

DESIRABILITY CHARACTERISATIONS

J. C. GOSLING
Oxford University

In this paper I propose to discuss some remarks made by Miss Anscombe in *Intention* §§ 33 — 43, to the effect that some series of questions "Why do you want x ?" must terminate in a certain sort of answer which characterises the object wanted as desirable, and that the type of answer in question renders any attempt to pursue the series either otiose or impossible. While I shall be concerned almost entirely with Miss Anscombe's arguments, as of the greatest volume on the topic, it is, of course, a fairly common position to hold that certain answers to the question "Why do you want x ?" are in some way privileged, rendering further query inapposite. Some such position seems attractive for instance, in discussing pleasure. But it is difficult to see quite what the claim amounts to, and this, as much as anything, is what I shall be concerned with.

First of all I shall spend some time trying to expound Miss Anscombe's position, and then offer some remarks which should either clarify the question or make clear my misunderstanding of what she says.

1. To begin with, not just any old case of wanting is going to be in order. Miss Anscombe is not concerned with fruitless yearnings, nor with fireside heart-to-hearts on what we want out of life, but only with cases where the desire leads to/ explains some action. Further, she excludes from consideration certain cases where I may do something, such as stick my tongue out at my hostess, or rap my knuckles on a gong, because I just wanted to, where these are cases in

which I had no particular reason, — it just occurred to me. The cases in point are those where an agent does something for some reason and where the reasoning can be spelled out in a calculative form which would normally be recognised by the agent as at least a systematic elaboration of his reason for acting as he did. There are special problems that arise with regard to specimens of reasoning which in some sense accurately reflect a person's reasoning although he never went through the steps, — but I shall not be dealing with them. Miss Anscombe's point about such cases is that the starting-point of the reasoning, or the last term in the series of answers to "What do you want x for?", must give something wanted, characterised as desirable. Until this point is reached the questions "And what do you want *that* for?" or "What is the good of that?" are still in order, thus showing that the first premise has not been reached. When we reach a point where what is wanted is characterised as desirable, then further questions of this sort are out of place. To take an example: — a farmer is going to market, and we ask him "What do you want to go to market for,/ What's the good of it?" "To buy a Jersey cow." Now this leaves matters obscure unless we surreptitiously supply answers. So we ask: "What do you want that for?/ What is the good of that?" "Any farm like mine could do with a Jersey cow." Now we may well not know *why* a farm like his could do with a Jersey cow, but, the argument goes, it is plainly absurd to ask either "What do you want what you could do with for?" or "What is the good of what you could do with?" We have come to the end of that sort of question. Similarly, I may rush to catch a bus because I want to go to a concert, and want to go to a concert because I enjoy concerts, but it seems a little obtuse to ask why I want what I enjoy.

I now wish to draw attention to four points about this thesis:

- i. First, it is held that any action taken as a result of

reasoning is done because it is considered by the agent conducive to, or a case of, x and x is considered to be φ , where φ gives a desirability characterisation. It is a necessary condition of something's being a case of reasoned action that the starting point of the reasoning should be from something considered by the agent to be φ . As a consequence, of course, if we could limit the possible values of φ and/or limit the range of things characterisable by the various values of it, we could hope to show that certain proffered cases of practical reasoning were either not, as they stood, cases of reasoning at all, or that what was said to be wanted at any rate could not be characterised by some *given* value of φ . These considerations give the thesis an interest for ethics, but I shall not be getting that far. I shall, however, be considering the proposed status of desirability characterisations in relation to reasoned action.

ii. The second point I want to note is the stopping property of desirability characterisations. Sometimes this is billed weakly as ensuring that no further question: "Why do you want x ?" is required (p. 71 para 2). Usually it is the stronger claim that no such question is in order (p. 66 para, p. 69 para 37, p. 75 para 1.) In either form the point is important as seeming to supply a means of identifying possible values of φ .

iii. The third point is that desirability characterisations are a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of wanting for a reason. This is a result of Miss Anscombe's limitation to cases of wanting that lead to action. I may consider lobster both tasty and indigestible. The outcome is not necessarily paralysis. I may decide to eat it, because tasty. In this case my realisation of its indigestibility does not form part of the calculation that leads to taking the lobster, —though it may explain the presence of two Rennies on my side plate. In general, all the factors that I take into consideration as *having weight* will in the last resort receive a desirability

characterisation, although in cases of conflict many will not explain any desire in the activating Anscombean sense, and so even sincere attribution of a desirability characterisation is not a sufficient condition of desire.

iv. The fourth point is that there is no *one* desirability characterisation that is a necessary condition of wanting (p. 75 para 1). There are various alternative values of φ which do not reduce to each other. "X is a good thing to have" does not give a desirability characterisation, but rather the general form such characterisations must take. There is no such thing as being a good thing to have that is not either being pleasant or being healthy or, and no *one* of these is of itself necessary.

Each of these four points is individually very plausible, but I hope to show that at least *prima facie* they set up a number of strains.

To begin with *iv*: it does seem at first sight fairly clear that I may consider something pleasant while thinking it not to be healthy, and consider something to be morally worthy or to my intellectual good which I realise is not pleasant. The onus is on someone who wishes to hold that all these considerations are equivalent. If they all give ways in which things may be wanted, it follows that the onus of proof is on the man, a hedonist say, who wishes to hold that there is only one way in which things are wanted, to show that these supposed alternatives all collapse into one.

"Because it is healthy" and "because it is pleasant", then, form two independent characterisations of something as desirable, neither of which reduces to the other. Now suppose that I am in the market looking for a likely lobster. When asked why I want a lobster I shall say "because I enjoy my food". You point out that for many people, of whom I am one, lobster is unhealthy. I remain unmoved. With much ingenuity you then manage to persuade me that unhealthy food is really not very nice; that only healthy food is enjoyable. Convinced, I change my store: "I should like

a nut cutlet and a fruit bar, please". "What do you want those for?" "They are healthy". Now according to *ii*, the point about the stopping properties, the questions should stop there. But plainly anyone who took that answer as final would misunderstand my reasoning and view me as a hypochondriac whereas in fact I am a sybarite. I have a perfectly good answer to "What do you want healthy food for?" — or "What do you want what is healthy for?" — "Because it is pleasant." If the propaganda has been good enough I want everything healthy, — food, exercise, operations, — because I think that what is healthy is enjoyable.

It might be objected to all this that it is unfair. I have been assuming that if "Because it is φ " comes at any point as a true answer to "Why do you want x ?" then it must be a final one. But in fact even when "Because it is φ " plays a part in explaining what x is wanted for it does not necessarily determine the form of the desire. The "what do you want x for?" / "what is the good of x ?" criterion, whereby we can tell values of φ by the inapplicability of these questions, is not independent of the criterion whereby a desirability characterisation is what comes in the agent's first premise. When the enquirer, starting from the action before him, begins his series of "Why?" questions, he will doubtless pass through a number of desirability characterisations; but the agent has a final objective characterised as desirable, and when he, say, declares that he wants the food because healthy, that may not be the way he characterises it as desirable. As a gourmet his desire is for pleasure. Recognising that the food is healthy is not a sufficient condition for his desiring it. His desire, the one that stirs him to action, takes the form of desire for pleasure. To count as having a desire at all there must, by *i*, be a desirability characterisation of what he really wants, and of *that* there can be no further "what for" questions.

Now this objection complicates the problem somewhat. As first expounded the point about the absurdity of certain

questions seemed to yield a criterion for identifying possible values of φ independently of particular occasions. The absurdity of "Why do you want what you enjoy or what is healthy?" was supposed to be transparent, — and indeed it is tempting to think that in some way it is at least obviously intelligible that a person should want these things. In consequence it seemed that we can identify various desirability characterisations and so know when in any particular case we had to stop. But in so far as we are concerned with possible examples of individual pieces of practical calculation it seems that whatever absurdity attaches to "Why do you want what you enjoy?" etc. it is not one that rules out the possibility of a particular agent having a more basic starting-point in his calculation. We are now therefore left at best with the weaker thesis mentioned earlier: that once we reach a desirability characterisation we have reached a point where no further answer to the question "What for?" is required. That is to say, when the answer "Because it is healthy" is given to "why do you want a nut cutlet?", we know that, we have reached a point where desire for a nut cutlet has been made intelligible, — this a possible reason, — although we may not in fact yet have got to the bottom of this man's desire. Now this leaves us with a problem about the identification of desirability characterisations. One might be tempted to try the following test: if an agent says "I want x just because it is y " and it is absurd to ask "Why do you want x just because it is y ?", then y is a possible value of φ . Thus, if I had said "I want a nut cutlet just because it is healthy" then, as it is absurd to go on with further questions, and is in general absurd to ask "Why do you want anything just because it is healthy?" we know that we have the relevant desirability characterisation. The trouble here is to be sure wherein the oddity of these questions lies, and it looks as though it is the word "just" that makes for it. For it is the function of this word in this sort of context to indicate that questions end here.

To pursue the questions, therefore, is incompatible with accepting that answer. The question "Why do you want anything just because it's healthy?" must be moving to a query as to why health has an important place in the man's priorities. But now it is difficult to see that anything has been shown about "healthy". For the question "Why do you want anything just because it is an apple" is odd for the same reason: it is a shift to a query about why apples are given importance.

In short, it seems tenable that health and pleasure are like breakfast: it is so familiar a fact that people go in for them that raised eyebrows are out of place. It is in fact perhaps worth lingering over breakfast. Suppose I am on holiday on the continent and you find me wandering round a small town looking for a restaurant. When asked what I want a restaurant for I say that I want one because I want breakfast. Suppose you now ask: "What do you want breakfast for?" or "What's the good of breakfast?" These may be questions that had never occurred to me before. If you specify: "for instance, is it that you think it enjoyable?" I may truthfully answer that I do, but I hadn't considered that until now. Similarly, if you ask: "Do you think breakfast's a good thing?" I may say "Well, yes, I suppose it is really, isn't it? Keeps you going through the morning and all that". But in neither case does this give the characterisation under which I wanted breakfast. Both are only possible justifications of a practice I had never thought about before. In so far as we are concerned with practical reasoning, therefore, they will not do, for neither is acceptable as giving the description under which I want breakfast and so set out looking for a restaurant. Nor will "I should feel uncomfortable not doing it", for the same reason. If we abandon some such test as acknowledgement by the agent, or previous consideration, we are left with no means of excluding anything that happens to be true, whether realised by the agent or not. Thus take Miss Anscombe's case of just trying to

see if I can reach a spot on the wall by standing on my toes. Suppose, now, that I get a pleasant tingle when I do it. We need to be able to exclude that as a desirability characterisation of reaching for the spot for cases where I had no idea of such a result, but just thought I would see if I could reach it.

Breakfast, in fact, is just something one always has in the morning, and it never occurs to one not to. Yet it is at times responsible, as in the above case, for pieces of practical reasoning and calculation leading to action. It will not do, therefore, to say that my looking for a restaurant is done "for no particular reason", as Miss Anscombe is prepared to say in the spot-reaching case. So we have a case of practical reasoning where no familiar desirability characterisation rounds it off, unless we promote breakfast to that company. But if we allow breakfast into that company it will be hard to keep lunch and tea out, and then the rot has set in earnest.

At this point there seem two possible moves:

i. To claim that if breakfast is wanted then it must be considered a good thing or, ii. To claim that if it is *not* in any way considered a good thing then the behaviour is not rational, and the reasoning that takes place is of a degenerate sort. The first move is not, I think, open to Miss Anscombe. "Good" is not, in her use the formal object of wanting, but rather the formal object of wanting for a reason. In those cases where she allows that one may do something and the explanation of setting about it is that "I just wanted to", (i.e., there is no answer to "What is the good of it?") this answer is another way of saying "For no particular reason". To want something for a reason is to have an answer to the question "What is the good of it?", for it entails considering that thing to be a good thing. But as we saw in considering point *iv* above, "is a good thing" is not a possible value of φ . If I claim that breakfast is a good thing, this is another way of saying that I have a reason for wanting breakfast;

but to repeat my view that it is a good thing, is not to give that reason, but simply to repeat that there is one. In other words, it commits me to the possibility of supplying a desirability characterisation for breakfast, *or* asserting that breakfast is one. But as we have seen, this is just where the problems are.

ii. The Second move was to claim that the breakfast case is in some way a degenerate case of practical reasoning. For although I can answer the question "What do you want a restaurant for?", my inability to cope with the same question about breakfast, and indeed my surprise at such a question, show my total bit of behaviour not to have any particular reason. Now while no doubt such a position needs arguing for, it does seem to me to have a *prima facie* plausibility. My whole attitude to breakfast does seem to fall short of being a prime example of rationality in this special sense. The difficulty is to see why, and in particular to see whether such a situation shows some defect of reason or some peculiarity as a human being, or what.

In order to tackle this I want first to extend a point made by Miss Anscombe: that the questions "What do you want x for?" / "What is the good of x ?" "Why do you want x ?" may express more than one interest and in particular are not confined to an interest in discovering the reason the subject has on this particular occasion for going after x . For present purposes I want to distinguish three interests the questions might express, and I shall illustrate them via the familiar example of chess.

1. Suppose then that a man is playing chess and makes a move with his knight. Suppose, too, that we are teaching him chess and therefore want to discover how his mind works. We ask him what he wanted to move there for. He says it was to threaten his opponent's queen. He has not been playing long, and when we ask what he wants to do that for he can only say that he thought that was a good sort of thing to do,

the sort of thing that helps to win. If some Socrates on the sidelines now asks "What do you want to win for?" or "What's the good of playing chess?" we are fairly clearly on a different line of enquiry, at least in most cases. It is possible to construct a case where, say, a man, having been showing some disinterest, suddenly decides that chess is an intellectual's game, or that to win would be a glorious thing, and this is the starting-point of the reasoning that galvanises him into moving his knight. Commonly, however, chess moves are made, if with any calculation at all, with a view to causing one's opponent some discomfort, and the higher level justifications of playing chess at all play no part in the reasoning. So usually to press questions at this level is to move from an interest in the person's reasoning that led him to act as he did, to an interest in matters of priorities and so on, often remote from his reasoning, perhaps not even serving to give the characterisation under which he actually views his present objective.

2. So far, then, we have a question: "What do you want to move the knight there for?" which is an interest in the man's purpose, and a point beyond which a repetition of the question will usually mean a change of interest. If, however, we are teaching this man chess we shall very likely not be satisfied with his simply saying "I want to threaten his queen" and then going on to say that he wants to do that because he wants to win or whatever. On the contrary, on being told that he wants to threaten his opponent's queen we shall very likely want to ask "And what's the good of that?"/ "What do you want to do that for?" in order to encourage him to look beyond the immediate effect of his move and see it in the context of some wider strategy. We want him to think more carefully of what he is doing. Now the interest here is not, or not simply, in what his reasons were, but nor is it a shift to some enquiry remote from the particular move. The concern is very much with the particular move, but also with whether it is well thought out. A person who

cannot place his move within the context of any strategy thereby shows that he is not as yet approaching the game in a thoughtful, rational way. Our man's failure to have any answer to "What's the good of that?" is an admission that his move is defective in reasoning. He has *some* reason for moving the knight, but his inability to explain the good of threatening the queen shows his move to be a poor case of reasoning. Of course, if he could answer it, it may be that his answer in fact showed incompetence at chess, and so an intellectual incompetence, but he would show, for present purposes, that his was reasoned behaviour: fully considered in the context of chess. It is, in fact, a common function of the question "What is the good of x ?" to voice an interest in whether x has been considered in the light of other factors, or whether it has been taken without further thought as an objective. Sometimes this question is simply pushing the enquiry within the context of the activity, sometimes to the point of querying the activity. In either case the interest is not in discovering the actual reasoning, but in provoking a justification.

My purpose in dwelling on this example is as follows: Miss Anscombe is, I think, quite entitled to restrict her interest to cases where "What is the good of x ?" / "What do you want x for?" simply express an interest in the agent's calculating processes. It is, nevertheless, a very common function of the first question, and a quite common function of "What do you want x for?" to be an enquiry as to whether or not x has been further thought about. Further, in these cases there can seem to be a connection between having no answer to such a question and a lack of reasoning. In a special case such as chess, the lack of an answer shows a failure in technique, and my action is one for which there is not much reason. In less special cases an absence of answer shows that that objective has not been further considered, but it is far from obvious that that shows any inadequacy on the agent's part. In intermediate cases, such as breakfast,

it is, I suppose, shown that my pursuit of breakfast is not one of my more considered practices. There has been a *lack* of reasoning about it, but there is no obvious context of skill to yield a conclusion of ineptitude on my part.

Now so far as I can see it always makes sense to ask "What's the good of that?", on the broad interpretation needed by Miss Anscombe, of anything that could be an informative answer to it. But it is also possible for the answerer to make it clear that he has gone as far as he can go. To do this he has to make it clear that some answer gives something which for him operates as a considered criterion for deciding whether there is any good in doing other things. In the breakfast example, as expounded, it became clear that I had no answer to "What is the good of breakfast?", but also that I had not thought about breakfast in general at all. I could not truthfully say that I considered breakfast as one of life's desirables in itself: it is just a matter of habit. If I accept the question, however, and consider that I should have an answer to it, there will come a stage where I shall have to stop, and this stage will be something which I take as having priority either in general or in a certain area, or whatever. Now for some, breakfast may be an item of just such importance, given a considered priority for its own sake. While such a person will not be able to answer "What is the good of breakfast?", he will show his difference from me by his scandalisation at anyone asking such a question. His pursuit of breakfast will differ from mine, just as will that of the man who thinks it keeps one alive; it will be a matter of considered policy, and so his behaviour is 'reasoned' in a way in which mine is not. It will be true of him that he thinks that breakfast is a good thing.

I am not, in all this, holding a brief for the man whose behaviour is reasoned in the reflective way outlined. Indeed I have an unthought-out prejudice in favour of having a fair number of actions not being thought on too closely. My point is simply that while, sometimes "Why do you want to do

$x?$ ” is only a request for the purpose or the actual form of reasoning, sometimes it is probing further to see whether the action can be put in any wider, or more thought out context. In such cases inability to answer shows a lack of thought, or else that we have reached a considered criterion, and in special cases it may show some defect in reasoning. Consequently, one is tempted to generalise to the conclusion that any piece of practical reasoning must start from considerations of desirability.

3. Suppose we now return to chess. Our pupil has been showing an inclination to fiddle with his knight, and an evident disappointment when he discovers that the possibility is blocked. At last the opportunity arises and at once the knight sails over a neighbouring castle into a tactically not too healthy position. It is clear that he has been wanting for some time to move his knight, and that that was why he moved it. From observation we may have decided that he is certainly not employing any strategy, and that his moving his knight has no special purpose, but that moving the knight clearly has some attraction for him. The question “What do you want to move the knight for?” is not a request for the purpose, nor for strategic considerations, but an enquiry as to what constitutes the attraction. It emerges that we have a romantic type, for whom the pieces are not mere pieces. They are knights in armour and stone castles. For him chess is an entry into the world of Malory, and the knight’s move, with its slanting leap over castle or bishop’s mitre has a special thrill for him. As he lyricises so do we get an answer to our question, but it is an answer that would not be relevant to the other two questions and if it was all there was to be said would simply show that there was no answer to them. It does not give a purpose served by the move, still less indicate the move’s place in an over-all strategy. Of course, it may sometimes happen that verbally the answer may do indifferently for more than one enquiry. “I want my knight to threaten his queen” might

give the purpose of the move, or its dramatic colour, but this does not prevent its role from being quite different in the two circumstances.

It is now time to get back to the supposed topic of this paper: desirability characterisations. I have tried to make out that the questions "Why do you want x ?" / "What do you want x for?" / "What is the good of x ?" can vary in their import, even when the question is about the explanation of an intentional action. On one interpretation the question is an enquiry specifically into the reasoned status of the action, a slant that the form "What is the good of x ?" very frequently has. The fact that this interpretation of the questions is always lurking in the background is, I think, part of what makes it tempting to think that a failure to have an answer to "What do you want x for?" shows a lack of reason for the behaviour. Neither giving the purpose nor giving the attraction answers this query. It may be that a chessplayer of high calibre nevertheless has a romantic streak. He always wants to move his knight, but considerations of strategy make him keep a firm check. Until we know just what the questioner is interested in we shall not know which sort of answer is going to meet his query, and there is ample room for misunderstanding. If the interest is in the attraction that moving a knight has, then indeed the answer "It is such fun" or "I get such a thrill from it" does seem to have some special status. "What do you want fun for?" or "Why do you want what you find thrilling?" do seem rather peculiar when the interest is in the attraction, though the oddity, of "What is the good of what you find thrilling?" seems to lie solely in its clumsiness. For the others the proper further question seems to be a request for some exposition of the form the fun or the thrill takes. A number of familiar candidates for the status of desirability characterisation are in fact typical ways of giving some general form of attraction "It's fun, thrilling, fascinating, amusing," and it does seem that when we reach some-

thing characterised in one of these ways we have reached the thing found attractive; or at least, all we can do is either challenge that characterisation, or ask for more detail; we cannot sensibly ask what someone wants something so characterised for, on this interpretation of the question.

This last point needs some qualification. It is assumed in the situation that the subject in question clearly does want something, and consequently the answer "It will be pleasant" "It's fun" and so on is interpreted as giving the form of an operative attraction. But I can, of course, believe something will be pleasant without finding the prospect stirs me, and the attainment of a future pleasure may be my purpose despite a present lack of enthusiasm about it. I usually enjoy a philosophical discussion when it gets under way, but in prospect it has no attraction for me — rather the reverse. So the answers "I find it thrilling", "I find it enjoyable" only answer the question on this interpretation of it on the assumption that not only do I find the activity in question thrilling or enjoyable, but the prospect. If I give a philosophical paper there is a time when I can be found writing the paper and getting back to it with some enthusiasm. My purpose is to have something to deliver on a given night, and I accepted to do that because I recognise the above fact about myself. My enjoyment of philosophical discussion, however, plays no part in explaining the attraction of writing the paper, although it supplies the goal. Had I not been intrigued by the problem the production of the paper would be leaden-footed.

With this qualification, however, it does seem true that there is an interpretation of the question "What do you want x for?" such that there is an interpretation of certain answers such as "It is fun" whereby they do stop that train of questions. Further, it seems that if the subject wants anything in the required sense, it must be true that what he wants must be characterisable in some such way. But two points should now be noted: first that we are no longer confined

to cases of wanting that lead to intentional action, and secondly that it is not clear in what sense the ability to give desirability characterisations in cases where these wants are acted on is related to practical reasoning.

i. The first point is fairly obvious, I think. In the example I gave of the able chess-player with a romantic streak, the man's itch to move the knight is not what leads him to move it, though it doubtless adds a spice when strategy permits. Even more obviously: one often or sometimes refrains from doing what one finds attractive. So a tenable thesis about desirability characterisation can be extended beyond Miss Anscombe's limits. The question really is whether it can be extended to cover all that falls within her limits, and this subdivides again.

ii. a) First there is the question as to whether and if so in what sense cases of wants that are acted upon and receive explication in terms of a desirability characterisation of the "It's fun" sort, are cases of practical reasoning. If I see a lot of people doing the frug or the shuffle, or whatever the latest dance is, I may well join in for the fun of it. I know why I joined in: it looked fun and I wanted to see if I could do it. Yet it is a most uncalculative piece of behaviour, the acme of spontaneity. Of course, spontaneity varies. If I believe strongly in justice I may quite spontaneously and unreflectingly leap to the defence of someone who is being ill-used. Here, too, I shall know why I behaved as I did. But there does seem to be a difference in the plausibility of spelling out the reasons in the form of reasoning in the two cases. For all my spontaneity in the second case, just because my reason is that I believe in countering injustice, it is natural to continue the explication with "so when I saw this person being ill-used, I thought I should do something about it", which is an everyday way of saying the Aristotle-wise: "Injustice should be countered, this is a case of injustice, therefore" In the case of the frug no such treatment of the case as one of a type is involved, and no

similarly plausible syllogistic explication comes to mind. If this sort of case were the pattern: if we did not have recognised worthwhile purposes, nor ever tried fitting our actions into wider contexts, but always did what at the time attracted us or avoided what repelled, we should just not be beings who went in for practical reasoning at all. Of course, whether one agrees or not with this point, and whether one does or does not nevertheless decide to include such cases as ones of practical reasoning depends very much on what one's criteria for practical reasoning are, and this in turn depends on the purpose for which the notion is introduced. As I am interested more in the other line of questions I shall not pursue this. I only want to remark that there will be a large number of such cases of intentional action done because of a want where what is wanted receives a desirability characterisation, and it is "Because x is φ " that the agent does what he does, and that there is room for argument as to whether any notion of reasoning should attach to such cases, though it is quite clear that in some sense we are given the agent's reason for doing what he did.

ii. b) The second question is as to the extent to which one can detach cases of thought out action from cases of attraction-wanting in the reverse direction. I have tried to distinguish an interest in the form the attraction takes from interests in the purposes of an action and in the degree of further reasoning about it. It does not, of course, follow from *this* that one can get cases where only one of the enquiries can be satisfied. The breakfast example above, however, was also intended as an example where one had a purpose but the goal was not pursued as exercising any particular attraction. The question arises, however, whether this could be universally the case, and what effect such a supposition would have on the attribution of practical reasoning. While I shall have a little more to say about this, it is in fact a question on which I shall end.

If *all* our wants were like the breakfast case, then cer-

tainly we should be a pretty dull lot, and should show over a wide field the sort of lethargy in reasoning that is there shown in the one case. But suppose we had a population most of whose goals were accepted as goals in general for further reasons. There are just a few reasons for doing things which are used to justify the priorities of goals. They consider that things should be done to preserve their own lives and other people's and to extend knowledge. So all their reasons for acting are either of the breakfast type, or, more commonly, of a sort that would be justified by reference to the preservation of life or the furtherance of knowledge. When it comes to those, however, they cannot answer, or indeed understand the import of the question "What do you want those for?", unless interpreted as asking either for the purpose or for further thought about the reasons. So interpreted they could understand the question, but would know there was no answer. There are no further purposes for pursuing life. It is, of course, true that either purpose mentioned may serve the other, but each is taken as not needing anything further, and there is a clear order of priorities: the preservation of life always yields to the furtherance of knowledge. But the language of attraction and revulsion is one they do not have, — only the language of pursuit and avoidance. We have, then, a thoughtful population, with a general reasoning organisation of their lives by its members. There is plenty of practical reasoning, but no use of, or application for, any desirability characterisations of the attraction sort. The preservation of life and the furtherance of knowledge are just things that people go for. What I now want to ask is: has anything gone wrong? Admittedly, it is a rather chilling population, but that is no argument. One is also tempted to say they are just machines. But that is just abuse. Is there any reason to suppose that it is really a mistake to attribute practical reasoning to them except in some derivative sense in which one would attribute it to machines or animals?

If there were, then there would be an interesting thesis about desirability characterisations along the following lines: there is a question "What do you want x for?" which demands in the last resort an answer that gives the form of the attraction that what is wanted has for the subject. Further, of any rational being it must be true that at least some of the things that are wanted that operate as means for ordering goals must be wanted under some such characterisation. An inability to supply any such characterisation at least begins to raise the question of whether we are dealing with a rational agent and so a piece of practical reasoning at all. If this could all be made out we should doubtless get some illumination on the concept of reasoning and it would of course make the desirability characterisation requirement central, and so that thesis as modified would be an important one in the discussion of practical reasoning. It is however, a very modified version. It does not seem to me evident, but in need of argument, that intelligent beings cannot have certain goals which they simply accept as goals. There will, of course, be a sense in which they will *ipso facto* consider these goals a good thing, in so far as to take something as an object of pursuit is to consider it a good, but not in any sense which demands further exposition. Anything that men pursue will in *this* sense count as a human good, but this is rather different from the sense in which health is a human good i. e., is good for them, whether they want it or not. The set of candidates for the status of desirability characterisation which includes such members as "It is healthy" "It's digestible" "It's educative" do not seem to me to have any stopping power in relation to any series of "What do you want x for?" questions. It is in practice no problem for us to understand someone's avoiding what is unhealthy, and so we do not customarily bother to pursue questions further. But that a given explanation should normally be accepted as unproblematic does not confer on it the special properties claimed for desirability characteris-

ations, properties which can successfully be claimed for some answers to some questions about wanting, on certain restricted interpretations.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se discuten las secciones 33-43 del libro de G.E.M. Anscombe *Intention*.

1. *Exposición*. La señora Anscombe se interesa por aquellos casos en los cuales el querer o desear algo explica el que la gente haga algo por alguna razón y como resultado de un razonamiento. El punto de partida de tal razonamiento o el término final de una serie de cuestiones del tipo “¿Para qué quieres (hacer) x ?” debe dar por resultado algo caracterizado como deseable. Caracterizar en tal forma algo, excluye como impropias nuevas preguntas del tipo señalado.

Cuatro puntos hay que notar:

i. La tesis es acerca de la acción hecha como resultado de un razonamiento.

ii. Los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable ponen fin a preguntas adicionales del tipo “¿Para qué quieres (hacer) x ?” haciéndolas o impropias (interpretación fuerte) o innecesarias (interpretación débil).

iii. Los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable son una condición necesaria, pero no suficiente, de querer o desear algo por una razón.

iv. No hay una tal caracterización que sea una condición necesaria. Hay varias alternativas independientes.

2. *Crítica*. Parece posible ofrecer ejemplos en donde “porque es saludable” es únicamente un punto intermedio en el razonamiento del agente, de manera que la cuestión “¿Por qué quieres o deseas lo que es saludable?” puede ser respondida y por tanto, presumiblemente, preguntada. De manera que si el punto iv es correcto, el punto ii no lo será según la interpretación fuerte.

Quizá deberíamos distinguir una tesis acerca de los inicios del razonamiento de un agente de una tesis acerca de las preguntas pertinentes que pueda formular un observador y considerar que la señora Anscombe se ocupa de la primera tesis únicamente. Esto tiene su precio pues ahora perdemos una manera fácil de identificar los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable; a saber: la posibilidad de convertir nuevas preguntas del tipo “¿Para qué?” en preguntas absurdas.

Parece sostenible que la salud y el placer son objetivos familiares, así como desayunar, cuya prosecución no causaría asombro. Puede ponerse un ejemplo en donde "desayunar" pueda explicar algún razonamiento práctico pero donde él mismo no ha sido pensado como objetivo. De manera que, o el punto *iii* está equivocado, o "desayuno" se convierte en un adjetivo que caracteriza algo como deseable con resultados desastrosos para la tesis.

La única salida sería decir que "desayunar" no es, en este caso, un adjetivo de ese tipo y que por ello tenemos un caso bastardo de razonamiento práctico. Esta sería una afirmación bravía.

Quien formula la pregunta "¿Para qué quieres (hacer) x ?" puede tener cualquiera de los siguientes intereses: primero, un interés en la forma de razonamiento, si es que hay alguna, que está detrás de la acción en cuestión; segundo, un interés acerca de cuán lejos puede localizarse la acción en el contexto de fines o principios adicionales; tercero, un interés en la atracción que la acción tiene para el agente. Si una persona no tiene respuesta a la primera cuestión, entonces o no hubo razonamiento o tenemos su razonamiento completo. Si una persona no tiene respuesta a la segunda cuestión, entonces o no ha pensado nada más acerca del asunto o ha decidido que no tiene necesidad de ninguna razón adicional para desear x . Si una persona no tiene respuesta a la tercera cuestión, entonces o la acción no tiene atractivo particular o hemos captado ya la forma que la atracción toma.

La falta de respuesta a la segunda cuestión *puede*, entonces, mostrar cierta carencia de pensamiento por parte del agente y en circunstancias especiales una imposibilidad de razonar apropiadamente, pero los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable tales como "es placentero" no desempeñan un papel especial al responder a ésta o a la primera cuestión, como tampoco aquellas respuestas que exhiben la forma de la atracción. Por otra parte, al placer, etc. se les puede, con cualificaciones, conceder un papel especial en relación a la tercera pregunta, convirtiendo cuestiones adicionales del tipo "¿Para qué?" en preguntas que no son pertinentes. De manera que alguna variante de la tesis que lleva al punto *iii* puede ser sostenida, siempre que se abandone el punto *i*.

3. *Conclusiones.* a) No parece haber una tesis clara acerca de los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable que sea sostenible en casos de razonamiento práctico.

b) Algo parecido a tal tesis parece sostenible en preguntas acerca de formas de atracción.

c) La única esperanza consistiría en sostener que, en cierto modo, el encontrar que los fines son atractivos es algo central al

deseo razonado. Esta sería una tesis extremadamente difícil de establecer; de manera que si a esto es a lo que equivale la tesis acerca de los adjetivos que caracterizan algo como deseable, no puede pretender ser más que un programa.