

Desires, Dispositions and the Explanation of Action

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A central question in philosophy of mind and action is: How do desires explain the actions that constitute their manifestations? And the most common contemporary answer is that desires are dispositional states that explain those actions in just the way that dispositions generally explain their manifestations. Since dispositions are widely thought to be causal conditions of their manifestations, it is also widely thought that explanations of the manifestation of a disposition by reference to the disposition are causal explanations. Consequently, desires are also regarded as causal conditions of the actions that constitute their manifestations, and hence to explain those actions causally. In this paper I explore this widely accepted picture by examining a way in which desires seem to differ importantly from the kinds of inanimate dispositions often discussed in the literature on dispositions.