I want to, but…

Milo PHILLIPS-BROWN[1] — *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Abstract. I want to see the concert, but I don't want to take the long drive. Both of these desire ascriptions are true, even though I believe I'll see the concert if and only if I take the drive. Yet they, and *strongly conflicting desire ascriptions* more generally, are predicted incompatible by the standard semantics, given two standard constraints. There are two proposed solutions. I argue that both face problems because they misunderstand how what we believe influences what we desire. I then sketch my own solution: a *coarse-worlds* semantics that captures the extent to which belief influences desire. My semantics models what I call *some-things-considered* desire. Considering what the concert would be like, but ignoring the drive, I want to see the concert; considering what the drive would be like, but ignoring the concert, I don't want to take the drive.

Keywords. Desire ascriptions, strongly conflicting desire ascriptions, coarse worlds, some-things-considered desire.

1. Introduction

I want to pass, but I don't want to study; I want to eat pizza, but I don't want heartburn; I want to see the concert, but I don't want to take the long drive. These are pairs of *strongly conflicting desire ascriptions*. Standard accounts of 'want' wrongly predict that they're incompatible.

Say that ⌜A wants p⌝ and ⌜A wants q⌝ *conflict* when A believes that p will obtain only if q does not. Say that ⌜A wants p⌝ and ⌜A wants q⌝ *strongly conflict* when A believes that p will obtain if and only if q does not.

Here's an example. The Who are performing tonight, and Al's parents are deciding whether to take the long drive to the concert. Al knows that he'll see the concert only if he takes the drive, and he knows that he'll see the concert if he takes the drive. Al loves The Who, but he gets very carsick, and the drive isn't at all worth it. Al begs his parents to not take the drive.

(1)   Al wants to see the concert.

(2)   But Al doesn't want to take the long drive.[2]

Intuitively, both (1) and (2) are true, even though they strongly conflict (Al believes that (p) he'll see the concert if and only if it's not the case that (q) he doesn't take the drive).

Strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are common. Yet all of the standard semantics, given

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[2]I'll be talking about the prominent, neg-raising reading of (2): Al wants not to take the long drive.

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two standard constraints, predict that strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are incompatible. The standard semantics form a class: they all treat 'want' like a deontic modal.[3,4] I can't show here that all contemporary, deontic modal-style semantics for 'want', with the two constraints, make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions incompatible. What I can do is give a feel for the problem with a case study: a best-worlds semantics for 'want'.[5]

I am not the first to notice that (merely) conflicting *desires* are puzzling, or that (merely) conflicting desire *ascriptions* are a problem for *some* of the standard semantics.[6] I'm focusing on strongly conflicting desire ascriptions—and by extension, strongly conflicting desires—because strongly conflicting desire ascriptions pose a problem for *all* of the standard semantics, given the two standard constraints. Two non-standard accounts have been developed that make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible (each drops one of the two constraints). But, I argue, each faces problems elsewhere. Both misjudge the extent to which what we believe influences what we desire. The first non-standard account, like the standard account, overestimates it. The second non-standard account underestimates it.

After discussing the problem and the two proposed solutions, I sketch my own: a *coarse worlds* semantics, designed to model what I call *some-things-considered* desire. My account gives an intuitive characterization of how our desires lead to strongly conflicting desire ascriptions, and it accurately reflects the extent of belief's influence on desire.

2. Case study: a best-worlds semantics for 'want'

We have a modal base f and an ordering source g. Both take a world w and an agent A as arguments (and a time, strictly speaking). The modal base returns a set of worlds. The ordering source returns a set of propositions.[7] (I'll sometimes use 'modal base' and 'ordering source' to refer to the functions and sometimes to refer to their values.) The ordering source determines a preorder $\preceq_{g(A,w)}$ on worlds, and $\text{BEST}(A,w,f,g)$ is the subset of $f(A,w)$ that is minimal according to $\preceq_{g(A,w)}$.[8] Here is the form of the semantics:

Best-worlds semantics. $[\![A \text{ wants } p]\!]^{w,f,g} = 1$ iff $\forall u \in \text{BEST}(A,w,f,g): [\![p]\!]^{u,f,g} = 1$.

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[3]These semantics include: an "other things equal" semantics (Heim, 1992), a variant of a best-worlds semantics (Portner, 1997), an "absolute preference" semantics (Geurts, 1998), a decision-theoretic semantics (van Rooij, 1999; Levinson, 2003; Lassiter, 2011), a contrastive semantics (Villalta, 2008). Deontic modal analogs are given by, e.g. Goble (1996), Lassiter (2011) (decision-theoretic); Jackson (1985), Cariani (2013) (contrastive). A caveat: a semantics with a probability function makes desire ascriptions incompatible not when A merely believes that p will obtain if and only if q does not, but when she is *certain* of it.

[4]There's another prominent approach to 'want', traditional in the philosophy literature, and recently proposed by Condoravdi and Lauer (2016) (Moltmann (2013) has a related approach). Roughly: ⌜A wants p⌝ is true iff A has a desire that is satisfied in all and only the p-worlds. Strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are compatible on this approach, but it has its own problems (see Fara (2013) and Braun's (2015) reply to Fara).

[5]Kratzer (1981), Giorgi and Pianesi (1997), von Fintel (1999).

[6]See e.g. Davis (1984), Jackson (1985), van Rooij (1999), Levinson (2003).

[7]I'm roughly following von Fintel in presenting the best-worlds semantics.

[8]$u \preceq_{g(A,w)} v$ iff $\{p \in g(A,w) : v \in p\} \subseteq \{p \in g(A,w) : u \in p\}$. $\text{BEST}(A,w,f,g) = \{u \in f(A,w) : \neg\exists v \in f(A,w), v \prec_{g(A,w)} u\}$. On this definition, 'best' means 'none better'. I make the limit assumption (Lewis, 1973), which entails that $\text{BEST}(A,w,f,g)$ is non-empty if $f(A,w)$ is non-empty.

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This is just the form. We need to say what the modal base and ordering source are.

Start with the modal base. Which worlds are in the modal base when we evaluate $\ulcorner$A wants p$\urcorner$? In other words, whether $\ulcorner$A wants p$\urcorner$ is true depends on whether p is true in certain worlds. Which? Presumably not *all* worlds. Say that I want sushi. Somewhere out there in the total space of worlds eating sushi carries a lifetime prison sentence, yet worlds where it does are irrelevant to my desire. They're not possibilities that I take seriously. I believe that eating sushi is legal, so worlds where it isn't don't figure into my desire for sushi.

Along these lines, Stalnaker suggests that "wanting something is preferring it to certain relevant alternatives, the relevant alternatives being those possibilities that the agent believes will be realized if he does not get what he wants" (Stalnaker, 1984: p. 89). You might translate this thought into the semantics by identifying the modal base with the set of worlds compatible with what the agent believes—the agent's belief set.[9] And indeed it's standard to identify the modal base with the belief set, or a close relative.[10] (The modal base actually can't *always* be the belief set (Heim, 1992). In particular, it can't be the belief set when the agent either believes p or believes $\neg p$. I won't discuss such cases, so we'll only need to settle what the modal base is like when the agent believes neither p nor $\neg p$.)

> *Constraint: belief set modal base.* $[\![$A wants p$]\!]^{w,f,g}$ is defined only if $f(A, w) =$ A's belief set in w (when A in w believes neither p nor $\neg p$).

What about the ordering source? On what basis does it rank the worlds for desire ascriptions? On the basis of the agent's desires. That much is universally accepted. What's not quite universally accepted, although still standardly assumed, is that the ordering source ranks worlds based on the agent's *total desire state*.[11] An ordering source ranks worlds based on the agent's total desire state when it contains *every* proposition that counts in favor of a world in the agent's eyes. (When it contains *some* such propositions, it ranks worlds based on *part* of her desire state.)

> *Constraint: unique (total desire) ordering source.* $[\![$A wants p$]\!]^{w,f,g}$ is defined only if $g(A, w)$ represents A's total desire state in w.

Combining the semantics with the two constraints gives us:

> *Simplified, informal truth conditions.* $\ulcorner$A wants p$\urcorner$ is true iff p is true in all of the best worlds in A's belief set, as ranked by A's total desire state.

Let's see why these truth conditions make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions incompatible.

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[9]Heim (1992) also uses the presupposition behavior of 'want' to motivate using the belief set.

[10]E.g. Heim (1992), Giorgi and Pianesi (1997), Portner (1997), Geurts (1998), von Fintel (1999), Giannakidou (1999), van Rooij (1999), Levinson (2003), Lassiter (2011), Pearson (2016) all identify the modal base with the belief set or a close relative (at least when A believes neither p nor $\neg p$).

[11]So far as I know, only Levinson (2003) and Crnič (2011) have denied that the ordering source ranks worlds based on the agent's total desire state. Everyone else accepts it (some implicitly, others explicitly).

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2.1. Predicting that strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are incompatible

Al believes that he'll see the concert if and only if he takes the drive, which will make him sick.

(1)   Al wants to see the concert.

(2)   Al doesn't want to take the long drive.

(1) and (2) are both true. But that's not what we predict. If (1) and (2) are both true, then the truth conditions say that Al both sees the concert and doesn't take the drive in the best worlds in his belief set. But Al believes that he'll see the concert if and only if he takes the drive: there aren't any worlds in his belief set where Al both sees the concert and doesn't take the drive.[12]

More generally, we predict that all strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are incompatible: $\ulcorner$A wants p$\urcorner$ and $\ulcorner$A wants q$\urcorner$ are both true if and only if among the possibilities that A takes seriously (the worlds in A's belief set), the best are those where p and q both obtain. But by definition, if $\ulcorner$A wants p$\urcorner$ and $\ulcorner$A wants q$\urcorner$ conflict, then A believes that p will obtain if and only if q does not—she doesn't take seriously the possibility that p and q will both obtain. The agent's beliefs are making strongly conflicting desire ascriptions incompatible—they're influencing the modal base too much.

2.2. Two ways to make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible

Given the belief set modal base and unique ordering source constraints, the best-worlds semantics wrongly predicts that strongly conflicting desire ascriptions are incompatible. There are two obvious ways to make things right: drop the unique ordering source constraint or drop the belief set modal base constraint. Both have been proposed, and both do make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible. But, as I argue in sections §3 and §4, both face problems elsewhere. These problems stem from a misunderstanding of how what we believe influences what we desire.

3. Drop the unique ordering source constraint?

Intuitively speaking, what is happening when Al wants to see the concert *and* wants to avoid the drive? What is happening when an agent wants two things and believes that one will come about if and only if the other does not? Maybe the agent has conflicting values. Al values hearing good music. He also values avoiding sickness. When Al believes that one of these values will be realized if and only if the other is not, desire ascriptions strongly conflict. You might base your account of 'want' on this picture of values by saying that desire ascriptions are true or false *relative to a value*. Relative to Al's value of having hearing good music, (1), 'Al wants to see the concert', is true; relative to his value of avoiding sickness, (2), 'Al doesn't want to take the drive', is true.

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[12]This amounts to a contradiction if we assume what's entirely plausible: that Al's beliefs are consistent, in which case there will be best worlds in his belief set (see footnote 8 for details).

To implement truth relative to a value in our semantics, we need to represent some things that the agent values without representing them all. In other words, we need to enable ordering sources to represent only part of the agent's desire state: we need to drop the (unique) total-desire ordering source constraint. Levinson (2003) and Crnič (2011) propose to do this by letting the ordering source vary by context:[13]

> *Constraint: variable (partial-desire) ordering source.* $[\![A \text{ wants p}]\!]^{w,f,g}$ can be defined even if $g(A,w)$ represents just some part of A's desire state in w.

Both (1) and (2) need true readings. What does that take? The variable ordering source view says that in a given conversation, there are multiple ordering sources that different contexts determine, multiple ordering sources that are *available* for evaluating a given desire ascription in a given conversation. A desire ascription has a true reading when evaluated against an ordering source that is available for evaluating that ascription.

Suppose that there are two ordering sources available for evaluating (1) and (2). One of them, g_1, represents Al's value of hearing good music; the other, g_2, represents his value of avoiding sickness. In Al's belief set, Al sees the concert in the g_1-best worlds, giving (1) a true reading, while in the g_2-best worlds, Al doesn't take the drive, giving (2) a true reading.

The crux of the variable ordering source view is: extra ordering sources, extra readings. Before, at most one of two strongly conflicting desire ascriptions could have a true reading, and now both can. However, along with these extra readings that we want, we get others that we don't.

3.1. Overgeneration threatens the variable ordering source view

Consider:

(3)   Al wants to take the drive.

(3) has no true reading here: Al is kicking and screaming, begging to not go. But the variable ordering source view has just said that there's an available ordering source, g_1, which gives (3) a true reading. Because g_1 makes (1) true, it ranks concert-worlds best in Al's belief set. Yet the concert-worlds *are* the drive-worlds in his belief set, so g_1 ranks drive-worlds best in Al's belief set: (3) is true relative to g_1. We've overgenerated.

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[13]Three things to note. First, neither Levinson nor Crnič give a best-worlds semantics (Levinson's semantics is decision-theoretic, and Crnič is noncommittal among the deontic-modal-style semantics). My objection to the variable ordering source view in §3.1 also applies to the other deontic-modal-style semantics. Second, van Fraassen (1973) and von Fintel (2012) propose an analog of the variable ordering constraint for 'ought'. Third, instead of having ordering sources vary by context, you could build extra orderings into the semantics. Let $\mathscr{G}$ be a set of ordering sources. $[\![A \text{ wants p}]\!]^{w,f,\mathscr{G}} = 1$ iff $\exists g \in \mathscr{G}: \forall u \in \text{BEST}(A,w,f,g): [\![p]\!]^{u,f,\mathscr{G}} = 1$. $[\![A \text{ wants p}]\!]^{w,f,\mathscr{G}}$ is defined only if, for every $g \in \mathscr{G}$, $g(A,w)$ represents at least some of A's desire state in w. (For analogous approaches to 'ought', see e.g. Horty (2003), von Fintel (2012), and Cariani (2013).) This view makes strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible, but it's susceptible to the objection to the variable ordering source view that I give in §3.1.

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(If the concert were enjoyable enough to be worth the drive, we could get a true reading of (3): Al might say to his parents that he wants to take the drive to convince them to go to the concert. This is not the case as we've set it up though.)

We can't conclude that the variable ordering source view is wrong. Because it posits variability in a contextual parameter, it is flexible. Maybe it can give principled constraints according to which g_1 is *not* available for evaluating (3), even though it is available for evaluating (1). With such constraints, we wouldn't overgenerate. For now, I'll operate as if we don't have such constraints, and I'll return to the issue in §7.

3.2. Lesson

Because we've continued to use the belief set modal base, the agent's beliefs continue to influence the modal base too much. Al believes that he'll see the concert if and only if he takes the drive—in his belief set, the concert-worlds are the drive-worlds. The ordering source draws only on worlds in the modal base—only on worlds in the belief set—so it can't distinguish the concert from the drive. We need to lessen the influence of the agent's beliefs on the modal base.

4. Drop the belief set modal base constraint?

A natural way to lessen the influence of the agent's beliefs on the modal base is to let the modal base contain worlds outside of the agent's belief set:

> *Constraint: beyond-belief set modal base.* $[\![\text{A wants p}]\!]^{w,f,g}$ can be defined when $f(\text{A}, w)$ contains worlds outside of A's belief set in w (even if A in w believes neither p nor $\neg p$).

If we adopt the beyond-belief set modal base constraint, we again make unacceptable predictions, although now we'll do so because the agent's beliefs influence the modal base too *little*.

If we want our modal base to reach beyond the belief set, we need to give a principled answer to the question *which worlds outside of the belief set are in the modal base?* Villalta gives a principled answer.[14] Let's look at what she says.

4.1. Villalta's answer

We know that if the modal base is the belief set, at most one of two strongly conflicting desire ascriptions can be true: if ⌜A wants p⌝ and ⌜A wants q⌝ are both true, then p-and-q-worlds are best in the belief set, but if ⌜A wants p⌝ and ⌜A wants q⌝ strongly conflict, there aren't any p-and-q-worlds in the belief set. If the modal base isn't the belief set, there can be p-and-q-worlds in the modal base: there is no *structural* obstacle to two strongly conflicting desire ascriptions

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[14]The other authors who propose a beyond-belief set modal base are Asher (1987), Anand and Hacquard (2013), and Rubinstein (2017). Anand and Hacquard adopt Villalta's view, Asher doesn't specify which worlds are outside of the belief set, and although Rubinstein says in a particular case which worlds are outside the belief set, she doesn't give a principled answer to the question of which worlds outside the belief set are in the modal base.

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both being true. Nonetheless, if we use Villalta's modal bases, most desire ascriptions come out false, strongly conflicting or not.

Villalta's semantics is contrastive, so her modal bases are built out of the contextually salient contrast class. If p, q, and r make up the contrast class for ⌜A wants p⌝ in a given context, then the modal base is the union of p, q, and r.

Consider (1), 'Al wants to see the concert', evaluated against a contrast class that's just *Al sees the concert* and *Al doesn't see the concert*. If (1) is true, the best worlds in this set must all be concert-worlds. (This is what's predicted by both the best-worlds semantics and Villalta's.[15]) It just can't be, though, that all of the best worlds in this set are concert-worlds. The possible ways for Al to *not* see the concert are too varied. In some worlds where he doesn't see the concert, The Who perform in his living room. In others, John Lennon and George Harrison have been resurrected from the dead, The Beatles are reunited, and *they* perform in Al's living room.[16]

When we evaluate ⌜A wants p⌝, we can't concern ourselves with *every* way that p and the relevant contrast propositions can come about. If we do, only rarely will all of the best worlds be p-worlds. With Villalta's modal bases, most desire ascriptions will come out false. The agent's beliefs are influencing the modal base too *little*: doxastically outrageous possibilities have nothing to do with our desires. This is how we motivated the belief set modal base in the first place: worlds where I'm imprisoned for eating sushi have nothing to do with my desire for eating sushi, just as worlds where Lennon and Harrison are resurrected have nothing to do with Al's desire to go to the concert.

We need a principled answer to the question *which worlds outside of the belief set are in the modal base?* Villalta's answer doesn't succeed, but that doesn't mean that no answer could. I'll now suggest a different answer and two ways to flesh it out. Neither succeeds.

4.2. A simple, incomplete answer

The problem with the belief set modal base was that (1), 'Al wants to see the concert', and (2), 'Al wants to take the drive', couldn't both be true because there aren't worlds in Al's belief set where he both sees the concert and doesn't take the drive. There's an obvious fix: take Al's belief set and add worlds just like those in his belief set, except that in the new worlds, Al sees the concert *and* doesn't take the drive. Of course, Al most desires going to the concert without taking the drive, so these concert-no-drive-worlds are best in the new modal base. If the new modal base is available for evaluating both (1) and (2), then both have true readings.

But consider a different case. Jo is ill. Her doctors may give her antibiotics—whether she wants them or not. Jo herself wouldn't choose to have them. She believes that she can't be cured.

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[15]See p. 479, where Villalta defines her preference relation: it is effectively a best-worlds approach.

[16]The problem isn't with the *Al sees the concert/Al doesn't see the concert* contrast class. If it were instead e.g. *Al sees the concert/Al stays home*, there would still be worlds where The Who perform in his living room.

(4)   Jo wants the doctors to give her antibiotics.

(4) has no true reading. Yet we can give (4) a true reading with a modal base that goes outside of the agent's belief set: take Jo's belief set and add worlds just like those in her belief set, except that in the new worlds, she gets antibiotics *and* is cured. Of course, being cured is better than not, so these *antibiotics*-cured-worlds are best in the new modal base. If the new modal base is available for evaluating (4), then (4) is wrongly predicted to have a true reading.

The agent's beliefs are again influencing the modal base too little. Jo doesn't want to be given antibiotics *because* she believes they can't cure her: if the modal base contains worlds where she is cured by antibiotics, we'll make the wrong predictions about her attitude towards antibiotics.

The simple, incomplete answer is simple because it gives us a simple way to build a modal base to make (1) and (2) compatible. The simple, incomplete answer is incomplete because it doesn't tell us why we get to add concert-no-drive-worlds to Al's belief set but not antibiotics-cured-worlds to Jo's. It doesn't give us a complete, principled answer to the question *which worlds outside of the belief set are in the modal base?* I'll now make two attempts to complete the incomplete answer. Both fail.

4.2.1. An attempt at completing the simple, incomplete answer: conjunction-introduction

Here's a more complete answer—a *conjunction-introduction* answer: when ⌜A wants p⌝ and ⌜A wants q⌝ are both true and there aren't any *p*-and-*q*-worlds in A's belief set, then the modal base is A's belief set, plus some *p*-and-*q*-worlds. This answer delivers Al's belief set, plus concert-no-drive-worlds (because both 'Al wants to see the concert' and 'Al doesn't want to take the drive' are true), but it doesn't deliver Jo's belief set, plus antibiotics-cured-worlds (because 'Jo wants antibiotics' is not true), just as we wanted. However, there are two problems.

First, the conjunction-introduction answer is itself incomplete: it works backwards from what the right predictions are to what the modal base must be. We want to go the other way around. We want to give a principle for generating the modal base that yields the right predictions.

Second, the conjunction-introduction answer is not in general true. There is a kind of case of strongly conflicting desire ascriptions where the conjunction-introduction answer simply makes the wrong predictions. Consider Lu, who believes that she may be served one of two drinks tonight: either a champagne or a port. Lu is big fan of both. She says:

(5)   I want to drink the champagne.

(6)   I also want to drink the port. (I'm excited to see what they serve!)

(7)   But of course I don't want to drink the champagne *and* the port. That would ruin both.

(5) and (6) are true, and there aren't any champagne-and-port-worlds in Lu's belief set. The conjunction-introduction answer tells us to add to Lu's belief set worlds where she drinks

port *and* champagne, banking on these conjunction worlds being best in the new modal base. They're not. Drinking champagne and port would ruin both! The conjunction worlds are *worst* in the new modal base.[17] (5) and (6) are wrongly predicted false.

4.2.2. A different attempt at completing the simple, incomplete answer: partly belief-based

We've seen that if we want to use a modal base that's not the belief set, we risk the agent's beliefs influencing the modal base too little. We don't have to throw out the baby with the bath water, though. We can use a modal base that's not the belief set and still use the agent's beliefs to influence the modal base to *some* extent.

Think of the belief set as the set of worlds that an agent thinks are viable candidates for actuality. All worlds outside the belief set are unviable candidates. Nonetheless, some worlds outside of the belief set are less viable than others. According to Al, worlds where Lennon and Harrison are resurrected are unviable candidates for actuality, as are worlds where Al sees the concert without driving. Both kinds of worlds are outside of his belief set. Nonetheless, Al thinks that worlds where Lennon and Harrison are resurrected are *less* viable candidates than worlds where Al sees the concert without driving. Put another way: Al would be less surprised to learn that he could see the concert without driving than he would be to learn that Lennon and Harrison were resurrected.

You might use viability to complete the incomplete answer. Here's a *partly belief-based* answer to the question *which worlds outside the belief set are inside the modal base?* Worlds that the agent thinks are unviable candidates for actuality can be inside the modal base, but worlds that the agent thinks are *too* unviable can't be inside the modal base.

We want the partly belief-based answer to give (1), 'Al wants to see the concert', and (2), 'Al doesn't want to take the drive', true readings without giving (4), 'Jo wants the doctors to give her antibiotics', a true reading. We want to allow the modal base that is Al's belief set, plus concert-no-drive-worlds, but disallow the modal base that is Jo's belief set, plus antibiotics-cured-worlds. So we'd need it to be that Al thinks that concert-no-drive-worlds are *more* viable candidates for actuality than Jo thinks antibiotics-cured-worlds are. But we can just suppose that this isn't the case. We can suppose that Jo would be *less* surprised to learn that she could be cured with antibiotics than Al would be to learn that he could see the concert without driving.

4.3. Lesson

In trying to reduce the influence of the agent's beliefs on the modal base by letting the modal base contain worlds outside of the agent's belief set, we make wrong predictions. And we do so *because* we have reduced the influence of the agent's beliefs too much. The possibility that The Who perform in Al's living room is irrelevant to Al's desire to see the concert *because* Al

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[17]The conjunction-introduction answer also fails when the prejacents of two true desire ascriptions are incompossible (Davis (1984), Fara (2013) give such cases). Van Rooij (1999) and Levinson (2003) also point out that 'want' is not closed under conjunction.

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believes that he can only see The Who perform if he sees the concert; the possibility that Jo is cured by antibiotics has nothing to do with Jo's desire to not be given antibiotics *because* she believes that antibiotics can't cure her; the possibility that Al drinks port with champagne has nothing to do with his desire to drink port, and champagne, respectively, *because* he believes that he won't drink them together. Doxastic impossibilities are irrelevant to the agent's desires.

If our modal bases for desire ascriptions contain possibilities that are irrelevant to the agent's desires, we shouldn't expect to make the right predictions—we shouldn't expect to make the right predictions if we adopt the beyond-belief set modal base constraint.

5. Interim summary

The standard, deontic modal-style semantics for 'want', given the two standard constraints, make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions incompatible. We've seen the incompatibility, and the problems with dropping either of the two standard constraints, within the best-worlds semantics.

If we keep the best-worlds semantics—or any of the standard deontic-modal style semantics—we're in a bind. With the belief set modal base constraint, the agent's beliefs are too influential: in Al's belief set, the concert-worlds are the drive-worlds, and so ordering sources (variable or not) can't distinguish the concert from the drive. Yet without the belief set modal base constraint, the agent's beliefs aren't influential enough: doxastic impossibilities are irrelevant to our desires. To make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible without going wrong elsewhere, the agent's beliefs should influence the modal base some, but not too much. To properly capture the influence of the agent's beliefs on the modal base, I propose a new semantics.

6. A sketch of a coarse worlds semantics

Here's a hypothesis about *desire*—a hypothesis about how much our beliefs influence our desires—that makes strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible: in situations like Al's, the agent *considers* how the world will be in certain respects, but *ignores* how it will be in others.

Al can consider how things would be at the concert but ignore how they'd be during the drive. When Al considers *what the concert would be like*, what's good about the concert—he'd hear good music—comes to the fore. When Al ignores *what it would take to get to the concert*, what's bad about what it would take to get to the concert—he'd get carsick from the drive—does not come to the fore. In other words, when Al considers what the concert would be like, but ignores what it would take to get to the concert, *Al wants to go to the concert*. Similarly, when Al considers what the drive would be like, what's bad about the drive—carsickness—comes to the fore. When Al ignores what what he would do if he took the drive, what's good about what he would do if he took the drive—experience good music—does not come to the fore. In other words, when Al considers what the drive would be like, but ignores what he would do if he took the drive, Al doesn't want to take the drive.

This is a picture of *some-things-considered* (other-things-ignored) desire. Desire is not a *two-place* relation between an agent and a proposition, but rather a *three-place* relation between an agent, a proposition, and what the agent is considering. You don't desire *p simpliciter*. You desire *p* considering some things and ignoring others.

It will help to say a little more about considering. We'll model considering *p* with a *question* that bears on *p*. Formally, I'll take a question to be a partition on the total space of worlds, a partition whose cells are the exhaustive answers to the question (Hamblin, 1958):[18] e.g., the question *q?* is represented with $\{q, \neg q\}$.

> Say that a set of propositions Π *bears on a proposition p* iff *p* is entailed by some member of Π or $\neg p$ is entailed by some member of Π.

Take the question that asks both *does Al go to the concert?* and *does Al hear good music?* This question is $\{concert \wedge good\ music, concert \wedge \neg good\ music, \neg concert \wedge good\ music, \neg concert \wedge \neg good\ music\}$, and it bears on the proposition *Al goes to the concert*. We can use this question, call it 'Π_1', to represent considering going to the concert because its answers tell us about the concert, and in this case, also about not going to the concert. What about ignoring? To ignore something is to not consider it. We model ignoring *p* with a question that can't tell us about either *p* or $\neg p$—with a question that doesn't bear on *p*. So, for example, we can model ignoring the proposition *Al takes the drive* with Π_1 because Π_1 doesn't bear on *Al takes the drive*.

We're not interested merely in modeling Al considering what the concert would be like, but also in modeling what Al believes the concert would be like—after all, ways for the concert to be that Al believes are impossible are irrelevant to his desires. We need to fit the agent's beliefs in our picture of considering and ignoring. We need to model what the agent believes about a given question. An agent's beliefs about a given question eliminate answers to that question. Take again Π_1, and suppose that Al believes that he'll hear good music if and only if he goes to the concert. Al's beliefs are incompatible with certain answers to Π_1 (*concert* $\wedge \neg good\ music$, $\neg concert \wedge good\ music$), and compatible with others (*concert* $\wedge good\ music$, $\neg concert \wedge \neg good\ music$).

Following Yalcin (2016), we'll call the set of answers to Π_1 that are compatible with Al's beliefs, Al's Π_1-*relative belief state*. More generally:

> A's *belief set* in *w* is the set of worlds compatible with what A believes in *w*.

> Where Π is a question, A's Π-*relative belief state* in *w* is the set of answers to Π compatible with what A believes in *w*: $\{p \in \Pi : p \cap A$'s belief set in $w \neq \varnothing\}$.[19]

Yalcin has motivated the existence of question-relative belief states by arguing that they can help us solve certain problems that go under the name 'the problem of logical omniscience'.

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[18] I don't think much turns on whether we use a partition approach to questions. I'm using it for concreteness.

[19] I'm defining question-relative belief states slightly differently from Yalcin, who thinks that agents' beliefs can't be represented with a belief *set*. This difference isn't important to my view.

Here, I'll take for granted that agents have question-relative belief states.

The answers to a question are propositions. To better understand my semantics, it will help to think of these propositions as *coarse worlds*. A coarse world is coarse in the sense that it does not decide the truth value of every proposition. Where defined, every proposition, or its negation, is *true* at a given (non-coarse) world. But not every proposition, or its negation, is *entailed* by a given coarse world.[20] I will use a bold '***p***' to indicate that you should think of the proposition p as a coarse world.

Back to some-things-considered desire. The term 'considering' is a little misleading: it suggests something *episodic*. I don't mean it that way. In order for Al to want to see the concert—considering what the concert would be like, but ignoring what the drive would be like—there doesn't need to be, or have been, an *episode* of Al considering what the concert would be like. Compare: in order for Al to believe that he'd hear good music at the concert, there doesn't have to be, or have been, an episode of Al believing that he'd hear good music at the concert.

On the picture of some-things-considered desire, desire is a relation between an agent, a proposition, and what the agent is considering—more precisely, a relation between an agent, a proposition, and a question-relative belief state. Coarse worlds in questions decide the truth values of some propositions, but not others, and that's helpfully understood as the agent considering some propositions, but not others. I said, speaking loosely, that considering what the concert would be like, but ignoring what the drive would be like, Al wants to go to the concert. Strictly speaking, what I mean is that there is some question Π that bears on what the concert would be like, but not on what the drive would be like, and the desire relation holds between Al, the proposition *Al goes to the concert*, and Al's Π-relative belief state.

What is Π? The question-relative belief states that figure into our desire relations are complex. Whether Al desires to go to the concert depends on what he believes about a whole host of propositions: does Al hear good music? do The Who perform? which songs? does Al have fun? how much fun? how long is the concert? how loud? where does Al sit? will it be crowded? And so on. A question that bears on all of those propositions has a great many answers—many more than the four that e.g. Π_1 has. To make the semantics easier to understand, though, we'll consider how it works with toy questions. So in place of the true question that bears on all of these propositions about the concert, we'll use the question that asks just *does Al go to the concert?* and *does Al hear good music?* We'll use Π_1.

6.1. The semantics

The picture of some-things-considered desire adds an extra relatum to the desire relation—a question-relative belief state. To give a semantics that represents some-things-considered desire, we need to add an extra parameter—a question. Compare:

> *Old truth conditions, informally.* ⌜A wants p⌝ is true iff p is *true* in all of the best

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[20] 'Coarse worlds' comes from Yalcin (2011). See also Humberstone (1981).

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(non-coarse) worlds in A's belief set, as ranked by A's total desire state.

> *New truth conditions, informally.* ⌜A wants p⌝ is true with respect to Π iff *p* is *entailed* by all of the best coarse worlds in A's Π-relative belief state, as ranked by A's total desire state.

Two strongly conflicting desire ascriptions can both be true: each with respect to a different question.

Recall that Al's Π_1-relative belief state is {*concert* ∧ *good music*, ¬*concert* ∧ ¬*good music*}. There are two coarse worlds here: one where he goes to the concert and hears good music, and one where he doesn't go to the concert and doesn't hear good music. Hearing good music is better than not hearing good music, so he goes to the concert in the best coarse world in his Π_1-relative belief state. If Π_1 is available for evaluating (1), 'Al wants to see the concert', then (1) has a true reading.

We'll now use a second toy question, Π_2. Let Π_2 ask both *does Al take the drive?* and *does Al get carsick?*—i.e. $\Pi_2 = \{drive \wedge sick, drive \wedge \neg sick, \neg drive \wedge sick, \neg drive \wedge \neg sick\}$. Now suppose that Al believes that he'll get carsick if and only if he takes the drive: Al's Π_2-relative belief state is {*drive* ∧ *sick*, ¬*drive* ∧ ¬*sick*}. There are two coarse worlds here: one where he takes the drive and gets sick, and one where he doesn't take the drive and doesn't get sick. Not being sick is better than being sick, so he doesn't take the drive in the best coarse world in his Π_2-relative belief state. If Π_2 is available for evaluating (2), 'Al doesn't want to take the drive', then (2) has a true reading.

Let's state the semantics precisely. Before, the modal base was a function from an agent and world to a set of worlds. Now, it's a function from an agent, a question, and a world to a set of coarse worlds. The ordering source is still a function from worlds to sets of propositions (although the way that it orders possibilities differs slightly from before—see just below).[21]

> $[\![A \text{ wants } p]\!]^{w,f,g,\Pi} = 1$ iff $\forall \boldsymbol{q} \in \text{BEST}(A,w,f,g,\Pi)$: $\boldsymbol{q} \subseteq [\![p]\!]^{f,g,\Pi}$.

$[\![A \text{ wants } p]\!]^{w,f,g,\Pi}$ is defined only if:

(i)   *Constraint: unique (total desire) ordering source.* $g(A,w)$ represents A's total desire state in w.

(ii) *Constraint: question-relative belief state modal base.* $f(A,\Pi,w)$ = A's Π-relative belief state in w (when A believes neither p nor $\neg p$ in w).

These are not the only constraints we'll need (see below), but let's look at them first.

The question-relative belief state modal base constraint prevents the problem with the beyond-belief set modal base view. The problem was that the modal base contained worlds incompatible with the agent's beliefs—worlds irrelevant to the agent's desires. Tthe problem was that the agent's beliefs influenced the modal base too little. But if the modal base is the agent's question-

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[21]Dandelet (ms) proposes a similar, situations-based semantics for 'want'.

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relative belief state, then the modal base doesn't contain any *coarse worlds* incompatible with the agent's beliefs. The agent's beliefs *don't* influence the modal base too little.

The unique (total desire) ordering source is just what we had before. $g(A, w)$ is the set of all propositions that A cares about. What's different is the way that the ordering source ranks possibilities. Before, the ordering source ranked (non-coarse) *worlds* on the basis of *which propositions those worlds make true*.

> Old ordering: $u \preceq_{g(A,w)} v$ iff $\{p \in g(A,w) : v \in p\} \subseteq \{p \in g(A,w) : u \in p\}$.

Now, the ordering source ranks *coarse worlds* on the basis of *which propositions those coarse worlds entail.*[22]

> New ordering: $\boldsymbol{q} \preceq_{g(A,w)} \boldsymbol{r}$ iff $\{p \in g(A,w) : \boldsymbol{r} \subseteq p\} \subseteq \{p \in g(A,w) : \boldsymbol{q} \subseteq p\}$.

We can now verify that (1) is true relative to Π_1. To simplify things, suppose Al just cares about hearing good music and avoiding sickness: $g(Al, w)$ is $\{good\ music, \neg sick\}$.[23] Al's Π_1-relative belief state is $\{concert \wedge good\ music, \neg concert \wedge \neg good\ music\}$. There is a single concert-coarse-world in Al's Π_1-relative belief state, *concert* ∧ *good music*, and it entails a proposition in $g(Al, w)$, *good music*. But the no-concert-coarse-world in Al's Π_1-relative belief state, ¬*concert* ∧ ¬*good music*, entails neither *good music* nor ¬*sick*, so the concert-coarse-world is ranked best within Al's Π_1-relative belief state: (1) is true relative to Π_1.[24] The explanation for why (2) is true relative to Π_2 goes along similar lines.

6.2. A comparison with the variable ordering source view

I propose:

> *Constraint: question-relative-belief-state-bearing-on-prejacent.* $[\![A\ wants\ p]\!]^{w,f,g,\Pi}$ is defined only if A's Π-relative belief state in w bears on p.

This constraint prevents the immediate overgeneration problem that threatens the variable ordering source view. The variable ordering source view gives (1) a true reading with an available ordering source, g_1, which ranks concert-worlds best in Al's belief set. But given that in Al's belief set, the concert-worlds are the drive-worlds, g_1 ranks drive-worlds best: without further constraints on which ordering sources are available, the variable ordering source view incor-

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[22]Two things to note. First, Cariani et al. (2013) have a related approach to 'ought'. Second, 'BEST' needs to be adjusted: $\text{BEST}(A, w, f, g, \Pi) = \{\boldsymbol{q} \in f(A, \Pi, w) : \neg \exists \boldsymbol{r} \in f(A, \Pi, w), \boldsymbol{r} \prec_{g(A,w)} \boldsymbol{q}\}$ (compare with footnote 8).

[23]Note that simplifying in this way wouldn't help the variable ordering source view. It faces overgeneration regardless of which propositions Al cares about.

[24]Note that the coarse world *concert* ∧ *good music* contains (non-coarse) worlds where Al gets sick, as well as (non-coarse) worlds where he does not. The presence of (non-coarse) worlds where Al get sick doesn't matter to how *concert* ∧ *good music* is ranked. The ordering source ranks coarse worlds *only* on the basis of which propositions those coarse world entail: since *concert* ∧ *good music* contains both sick-worlds *and* no-sick-worlds, it does not entail that Al gets sick.

rectly predicts that (3), 'Al wants to take the drive', has a true reading.

My view gives (1) a true reading with an available question, Π_1, where concert-coarse-worlds are best within Al's Π_1-relative belief state. Unlike g_1, Π_1 doesn't give (3) a true reading: Al's Π_1-relative belief state, $\{concert \wedge good\ music, \neg concert \wedge \neg good\ music\}$, does not bear on the prejacent of (3): neither member of this set entails either *Al takes the drive* or *Al doesn't take the drive*. In other words, considering what the concert would be like, but ignoring the drive, it's neither the case that Al wants to take the drive nor that he doesn't want to take the drive: he is *ignoring* the drive. This is captured by the question-bears-on-the-prejacent constraint: (3) is *undefined* with respect to Π_1.

In §7, I say more about how my view compares to the variable ordering source view.

6.3. The agent's beliefs don't influence the modal base too *much*

We've seen that the agent's beliefs don't influence question-relative belief state modal bases too *little*. They also don't influence question-relative belief state modal bases too *much*.

Al's beliefs influence the belief *set* modal base too much because within Al's belief set the concert-worlds are *coextensive* with the drive-worlds. We don't have such coextension in question-relative belief state modal bases: the questions involved in question-relative belief states are partitions over the set of all worlds, partitions over the entire space of metaphysically possible worlds. (They are *not* partitions over the agent's belief set.) Take Al's Π_2-relative belief state, $\{drive \wedge sick, \neg drive \wedge \neg sick\}$. The drive-coarse-world here, $drive \wedge sick$, is coextensive with another coarse world just in case that coarse with is *metaphysically equivalent* to $drive \wedge sick$. But the proposition $drive \wedge sick$ is not metaphysically equivalent to any coarse world where Al goes to the concert (i.e. it's not metaphysically equivalent to any proposition that entails that Al goes to the concert).

The key here is that considering merely whether he'll take the drive and whether he'll get sick, and ignoring the concert, Al ignores the relationship between the drive and the concert. Even though Al believes that he'll see the concert if and only if he takes the drive, that belief makes no difference to which coarse worlds are in his Π_2-relative belief state. Al's Π_2-relative belief state is the set of coarse worlds in Π_2, $\{drive \wedge sick, drive \wedge \neg sick, \neg drive \wedge sick, \neg drive \wedge \neg sick\}$, that are compatible with his beliefs. Only certain of Al's beliefs make a difference to which of these coarse worlds are compatible with his beliefs. Although Al believes the proposition *concert iff drive*, that proposition is *compatible* with every coarse world in Π_2, so his belief in *concert iff drive*, doesn't affect which coarse worlds are in his Π_2-relative belief state. Some of the agent's beliefs influence the modal base—a belief influences the modal base if it's incompatible with an answer to the relevant question. But not all of an agent's beliefs are incompatible with answers to a given question, so not all of the agent's beliefs influence the modal base. The agent's beliefs influence the modal base some, but not too much.

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7. Conclusion

The standard semantics, given two standard constraints, make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions incompatible. There are two proposed solutions—the variable ordering source view, and the beyond-belief set modal base view—each of which drops one of constraints. I've argued that the beyond-belief set modal base view is misguided: possibilities incompatible with an agent's beliefs are irrelevant to what she desires. I have not taken such a strong stance against the variable ordering source view. I pointed out that as long as we keep the belief set modal base in a non-coarse worlds framework, ordering sources can't distinguish propositions that must be distinguished, which means that the variable ordering source view overgenerates *without further constraints* on which ordering sources are available. No further constraints have been given. That doesn't mean they couldn't be given in a principled way, although I'm pessimistic.

I've sketched my own way to make strongly conflicting desire ascriptions compatible: a coarse-worlds semantics based on a picture of some-things-considered desire. My view has two principal merits. First, the picture of some-things-considered desire gives an intuitive explanation of why our *desires* strongly conflict, a picture that my formalism captures. Second, what we learned by looking at the two proposed solutions was that the problem with strongly conflicting desire ascriptions stems from the extent to which our beliefs influence our desires. A solution to the problem needs belief to influence desire some, but not too much, and mine does.

A *complete* solution to the problem will allow us not just to say that some, but not all, beliefs influence desire. It will also identify, in a principled way, *which* beliefs influence which desires. I have already done some identifying (e.g. Al's desire to go to the concert is influenced by his beliefs about what the concert would be like, but not by his beliefs about what the drive would be like). Nonetheless, I have only given a sketch of my semantics—not a complete solution. I have not given a complete, principled answer to the question *which questions are available for evaluating a given desire ascription?* To properly answer that question I need further constraints—beyond those I have given—on which questions are available. Without such constraints, my account will overgenerate. This means that I have not shown that my view has a decisive advantage over the variable ordering source view. But I hope to have shown that the some-things-considered desire framework—and so the coarse-worlds framework—is a powerful one for identifying which beliefs influence which desires. Developing further constraints within this framework is the most important task for future work.

Here are two other issues that I hope to pursue in future work.

First, any adequate account of 'want' needs to address certain invalid inferences that Villalta noted.[25] She pointed out that Heim's semantics wrongly validates inferences like:

(8)   a.   Cy wants to pass.
       b.   Cy believes that he'll pass if and only if he studies.
       c.   So, Cy wants to study.

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[25]Pettit (1991) noted similar inferences.

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It's not just Heim's semantics that validates such inferences. Any semantics that uses (an analog of) the belief set modal base constraint wrongly predicts that 'want' is *closed under believed extension*. On my view, both (8a) and (8b) can be true in a given context c, while (8c) is not true but *undefined* with respect to the question that c determines. The further constraints I just mentioned are constraints on definedness conditions: understanding what these constraints are can shed light on why closure inferences fail.[26]

Second, although I've shown my idea for a coarse worlds semantics within the best-worlds framework, the best-worlds framework is not essential. I've used it not because I think it is the right framework for 'want'—it has its limitations—but because the Kratzer-style ranking on (non-coarse) worlds extends transparently to a ranking on coarse worlds (the ordering source ranks (non-coarse) worlds on the basis of the propositions those (non-coarse) worlds make true, and it ranks coarse worlds on the basis of the propositions those coarse worlds entail). Coarse worlds can be implemented within other semantics, too. Within a given semantics, we replace (non-coarse) worlds with coarse worlds and adjust accordingly. The implementations will be different within different semantics. (For example, some semantics use a probability distribution over worlds, and that distribution will have to be extended to coarse worlds.) The point is that a coarse worlds semantics—within the best-worlds framework or not—is a promising approach to strongly conflicting desire ascriptions.

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[26]Two things to note. First, my view does make closure inferences *Strawson-valid* (von Fintel, 1999, 2001). Understanding what Strawson validity has to do our intuitions of validity in these cases is another thing to explore further. Second, Crnič (2011) also suggests that something like question-relative belief states can help with these inferences, although he doesn't develop his suggestion or discuss constraints on which questions are available.

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