

Desiderative Truth: Caprice and the Flaws of Desire

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Abstract

Ronald de Sousa has vindicated the importance of emotions in our lives. This transpires clearly through his emphasis on “emotional truth”. Like true beliefs, emotions can reflect the evaluative landscape and be true to ourselves. This article develops his insights on emotional truth by exploring the analogous phenomenon regarding desire: “desiderative truth”. According to the dominant view championed by de Sousa, goodness is the formal object of desire: a desire is fitting when its content is *good*. Desiderative truth is evaluative. I propose an alternative, deontic approach: a desire is accurate when its content *ought to be*. I contrast these two accounts by examining one type of flawed desire that has eluded philosophers’ attention: caprice. Capricious desires – as the desires expressed in children’s tantrums – are fascinating yet unfitting. What is wrong with them? I argue that evaluative truth fails to explain their inadequacy. Surprisingly, capricious desires can be about good states; in fact, this is often where the culprit lies: the object of desire is *too good* to be worth desiring. By contrast, the deontic account nicely captures what goes wrong with capricious desires. Although they can be good, the states desired are not such that they *ought to be* for one to be happy. Capricious people are too demanding and misunderstand the boundaries of happiness. As the flaw in caprice is deontic, desiderative truth is deontic truth.

Keywords

Desire – Formal Object – Emotion – Correctness Conditions – Deontic Conception – Guise of the Good – Caprice – Well-Being

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