we can do so in a way that is compatible with the claim that the fulfilment of a subject's intrinsic desires necessarily improves their well-being. If successful, this investigation has defused an

influential problem for desire theories of well-being, while enriching our understanding of the moral psychology of disappointment.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that reflection on the nature of Dead Sea apples can reveal interesting features about the structure of desire. In my view, Dead Sea apples sometimes arise when we have a frustrated conjunctive desire that contains some satisfied conjuncts. The fact that the desire contains some satisfied conjuncts explains why we misidentify it as fulfilled. This analysis has three interesting implications. Firstly, theories that take the fulfilment of desires to always improve well-being are not undermined by the existence of Dead Sea apples. Secondly, the existence of Dead Sea apples undermines the view that we always have transparent access to the content of our desires. Thirdly, conjunctive desires play an important role in our mental lives that extends beyond explaining disappointment. These second two findings may have further implications for our understanding of moral psychology more broadly.

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