

**Abstract:** This dissertation contends that emotions are subject to ethical assessment, not simply as motives or overt expressions, but in their own right. Emotions, I argue, are subject to assessment because they are aspects of a person's character. Specifically, emotions involve voluntary acts of attention, which are due to habituation. These acts show character by manifesting certain stable, deeply-held desires called 'concerns.' This view, dubbed 'Attentional Voluntarism,' is opposed to the prevalent view, dubbed 'Rationalism,' that emotions are subject to assessment because of their propositional content. Rationalism is unable to account for certain kinds of irrational emotion, where one forms an unwarranted emotion to avoid anxiety and secure pleasure. It exaggerates how mature and adaptive these emotions are. Attentional Voluntarism, by contrast, accounts for the childish and even infantile character behind such emotions, because the relevant habits of attention may simply be the residue from previous developmental stages.

# Feeling in Character: Towards an Ethics of Emotion

by

John M. Monteleone

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## Chapter I: Ethics of Emotion

### I.1. Introduction

Imagine the following scenario. You visit a close friend at the small business he owns and runs. As the two of you are chatting, several members of a racial minority walk in. By all appearances, these people are interested in buying something. There is nothing which could easily or reasonably be regarded as suspicious about them. Yet, as these patrons begin shopping, your friend grows visibly agitated, and utters *sotto voce* “I hate people of that sort.” Then, he takes an aggressive and almost confrontational interest in assisting the people, finding out what they are shopping for, seeing if they have any questions, etc. All the while, he does not let them out of sight. Eventually, he finds some flimsy pretext for asking them to leave, such as the harmless way they wear hats or pants, insisting that this is his store policy and it applies to everybody, etc.

I hope that many of us, if we were to witness such a scene, would feel what Strawson calls “the reactive attitudes” towards the friend.<sup>1</sup> We would be angry with him, resent him. As Strawson tells us, these emotions constitute the withdrawal of the good will you formerly felt towards the friend.<sup>2</sup> But what precisely is this withdrawal of good will about? What in this scene makes it fitting or appropriate to be angry or resentful of the friend? The scene is a complex of elements: what the friend said to you, what expressions he wore on his face, his condescending and suspicious manner towards the patrons of his business, his intentional act of asking the

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1 Strawson, 1962, 152-153

2 *Ibid.*, 161

people to leave the store. Getting clear on the precise details of exactly why we would withdraw our good will from the friend is important, because we may be called upon, by the friend himself or by others, to articulate exactly why we are angry and resentful. And this would require characterizing in some more principled way the friend's putative ethical failure.

The intuition to be pursued for the subsequent five chapters is the following. In cases like this, the friend's ethical failure is not, or not simply, the overt behavior he showed, but also consists in the emotions he felt. Assuming that the friend's behavior is not insincere, he genuinely hated these people who came to shop at his business, because they were members of a minority. In virtue of his hating of somebody for being a racial minority, we are correct to be angry with and to resent him. It is a widely held assumption that a person is subject to ethical criticism, approbation, censure, and so on, for the actions he performs. But, as I think the example shows, a person might also be subject to moral criticism, approbation, censure, for his emotions as well.

The possibility of appropriate ethical criticism, approbation, censure, etc., of a person for his emotions raises difficult philosophical questions about ethics and about emotions. This chapter will be dedicated to setting up those problems, and defining the terms in which the debate will be conducted. So, in the second section, I will define more exactly what it would mean for there to be an 'ethics of emotion.' Then, in the third section, I will present the main objection to the possibility of an ethics of emotion, the idea that ethical norms only govern intentional actions. In the fourth section, I will canvass the extant literature for arguments why emotions do not, in fact, satisfy this requirement. These arguments generates an important contrast between emotions and actions, one which seems to count against the possibility of an



ethics of emotion. In the fifth section, I will preview my answer to the problem. Finally, in the sixth section, I summarize the chapters to follow.

## I.2. What Emotions One 'Ought' To Have

The lesson of the racist shop owner is that emotions can be morally assessed.<sup>3</sup> Only then would it be fitting or appropriate for us to have reactive attitudes, such as resentment or anger, towards the person on account of his emotions, or for that person to be guilty about his own emotion. And I think there is a widespread intuition that such moral assessments, at least sometimes, make sense. After all, we will tell somebody without hesitation “Don't be angry; it isn't worth it,” or “You should be proud of what you have accomplished!” It then becomes a problem to say, with a bit more precision, *why* emotions can be morally assessed.

To fix terms, I will present this problem as a question regarding how it could ever be true that there are certain emotions a person, ethically speaking, ought or ought not to have. As Neu puts it, “there are any number of things that it is said one ought, or ought not to feel.

Traditionally, it has been held a sin (indeed, a “deadly” sin) to feel envy, pride, or anger... Envy, pain at the success of others, is supposed to be wrong.”<sup>4</sup> In this way, we might conceive of a body of norms that specifically govern emotions, analogous to to the more popularly recognized body of norms governing actions. For example, when ought one, ethically speaking, to be proud, or jealous? Postulating these norms does not, as of yet, require us to take a definite stance on whether – and if so, when – anger, contempt, or envy, etc., is wrong. Furthermore, there are important questions about whether the wrongness in question applies specifically to *types* of

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3 Roberts, 1991, 13-15; Shaffer, 1983, 165

4 Neu, 2010, 506-508

emotion (i.e., pride as such), as Neu's description of the traditional view seems to suggest, or to *tokens* of that emotion (i.e., particular episodes of pride).<sup>5</sup> However, for the present, it is clear that making any headway here presumes the existence of a framework wherein it makes sense to think of emotions as subject to ethical norms at all. To explore this possibility, I will discuss a notional body of norms, whose content is yet to be made determinate, as a distinct “ethics of emotion.”<sup>6</sup>

There are several reasons to frame the issue in this way. In the first place, doing so shows the affinity between our present question and the mainstream questions of ethics. One of the dominant problems for moral philosophers has been about the rightness or wrongness of action. That is, what are the essential properties of actions that we ethically ought to perform? By representing the issue as about norms, it becomes clear that the possibility of moral assessment of emotions is continuous with – and hence, would entail a positive expansion of – the subject-matter of ethics, properly so called.

Secondly, by framing the issue as about a body of norms that specifically govern emotions, we make it clear that the appropriateness of certain reactive attitudes, such as blame, resentment, anger, guilt, etc., is at stake. These reactive attitudes have sometimes been classified as the so-called “moral emotions.” The distinctive feature of a moral emotion, as Rawls suggests, is that “the person's explanation of his experience invokes a moral concept and its associate principles. His account of his feeling makes reference to an acknowledged right or wrong.”<sup>7</sup> This is to say, there must be some determinate way in which a norm has been violated (whether

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5 I think it is important to preserve the idea that emotions may be evaluated at *both* the level of the type and the token, although perhaps the latter is less obvious. Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here.

6 Neu, 2010

7 Rawls, 1971, 421. Aristotle describes anger as being about “a conspicuous slight being directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or what concerns one's friends.” (1378a31)

merely in the person's perception or in fact) in order for one to appropriately be angry, resentful, guilty, etc., about an emotion. In this way, unless it is true that there are norms that govern emotions, in addition to those governing actions, then it could not be true that reactive attitudes are ever justified in response to an emotion.

Nevertheless, I do not suppose that the issue is confined solely to claims wherein it is explicitly stated that one ought or ought not to have a particular type of emotion. More frequently, our ordinary assessments of emotion are framed in terms of numerous other so-called thick value concepts.<sup>8</sup> For example, another person's emotions might be called “base,” “despicable,” “lofty,” “noble,” “admirable,” “contemptible,” “ugly,” “cruel,” etc. In advertent to such characterizations of a person's conduct, I maintain, one is at least implying that the person ought or ought not to have the emotion in question. So, by framing the issue as about 'oughts', I am attempting to capture some generic, determinable content, which can in turn be made determinate in a particular context with the use of various thick concepts.

Whether we are correct to countenance the possibility of an ethics of emotion will, of course, will depend significantly on what emotions are. As we shall see, there are disagreements even here. At the very least, however, it can be agreed that emotion is an intentional mental phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> This is to say that it has a relational nature, in that it is directed or about something else. One is not simply angry, but angry at the waiter; not simply afraid, but afraid of the dog chasing one down the street. It is an internal state which is essentially related to the waiter or the barking dog.<sup>10</sup>

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8 Williams, 1985, 129,142ff.

9 This may be redundant. Some have argued intentionality to be both necessary and sufficient for some phenomena to be mental. Crane, 1998

10 Admittedly, there are examples of emotions, or emotion-like states, that are less obviously intentional. Moods do not have a fully determinate object, at least of the same sort as paradigmatic emotions. For example, one might feel gloomy, depressed, or optimistic, but not about anything in particular. Further, other affective

Furthermore, we can distinguish between certain external behavior which often or perhaps usually accompanies the emotion, and an emotion itself. For example, emotions are often manifested in characteristic facial expressions, such as anger being accompanied perhaps by a grimace or bared teeth. Furthermore, there are certain actions that a person with a particular emotion can be reliably expected to perform. The angry person may retaliate or otherwise seek to rectify the perceived wrong. But, it will be urged, anger does not necessarily involve these facial expressions, or the actions of retaliating or attacking. In many cases, an angry person neither displays any facial expressions, nor acts on her emotion in any way. One might have been trained not to show any sign of this anger. Furthermore, he may have judged that the retaliation is simply not worth it, and has undertaken more constructive courses of action. Anger essentially is the mental state which is manifested in the facial expressions and overt action, when they occur, but need not take on these forms.

Therefore, the norms comprised by the so-called “ethics of emotion” are not specifically about either behavioral expressions or actions motivated by the emotion. Return to the example of the racist shop owner. It is true that he makes certain facial expressions, utters his hatred aloud, and then condescendingly harasses the shoppers. Any of these may in fact be within the purview of ethics, as it is traditionally construed. These behaviors could have harmful consequences, could violate some duty towards others, or be the sort of thing that a virtuous person would not do. But the present issue is rather whether the shopkeeper ought not to have had a certain internal intentional state. Hence, the issue is not confined to these other behaviors

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conditions more conspicuously lack an object, such as feeling giddy, restless, or uncomfortable. For the present, it does not need to be settled whether any, or all, of these states are such that a person could be appropriately criticized, blamed, for them. Our question is whether such criticism, blame, etc., makes sense even in the case of paradigmatic emotions, such as anger, jealousy, pride, joy, etc. It falls to subsequent investigations into determine whether, and to what extent, this domain includes moods and other affective conditions.

that often, but do not always, accompany anger. Is there a sense in which the shop owner ought not to have had the inner state of hatred, even where he did not show this hatred in his outward demeanor?<sup>11</sup> In such a case, neither the shoppers nor anybody else would know how the proprietor felt. How then could he still have done something wrong?

### **I.3. The Problem: “Ought” Implies “Can”**

In this way, our question is the following: is it possible for there to be ethical norms which apply specifically to an inner mental state of emotion, a state which can be – but is not necessarily – manifest in certain overt expressive behavior and actions? By speaking in terms of how a person ought or ought not to feel, it is possible to frame clearly what I take to be the main objection to an ethics specifically about emotions.<sup>12</sup> In explicating the commonsense notion of duty, Kant finds that it applies exclusively to the will, and that which is subject to the will.<sup>13</sup> He argues that feelings cannot strictly speaking be governed by duties thus:

love as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty – though no inclination impels us to it and, indeed, natural and unconquerable aversion opposes it, is practical but not pathological love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in principles of action, not in melting sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.<sup>14</sup>

And so, emotions themselves cannot be governed by norms, because they are inclinations. That is to say, they are not the sorts of things that are subject to being altered by our intentions. But why should the fact that some response is not being subject to alteration by our intentions rule

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11 Smith, 2011 focuses on what is to be said on behalf of guilt for thoughts that one has not expressed.

12 Smith, 2011 discusses two others, what she calls the No Harm objection, and the Psychological Health objection, 240-241

13 Here I am not going to distinguish between claims of the form “It is my duty to A,” “I ought to A,” “It is morally right to A.” However, there may be good reason to make these distinctions, Ross, 1930, 3.

14 *Groundwork*, 4:399-400.

render “ought” judgments inappropriate?

The main answer, as far as I can tell, is an application of the well-worn philosophical principle that “ought” implies “can.” What the strictest version of this principle says is that it is true that a person *ought* to do something at a time only if, at the time, that response could be undertaken as a basic intentional action.<sup>15</sup> What I mean by calling these actions “basic” is that one can perform the act, by trying or intending to do so, without the need to adopt some functionally distinct means in order to accomplish what one is trying or intending to do. There has been dissent from this principle.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, many philosophers think that it provides the justification for conceiving emotions as definitively outside the purview of “ought” claims. Ross, discussing the suggestion that it might be a duty to act from a certain motive, says “it is not the case that I can by choice produce a certain motive ... in myself at a moment's notice”<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere, Richard Taylor says

one can do certain things, and what is thus done is an action, but emotions can only in the strict sense, be suffered. That is to say, they can be evoked within oneself either by one's own actions... It is for this reason that one could be commanded, for example, to swing his arms (an action) but could not intelligibly be commanded to love or hate (passions.)<sup>18</sup>

In short, the fact that a person cannot, at any given moment in time, alter or adjust what her emotions are as a basic intentional action implies that it would be false to maintain that he ought or ought not to have a certain emotion at that time.

It is useful, by way of contrast, to articulate better the notion of basic intentional action.

The clearest example is certain body movements. I can usually bend my knee or extend my arm

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15 The notion of a basic intentional action is due to Danto, A., 1965, who thought that basic actions were movements of the body. I return to a qualified version of this principle in Chapter II.

16 Cf., Sher, 2005, Stocker, 1971

17 Ross, 1930, 5

18 Taylor, 1970, 241. By contrast, Wallace, 1996 frames the issue, not about basic intentional action, but about what can be motivated by one's explicit grasp of reasons, 131-132

by simply intending or trying to make these motions. These body movements are basic, in that there is not some more narrowly circumscribed action I must perform in order to bend my knee or extend my arm.<sup>19</sup> It certainly is possible for me to conceive of an elaborate plan, using devices or the assistance of others, whose end result is the extension of my arm or bending of my knee. But such plans are unnecessary for me to get moving, they way they would be to get a car moving.

Sometimes, due to sudden paralysis or physical restraint, intending or trying cannot successfully bring it about that my knee is bent or my arm extended. But such cases provide no evidence against the thesis that various body movements, when we are not paralyzed or restrained, are basic intentional actions. Rather, in paralysis and restraint, certain atypical physical conditions counteract the ability to move my limbs that I usually have, and do not count against the thesis in those conditions we usually find ourselves. So, my intending or trying is typically sufficient to move my body in these (and other) ways. Furthermore, in the normal conditions, once I intend or try to extend my arm, my arm begins extending immediately. There is no lapse in time between my willing or trying and what I willed or tried to do.

However, there are borderline cases here that reveal the place of effort and degrees of trying. It could that be my first attempt to lift a gallon jug is unsuccessful, because I supposed it was filled with water when it was actually filled with quarters. In this case, unlike the paralysis example, I can exert more effort in trying or willing, and can likely (again, assuming normal human physical capacities) lift the jug of quarters.<sup>20</sup> In other words, trying or willing can come in

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19 Some action theorists argue that *every* bodily movement involves “overlapping trajectories,” such as extending my arm a distance  $n$  in order to extend it to  $n+1$ . Hence, all intentional body movements involve parts that can be regarded as means, Thompson, 2008, 107-108. I use the expression “functionally distinct” to mark that the means adopted cannot be of this homogeneous sort. The means must accomplish some distinct role toward the end, such as breaking the egg in order to make an omelet.

20 Some may deny that exerting more effort, as opposed to trying different techniques, ever makes a difference to

quantities or degrees. So, the claim must be that willing or trying, in the adequate degree, is typically sufficient to move my limbs in these ways. Such cases will bleed into impossibilities to the extent that no amount of effort on one's part would actually move one's limbs, because one is carrying something too heavy to lift, etc. And like physical restraint, the impossibility of lifting objects beyond normal human ken does not rule out that, typically, the motions of our limbs are basic intentional actions.

This sense in which we can move our limbs as basic intentional actions is meant to be non-committal on philosophical debates about whether freedom is compatible with the truth of causal determinism. Some incompatibilists suggest that our body movements proceed from certain events in our brains which are “immanently” caused.<sup>21</sup> That is, their occurrence is not the consequence of certain antecedent conditions in accordance with natural laws. Only then are these movements the sorts of things under the person's control. When compatibilists deny that any event is independent of the operations of natural law in the way suggested, they are not thereby denying that the movements of our limbs are subject to the immediate control of an agent. Rather, they are merely arguing that the psychological states of trying or willing can themselves in turn be regarded as effects. In other words, compatibilists do not do without control, as much as re-conceive it as being consistent with a naturalistic picture of the world. Accordingly, for present purposes, we can remain agnostic about whether a libertarian or compatibilist analysis of control is correct, so long as there is something to be said on behalf of freedom against skeptics.

Hence, the argument plausibly being offered by Kant, Ross, Taylor, and others is only

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the success of an action. My own experience lifting heavy objects speaks to the contrary.  
21 Chisholm, 1964, 178-179



what is a basic intentional action, or is essentially related to a basic intentional action, can be governed by norms. Some change that was necessarily outside of the scope of one's capacity for basic intentional action would, at no point in time, be such that one ought to effect or bring it about. Call this view *Intentionalism*.<sup>22</sup>

If Intentionalism is true, there are many features of a person that are immune to specifically ethical criticism, such as shoe size, race, or the socio-economic status his parents had as a child. These are not the sorts of things that one could alter or adjust, simply by trying or willing to do so. And hence, although similar features could have normative significance for somebody who is drafting public policy with a view towards future generations or building an ideal society, they clearly cannot be normative for the person whose shoe size, race, or socio-economic status is in question. There is no sense in maintaining that one ought to have been born in 1960s, rather than the 1980s. According to defenders of Intentionalism, the idea that one ought not to feel envy or hatred any different is similarly baseless.

#### **I.4. Why Emotions Are Not Basic Intentional Actions**

Accordingly, the main objection to recognizing the existence of a body of norms specifically governing emotions is the widely-held thought that emotions, the inner states which explain certain outward expressive behaviors and acts, are not the sort of feature we can alter or adjust simply by intending or willing to do so. Is this accurate? Philosophers and non-philosophers alike suppose that a person can not immediately bring himself to feel sad, jealous, or angry, etc, or alternatively, to leave off having one of these emotions, simply because he intended or tried to

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<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Irene Liu for helping me vastly to simplify the nature of the dialectic here, and consequently, the remainder of the dissertation.

do so. This is a reflection of the idea that emotions are “passions,” events in the life of a person which befall him or come over him, and to which he is necessarily a bystander.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the passivity of the emotions can seem so self-evident that it may be viewed by many as ridiculous to doubt it. However, it is in part the task of philosophy to establish the rationality of many unquestioned points of consensus, lest these simply be inherited prejudices. So, what arguments can be offered that emotions are not subject to our will in this way? A survey of the literature reveals at least three noteworthy objections: (a) the impossibility of deciding to believe something, (b) the involvement of affect and physiological arousal in emotion, (c) the lack of intention in what one feels.

I make no claim that these are the only, or even the best, possible objections. However, there is one type of objection I wish to set to the side. I do not think we should be swayed to appeals to grammar or our ordinary speech about these matters. As Gordon points out, many emotion words come from a more general class of past perfect participial adjectives, such as 'magnetized,' 'frozen,' 'congealed,' which serve to indicate the present state of something as resulting from the operation of some distinct causal power.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere, Peters appeals to ordinary, metaphorical descriptions of emotional experiences “consonant” with passivity, such as 'boiling' with anger, 'swelling' with pride, 'sparkling' with delight.<sup>25</sup> An argument, even *prima facie*, based on such considerations ignores the possibility that grammatical distinctions and ordinary ways of speaking themselves may reflect false beliefs and misguided theories about the true nature of the phenomena being discussed.

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23 Lawrie, 1980; Gordon, 1986; Peters, 1962; Thalberg, 1978

24 Gordon, 1986, 376; cf. also Roberts, 1984, 402

25 Peters, 1962, 121

#### ***4.a. Deciding to Believe***

It is common to suppose that emotions involve belief, or belief-like attitudes. As Gabriele Taylor says “it is largely by reference to the thoughts and beliefs we have about the world that we distinguish between different emotions.”<sup>26</sup> Critics contend, however, that since one cannot immediately alter the beliefs involved in an emotion, as a basic intentional action, emotions too cannot be basic intentional actions.<sup>27</sup>

For example, suppose you are a contestant on a show where a substantial cash prize is awarded to anybody who believes that the current month is January (when it is actually June). In such a case, you have a significant incentive to form the belief that, contrary to what you know to be true, the current month is January. Is it possible for you to do so? Will you win the money? The argument for a negative answer is based on the idea that belief “aims at truth.”<sup>28</sup> To believe some proposition is to take its constituent proposition to be true, and to do so in such a way as to be vulnerable to questions and criticisms bearing on whether it is in fact true.<sup>29</sup> Forming a belief is accordingly a matter of settling for oneself whether the constituent proposition is true. But the fact that forming a certain belief would be good, useful, desirable is entirely irrelevant to whether its constituent proposition is true. Thus, one cannot (without self-deception or manipulative techniques) form a belief simply because forming or having such a belief would be good, useful, desirable, etc.<sup>30</sup> The profitability of believing that it is now January has nothing whatsoever to

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26 Taylor, 1975b, 391

27 I find this argument, or a closely related one, voiced by Oakley, 1992, 130-131

28 Williams, 1970, 136-137

29 Hieronymi, 2006, 50. The contrast here is with supposing or imagining, which involve taking a proposition to be true, but only for the sake of some fairly circumscribed project. Thus, somebody who supposes or imagines *that it is raining* is not vulnerable to criticism and questions about why the sun is out, there is no water on the ground, etc.

30 Qualifications are necessary here. I am leaning on the “simply” in this formulation, because it is obviously possible, when believing something would be desirable, to subsequently determine whether the proposition was

do with whether the current month is January or June.

In other words, there are non-trivial constraints on which propositions it is possible for a person, in a given set of circumstances and without deceiving himself or adopting some manipulative techniques, to take to be true. To avoid this conclusion, one might try to appeal to the possibility of beginning an inquiry for the sake of forming a candidate belief. For example, I want to believe that Fred committed the crime, so I deliberately review the evidence of Fred's case in order to form this belief. However, deliberate inquiry is not enough to establish that we can decide to believe, for two reasons. Firstly, deliberately reviewing the evidence of Fred's case would not always, or typically, be sufficient for forming the belief, because there might not be enough evidence that Fred committed the crime. Secondly, even where there is sufficient evidence, forming the belief as a result of inquiry would not qualify as a basic, as opposed to a non-basic, intentional action. There were functionally distinct means one needed to take in order to form the belief. (Similar arguments apply where individual's agency occurs, not via inquiry, but via acting to bring about the truth of the proposition).

Some may point out that belief involves, not just the recognition of evidence, but *assenting* to a proposition.<sup>31</sup> Assent may be conceived of as a mental act that would ostensibly be a sort of basic intentional action. The clearest cases of assent occur when comparable evidence points in multiple directions, such as there existing rational arguments both for and against Fred's guilt. The person (a juror perhaps, following the judge's instructions) then must opt to believe one way or another about whether Fred committed the crime. However, it is far from clear that assent in tie-breaking cases actually sheds much light on the emotions, where one is not

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true and *thereby* form the belief. According to Hieronymi, these 'extrinsic' considerations can lead to the formation of a second-order belief that "the belief that p would be good to have" (60)

31 Stocker, 1982, 402

deliberating. Furthermore, it can be argued that, outside of the scope of deliberation, assent is often itself “passive,” as the truth grips or dawns upon the person, with little to no contribution on his part.<sup>32</sup> It would thus not seem accurate to characterize passive assent as a basic action, because one has not formed the belief simply by intending or trying to do so.

#### ***4.b. Affect and Physiological Arousal***

It is frequently supposed that emotions involve affect, and especially changes in the state of one's body, such as pumping adrenaline, heart palpitations, sweaty palms, quickened breathing, among many other examples.<sup>33</sup> As James states “without bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth.”<sup>34</sup> Critics have argued that since one cannot alter the affect and physiological states involved in an emotion, as a basic intentional action, emotions too cannot be basic intentional actions.

Several different reasons have been offered for why affect and bodily changes are not subject to the will. Oakley emphasizes the uncertainty of success in generating affect by trying or willing to do so:

while it may perhaps be possible to to arouse 'pangs' of jealousy in ourselves, or to 'work ourselves up' into feelings of rage, it seems that we cannot be as confident about the success of such attempts as we can be about the success of many (simple) physical acts<sup>35</sup>

In other words, simply trying or willing to have certain affective states is not typically sufficient for the relevant changes to occur. Even in the cases where such attempts work, they sometimes

32 Some have argued that emotions involve passive assent, rather than the active assent of deliberation, Helm, 2001 66-67; For discussion of this difference, cf. Brady, 2009

33 James, 1884; Damasio, 1994; Prinz, 2004; Whiting, 2006; Whiting, 2009, among others.

34 James, 1884, 128

35 Oakley, 1992, 130

require the adoption of functionally distinct means to bring about the intended result. For example, I can generate in myself a light-headed feeling, but I must hold my breath for some time in order to do so. Moreover, even where such attempts are successful, their success does not always result straightaway, simply because one tried or willed to be in such a state.

Another reason why affect and bodily states may not be basic intentional acts has to do with the quickness of their onset.<sup>36</sup> Many contemporary writers subscribe to the view that emotion is a process which has its beginnings in events (whether those be cognitive appraisals or not) whose occurrence is too fast for human recognition. The emotion is already underway, as evidenced by involuntary facial expressions and physiological changes, *before* the person is in the position to try or will to have it. Thus, in order to defend the idea that emotions are basic intentional actions, one is forced to defend the untenable view that the person tried or willed, without being conscious of doing so, to have an emotion she was incapable of noticing until a later point in time.

Still other writers emphasize that emotions, in virtue of affect and bodily changes, manage to interrupt other actions we are actually undertaking. Peters argues for this conclusion by pointing out the different types of impacts that affect and bodily change (which he assumes to be modifications on the autonomic nervous system) could have on actions: “fear and anger, as emotions, can be contingently rather than necessarily related to action in the sense that they can disrupt, intensify, and heighten motor performances.”<sup>37</sup> In short, affect and bodily change frequently disrupt the control we have over ourselves, and so it cannot be true without qualification that they are actions we can undertake simply because we intend or try to do so.

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36 Elster, 1999b, 311

37 Peters, 1962, 121

#### ***4.c. Lack of intention***

There remains yet a distinct set of difficulties. In the case of immediately controlled body movements, my motions are typically due to direct, explicit awareness *that* I am, e.g., bending a knee or extending my arm. This is clearest when the action is useful to accomplish some further purpose: I know I am extending my arm, since I am trying to grab the kettle for tea. In these cases, my ability to move my limbs requires the direct, explicit intention that I am moving my body thus and so, grabbing the kettle, making tea, and so on.

Critics have suggested that the absence of the relevant intention shows why emotions not intentional actions. As Adams says, “in having ... emotions, we are typically not aiming at having them at all, and usually not in a way that is aptly described as 'trying or choosing or meaning' to have them.”<sup>38</sup> For example, if Yvonne is embarrassed, she need not be intending to feel embarrassed, even if she recognizes certain features of her surroundings, such as people laughing at her. Without this intention, she cannot be said to be trying to feel embarrassment, nor trying *because* doing so would be desirable in some way. As Gordon puts it,

the belief that enters into the analysis of her embarrassment is not a belief that her embarrassment will or might somehow do some good, much less a belief that it will, specifically, undo the state of affairs she is embarrassed about.<sup>39</sup>

Even being in possession of a justification for an emotion “does not entail having a positive (or negative) evaluation of the emotion itself.”<sup>40</sup> In this way, the intention that would be necessary for an emotion to qualify as a basic intentional action is missing.

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38 Adams, 1985, 9-10

39 Gordon, 1986, 389

40 Gordon, 1986, 390

To be clear, the present worry does not depend, or depend merely, on the idea that emotions elude our notice, such as could be chalked up to the aforementioned rapidity of onset. Suppose that Yvonne was hooked up to a measurement device (error-free, to simplify the example) indicating precisely when she has an emotion. So, Yvonne infallibly knows whenever she has an emotion. The measurement device can, at best, furnish Yvonne with third-person *observations* of her emotional state, of the same variety available to a bystander. But the knowledge of what one intends is non-observational, and is in principle accessible only to the agent. For example, I do not need to look at the marks that are being made on a chalkboard in order to know that the word I am writing there is 'cat' rather than 'dog.' However, as the writer, I know that I am writing 'cat' rather than 'dog' without looking at the marks that are actually being made upon the board, because I have a direct, explicit awareness of the motions I am making with my body.

Someone may resist this argument, suggesting that we often can alter states of affairs with regard to which we lack explicit, direct awareness. Imagine a device (again, error-free) that has a light that goes on when my arm is fully extended, and is off otherwise. Ignorant that my movements are being monitored in this way, I do not know that my arm's extension flips on this light. In this example, turning the light on or off seems to be a basic intentional action, although I do not intend to turn the light. Similarly, it may be suggested, emotions are causally linked to something else to which the person does intend. However, such examples establish non-basic, rather than basic, actions. The process of turning on the light involves some functionally distinguishable means, regardless of whether I recognize this means-end connection. Were I to try and turn on the light, I would need to extend my arm in order to do so.



Along these same lines, we do well to allow that in some cases the person can intentionally have an emotion out of recognition that it would be desirable for her to have. Perhaps method actors constitute examples of this sort, insofar as they feel an emotion in order to accurately portray a character and compellingly act out scene. But even here there are grounds for denying that the ability possessed by the method actor is of the same variety as the ability we have to move our limbs. Method actors may have to imaginatively put themselves into character, through mental simulation, to conjure up the relevant emotions. As with several other cases, there would thus be some functionally distinct means that need to be adopted in order to have the relevant emotion.

### **I.5. Previewing The Argument: Attentional Voluntarism**

Accordingly, the principal objection to the possibility of an ethics of emotion is that emotions are not intentional actions. Rather, due to the involvement of belief, bodily arousal and affect, the lack of intention, etc., these emotions are events towards which the person is necessarily passive. In this way, we seem forced to conclude, together with Kant, Ross, and Taylor, that having an emotion is akin to being of a certain race, height, or shoe-size, in a crucial respect. None of these conditions are such that one could appropriately be censured or blamed for having them.

Return to the example of the racist shopkeeper. The objector could reason thus: it makes no sense to say that the shopkeeper ought not to have felt hatred towards his patrons who belonged to a racial minority. His hatred overcame him, and would have done so despite his attempts, with any amount of effort, to try or will to have a different emotion. This means that, at the time in question, the shop keeper may not have been able to feel differently than he did.

Ultimately, I think that this objection fails, and that an ethics of emotion is in fact a legitimate – and important – extension of the subject-matter of ethics. My argument for this claim, occupying the course of the following five chapters, has fundamentally two strands to it. The first strand deals with the fact (and I will treat it as a fact) that our emotions are not intentional actions. Does this rule out the possibility of an ethics of emotion? As I contend, it is incorrect to assume that “ought” always and necessarily entails “can,” even in a weak sense. Rather, there are norms that apply to your emotions, desires, etc., independently of whether these responses are, in any way, intentional acts. These norms have to do with the sort of moral character that is embodied in such reactions. I call this the view of responsibility as *attributability*. For example, an emotion may show its possessor to be selfish or vain. Hence, this is the sort of emotion one ought not to have, since one ought not to be a selfish or vain person.

Once we have admitted that there are certain responses one ought or ought not to have, simply in virtue of the fact that these reflect one's moral character, another question arises. Precisely why does an emotion reveal the person's moral character? The second strand of the argument consists in furnishing an answer to this question. My view is that emotions reveal the person's moral character insofar as they constitutively embody person's *concerns*. A concern is a disposition to bring about specific sorts of changes in the world, as well as to notice when these changes are needed or fulfilled. For example, in being afraid, one is disposed to protect oneself, or to avoid the danger posed by what one fears. Although in many cases one may not ultimately act on this disposition, perhaps through an attempt to master one's fear or because one risks a worse danger by engaging in aversive behavior, the disposition itself is essential to the emotion.

Overall, the view I will defend is called *Attentional Voluntarism*. Despite the

aforementioned objections, emotions are, in an important respect, voluntary. Anger, hatred, sympathy, sadness involve acts that the person could be truly said to do or undertake, rather than simply being events or condition to which she must necessarily be a bystander. How is this claim to be reconciled with denying that emotions are intentional actions? The answer is that not every aspect of a person's life in which she is active is an intentional action. In particular, in having an emotion, one attends to certain features in one's environment. The object and manner in which one pays attention may be something one literally does. This is true, even where the person did not try or will to pay attention, and could not stop paying attention if she were will to try or will to do so. Moreover, she may not even know that she is attending in such a way. Such patterns of attention can frequently disrupt other things a person may be doing.

These acts of attention, as I see it, are the fundamental story for why it is appropriate to become angry or resentful of another person's emotion. Specifically, these patterns of attention manifest the person's concerns. What it is to have a concern, *inter alia*, is to notice when what one wants is unrealized or unfulfilled, and to see ways in which the world affords being altered to suit one's wants. To return to our example, the fact that the shop keeper attends to the race of his patrons, and in this connection regards them with distrust, condescension, and disdain, is why we are correct to resent him. He looks for opportunities to remove them from his store, not simply because they might steal, but hatefully, out of a cruel or destructive interest. These acts of attention are what show the kind of character the shop keeper has, even where he did not try or will to have the emotion in the first place, nor could he stop having the emotion if he tried or willed to do so. So, even if he is, in some sense, passive with regard to his emotion, because it is not the sort of thing he could alter just by trying or intending to do so, it is nevertheless his own

mental activity to which is his passive. This activity indicates the sort of person he is.

The key novelty of Attentional Voluntarism is within the second strand of the argument. Other philosophers have agreed that emotions are subject to normative assessment and criticism, despite the fact that they cannot be altered simply by trying or intending to do so, because emotions are part of the person's character. However, their way of accounting for why an emotion reveals the person's moral character is a view I shall call *Rationalism*. For Rationalists, emotions reflect the moral character of their possessor insofar as they, on account of their propositional content, indicate certain evaluations that the person accepts. That is, even though the person could not control her emotion, it reveals what she took to be worthwhile, significant, or important. This is a conception of character which emphasizes exclusively certain judgments the person makes.

However, as I shall argue, it seems implausible and incorrect that every emotion that discloses a person's moral character actually embodies the person's evaluative judgments. There are many cases of what is sometimes called *recalcitrant* emotion, where the emotion conflicts with what one regards to be worthwhile, significant, or important. As I shall argue, certain extreme cases of recalcitrant emotions show Rationalism must be false. Hence, Attentional Voluntarism allows for the possibility that the mental activity underlying an emotion is distinctively non-rational. Such activity is in no way guided by considerations of what was true, warranted, appropriate, etc. In fact, in many cases, emotions may be ways for the person to voluntarily disregard what is true, warranted, appropriate, etc., in order to avoid anxiety or protect her self-esteem. This is a significant, if somewhat uncomfortable, conclusion: what many of our emotions reveal about us is our narrowly self-serving, and often infantile, concerns.

## **I.6. Summary of the Dissertation**

The dissertation can be roughly organized into three parts. The part spanning chapters I-II addresses the objection based on the thought that “ought” implies “can,” and argues against tying the ethics of emotion to the capacity to act intentionally. This part corresponds to what I earlier called the first strand of the argument. The remaining two parts are devoted to the second strand, explaining the attributability of emotions. Chapters III-IV explicate the strengths and weaknesses of the prevalent and persuasive view I call Rationalism. Rationalism leaves out the possibility that some emotions might be due to non-rational mental activity. In Chapters V-VI, I give a theory of this non-rational mental activity in terms of routines of habituated attention.

Here are the detailed chapter summaries. In chapter II, I argue for an attributability-based approach to the ethics of emotion. Despite the fact that emotions are not basic intentional actions, many have argued for a weaker version of Intentionalism based on the idea that we can often bring about emotions by taking other intentional actions as means, such as by subjecting oneself to re-training, avoiding situations that characteristically trigger certain emotions, etc. In short, emotions are non-basic intentional actions, in that they are the sorts of result we can accomplish by resorting to functionally distinct means. Nevertheless, it is still far from obvious that this indirect influence can be the basis of our responsibility.

The implausibility of the weakened, indirect version of Intentionalism makes room for an alternative, according to which our responsibility for emotions, if it exists, consists in attributability. In Chapter III, I explicate Rationalism. Rationalism has been, as far as I can tell, the only version of this strategy that has ever actually been defended. According to Rationalists,

an emotion's content indicates what the person regards to be significant, worthwhile, or important. For this reason, an emotion which the person could not have avoided may nonetheless reveal her character.

In Chapter IV, I discuss recalcitrance as a problem for the Rationalist approach. There are cases where the emotion's content can hardly be regarded as the person's evaluative attitude, such as in recalcitrance. A recalcitrant emotion is one which occurs, despite conflicting with the person's evaluative beliefs and judgments. Many recalcitrant emotions do accurately reflect the person's evaluative attitudes, as evidenced by the fact that they persist past the repudiation of the emotion. In particular, I will focus on cases where the emotion seems to be a product of the person's imagination, such as an emotion had during a dream which persists past the point of waking. Since these emotions can nevertheless disclose the person's character, the Rationalist account of attributability is mistaken.

My alternative proposal is to ground normative assessment of emotions on the phenomenon of attention. In Chapter V, I argue that the attention captured and consumed in emotions is voluntary, because it is a response that has been habituated. This is to say, it is the execution of a routine that is guided by specific external conditions, without needing to be intentionally initiated or directed by the person. Nevertheless, this routine comprises discrete acts of attention, any of which could be undertaken intentionally in the right conditions. Attention thus falls in the neglected category of what is voluntary but non-intentional. The person need not know how or why she is attending in certain ways, nor need she genuinely have the ability to direct her attention elsewhere.

Why do these acts of attention show a person's moral character? I argue that having an

emotion discloses our character because it is, significantly, something one does or undertakes. This theory does not presuppose that the person had a reasonable opportunity to avoid having the emotion. In particular, I argue that our emotional attention discloses the person's moral character because it is an unmediated and spontaneous expression of her concerns, which are durable dispositions to change the world and notice when the relevant changes are needed or not. This account of attributability thus accommodates recalcitrance, insofar as it admits that our concerns do not always correspond to our evaluative beliefs. In this way, it can allow what the Rationalist cannot: that emotions may be due to unconscious phenomena, such as wish-fulfillment.

In Chapter VI, I argue for Attentional Voluntarism. My contention is that Attentional Voluntarism is the only viable account of the “strategic irrationality” in emotions. I follow Jean-Paul Sartre and Robert C. Solomon in thinking that emotions are often 'strategically irrational,' where the person specifically forms an unwarranted emotion in order to avoid discomfort and anxiety, as well as to promote pleasure and self-esteem. An extreme form of this phenomenon is where emotions are what psychoanalysts classify as 'wish-fulfillments,' unconscious attempts to re-fashion the world to suit one's repressed desires. In such cases, Rationalists must hold that the person has numerous logically inter-related propositional attitudes, including beliefs, desires, and intentions, that make sense of the unwarranted emotion as a strategic adaptation to the situation. They thus exaggerate how mature and adaptive the person actually is. By contrast, Attentional Voluntarism holds that the emotion may simply be a residue of the person's past. He need only have become habituated or accustomed to attending in ways that, in similar circumstances, have succeeded in minimizing tension or discomfort, protecting his self-esteem, creating a sense of the world being as he wishes, and so on.

The overall picture which emerges is that an emotion, including its propositional content, can be part of a concealed attempt to disregard a reality that is too uncomfortable, anxiety-provoking, or hostile for the person. Attentional Voluntarism alone adequately acknowledges ways in which a person, through his emotions, might be childish or downright infantile. By insisting upon this aspect of emotion, the whole dissertation opposes an overly intellectual, value-centric, or purified view of character. It seeks to keep within the scope of ethics certain fundamental – if somewhat unflattering – aspects of ourselves.



## **Chapter II: Action and Character in Responsibility for Emotions**

### **II.1. Introduction**

Are there some emotions which a person ought or ought not to feel? A positive answer to this question would admit that emotions can be properly governed by norms. And we do sometimes exhort each other along such lines: “Don't get angry!” “You should be proud of what you have accomplished,” and so on. Furthermore, if we are to take these exhortations at face value, they do not simply apply to outward expressions of emotion. I would have disobeyed your order to stop being jealous if I merely avoided displaying my jealousy in my facial features and body language. Furthermore, I would have also disobeyed your order if I merely refrained from acting upon my jealousy. Thus, the question is how norms might properly govern an emotion itself, regardless of whether that emotion is expressed in body language or motivates subsequent action.

One reason why providing an answer to this question proves to be philosophically puzzling is that emotions are not basic intentional actions. An irate shopper in a confrontation with the store manager cannot simply stop being angry, simply by trying or intending to do so. This is why emotions are commonly thought of as fundamentally passive phenomena. They are suffered rather than performed, and can befall us against our will. This creates a problem, because according to the view I referred to as Intentionalism, ethical judgment is only appropriately applied to what one could have done intentionally. Thus, in advance of articulating specific norms regarding when anger, jealousy, amusement, hatred, etc., ought or ought not to be felt, it needs to be established that the application of norms to emotions makes

sense in the first place.

In the present chapter, I will consider a strategy to reconcile the existence of these norms with Intentionalism, by showing how emotions are intentional acts, albeit non-basic ones. That is to say, one could have undertaken certain intentional actions, at some earlier point in time, that did or could have made a difference to one's present emotions. It is in virtue of these prior intentional actions that one ought or ought not to have those emotions now. Call this view the Practical-Foresight account. As it turns out, however, the Practical-Foresight account is beset by problems as well. It fails to allow for important cases, and it mis-conceives those cases for which it does allow. In consequence, we must consider alternatives which jettison the assumption that "ought" implies "can."

Here is how the chapter will proceed. In section two, I discuss the normative underpinnings of the principle that "ought" implies "can." This principle rests on the intuition that it is unfair or unjust to adversely affect the interests of somebody who lacked a reasonable opportunity to avoid such an outcome. This puts us in a position, in section three, to consider the Practical-Foresight account. In section four, two objections to this account are introduced and defended. If successful, these objections show that even the more plausible, qualified version of the principle that "ought" implies "can" fails, and hence we must find an account of the ethics of emotion which does not presuppose this principle. Accordingly, in section five, I introduce the Attributability theory, according to which emotions are subject to normative assessments simply because they disclose the person's moral character, not because that emotion was in any way something one could do intentionally. In this case, Intentionalism must be false. That is to say, an ethics of emotion is not in any way a function of the fact that emotions are intentional actions. In

the remaining two sections, I consider objections to this view. In section six, I consider the objection that normative criticism based on attributability is unfair or unjust. In section seven, I consider the objection that normative criticism based on attributability is necessarily shallow, because it equally well applies to animals, children, and even inanimate objects.

## **II.2. Reasonable Opportunity To Avoid**

If emotions are not themselves basic intentional actions, it is a philosophical problem to show how this fact can be reconciled with the assumption that the very having (or lacking) an emotion, as opposed to acting upon or expressing that emotion in our overt behavior, might qualify as an ethical failing. Emotions would thus seem to violate the well-worn philosophical principle that “ought” implies “can.” On the version of this principle discussed in the previous chapter, it is true that a person ought to do something at a time only if, at that time, that response is itself a basic intentional action.

The underpinnings of this principle lie in a view of responsibility as *accountability*. According to this view, for some response to be subject to a normative requirement, the person must have had a “reasonable opportunity” to avoid violating that requirement. Principally, reasonable opportunity to avoid violating a requirement means that the person could have ensured that she satisfied the relevant requirement, but it further means that she could have avoided being subject to the requirement in the first place.<sup>41</sup> But certain bare metaphysical possibilities, such what one could do when in the possession of super-human capacities, or capacities that one could possess only after years of practice or therapy do not suffice for having

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41 Watson, 2004, 276; Levy, 2005, 3

a reasonable opportunity to avoid some violation. For example, one is not obligated to do anything which would require treading water for twelve hours. Although certain extraordinary human beings may have the endurance and strength to accomplish such a feat, ordinary human beings do not. In this way, reasonable opportunity must be understood as what was possible to avoid, given the person's intellectual and physical abilities.

Reasonable opportunity combines epistemic and practical elements. Firstly, the person must know, or be in the position where she can reasonably be expected to know, that the requirement in question has application, generally speaking. Furthermore, she must know, or be in the position where she can reasonably be expected to know, that the requirement has application to some particular situation, and that unless she acts to prevent that situation from coming into being, she will be in violation of the requirement. Finally, the person must know, or be in the position where she can reasonably be expected to know, what acts or efforts would be required to prevent her from being in violation, and she must have the ability and opportunity to undertake those steps.

Of course, a great deal hangs on what it means to claim that a person is “reasonably” expected to know that a norm has general application, or application to some specific situation, etc. This qualification is meant to distinguish between blameworthy and exculpating ignorance. There may have been evidence available which, when recognized by somebody meeting a certain threshold of experience and intellectual powers, would lead that person to know that the norm has application, he would be in violation, etc. In such a case, ignorance is not excuse, because the individual should have known better. Admittedly, there are numerous standards about whether some ignorance is blameworthy or blameless in particular cases, and disagreement is possible.

Given the intellectual powers and experience assumed to be possessed by those who grow up in a modern society, an adult can be reasonably expected to know that screaming “fire!” or “bomb!” in a crowded public place would be both dangerous and illegal. But these standards may be more difficult to apply to other cases, such as a thirteen year-old boy, or a recent émigré from a radically different culture. However, disagreement over the details of those epistemic standards, as they apply to specific cases, does not gainsay a general distinction between ignorance that exculpates, and ignorance that itself is the person's responsibility as well.

The need to postulate reasonable opportunity rests on the fact that the censure or criticism of another person for having violated some norm can be regarded as having the social function of imposing sanctions upon the person being criticized or blamed.<sup>42</sup> These reactions can, through a loss in public esteem, or in consequence, through subsequent treatment by others, adversely affect the significant interests of the person who is being censured or criticized. It could be argued that it is unfair to do this to somebody who lacked a reasonable opportunity to prevent her interests from being thwarted. This concept of criticism as the imposition of sanctions extends even to reactive attitudes, such as anger or resentment. These reactive attitudes constitute the withdrawal of good-will towards one's peers, and for this reason alone, could adversely affect the significant interests of another person. Cooperation with others is necessary to meet one's needs in society. So, to the extent that others have withdrawn their good-will, one may be hindered in one's ability to cooperate with them, and hence to meet one's needs.

Thus, the principle that “ought” implies “can” is underpinned by a conception of when it is just or fair to adversely affect the interests of another. Some may object that the fact that censuring would impose sanctions upon the person is irrelevant to whether ethical assessments

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42 Watson, 2004 *ibid.*, 279-280

are appropriate. After all, it might be suggested, person may have violated some norm even if nobody actually censures him. However, we must distinguish between when censure is actually offered, and when censure would be appropriate or correct. As I framed the issue in the Chapter I, we are especially interested in the conditions in which reactive attitudes towards another person's emotion are correct. Anger, resentment, guilt, etc., may all be correct towards an action, or emotion, even if nobody is in fact angry, resentful, guilty, etc. And insofar as the truth of the relevant judgment is what makes the reactive attitude correct, it makes sense to consider the costs that these reactive attitudes might impose on the person.

If the unfairness of censure, blame, etc., where the person lacked a reasonable opportunity to avoid violating a norm is what ultimately explains the intuition that “ought” implies “can,” then we can frame a more plausible version of that principle than the one suggested by Kant, Taylor and others. The stricter version of this principle says that the person must, *at the time when censure or criticism is rendered*, be able to perform some basic intentional action that would itself satisfy the relevant requirement. However, it seems that a person would nonetheless have had a reasonable opportunity to avoid violating a requirement if, *at some earlier point in time*, she was able to perform some basic intentional action that could reasonably be foreseen to make a difference to whether the relevant requirement was satisfied now.

There are cases which can illustrate this distinction. For example, Laura's house is burning wildly, due to sparks generated by an overloaded electrical outlet. Laura cannot, now watching in horror from the street, prevent the sparks from setting her house aflame. Yet, it was in her power, at some earlier point in time, to ensure that there was no fire. She could have reasonably been expected to know that over-loaded electrical outlets are fire hazards, and

accordingly have removed the excess cords. Thus, although the fire is not now in her ability to prevent, it was at an earlier point in time in her ability to prevent. Therefore, she may nevertheless be fairly vulnerable to censure, criticism for the fact that her house is burning now.

In the next section, I will suggest that this weakened, more plausible principle can be reconciled with the passivity of emotions. In short, this is a strategy for defending an ethics of emotion without rejecting Intentionalism.

### **II.3. The Practical-Foresight View**

Accordingly, the more plausible interpretation of the “ought” implies “can” principle is as follows: a person is subject to a normative requirement at a time only if she, at some earlier point in time, she had the ability to perform an intentional action she knew, or could be reasonably expected to know, would make a difference to whether the requirement was violated. Somebody who satisfies this principle, I suggest, would have had reasonable opportunity to avoid the violation.

What implications does this more plausible principle have for the possibility of an ethics of emotions? On this weaker interpretation, it is possible for there to be ethical norms governing emotions, even though our emotions are not basic intentional actions. In short, being angry or jealous is not the sort of thing that a person can change simply by trying or willing to do so. For example, if the irate customer could, at some prior point in time, have done something which would have made a difference to whether he felt anger towards the manager, then he can fairly be censured or blamed for his anger. Thus, normative criticism and criticism does not necessarily require that one's emotion be a basic intentional action, but rather only that one could, in the past,

have acted intentionally in some way which would have made a difference to whether one has the emotion in question now.

One can, no doubt, practically and effectively manage one's emotion through intentional action. There are many strategies available. Firstly, within an emotion-triggering situation, there are actions one can immediately take which can be expected to alter the emotion.<sup>43</sup> One can leave the room, take a few deep breaths, count to ten, think of something more pleasant, etc. Secondly, one can avoid the emotion-triggering situations altogether. That is, a person can recognize the types of circumstances in which some objectionable (or commendable) emotion of his is characteristically triggered, and then intentionally avoid (or seek out) circumstances of that type.<sup>44</sup> For example, James has repeatedly lashed out at his brother-in-law in very juvenile and embarrassing ways, due to deep-seated feelings of hatred triggered by the brother-in-law's snide and cutting remarks. Ideally, James would not be bothered by his brother-in-law. However, the problem can be effectively dealt with because James can largely avoid these feelings of hatred by not attending functions where his brother-in-law is present. Thus, James is indirectly controlling whether he has certain emotions by acting in order to avoid the eliciting situation.

A third, but equally important, class of actions concerns the intentional management of one's dispositions to have certain emotions in the first place.<sup>45</sup> That is, one can alter whether one is the sort of person who will be disposed to have certain reactions in emotion-triggering situations. Kosman argues that

one does not have control over one's feelings, and in this sense the feelings are not chosen, but one does have control over actions which establish the

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43 Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here.

44 Elster, 1999a, 149-153; Sankowski, 1977, 833

45 Kosman, 1980, 111-113; Sabini & Silver, 1998, 17-19; Elster, 1999a, 153-154. Relatedly, Jones, 2003, 194ff., argues that rationality involves monitoring of one's propensities for emotion and desires, and a preparedness to re-calibrate these propensities



dispositions... we are responsible for our character as the dispositional source of those feelings.<sup>46</sup>

The suggestion is that an adult can, within a certain range, choose her emotions, because she can act so as to alter the structures of personality which underlie those emotions. For example, if one wanted to become sympathetic to the sufferings of the unfortunate and poor in this world, then one can perform certain acts which would accustom oneself to having this emotion. In particular, somebody with this goal could visit the homeless, sick, and destitute in shelters and help these individuals, or, to adopt a more radical approach, live as a homeless and destitute person for a week or a year.<sup>47</sup> These actions would lead one to become increasingly sensitized to the plight of the homeless, sick, and destitute.<sup>48</sup>

This idea that one can deliberately manage one's dispositions to have emotions rests on an Aristotelian conception of habituation. For Aristotle, the means of acquiring the dispositions of the virtuous person is to act in ways outwardly similar to those of the virtuous person, as conveyed by the slogan “we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”<sup>49</sup> Through repetition, these acts instill the relevant dispositions of character, especially dispositions to have emotions, in the learner. This process is, no doubt, due to the fact that the act itself involves its own “characteristically and naturally associated” patterns of thought and feeling.<sup>50</sup> For example, in intentionally stealing somebody's

46 Kosman, 1980, 112. Cf. Oakley, 1992, 137, who says “we can endeavour to develop or avoid developing certain emotional capacities,” and Sabini & Silver, 1998, 18-19.

47 Becky Blanton gave a TED talk ([http://www.ted.com/talks/becky\\_blanton\\_the\\_year\\_i\\_was\\_homeless.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/becky_blanton_the_year_i_was_homeless.html)) in 2009 where she describes such an experiment, which inadvertently turned into genuine homelessness.

48 Jonathan Jacobs pointed out to me that this exposure method need not always be straightforwardly successful, such as when the person comes to feel revulsion towards the homeless as a result. This revulsion need not automatically qualify the person to be morally bad, if, e.g., he worked to overcome or mitigate his feelings of revulsion.

49 1103b2-3, transl. T. Irwin. Later: “a state [of character] results from [the repetition] of similar activities,” 1103b21-22. Cf., also, Jacobs, 2001, 13-15

50 Kosman, 1980, 112.: “A person may act in certain ways that are characteristically and naturally associated with a certain range of feelings, and through these actions acquire the virtue that is the disposition for having the

property, the learner will see other people's possessions as opportunities to benefit himself. By repeatedly stealing, he accustoms himself to see other people's possession in these ways. So, for good or for ill, our activities are largely what determine our dispositions to have certain kinds of emotion. As Aristotle says “what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear or confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others cowardly...”<sup>51</sup>

Given the gradual, cumulative nature of habituation, it could be argued that people are never in the position to reasonably know what the effects are of their actions upon the disposition to have certain emotions. The net effect of each act on one's character is at best, negligible, and at worst, unnoticeable. Since it takes many acts to yield a sea change in one's second nature, it need not be true for any one of those acts that it was reasonable to know what effect it will have, and in what way. However, the foreknowledge here need not be confined to the discrete causal upshot of one particular act, as opposed to similar acts performed frequently.<sup>52</sup> The smoker need not know the exact effect one particular cigarette has on his habit, but nevertheless he knows what the effects will be of continued smoking will be on his habit. So, it is reasonable to expect that somebody know the effects of the act type, when performed frequently, even if he does not know the effects of this one particular act.

This overall picture is what I call *the Practical-Foresight account*.<sup>53</sup> It holds that emotions are subject to ethical assessment because a person, at some earlier point in time, had the ability to perform an intentional action she knew, or could be reasonably expected to know, would make a difference to whether she had the emotion. We can perform intentional actions, such as avoiding

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feelings directly...”

51 1103b15-17;21-22, trans. T. Irwin.

52 For discussion of this and related issues, cf. Jacobs, 2001, 22-24

53 By my lights, Kosman, 1980; Sabini & Silver, 1998; Oakley, 1992; and Sankowski, 1977 all explicitly defend Practical-Foresight accounts.

triggering situations, re-habituating dispositions to react in emotion-triggering situations, and even controlling and mitigating the emotion once it has been triggered, that make a difference to which emotions we feel.<sup>54</sup> For the Practical-Foresight theorist, when person has an emotion which is objectionable or which she ought not to have, the responsibility which grounds this evaluation is due to the fact that, *at some time in the past*, the agent knew, or could have reasonably been expected to know, that her actions (or failure to act) would lead to this objectionable emotion, and hence, could have acted differently. If so, the objectionable emotion would not have resulted.

Critically, the Practical-Foresight view is consistent with the idea that the current emotion is not now a basic intentional action, and hence, she cannot now do anything to alter whether she is in such a state.<sup>55</sup> It can be quite literally true that someone ought not feel some emotion, although, given the circumstances, it is very difficult or impossible for her state of mind to be otherwise. Accordingly, it is consistent with the denial that we can ever alter our emotions by intending or trying to do so. The irate shopper can simply put aside his rage at the store manager, simply because he tries or wills to do so.

#### **II.4. Is Practical-Foresight the Basis of an Ethics of Emotion?**

The Practical-Foresight theory promises to show why the very having of certain emotions, rather

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54 This appeal to the idea of *management* or *self-management* dovetails nicely with what Hieronymi calls 'managerial control' Hieronymi, 2006, 53. For Hieronymi, managerial control is exemplified by our ordinary manipulation of material objects. We can change the material world to suit our purposes, but to do so, we need to act in light of the causal regularities which govern such objects.

55 This concurs with Jacobs' account of moral disability, which holds that people's second nature can be such that they are unable to recognize or respond to moral considerations. Jacobs, 2001, 34ff. Jacobs denies that the morally disabled person *can* do the morally right thing. But there must have been some point at which he *could have done* which would make a difference to whether he became (as he now is) morally disabled.

than acting upon or expressing those emotions, might still be subject to ethical criticism and assessment, even though emotions cannot be altered by intending or trying to do so. It does this by arguing that a person had reasonable opportunities to avoid having certain emotions, since there were intentional actions which could have been undertaken at some earlier moment in time, actions which would have made a difference to what emotions she now has. In particular, she could have altered or adjusted her emotion from within the triggering situation, she could have deliberately avoided the triggering situations, or she could have deliberately managed her dispositions to feel certain emotions.

Nevertheless, as I shall now argue, the Practical-Foresight view is unworkable as a basis of the ethics of emotion. There are at least two problems, one a matter of detail and the other of principle. The issue of detail is that the view is not even extensionally adequate. There seems to be emotions which are plausibly subject to ethical assessment and criticism, but which the person did not have a reasonable opportunity to avoid. The issue of principle is that the actions which did, or could, have made a difference to whether a person has some emotion do not seem to enter into what makes it correct to blame, censure, criticize him.

It is not obvious that every emotion plausibly subject to ethical criticism and assessment meets the condition that the person had a reasonable opportunity to avoid having it. Return to the example of James, who is disposed to feel hatred towards his brother-in-law. Now suppose that James is invited to a friend's house, who is also friends with James's brother-in-law through other channels. There is no way James could have reasonably been expected to know that his brother-in-law would be at his friend's house. So, did James have reasonable opportunity to avoid feeling hatred toward the brother-in-law at the friend's house? Perhaps. He could have subjected

himself to a broader program of re-habitation, perhaps with the aid of a therapist, concerning his responses to his brother-in-law. To do so, however, James must already know, or be reasonably expected to know, that he possesses the relevant disposition to feel hatred towards his brother-in-law. Further, re-habitation is an effective strategy only in the long-term, due to its cumulative, gradual nature. This means that James must, further, have been able to undertake a long-term project of re-habitation in light of the knowledge of his disposition to hate his brother-in-law.

We simply do not have the requisite foreknowledge of our emotions in many cases, such as when the person does not know – or, know yet – that he has a disposition to have some objectionable emotion. Imagine a person who had never been in a position of authority before. As he discovers when finally in placed a position of authority, he takes great pleasure in humiliating and dominating his subordinates. We would find such a person, I suppose, repulsive. But his promotion came with no advance notice (his name having been drawn from a hat), and convinced of his mediocrity, he had never anticipated being in a position in a position of authority before. Now, having had some experience, he can reasonably be expected to know his cruelty, there is no grounds for making the same claim *prior* to his first attempts at being an authority. So, if the Practical-Foresight account is true, there are certain emotions at the outset of such a person's tenure which cannot be normatively assessed or criticized.

This problem derives from a combination of two varieties of moral luck, which Nagel calls “circumstantial luck” and “constitutive luck.”<sup>56</sup> In general, the phenomenon of moral luck is that our moral assessments of other people are conditional upon factors which were not under their control. In circumstantial luck, one can be fortunate or unfortunate with respect the

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56 Nagel, 1976, 32-33

situations in which one finds oneself, whereas in constitutive luck, one can be fortunate or unfortunate with respect to one's character, upbringing, past, etc. These combine in the following way: one can be fortunate to never have found oneself in circumstances that bring out one's unfortunate traits of character. To return to our example, the cruel leader, until the present moment, was fortunate never to have been in situations which elicit his cruelty. (Similarly, most of us are fortunate to never have found ourselves in situations which would manifest the cruel abusiveness seen in the guards at Abu Ghraib prison.)

Somebody may object in the following way. Obviously, there is general evidence available to such a person, regarding regards the ills of human nature and past abuses by others. Furthermore, the cruel manager may be just as likely as anybody else to be prone to cruelty.<sup>57</sup> After all, what is to distinguish him from any of the other particular people who have succumbed to cruelty when in positions of power? However, the Practical-Foresight theorist cannot simply content himself with arguing that the cruel manager could reasonably have been aware of his cruelty. (Many potential prison guards get this far.) It needs additionally to be argued that the manager reasonably could have been aware that the risk posed by this disposition was serious enough to necessitate counteractive measures, such as would be involved in a full-fledged project of self-management. This latter seems too much to require. There are countless problematic configurations of character to which one carries a general risk, due to the frailties of human nature in different, oftentimes, unexpected conditions. To argue that it was technically in one's power to have counteracted all the relevant possibilities, or all the morally significant types of possibility, is to return again to the assumption where "reasonable opportunity to avoid" involves super-human capacities for knowledge, practice, experience, etc. But if one cannot be expected

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<sup>57</sup> Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here.

to counteract all of these configurations, it is arbitrary to insist that one could be expected, simply on the basis of these general liabilities shared by human beings, to counteract some particular configuration elicited by heretofore unexpected conditions.

Beyond the extensional adequacy of the Practical-Foresight view, there is a more serious matter of principle. Suppose, contrary to what I have just argued, that every emotion which is correct to normatively censure, criticize, etc., is such that the person had a reasonable opportunity to avoid having that emotion. Even if there are intentional acts that the person did, or could have performed, to make a difference to what emotion he felt, these acts may nevertheless be *irrelevant* to whether the emotion is one a person should or should not have. This irrelevance is supported by the intuition that these prior acts are no part of the phenomenology of blame, resentment, criticism, etc., regarding emotions:

when we praise or criticize someone for an attitude it seems we are responding... not to facts about its origin in a person's prior voluntary choices.... If this is correct, then it is a mistake to try to account for a person's responsibility for her own attitudes in terms of their connection to her prior...voluntary choices<sup>58</sup>

In short, when we blame, resent, or criticize somebody for their emotion, the actions that the person did, or could have, taken that would have made a difference to whether she has the emotion are no part of how we make sense of our blame, resent, criticism to ourselves and others. If so, even where the person did have reasonable opportunity to avoid having an emotion, these prior actions are irrelevant to the appropriateness of our assessments.

In other words, the Practical-Foresight account unduly assimilates the putative wrongness of an emotion to that of negligence.<sup>59</sup> Just as a homeowner could have prevented the pedestrian's

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58 Smith, 2005, 251

59 Adams, 1985, 25

fall by fixing the sidewalk, a person could have taken steps to avoid having some criticizable emotion, or to ensure her having a commendable one. On such a view, the person's error is not simply here and now in her current state of mind, but stretches back over broader swathes of her goal-directed activity which made a difference (or could have made a difference) to her current state of mind. Yet, it is far from obvious that what is wrong about the James's hatred towards his brother, the irate shopper's anger, or the first-time authority's cruel pleasure is negligence, as opposed to some intrinsic feature of his mind at the present moment in time. If this is correct, then the Practical-Foresight view is not even a true account of the emotions to which it is extensionally adequate.

It could be objected that this argument sticks the Practical-Foresight theorist with a false dichotomy, i.e., either the wrongness consists in intrinsic features of the emotion, or it consists in negligence.<sup>60</sup> Rather, the objector imagines, the Practical-Foresight theorist could argue that one is negligent for allowing oneself to get in a position where one has a bad emotion, but the explanation of the badness is different, and separate. By analogy, one is negligent in letting the sidewalk fall into disrepair, but this makes a difference when somebody actually falls on it. In this case, the negligence of failing to fix the sidewalk is a separate evaluation from the badness of the person twisting her ankle. I am fully prepared to allow that emotions could be good and bad in many different ways, both in virtue of intrinsic and extrinsic properties. Even so, it needs to be specified what the relevance of the evaluation in terms of extrinsic properties (such as the prior actions one did, or could have, taken) is to the question of whether the emotion is one a person ought or ought not to have. If the Practical-Foresight account is true, no such evaluation could be directly relevant to the wrongness or permissibility of an emotion, except insofar as it

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<sup>60</sup> Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here



applies to effects one did, could have, brought about by way of intentional actions. In short, the wrongness of an emotion could only be negligence, even where the emotion could be bad in multifarious ways.

For these two reasons, then, the Practical-Foresight view should be rejected as an account of why certain normative assessments and criticisms are correctly applied to emotions. Such a conclusion is extraordinarily important for our overall topic. The Practical-Foresight account was an attempt to substantiate the intuition that the person's responsibility for her emotions adheres to some more plausible version of the principle that “ought” implies “can.” But even the more plausible version of this principle fails. Hence, it makes sense to consider alternatives which reject this assumption. The alternative would hold that there exist a body of norms applying to emotions, distinct from those applying to our actions, but these norms are not be tied in any way to the assumption that the emotion was alterable, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions.

## **II.5. Attributability**

Practical-Foresight fails as an account of the possibility of an ethics of emotion, both because it excludes emotions which intuitively are subject to assessment and criticism, and secondly, because it unduly assimilates the putative wrongness of an emotion to that of negligence. So, we must consider the possibility that “ought” does not, or does not always, imply “can.” How might such a strategy be substantiated?

There are strategies that reject the assumption that the correctness of moral criticism requires reasonable opportunity to have avoided such criticism in the first place. On this line of

thought, the characteristics which are subject to moral criticism are those which express fundamentally who the person is, what she is like, in a way that her shoe-size, height, or family's income do not. This view of responsibility can be called the *Attributability* theory.<sup>61</sup>

Attributability theorists argue that criticism and censure can be appropriate even without control, even of an indirect sort.<sup>62</sup> What is instead being criticized or censured is who the person is, regardless of whether her act fulfills the more stringent requirements for reasonable opportunity that are part of the conception of responsibility as accountability. As Watson says “these appraisals concern the agent's excellences and faults – or virtues and vices – as manifested in thought and action.”<sup>63</sup>

Take some action, such as a factory owner's firing two-hundred local, skilled workers in order to move his factory overseas. Suppose that the owner truly did not have a reasonable opportunity to avoid firing these workers, perhaps on account of a sudden, unpredictable down-turn in the market. Moreover, if he does not fire them, the company runs the risk of going under, with the result that the workers lose their jobs anyway, in addition to those who were not fired. Attributionists can argue that, nevertheless, firing the workers in order to save the company discloses something significant about the character of the owner. Watson offers a justification for this idea, in terms of intention: “the conduct in question expresses the agent's own evaluative commitments, her adoption of some ends among others. To adopt some ends among others is to declare what one stands for.”<sup>64</sup>

The defenders of *Attributability*, in effect, re-order the relative importance of character

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61 Watson, 2004 describes this as the “aretaic perspective,” 266. Scanlon, 1998; Scanlon, 2008 describes it as responsibility as “attributability.” Despite subtle differences between the views of these two authors, I stick to the language of attributability.

62 Scanlon, 2008, 193-195

63 Watson, 2004, 266

64 Watson, 2004, 270

and action. They acknowledge that there may be fundamental normative requirements regarding to sort of character one has, which do not derive from any logically prior requirements regarding how one is to act. This is broadly in line with what is sometimes called “virtue ethics.”<sup>65</sup> Many may be inclined to deny that the relevant evaluation here is, in any sense, concerned with what sort of character one *ought* to have, but instead with what kind of character it would be *good* to have.<sup>66</sup> But it is worth pointing out that others have thought that character appropriately comes with the purview of “ought” as well: “it has often been said that for virtue ethics the central question is not 'what ought I to do?' but rather 'what sort of person ought I to be?’”<sup>67</sup> I will assume then that some sense can be made of such propositions. If so, then the appeal to attributability furnishes a radically distinct alternative to any view which bases normative requirements on one's intentional actions.

However, Watson's description of attributability in terms of the concept of intention, and the “adopting” of certain ends rather than others, applies to norms that govern actions, but it does not do so for emotions, desires, and other characteristics with regard to which we lack intention. And the Attributability approach certainly can, and should, be extended to these other characteristics. As Aristotle says in book II of the *Ethics*, the assessment of character “is about feelings and actions ... We can be afraid, for instance, or be confident, or have appetites, or get angry, or feel pity, and in general have pleasure or pain, both too much and too little, and in both ways not well.”<sup>68</sup> Smith offers the example of the oftentimes fleeting thoughts that arise unbidden in a person's mind, such as suddenly thinking how easy it would be to steal a laptop

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65 Hursthouse, 1999

66 Anscombe, 1958, 29ff., argues that 'ought' lacks sense without a divine law-giver

67 Loudon, 1984, 230

68 1106b16-23. Trans. T. Irwin

computer close at hand.<sup>69</sup> Yet, one's emotions, or appetites, or pleasure and pain, passing thoughts, do not involve intention, wherein one adopts one end among others.

To extend the Attributability theory to cover ethically significant emotions, thoughts, desires, and so on, defenders need to argue that emotions reveal what the person who experiences the emotion is like, and what she stands for, in approximately the same way that actions do so. But this faces certain philosophical problems, insofar as not every element in one's mental life discloses the person's moral character. Harry Frankfurt famously raises the problem of how to distinguish those aspects of mental life that can be substantively identified with the person, i.e., they are *hers*, from those that are not.<sup>70</sup> Call this the *Problem of Attributability*. The category of the non-attributable (what Frankfurt calls “the external”) is difficult to understand without resorting to figures and metaphors, such as the person being a “bystander” with respect to them or their “befalling” her, even though these events transpire within her own conscious life.<sup>71</sup> But even without furnishing a precise definition of non-attributability, we do have a pre-theoretical sense that certain thoughts, desires, hopes, fears, are distinctively “mine.” Accordingly, there is an interesting and worthwhile problem here about how to establish some principled philosophical account of the limits of the self. In virtue of what is a thought, desire, hope, feeling, etc., mine? Could thoughts, desires, hopes, feeling ever fail to be mine in this sense?

Many Attributionists have argued that the rationality of our attitudes, including emotions but also beliefs and desires, is what explains how character can be disclosed by them.<sup>72</sup> Insofar as

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69 Smith, 2005, 246-248

70 Frankfurt, 1977, 60-61

71 Frankfurt clearly thought that some mental occurrences would be external to the self. His examples include momentary bouts of anger in which the person loses control. Frankfurt, 1977, 63. Thalberg, 1978, 389-391, discusses some difficulties involved in the claim that we are bystanders to our own mental life.

72 Scanlon, 1998, 272-274; Smith, 2004, Smith, 2005, Smith, 2008, Smith, 2012. The underlying idea that we are being active, or (what is treated as synonymous) being ourselves, when we are responsive to reasons can be found in Raz, 1997, 14-17; Moran, 2002; Moreau, 2005, 295ff. This idea is discussed further in Ch. III.

emotions involve a disposition to recognize and respond accordingly to certain normative considerations, they show who the person is and what she is like. Call this strategy *Rationalism*. Rationalism will be the topic for the next part of the dissertation, but for the time being, the appeal to attributability can be defended in broad strokes.

## **II.6. Attributability and Unfairness**

The remaining four chapters will be devoted to detailed consideration of why exactly emotions are attributable to a person in such a way that would make sense of normative criticism, censure, blame, anger, resentment, etc., regarding them. To my knowledge, Rationalism is the only widely defended version of this strategy. However, for the present, it is worth defending the general approach embodied by the Attributability theory, in advance of drawing finer distinctions among competing versions of this theory.

Specifically, any version of the Attributability theory must address the intuition underpinning the principle that “ought” implies “can,” even in its weaker form. This intuition was that it is unfair to criticize, censure, blame somebody for a violation which she lacked a reasonable opportunity to avoid committing. According to this line of thought, it is unfair to impose upon a person costs which she lacked the ability to avoid incurring. Further, criticism, censure, etc., can be sanctions, and do in fact adversely affect a person's interests. But the Attributability theory maintains that normative criticism, censure, and so on, can be correct, even where the person lacked the ability to perform some intentional action that would have made a difference, either directly or indirectly, to whether she was to be criticized or censured. On this theory, what is fundamentally being criticized is the person's character. The problem thus arises:

how could criticism, censure, etc., of a person's emotions be fair, especially if we admit that such criticism can adversely impact the person's interests?

Another way to think about problem is closely related to certain avenues of more general skepticism about evaluations of character. As Galen Strawson puts it, "...to be truly responsible for how one is...[one] must consciously and explicitly have chosen to be the way one is...and one must have succeeded in bringing it about that one is that way."<sup>73</sup> But, as Strawson goes on, this is incoherent, because even one's very first self-constituting choice would have to be rationalized by already-held preferences and policies which would not, *ex hypothesi*, count as chosen. Thus, any action aimed at altering my dispositions of character is a function of unchosen factors, including upbringing, heredity, environment, personal history, temperament, etc. For Strawson, responsibility for character would require that agents have entirely self-determined natures, which is impossible for human beings. Since the development of our characters may, in crucial ways, influenced by non-voluntary factors, we could never be fully responsible for characters.<sup>74</sup>

Accordingly, the objection is that criticizing, censuring, blaming somebody for her emotions, considered merely as manifestations of character and not as the result of her actions, is unfair. To do so is to adversely affect that person's interests on account of something that was not in her power, much like her height, race, or socioeconomic status as a child.

The defender of an Attributability theory can, as a beginning, distinguish between the content of the criticism itself, and the treatment received from others in light of that criticism. The criticism itself, it is suggested, has certain adequacy or correctness conditions, which do not require the person to have prior control over whether she was so evaluated. But the putative

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73 Strawson, 1994, 6

74 This corresponds to what Trianosky, 1990 calls the Kantian view, 93-96

“costs” of such criticism, for the most part, consist in how others, perhaps including the one who makes the criticism, behave in light of that criticism. By analogy, there is a difference between correctly identifying somebody as a thief, and locking one's doors to prevent the thief from getting in. When an individual is subject to certain forms of censure, normative criticism, blame, etc., others may regard him differently, and in consequence, may interact with him differently, or not interact with him at all. These altered interactions can no doubt significantly affect one's interests.

However, it is important not to confuse the idea that treatment received from others who assent some criticism is unfair, with the claim that conditions in which the criticism would be correct are intrinsically unfair. Some may, of course, punish the one who is criticized for his emotions, avoid him, etc. These responses would in fact involve imposing costs upon the one criticized. However, there are other responses available, such as reaching out to that individual, offering assistance in improving himself, or just understanding. Whether others tend towards being conciliatory and sympathetic, or alternatively, aversive and punishing, in their responses does not bear on whether the initial assessment correct.

Hence, even where criticism, censure, anger, resentment, etc., directed towards another person in fact imposes costs upon him, doing so need not have been its express function. For example, layoffs do in fact set back a person's interests. But the point of a layoff (assuming that the only reason was the employer's inability to pay everybody) is to improve the finances of the employer, not to punish those who have been laid off. Similarly, the point of our critical reactions to another may not be to inhibit the person's ability to cooperate with others, or to diminish his social esteem. In fact, there need not be any particular social function served by our critical

reactions towards others or ourselves, other than evaluating ourselves and each other according to standards of moral character. Considerations of fairness are relevant, but they are relevant to the question of how best to respond in light of some criticism, not in whether the criticism itself is correct.

It could be argued that the criticizing attitude itself, such as anger, resentment, blame, etc., in which a negative view is taken of the person on account of her emotion, is itself the “cost,” rather than subsequent treatment at the hands of others. These attitudes are constitutively forms of diminished regard for the one who is criticized or blamed. If the esteem of peers is in the interest of human beings, then an acute diminishing of that esteem affects that person's interests, independently of how those peers treat him subsequently.

Yet, what is the ground for assuming that a person is entitled to being well-regarded or disregarded by his peers (or for that matter, by himself) only for those traits entirely due to his own efforts? Sadly, moral luck plays a prominent role here. The forms of social regard we need are not limited only to what, as Galen Strawson puts it, what one “consciously and explicitly” chooses. Rather, these traits may have been substantially influenced by elements of fortune, such as temperament, attractiveness, native intelligence or talent, skin color, the wealth and status of one's parents, possession of which is not due to one's own efforts. In fact, the appeal to fairness in blaming or criticizing in some domain (actions, character, etc.) itself implicitly the assumption that there is no such thing as moral luck in that domain. But the defender of an Attributability theory is amply willing to acknowledge moral luck, and especially constitutive luck, wherein one's moral character in part results from involuntary conditions, such as race, attractiveness, early family life. Hence, even the putative costs of diminished social esteem for traits that were



not entirely of one's choosing may nevertheless be appropriate or fitting.

## II.7. The Bad versus the Blameworthy

There is another serious line of objection to the strategy of conceiving of responsibility as attributability. Some authors have suggested that assessing a person on the basis of his or her character traits delivers only at best a “superficial” form of evaluation.<sup>75</sup> Susan Wolf, in particular, thinks that the form of evaluation furnished by the Attributability theory does not apply distinctively to people. Lower animals, small children, and even inanimate objects can have traits in virtue of which they can help to do, or accomplish good things. For example, a dog may notice when his master is having a heart attack and alert the neighbor. When we say that the dog was responsible for saving the owner's life, we accord the dog, and his attentiveness, a central role in a causal sequence which led to the neighbor being alerted. But, Wolf thinks:

when we hold an agent morally responsible for some event, we are doing more than identifying her particularly crucial role in the causal series that brings about the event in question. We are regarding her as a fit subject for credit or discredit on the basis of the role she plays.<sup>76</sup>

In other words, “deep” assessments, so to speak, do not simply involve the attribution of a causal role to an individual, but additionally evaluate that individual on the basis of her causal role.<sup>77</sup>

In brief, the objection is that criticizing a person for some emotion that she lacked the reasonable opportunity to avoid, simply because it is attributable to her, only amounts to a superficial, rather than deep, assessment. Similar judgments can be used to evaluate animals,

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<sup>75</sup> Wolf, 1990, 40

<sup>76</sup> Wolf, 1990, 40-41

<sup>77</sup> Blum, 1980, 189, says “I suggest that the notions of blame and praise, and blameworthiness and praiseworthiness, are closely connected to the notions of will, *of that which we are the initiators*” (my emphasis)

small children, and even inanimate objects. Dogs can be needy or loyal, children selfish or kind, can-openers fussy or reliable. In none of these cases do we accept the additional claim that the dog, child, or can-openers are fit targets of criticism, approbation, blame or censure on the basis of these traits, or their manifestations. Another way to put the same point is that, although such emotions may be bad to have, they certainly are not blameworthy.<sup>78</sup>

As I understand this objection, it urges us to distinguish between certain forms of assessment that can in principle apply to anything, including both animate and inanimate things, and certain very distinctive forms of assessment that apply exclusively to *agents*. A can-opener can be instrumentally good, because it serves my purposes, or can be non-instrumentally good, because it is beautiful, or a well-crafted exemplar of its kind. This is merely to indicate, as Enoch and Marmor put it, “a morally regrettable fact, a bad aspect of the world we live in.”<sup>79</sup> But it is precisely not to apportion blame, of a sort that gets distinctively applied to an agent. It would not make sense to say that the can-opener ought or ought not to be easy to use, beautiful, or so on, unless this is implicitly meant as a criticism of its maker.

Does a normative assessment of a person's emotion merely represent a “morally regrettable fact,” as opposed to some judgment that distinctively applies to an agent? It is not obvious that it does. The advocates of this objection assume that to be an agent with respect to one's emotion (in virtue of which one would be aptly regarded as “a fit subject for credit or discredit”) is to have the ability to alter one's emotions by way of intentional action. If so, one is simply responsible for emotion as one sort of causal effect, among others, to be brought about through intentional actions. This would entail that emotions are indicative of a person's character

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<sup>78</sup> Levy, 2005, 4-6; by contrast, cf. Adams, 1985, 22

<sup>79</sup> Enoch & Marmor, 2007, 428; Sabini & Silver, 1998, 18-21. Both Enoch and Marmor, as well as Sabini and Silver, see these evaluations to have much in common with aesthetic judgments.

in quite the same manner as *any* other psychological condition would be. Suppose a person could manage to generate a headache from putting his head in front of a very loud speaker. This headache would, on the present suggestion, have the same sort of normative significance (although perhaps differing in quantity) as would the fact that he is jealous of his neighbors. That is because both the emotion and the headache are equally psychological conditions which are effects of the person's intentional efforts. Since these are effects of the person's actions, she becomes an apt target of criticism precisely in her capacity as the initiator of these effects.

However, the defender of an Attributability theory is unlikely to agree that the putative normative significance of an emotion is simply one sort of causal effect, among others, that the person can achieve through her actions. As Angela Smith puts it very nicely, “we are not merely producers of our attitudes, or guardians over them: we are first and foremost, inhabitants of them.”<sup>80</sup> In short, we are not simply responsible for our emotions as one effect, among others, of our actions. Rather, emotions have some intrinsic moral significance to them. They may inherently be ways in which the person is active. It could very well be the emotion reveals her character due to this inherent activity, and not because she had the ability to alter through intentional action how she felt.

It is true that the friend of Attributability owes some account of this activity that is inherent to emotions. Furthermore, their story must also explain how the person can be active in these ways, even in certain cases where she lacks a reasonable opportunity to alter her emotion via intentional action. But it is surely a mistake to argue that since the person lacked this reasonable opportunity, any evaluation of that emotion must essentially be construing it merely as a “morally regrettable fact” about the world, and not a criticism, censure directed towards an

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80 Smith, 2005, 251

agent. This is, in effect, to assume that one's emotions can only reveal one's character insofar as one was the (potential) causal initiator of those states. It is a prejudice to make this assumption in advance of more detailed investigations into the ways in which agency might be realized in the mind.

## **II.8. Conclusion: Having versus Meeting Obligations**

In the previous chapter, we saw that the main objection to acknowledging a distinct body of norms that govern our emotions, parallel to those norms that govern actions, was the emotions – unlike actions – are not the sort of thing that can be altered, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions. On this basis, some philosophers are inclined to argue that it could never, literally speaking, be true that one ought to be proud, angry, jealous, glad, and so on. Accordingly, they appeal to the venerable philosophical principle that “ought” implies “can.”

In the present chapter, I considered a natural strategy, called the Practical-Foresight theory, in which the principle that “ought” implies “can” is reconciled with the fact that emotions are not basic intentional actions. This theory is based on the recognition that there are various courses of deliberate action, up to and including long-term projects of re-habitation, which can make a difference to what emotions one feels. Thus, an emotion can be an ethical failing, insofar as there are deliberate steps one took, or could have taken, in order to make a difference to what emotion one has. Even if the person could not, given the circumstances, have felt otherwise than she did, she may nevertheless have had a reasonable opportunity to avoid being subject to criticism, censure, blame, resentment, etc., in light of that emotion.

With the failure of the Practical-Foresight view, I suggest, it makes sense to consider

alternatives which do not assume that the “ought” putatively governing our emotions in fact implies “can.” Rather, as I have argued, these emotions are subject to norms not because they can be altered by our intentional actions, but instead because they disclose our moral character. This is the view of responsibility as attributability. According to that view, the moral significance of an emotion is not, or not simply, as the effect of our actions. Rather, its moral significance is principally about the sorts of people we ought to be, not simply a matter of what intentional actions we ought to perform. The existence of these obligations could rather be function of ways an emotion *intrinsically* is an embodiment of agency and activity, and not just the fact that it could result from some causal process initiated by an act of will.

I do not wish to deny that Practical-Foresight account describes important, or perhaps necessary, capacities that a person has for self-regulation, and specifically, management of one's emotions. It may be, especially for those of us who had a less than ideal upbringing, that re-habitation, or deliberately avoiding the triggers for an emotion, is the best, or most effective strategy for meeting obligations regarding how to feel. Yet, I suggest, this is not quite the same as claiming that the person has those obligations in the first place in virtue of capacities for self-regulation. This latter claim fundamentally misunderstands the fact that emotions are, crucially, not just results we bring about, but points of view we inhabit. To understand this idea better, we now turn to Rationalism.

## Chapter III: Rationalism

### III.1 Introduction

For many philosophers, the debate about whether there could be ethical norms distinctively applying to one's emotions has largely been waged around seeing how emotions can be reconciled with the well-worn philosophical principle that “ought” implies “can.” In brief, this principle requires that the emotion be the sort of thing that can be altered, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions in order for it to be subject to norms. However, as we have seen over the course of the previous two chapters, this principle cannot be maintained. In the first place, emotions are not basic intentional actions, the sorts of change we can bring about simply by trying or intending to do so. Further, even where the person can, as the Practical-Foresight account contends, take practical steps to influence her emotions, these steps seem quite irrelevant to why the emotion is subject to norms at all.

Instead, I have maintained, these norms must be accounted for in terms of the attributability of the emotion, not in terms of any intentional control (of either a direct or indirect variety) the person had over her emotion. For the defender of an Attributability theory, the emotion is subject to normative assessment, criticism, etc., in virtue of the fact that it reveals the person's moral character. In brief, there are certain normative requirements that apply to the sort of people we are, independently of the sort of practical influence we could have exerted over who we are. But defenders of Attributability face an explanatory burden: why is an emotion part

of the criterion for the person's character? Answering this question is critical, because emotions must be distinguished from other conditions, such as one's shoe-size, height, race, which are also not subject to being altered by intentional action.

In this chapter and the next, I will consider one particularly compelling way to answer this question: it is in virtue of their rational role that emotions are subject to ethical criticism. I call this view *Rationalism*. Unlike shoe size or the socio-economic status in which one grew up, it makes sense to inquire as to what reasons for her being angry, jealous, ashamed. In other words, emotions are the sort of characteristic for which it is legitimate to expect for a certain sort of explanation, which does not presuppose that the emotion was altered by one's intentional actions.

Here is how the chapter will proceed. In section two, I go into more detail regarding the intentionality of an emotion, i.e., its directedness or aboutness. In particular, emotions have a propositional content. This puts us in the position to understand, in section three, how the occurrence of an emotion can be explained by the propositional content, and especially by the recognition of reasons in favor of that emotion. This shows that emotions are, as it is sometimes put, "judgment-sensitive." In section four, I consider several objections to the ideas that emotions are judgment-sensitive. In section five, I consider how judgment-sensitivity can be thought of as an explanation of the attributability of our emotions. In this way, the rationality of an emotion is why it is part of the criterion for moral character. Finally, in section six, I return to the objection (discussed initially in Chapter II) regarding how to distinguish between badness and blameworthiness of emotions.

### III.2. Propositional Content of Emotion

The Rationalist strategy is to argue that emotions are subject to ethical criticism, not because we can alter them by way of our intentional actions, but instead because they are inherently part of our rational natures. But, what does it mean for emotions to be inherently part of our rational natures? The answer can be fruitfully divided into two parts. In the present section, I will explore the Rationalist's view of the content of an emotion, and then in section II.4., turn to questions about the explanation of an emotion.

Importantly, Rationalists argue that emotions can be consistent or inconsistent with other things we think, believe, judge, perceive, feel, want, or do. Imagine that Hank is jealous of Ted's new promotion at work. Hank thinks himself well-qualified for the position, and in losing out to Ted, feels these qualifications have been undeservedly overlooked. Now suppose that Ted is unexpectedly fired. The job is then offered to Hank. Finally, imagine that Hank, having been offered the job, claims not to want the position.<sup>81</sup> If his claim is sincere (i.e., he is not joking or bluffing) and true, then Hank is in a position of cognitive dissonance. We have a difficult time reconciling Hank's jealousy with his denial of interest in the position as both belonging to the same person. Alternative interpretations mitigate this dissonance. Perhaps his denial is not really true, because he is bitter at having been passed over and does not want to appear interested. Perhaps also he did have interest during the time when he was jealous, but has since come to peace with his current status and is now neither jealous nor interested in the position. But in absence of such subsidiary hypotheses, Hank appears downright unintelligible to us, and we imagine, to himself.

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<sup>81</sup> Similar examples are offered by Helm, 2001, 68-69



These relations of consistency and inconsistency would not be possible unless emotions involved distinctive ways of representing their targets. (I use the notion of a “target” loosely to indicate the particulars towards which the emotion is directed.) In the first place, they are about events, situations, people, etc., around us. To return to our example, Hank's jealousy was about Ted's new position. But they are not simply sources of information, as smoke may provide information about the presence of fire. Rather, they are logically-structured representations of the events, situations, people, etc., around us. Hank's jealousy is not only about Ted's new position, but his jealousy presents Ted's new position in a certain light, as being *a desired benefit* which has been *denied* or *withheld* from Hank. It is in virtue of this logical structure that emotions can be consistent or inconsistent with other intentional states.

By contrast, non-intentional states, such as the feeling of a stomach-ache, the after-image from staring into a bright light, or the jitters from drinking too much caffeine, cannot be inconsistent with anything else one says or thinks.<sup>82</sup> The stomach-ache, after-image, or jitters may be simple sources of information, by being reliably correlated with bodily damage, or increase in adrenaline, or hunger. But these states cannot, on their own, be inconsistent with any other beliefs, perceptions, judgments, etc. They do not, on their own, make any claim about the world with which a belief, perception, judgment could conflict.

The same point is sometimes made by saying that emotions have *formal objects*. The formal object refers to how the target is presented, i.e., what claim is being made about it, in the emotion. Articulating the formal object helps elucidate the emotion in at least two ways.<sup>83</sup> Firstly,

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82 Cf. Moran, 2002, 198ff., on the contrast between sensations and intentional states, which have “an internal normative structure” (208). This is not to deny that the latter category, including emotions, may yet have distinctive phenomenology or qualitative feels.

83 These two tasks of a formal object come from Teroni, 2007. The apparatus of formal objects is re-introduced by Kenny, 1963, 132-135. Cf. also Mulligan, 2007; Mulligan, 2010

it accounts for the emotion's phenomenology, about what state of mind one occupies in feeling that emotion, and how that state of mind makes sense to the person. Secondly, however, the formal object accounts for certain normative features of the emotion. It tells us about the standards which apply the token attitudes simply in virtue of the type they belong to. This standard can be called the emotion's "correctness conditions." By accounting for the phenomenology and the correctness conditions, the formal object indicates the essence of the attitude-type.

Formal objects are typically useful to account for particular sub-species of emotion, such as jealousy or anger, rather than wider category of emotion as such. For example, Foot proposes that "the characteristic object of pride must be something seen ... as in some way a man's own, and ... as some sort of achievement or advantage."<sup>84</sup> Phenomenologically, pride is thus characterized in terms of how the person represents his attitude's target. If it is towards something which he is, at least in the circumstances, unable to regard as his own, then his attitude (logically speaking) cannot be pride. This claim does not rule out that it might nevertheless be, for example, sympathy or joy toward the same target. It simply acknowledges that pride has its own essential object-directed structure. Normatively, Foot's claim indicates when pride is accurate or fitting.<sup>85</sup> Pride fits its target when it is *reasonable* to regard that thing as one's own and in some way an achievement or advantage. Thus, we can allow that somebody (perhaps suffering from a delusion) might genuinely feel proud of the sun or clouds, but

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84 Foot, 1958, 86. Not all writers agree that we can give such informative accounts of the formal objects for different emotion types. According to sentimentalists, the most accurate and non-circular description of a formal object ineliminably refers to the emotion in question. For example, a sentimentalist might hold that the formal object of fear is the fearsome, or that which makes fear appropriate.

85 de Sousa, 1987, 122. D'Arms & Jacobson, 2000b disambiguate this normative standard for emotions from others such as prudential and moral norms.

nevertheless deny that such an attitude is appropriate or warranted.<sup>86</sup>

If emotions have formal objects, they must therefore have the sort of content also had by beliefs, judgments, certain types of perceptions, certain types of desire. To return to our example, when Hank is jealous, he represents Ted's new position in a quite specific, logically-structured way. Crucially, this specific, structured representation must be such as could (at least in principle) be incompatible with the truth of Hank's other beliefs. Furthermore, Hank could be aware of, mitigate, or bear some responsibility for this incompatibility. One way to put this point is that emotions are *propositional attitudes*. Roughly, propositional attitudes are those that are individuated using Fregean senses. One can rationally believe that Mark Twain was the author of Huckleberry Finn without believing that Samuel Clemens was the author of Huckleberry Finn (if one did not know that Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens). Therefore, these are distinct beliefs, even though they are logically equivalent. Similarly, it is rationally coherent to want Obama to get elected even though one does not want the current U.S. president to get elected, and it is rationally coherent to be angry that Ted was promoted even without being angry that Mrs. Jones's favorite student was promoted. The fact that these attitudes can be differentiated in this way shows that they have fine-grained propositional contents.

To forestall any misunderstanding, the claim that emotions have propositional content does not entail that every emotion must be attributable using a '...that..' clause, as in "Hank believes that Ted got fired." This would require that every emotion, in essence, targets a state of affairs, its entirety. But it is fairly clear that many emotions do not do this. For example, I can be

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86 Two other examples are useful for bringing the more general point home. Neu tells us, "jealousy is typically over what one possesses and fears to lose, while envy may be over something one has never possessed and may never hope to possess" Neu, 1980, 47. Here, two putatively similar kinds of emotion are distinguished by their different relations towards their targets. Finally, as Gabriele Taylor tells us about anger: "the loss of my well-being is seen not as just a loss but as one which is in some way undeserved and unfair," Taylor, 1975b, 395.

afraid of the thunderclap, or hate your disdainful look. These are quite distinct attitudes from being afraid *that there was a thunderclap*, or hating *that you looked disdainfully*. Nevertheless, the claim that emotions have propositional content can still incorporate such cases, without assimilating them to being afraid *that*, or hating *that*. In cases where the emotion is clearly about an object, an event, and so on, it remains true that the content is given by a Fregean sense. In these cases, we can think of my emotion as simply about a part of the relevant Fregean sense. Thunder is essentially the audible effect of lightning. I could coherently and rationally fear the thunderclap without fearing the audible effect of lightning. Even if these expressions co-refer, the correlated fears are distinct.

Even if not all emotions are attributable in terms of a "...that.." clause, the use of formal objects requires that it is always possible to translate the content of the emotion into a full proposition. To return to our example, one might describe the thought behind Hank's jealousy roughly as follows: "Ted's new promotion is a desirable benefit which has been denied to me." This gloss is not to suggest that having such an emotion is simply, or most fundamentally, the bald thought that something is true, or that some state of affairs obtains. Instead, the gloss, according to the earlier explanation of formal objects, accounts for the phenomenology and appropriateness of Hank's jealousy. This means that, typically, other propositional attitudes must be in place for Hank to be appropriately jealous.<sup>87</sup> It must at least appear true to Hank, even momentarily, that Ted has been promoted, that the promotion is a desirable benefit for him, and that he has been passed over in the award of the promotion.<sup>88</sup> In many cases, but not all, these

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87 Solomon, 1977, 46-47, emphasizes the presupposition and entailment relationships between what he calls the emotional "judgment" and other beliefs the person holds.

88 Some writers have insisted on a full-belief requirement, such as Taylor, 1975b; Taylor, 1975a; Solomon, 1993. But others have argued that some weaker requirement, such as construal or appearance of truth, suffices. Cf. Roberts, 1988; Roberts, 2003; Calhoun, 1984; Greenspan, 1980; Greenspan, 1992.

underlying attitudes are full-fledged beliefs.<sup>89</sup>

This claim that emotions have propositional content is liable to be mis-interpreted in two ways that make emotions seem overly intellectual. By claiming that the emotion, for theoretical purposes of understanding Hank's point of view, can be glossed as a proposition, it is not being denied that affect or bodily feeling have a place, or even an essential place, in emotion. At least two views are possible here. On one view, there is a causal connection between emotional thoughts, and bodily or affective feelings. Thus, in any real situation, the emotion will always be correlated with feeling. This would require that the bodily or affective feeling is not what makes the emotion intelligible, but is instead a mere accompaniment. On the stronger view, the bodily or affective feelings can themselves have intentionality, or and can literally be about the world.<sup>90</sup> For defenders of this view, how the emotion feels is inextricably bound up with the claim it makes about the world.

Furthermore, the claim is liable to be misinterpreted, if one imports the assumption that whenever somebody has an emotion, she knows that she has the emotion, and fully understands the claim that the emotion makes about the world. But this rules out the possibility that one can have emotions which one has not yet been able to articulate. A clear example is Huck Finn's hesitation in handing over his traveling partner, the refugee slave Jim, to slave-catchers.<sup>91</sup> As many people read the story, Huck feels sympathy for Jim, and he does not turn Jim in out of this

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89 Incorporating the debate mentioned in the previous footnote, Pugmire, 2005, 38-9, allows for emotions whose cognitive commitment is weaker than belief, but argues that *deep* emotions require full-belief

90 Greenspan, 1992, 293-294, Greenspan, 2004, 132-33. For Greenspan, emotions are feelings of comfort or discomfort with a proposition as their target. She says in fearing Fido, the person “feels as though’ Fido is likely to injure him – as evidenced by the tendency, despite himself, to entertain that thought in Fido's presence.” Cf., also Madell, 1997; Goldie, 2000, 58-62; Goldie, 2009. Solomon argues that there could be a significant bodily dimension to these judgments. He calls them “judgments of the body,” although the meaning of this is not clarified, Solomon, 2003, 14

91 This case is discussed by Bennett, 1974; McIntyre, 1990; Arpaly, 2003.

sympathy. But Huck chalks up his failure to weakness, where he has not “the spunk of a rabbit.”<sup>92</sup> This is a case where somebody has an emotion, but fails to understand his emotion at a more reflective level. Nevertheless, the relevant failure to understand does not remove the sympathy from the scope of rationality.

### III.3. Explanation and Judgment-Sensitivity

According to Rationalists, emotions are capable of being fully integrated into our mental lives, which is not possible with regard to purely qualitative experiences or sensations. This capacity for integration must be due to the propositional content that an emotion has, which it in principle can share with beliefs, judgments, certain kinds of perceptions, and certain kinds of desires. We can gloss the content of an emotion in terms of a proposition. This technique of glossing assists, not only in understanding how the emotion makes sense to the person who has it, but also in understanding when the emotion would be appropriate or reasonable.

This latter point brings out a thread so far implicit in the discussion. If the propositional contents of anger, jealousy, hatred, etc., indicate when the emotion would be reasonable or appropriate to have, then we get the following result. There is a unified class of considerations that are directly relevant to whether the emotion was reasonable or appropriate. In other words, there are such things as *reasons* to have the emotion.<sup>93</sup> These are simply those features which show that the proposition glossing the emotion's content to be true. For example, suppose pride is characteristically about what is an achievement of one's own. Then, evidence of personal

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92 Arpaly, 2003, 75-76

93 On 'reasons to feel,' cf. Skorupski, 1997, 352 ff. I follow Pam Hieronymi in understanding a reason as “a consideration that bears on a question.” Hieronymi, 2005; Hieronymi, 2006.

achievement, such as evidence pointing towards a painting of yours winning a juried prize or your child graduating with honors, would seem to show that pride in such an outcome to be appropriate or reasonable.

Rationalists argue that reasons for emotions, in this sense, have an explanatory role in showing why an emotion occurs. The person herself is generally expected to be in a position to offer these reasons in reply to criticism or inquiry. If a bystander were to ask her, “why are you proud?” she could be expected to account for herself by appealing to some evidence of personal achievement, such as pointing out that she just won a prize for painting.<sup>94</sup> These explanations (often called “rationalizing explanations”) thus do not take some impartial or scientific perspective on a person's emotions. Rather, they explain an emotion by reference to those features which make it intelligible to the person whose emotion it is. That is, an appeal to reasons explains pride, anger, jealousy, etc., 'from the inside.'

When a person's emotion admits of a rationalizing explanation, her beliefs about the reasons supporting that emotion are an essential part of the explanation.<sup>95</sup> As Scanlon says “insofar as we are rational, we come to have [these emotions] when we judge ourselves to have compelling reason of the relevant kind to do so, and cease to have them when we judge there to be compelling reason against them.”<sup>96</sup> The actual occurrence of pride, jealousy, anger, hatred, (and therefore, any subsequently motivated desires or intentions) thus depends upon the person's beliefs in at least two directions. The first direction is that, in the normal case, when somebody believes that there are reasons for pride, she is proud. The second direction is that, in the normal

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94 Deonna & Teroni, 2011, Ch. 6; Brady, 2011; Salmela, 2011. Cf. Also, Neu, 1980, 49; Baier, 1985, 117ff.; Raz, 1997, Raz, 2004, 175-176; Williams, 1971, 224; Taylor, 1975b.

95 There are difficulties here deriving from the admission in the last section that the propositional attitudes underlying

96 Scanlon, 2002, 168.

case, the absence of the pride depends on the absence of the relevant belief. This in turn could happen in several ways. When somebody positively believes that there are not reasons for pride or that there are positive reasons not to be proud, she is not proud. But also when somebody does not believe there are reasons to be proud, she is not proud.

These claims, at minimum, indicate causal relationships. They need not be describing in any detail a discrete psychological mechanism whereby people come to have or lose their emotions, such as a structure in the brain which has certain identifiable effects. (Although their truth does require that some such mechanisms, whatever their nature may turn out to be, exist). Nevertheless, appeal to rationalizing beliefs can explicate events which have a place in the causal order of nature. When painter proudly holds up her award, and award is no longer on the table, the painter's rationalizing belief shows us why this state of affairs (and not some other) results. It indicates certain antecedent conditions without which the award would still be on the table. In this counter-factual sense, then, rationalizing beliefs are causes. Without its rationalizing belief, an emotion would normally dissipate, and thus, any subsequent effects of the emotion would not occur. Conversely, with the belief, the emotion would be present, active, etc., and thus any subsequent effects would be realized.

So, in the normal case, somebody's belief regarding the reasons supporting an emotion is both necessary and sufficient for her to actually have the emotion. The restriction to “the normal case” is non-trivial. Conformity of our emotions to our beliefs about their rational support is far from guaranteed. It is possible for a person to be proud even when he does not think that there is good reason to feel pride. Call such emotions *recalcitrant*.<sup>97</sup> Recalcitrant

97 Recalcitrance has been increasingly a topic of interest, as a rebuttal to more ambitious forms of cognitivism. Using this as an objection, cf. Roberts, 1988, 195ff.; Greenspan, 1980, 247; D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003, 128-129. For the expanded discussion of the importance, and rationality, of emotional recalcitrance, cf. Brady, 2009; Rorty, 1980; Döring, 2007; Döring, 2008. I discuss recalcitrance in Chapter IV.



emotions are not generally (although this is certainly possible) causal mishaps or accidents, such as when a flipping a switch, which normally turns on a light bulb, actually causes an electric surge that burns out the bulb. Rather, they are, or can be, rational failures due to the person himself.<sup>98</sup> Some further explanation needs to be offered for this failure, and such explanations likely appeal to the formation of the individual's personality and the history of his acquaintance with the target.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the restriction to “normal conditions” serves not only to acknowledge the possibility that the person might fail to have those emotions he believes he has reason to have, but also that this is not generally how matters transpire. Recalcitrance is the exception rather than the rule.

For Rationalists, then, not only does an emotion have propositional contents, but furthermore, the emotion can be explained by beliefs (or related propositional attitudes that fall somewhere short of full belief) regarding the adequacy of those contents to reality.<sup>100</sup> Specifically, these are beliefs about certain considerations which show that the state of affairs expressed by the proposition that glosses the content of the emotion obtains. Rationalizing beliefs need not be conscious, nor need they be the results of explicit episodes of deliberation and reflection. Rather, they are typically spontaneous responses to the world, which do not need to be chosen or reflected upon.<sup>101</sup> However, they are in principle open to critical scrutiny. A person is subject to inquiries about why she holds the rationalizing belief, and criticism depending on whether that belief has adequate support or conflicts with other things she takes to be true.

This is how Rationalists manage to incorporate the assumption, from which we began,

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98 I discuss these cases in greater detail in Chapter 3

99 Rorty, 1980, 106-107

100 For the qualification, see note 24

101 On the question of whether we can decide to believe, cf.

that emotions are not basic intentional actions. Instead, emotions are typically responses to the various circumstances in which we find ourselves. They occur without our trying or willing to have them, and barring the possibility of recalcitrance, they occur within the constraints set by of our rationalizing beliefs about those emotions. But through the possibility of critical scrutiny, a person can normally regulate the emotion in herself, without resorting to self-deception or manipulation. The class of attitudes for which this kind of agency is possible are *judgment-sensitive*.<sup>102</sup> This conveys that an attitude *could* be altered by deliberations which have not yet been (and may never be) performed. Thus, an emotion can be judgment-sensitive without having been in any way the product of reasoning. What is essential is that the attitude causally depends on beliefs about the reasons which support the emotion. These are the considerations which she would use defend her emotion if challenged or approached for clarification. It is precisely the emotion's dependence on these considerations that makes the attitude susceptible to being altered without recourse to decision or choice.

### III.4. Objections

Before proceeding, it would be useful to give voice to detractors to this view of emotions as propositional attitudes explained by reasons.

Several writers have forcefully objected to the claim that emotions are propositional attitudes.<sup>103</sup> As John Deigh puts the issue, this neglects the possibility of primitive emotions, capacity for which “is an inherited trait whose development, to the extent that it depends on the

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102 Scanlon, 1998, 18-22

103 Cf. also the critiques in Griffiths, 1997, 27-30; D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003, 140ff.

existence of environmental conditions, depends only on those necessary for meeting basic biological needs.”<sup>104</sup> Examples presumably include the fear of snakes, spiders, and steep drops, or disgust at rancid food and bodily by-products. These emotions can be explained by reference to our mammalian (human and non-human) ancestors, as traits the possession of which made a difference to whether certain individuals were able to survive and reproduce. The capacity for primitive emotions does not require the linguistic training necessary to have propositional attitudes. So, if non-linguistic infants and animals can be angry, joyful, afraid, then emotions are not propositional attitudes.

This objection assumes these reactions of pre-linguistic infants and animals are genuinely emotions. This assumption can seem obvious when the subject-matter is delimited as being about the underlying causes for tropisms, such as facial expressions, physiological responses like sweating and increased blood flow to the muscles, or atavistic behaviors such as freezing or attacking. This conception of the topic, held in the main by scientific psychologists and empirically-minded philosophers, see emotions to be discrete, quantifiable events. They can be quantified using methods such as measuring skin-conductance, which is the electrical charge of the liquid on the skin's surface.<sup>105</sup> If emotions are thus defined, then it would be mistaken to deny the possibility of primitive emotions. However, the terrain could be carved up a bit differently. One could see the subject-matter as being about those attitudes which make intelligible certain kinds of desire, such as the desire to harm an enemy or embrace a loved one, and intentional

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104 Deigh, 2004, 10. The same criticism is presented in Deigh, 2010; Deigh, 1994

105 Richard Lazarus has done experiments on what he calls 'subception,' Lazarus, 1991, 155-156. In these experiments, subjects were conditioned by electric shock to various nonsense strings of words. Subsequently, while watching unrelated slides, the same nonsense words were flashed so fast that the subjects were unable to recognize them. However, after being shown a word which before had come with a shock, there was a significant increase in skin conductance. In other words, the person had a shock-related response to the word shown at speeds too fast for conscious processing.

actions, such as stealing a coveted possession or suicide. And since these desires and actions, although they may have primitive analogues, are not shared by pre-linguistic humans and animals, the category of a “primitive emotion” would therefore be vacuous.

Nor would adopting the alternative definition for our subject-matter force the Rationalist to deny the importance, interest, or truth of the physiological research on emotions.<sup>106</sup> It is possible that many or all emotions have a physiological causes or effects. However, she could still insist that there is a non-trivial difference between the emotion itself, which can be accounted for as an attitude towards a formal object, and the physiological states which commonly accompany emotions. Furthermore, these accompanying physiological states could substantiate salient similarities between emotions and the quasi-emotional analogues found in pre-linguistic humans and animals, such as between a parent's fear for her child and the marmot's 'fear' of a predator.

Even if it is true that the reactions of pre-linguistic infants and children are genuinely emotions, one could nevertheless argue that Rationalism is the correct theory for the complementary class of non-primitive emotions.<sup>107</sup> In this way, conceding the existence of primitive emotions does not contradict the idea that non-primitive emotions could be propositional attitudes, and in turn, judgment-sensitive. It only implies that no primitive emotion is a propositional attitude or judgment-sensitive. But this implication does not pose difficulty for a theory about the foundations for an ethics of emotion, such as Rationalism. The individuals who we are interested in evaluating for their emotions do have the linguistic training necessary to have propositional attitudes. So, either they never have primitive emotions, or they sometimes

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<sup>106</sup> Solomon, 2007, 16-17

<sup>107</sup> This is closely related to the idea of “cognitive sharpenings” in D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003, 137. But for D'Arms and Jacobson, cognitive sharpenings are specifications of ontologically prior pre-linguistic emotion, whereas Rationalists would deny this claim because the nature of the emotion is its propositional content.

do. If never, then Rationalism is an accurate account of the class of emotions which interests us. If sometimes, then the Rationalist can deny that it is appropriate to assess such a person on the basis of a primitive emotion, precisely because that emotion is not judgment-sensitive. For example, an adult's terror upon being cast out of an airplane without a parachute would not be a legitimate basis for assessment. In this case, as well, Rationalism is an accurate account of the class of emotions which interests us.

Other authors have denied that emotions are inconsistent with desires, beliefs, judgments, or even other emotions.<sup>108</sup> This is supposed to be due to the fact that there is an analogy between the contents of emotion that that of perception. It has been argued that perceptual experiences, such as seeing an ovular shape or hearing an F-sharp, cannot conflict with opposing beliefs.<sup>109</sup> By contrast, a conflict would arise when one, in seeing the shape or hearing the sound, had the distinct thought “it is oval” or “that sound is F-sharp.” But then the conflict would not be with the experience itself, rather than the added thought. The important distinction is between the experience of F-sharp or an oval shape, taken by itself, and subsequent beliefs which we may subsequently form about the experience. Only the latter can enter into logical relations. So, the emotion itself, because it possesses a perception-like content, cannot enter into logical relations.

However, this objection is committed to view that people could never truly have reasons for their emotions at all. When I ask somebody why he feels angry, then I ask him to offer considerations which, at least in his own mind, make anger an appropriate response to the situation. In short, I want to know what he thought – however momentarily or fleetingly – was

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108 This view is associated with those who assert that emotions are non-conceptual. Döring, 2007; Döring, 2009; Tappolet, 2003

109 These experiences of seeing an ovular shape or hearing an F-sharp have, variously, been said to have non-conceptual content, cf. Peacocke, 2001. For arguments against the claim that perception has non-conceptual content, cf. McDowell, 1994, Lecture III.

true about the situation, which would support his anger. But this relationship of “supporting” or “being a reason for,” like consistency and inconsistency, is a logical relation. If we deny that emotions can stand in logical relations at all, as do the defenders of the objection in question, then emotions are not the sorts of things which can ever be supported by reasons. Admittedly, sometimes people are at a loss to explain how they feel. But this is a much different claim from denying that emotions can ever be rationally explained.

In reply, it could be argued (perhaps in the spirit of Pascal) that emotions have their own reasons. Some think that there is constituent rationalizing relation internal to an emotion. Fabrice Teroni argues, firstly, that emotions can be rationalized by perceptual inputs, and secondly, these perception-rationalized emotions are possible for pre-linguistic humans and animals.<sup>110</sup> Teroni can coherently hold both of these two claims, because he denies that the true nature of the rationalizing consideration (or for that matter, the rationalizing relation) need be apparent to the individual who has the emotion. So, my fear can be rationalized by a perception of danger, even if I don't realize that what I presently perceive is danger. Fear thus does not require being based in a propositional attitude towards danger, as such. The claim that “fear is about danger” is rather an *a posteriori* theory about what is common to the considerations that support fear, not a proposition one must endorse in order to feel fear at all.<sup>111</sup>

Presumably, to genuinely qualify as a reason for an emotion, a consideration needs to be such as the individual could come to recognize it to bear some supporting or favoring relation to the attitude. No doubt it is true that sometimes we can only reconstruct the reasons as such *after*

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110 Teroni, 2007, 404, endorses what he calls the “basing thesis,” that emotions are not free-standing intentional relations to their objects. Instead, they depend on the deliverances of other intentional states, i.e., the cognitive base. The primary example of a cognitive base is perception. His acceptance of 'primitive emotions' can be found on pg. 407, *ibid*. Furthermore, he is fully explicit that the cognitive base not only explains, but rationalizes the emotion, Deonna & Teroni, 2011, 106 ff.

111 Teroni, 2007, 412.

we have responded to them. But Teroni's theory requires us to countenance cases where some considerations support or favor emotions, yet it is impossible for the individual to recognize the relation between the reason and the emotion. Animals, for example, cannot recognize why certain perceived factors merit or call for emotion. This connection would require concepts, which are *ex hypothesi* unavailable to the animals. Thus, it is not feasible to conceive of this as a genuine rationalizing relation, rather than some sort of stimulus-response connection.

### **III.5. Rationality and the Nature of the Self**

Over the course of the last three sections, we have seen a bit more of what it means for emotions to be due to our rational natures. Emotions not only can bear logical relations to other attitudes, including belief, but are explained in virtue of these logical relations. This is owing to the fact that emotions have propositional contents, and present their target as falling under a formal object.

How exactly does this rational role bear on the Rationalist's claim that emotions are part of the criterion for the moral character of the person who has them? As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a problem of how to distinguish those aspects of mental life that can be substantively identified with the person, i.e., they are *hers*, from those that are not.<sup>112</sup> I called this the *Problem of Attributability*. In virtue of what is a thought, desire, hope, feeling, etc., attributable to the person?

One prominent theory accounts for these limits in terms of the reasons-seeking “why?” question. According to this theory, the thoughts, desire, hopes, etc., that belong to a person are

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<sup>112</sup> Frankfurt, 1977, 60-61

those for which she could provide some rational explanation. If somebody were to ask her why she wants a new job, a cup of tea, or some peace of mind, there is some story to be given which appeals to what about a new job, a cup of tea, or some peace of mind would be desirable for her. This explanation need not be, as it were, 'on the tip of the tongue,' but the person could, at least with some opportunity for reflection, provide it. As Moran says, the person in such a situation “takes the general question of what he wants here to be the expression of his sense of what he has best reason to pursue in this context.”<sup>113</sup> It is this relation to her thinking about what is true, good, worthwhile, and so on, that makes the attitude genuinely attributable to her. Another way to put the same point: on this view, the self is identified with elements the mind that are judgment-sensitive, i.e., those that depend for their continuation on the presence of beliefs (or some weaker propositional attitudes) concerning reasons.

The reasons adduced in such explanations need not be ultimately cogent or able to withstand criticism from acute inquirers.<sup>114</sup> Where a person is impressionable, foolish, young, misled, not very intelligent, self-deceived, etc., her explanation may involve falsehoods or unsupported claims. What matters, however, is not that her attitude is objectively getting the world right, but instead that it appears to her to be, in some respect, getting the world right. In other words, her attitude has the “semblance of rationality.”<sup>115</sup> That is to say, there is some story the person could offer in defense of why she thinks, hopes, feels in a certain way, even if these considerations are subsequently shown to be untenable, misunderstood, outweighed, etc. So long as her attitude appears (at least to her) to admit some – however minimal or tentative – rational explanation, it can properly be said to be hers, to be part of herself.

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113 Moran, 2002, 199

114 Cf. also, Moreau, 2005, 296

115 Raz, 1997, 16-17



Why does the scope of reasons-based explanations delineate, most fundamentally, the limits of the self? According to Rationalists, these explanations reveal our *evaluative activity*. Angela Smith says “the real core of our moral agency resides in our ... basic capacity to evaluate – in complex, spontaneous, and even contradictory ways – the world around us.”<sup>116</sup> Rationalists can argue that evaluations play at least two, perhaps related, roles. Firstly, the sorts of evaluations a person is disposed to make, or fail to make, are what constitute her character. For example, whether a person is cruel or kind, etc., is a function of the characteristic importance the pain and discomfort of others has for her. This is shown in how she comports herself with respect to considerations involving the pain and discomfort of others.<sup>117</sup> Secondly, it is through evaluation that a person makes sense of her own actions and attitudes. That is, evaluations make us intelligible to ourselves. An action, for example, must have some characteristics which made it eligible or attractive as a chosen response to the situation, given who the person is and how she saw things at the time. This requires belief (or weaker propositional attitudes) about respects in which the act is good.<sup>118</sup> Attitudes, and especially emotions, can be treated similarly, since they have propositional content which is evaluative. So, the reasons for an attitude will be indicated by evaluative beliefs. (The result of putting these two roles together is that the notion of character properly only has application where one can, at least in principle, be intelligible to oneself.)

It would be confused to assume that all evaluations are fully conscious, deliberative judgments.<sup>119</sup> For example, one may explicitly engage in a process of reasoning about whether a

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116 Smith, 2004, 340

117 Moreau, 2005, “loyalty..might be better construed as a disposition to take certain motivationally independent facts as reasons,”

118 Raz, 1999, 24

119 Smith, 2004, *ibid.*

tropical vacation is worth the cost and time away from work, or whether the Wall Street bailout was a failure of national leadership to stand up to big banks. The verdicts and intentions that issue from such explicit processes of reasoning will no doubt qualify as evaluations. But not all evaluations are fully conscious, deliberative judgments. Some evaluations may be very intuitive, momentary responses to the situation, especially where they fall short of full belief in the relevant values. For example, a person might, even for a moment, regard her doctor as an arrogant chauvinist, and growing angry, storm out of the doctor's office. But, on cooler reflection, such thoughts may seem rash or unwarranted. However, both the angry perception of the doctor's behavior, and the cooler, more objective assessment must equally be evaluations.

In light of this distinction, Rationalists deny that choice or action is part of the criterion for what qualifies an attitude or action as the person's own.<sup>120</sup> The argument for this conclusion is straightforward: the self is identified with evaluative activity, and some evaluations are unreflective, momentary responses that were not due to choice or decision. Emotions are a notable example in this category of exceptions. Emotions, on account of their propositional content wherein a target is presented as falling under a formal object, constitute an evaluative response to the world. This is not an evaluative response that the person chose or decided upon, but nonetheless it is a way in which *she*, the person herself, responds to the situation around her.<sup>121</sup> As Blum says, “we are passive with respect to our emotions and feelings but that, nevertheless ... they are properly seen as genuinely a part of us, no less a full part of us than are the actions we perform and the judgments we make.”<sup>122</sup>

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120 Smith, 2004, 340ff.; Smith, 2005.

121 Helm, 2001, 66-67 distinguishes between “active” assent to the value of something, as might be made in a moral or practical 'ought' judgment, as “passive” assent, as characterizes emotions. In Helm's terms, we could say: just because a person isn't actively assenting to value does not disprove that she isn't assenting to value at all.

122 Blum, 1980, 183. 'Passivity' in this claim must be read meaning “was not subject to the choice or decision.” It should be noted that Blum does not, at least not explicitly, endorse the Rationalist's explanation for why

Furthermore, Rationalists can argue that, even where choice and decision significantly reveal what person is like, this significance is ultimately due to rationality as well. There is more than one way to act towards an end, and these differences can be ethically relevant. Intentions, i.e., the attitude in virtue of which one aims at some end, are characteristically formed for reasons.<sup>123</sup> My intention to help the neighbor may itself reflect my awareness that she is in a state of need, or I could have the intention to help because I thought it my duty – abstractly speaking – to help others. Although it is the same intention to help in both cases, the acts reveal different types of character. To capture this difference, we need to turn to a finer-grained notion than *what* one strictly intends. We expect her to be able to say what about that course of action was worthwhile. In being provided with such an explanation, we are thereby provided with the reasons in virtue of which the choice made sense to the person (assuming she is being sincere.) On this basis, it could be argued that it is in fact the reasons for doing what one intends, not simply what one intends, that truly expresses the character in such cases anyway. This seems to indicate that the reasons which could be offered in defense of the choice, rather than the choice itself, is what makes for attributability. In other words, rationality can provide a unified, coherent explanation of the limits of the self.

Finally, there is no guarantee that the evaluations a person makes will all be consistent with each other. Some of our evaluative activity occurs in unreflective, passing reactions to situations; the remainder takes shape through quite explicit processes of reasoning and deliberation. It is certainly possible for my intuitive, unreflective evaluations to conflict with considered judgments. For example, I might judge that some work of art, like a post-modern

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emotions belong to the self.

123 Anscombe, 1957; Raz, 1997 . To avoid problems such as Kavka's Toxin Puzzle, we should hold that a reason to intend is, necessarily, a reason to perform the intended action.

film, is a great artistic accomplishment, and deserves to be watched. Yet, as I sit in my seat watching the film, I am bored, and irritated by the absence of any features, such linear narrative, character, dialogue, etc., which make traditional movie-going interesting. These two evaluations are inconsistent, regarding whether the post-modern movie is a good movie. We must not be tempted, as philosophers sometimes are, to identify the self with the reflective, deliberative evaluation as opposed to the unreflective bored and irritated reactions. This is not a case of external, alien forces assailing the undivided self from without, but somebody who is internally conflicted about whether the movie is worth watching. In such cases, my “identity as a person [has] become fragmented.”<sup>124</sup> This is, in part, why such cases are experienced as struggles. We are, as Smith says, “struggling against ourselves.”<sup>125</sup>

### **III.6. Badness and Blameworthiness**

To re-iterate, Rationalism exemplifies an Attributionist-style analysis of responsibility. It denies that ethical criticisms of an emotion require the person to have had a reasonable opportunity to avoid feeling the emotion. Instead, it holds that ethical criticism is possible because emotions embody who the person really is. It is thus appropriate to take an emotion as a basis of ethical assessment of that person, regardless of whether she had control, in some more substantive sense, over how she felt.

But Attributability theories still face an outstanding objection which deserves to be addressed. Critics argue that responsibility requires reasonable opportunity to avoid having the

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124 Helm, 2001, 137

125 Smith, 2004, 339

emotion, because only then could the relevant assessments be deep rather than superficial. For example, we might call some non-agent, such as a dog or small child, “awful” or “dangerous.” We do not thereby imply that the dog or child deserve to be blamed for such characteristics. How is criticism directed at emotions any different? These critics argue that, by allowing for ethical assessments of what the person lacked a reasonable opportunity to avoid, we collapse the distinction between a person being blameworthy and simply being bad.<sup>126</sup> In other words, no Attributability theory can recognize the relevant differences between an emotion warranting a more or less impersonal theoretical judgment about a person's character, and that emotion conferring upon others entitlement to blame the person.<sup>127</sup> So understood, this objection gets straight to the heart of the matter: if it turned out that intentional action was necessary for responsibility, then the possibility of an ethics of emotion would suddenly seem to be cast into doubt.

The objection implicitly assumes that Attributability theories only yield impersonal theoretical judgments, identical in kind to those that might be framed about non-agents like the dog and small child. Such judgments can be used in dealing strategically with her present and future behavior, but fall short of entitling any response that may impose costs upon the individual. However, Rationalists will point out that many of these judgments are not simply about the person, but are *addressed* to her. As Angela Smith says,

moral criticism, by its very nature, seems to address a demand to its target. It calls upon the agent to explain or justify her rational activity in some area, and to acknowledge fault if such a justification cannot be provided.<sup>128</sup>

Hence, the claim that somebody is, e.g., selfish or cruel should not simply be read as a theoretical

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126 Levy, 2005, 6

127 Several authors deny that blame, as opposed to the impersonal judgments, would ever be warranted with regard to emotions and character. Cf. Sabini & Silver, 1998; Enoch & Marmor, 2007

128 Smith, 2008, 381

or explanatory description of the person. Rather, such a claim implicitly holds the person to account, and treats her as answerable to this charge of selfishness or cruelty, as well as the actions and attitudes in which the selfishness or cruelty is manifested. Another way to put the same point: the relevant claims belong to what Strawson calls the “participatory” point of view.

<sup>129</sup> They are not theories made by some impartial, dispassionate observer; instead they are condemnations made by a member of a moral community to a peer. Nothing similar would be possible toward non-agents.

It is precisely the connection with judgment-sensitivity that underwrites the implicit direct address in judgments about the person's character. According to the Rationalist, the aspects of a person's life that are attributable to her (and hence subject to ethical criticism) are those for which she could be expected to give some rational explanation. It is appropriate to inquire as to why somebody feels or acts in certain ways, and she can legitimately be expected to no longer feel or act in those ways where reasons cannot be found. In short, by basing attributability on the possibility of discursive explanations in defense of one's actions and attitudes, the Rationalist ensures that the corresponding criticisms belong to the context of shared, more or less cooperative social life, rather than to a more detached, observational context.

What about the claim that sanctions, such as is involved in blaming, can only be fair where there has been a reasonable opportunity to avoid such costs? Here the Rationalist will emphasize, rather than prior decisions, the prior evaluations actually made by the person. The ethical criticisms are “directed at his judgmental activity, activity for which we must regard him as responsible if we are to regard him as a moral agent in any sense.”<sup>130</sup> On this view, the

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129 Strawson, 1962

130 Smith, 2008, 388

criticisms attach to ways in which the person has been, and continues to be, active in her mental life. Although she may not have been intentionally or deliberately decided to be active in these ways, it is nevertheless false that her attitudes were mere accidents, or transient phenomena to which she contributed nothing. The sanctions involved in blaming, which sometimes may simply consist in the withdrawal of good will, are deemed fair in virtue of such contributions.<sup>131</sup>

### **III.6. Conclusion**

Rationalism is a prevalent and plausible way of fleshing out the conception of responsibility as attributability. It shows how we might countenance the possibility of an ethics of emotion while denying the principle that “ought” implies “can.” For the Rationalist, an emotion discloses the person's moral character just because it shows what she takes to be significant, worthwhile, or important. It is precisely these evaluative points of view on the world that we blame, criticize, censure, resent, in an emotion. Hence, the intentional actions which made, or could have made, a difference to one's present emotional state are not relevant.

For the remainder of the dissertation, I will take a critical approach to the Rationalist view. In particular, there are problems concerning the emotions that are recalcitrant. As we shall see in the next chapter, recalcitrance shows the need for an altogether different form of explanation for the occurrence and persistence of an emotion. Fleshing out this alternative form of explanation, and its moral significance, will be the task for the final two chapters.

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131 Strawson, 1962

## Chapter IV: Recalcitrance and Rationality

### IV.1. Introduction

Are there certain emotions that a person ought not to have, or would be ethically bad for her to have? In other words, is it possible for there to be an ethics of emotion, apart from the ethics applying to actions? As we have seen, emotions – unlike actions – are not the sort of thing that can be altered, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions. One could not simply get angry when and because one tried or intended to do so. Therefore, substantiating the possibility of an ethics of emotion will require us to grasp the difference between emotions, on the one hand, and other characteristics of the person (such as her shoe-size or socio-economic status as a child) that are neither subject to our immediate control nor are appropriate targets for ethical criticism.

Attributability theories argue that normative criticism is appropriate just where the person's moral character is disclosed. Thus, a response need not be alterable, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions in order for it to be subject to norms. But this leads to further questions: in virtue of what does an emotion disclose a person's character? According to the view I called *Rationalism*, a person can be ethically criticized for all and only those characteristics that are “judgment-sensitive,” i.e., those characteristics that can be explained as responses to reasons. The person can be asked to defend herself regarding what is judgment-sensitive. For example, wanting to see a baseball game is attributable to me, discloses who I am, because I can be expected to defend going to the game as, at least in some way,



desirable. Since emotions are judgment-sensitive, they too can be attributed to the person as reflecting who she is, and what she stands for. For Rationalists, this is why emotions are subject to ethical criticism, while one's shoe size or one's economic status as a small child are not.

In the present chapter, I will pose a problem for the Rationalist approach, in the example of *recalcitrant* emotions. Recalcitrant emotions are those which occur despite the fact that the person lacked the beliefs that would make sense of that emotion. As I argue, recalcitrance is not a peripheral or isolated issue, but cuts against the very core notion of the person or the self that Rationalists draw upon. In particular, I argue that we cannot understand the occurrence of many recalcitrant emotions as proceeding from our rational natures at all, let alone from explicit reasoning or deliberation. So, assuming these cases are genuinely attributable to the person, that they reflect who she is, Rationalism must be mistaken.

Here is how I shall proceed. In section two, I introduce the concept of recalcitrance, and make a first attempt at showing why Rationalism, as a theory, cannot explain recalcitrant emotions. In section three, I discuss Angela Smith's views on recalcitrance, and in so doing, extract some broader lessons about how a Rationalist is inclined to approach the issue. However, in section four, I offer an example of recalcitrance, where an emotion that occurred as part of a dream persists past when the person awakes, which I claim cannot be understood in Rationalist terms. In section five, I defend this conclusion against several alternate characterizations of my example. Finally, in section six, I canvass objections based on the idea that every emotion, in virtue of the fact that it has propositional content, is an evaluation attributable to the person.

## IV.2. What is Recalcitrance?

Imagine a case of guilt without fault. Suppose Clara is driving to work, as she might on any other day. A reckless driver smashes into the rear of Clara's car. This collision is so violent that Clara's car veers out of control towards a nearby ledge. Clara, in a panic, tries to bring the car back under control and prevent herself from going over the ledge. However, while she is attempting to regain control of her own vehicle, she hits a third car. The third car, which is carrying a family with children, does hurtle over the ledge. Sadly, one of the children in this car dies. Haunted by memory of the incident, Clara finds herself with guilt over this child's death.<sup>132</sup> It was, after all, her car that pushed the family vehicle over the edge, and led to the death of the child. Nevertheless, Clara knows that the reckless driver was the cause of the accident, and she could not reasonably have done anything to prevent it.

This case involves logical conflict between Clara's emotion and her more considered, reflective judgments about what is true in the situation. As we saw in Ch.II, emotions have the sort of content which, at least in principle, could conflict with her other beliefs and judgments. So, Clara's guilt is not simply adrenaline-pumping, or other visceral reactions of the body. It is an intentional relation, wherein a target (in this case, the death of the child) is presented as falling under a formal object. Specifically, guilt is about infractions for which one was a morally responsible agent. But Clara is in possession of full-information about the circumstances of the case, she knows that she was not responsible. Nevertheless, she continues to feel guilty. She cannot both be morally responsible for the child's death, and not be morally responsible for the child's death. So, Clara's guilt and her more considered, reflective assessment cannot both be fully adequate to reality.

<sup>132</sup> This case borrowed, and somewhat adapted, from Greenspan, 1992

Conflicts between emotion and judgment or belief, such as displayed by Clara, are typically gathered under the heading of *recalcitrance*.<sup>133</sup> Historically, recalcitrance has been discussed as an objection to certain cognitivist views of emotion. According to these views, for the emotion to be anger, disgust, pride, etc., the possessor must take the propositional content to be true.<sup>134</sup> Not only do emotions make a claim about the world, but the emotion's possessor must fully endorse or stand behind the accuracy of the relevant claim. But, as many philosophers argue, this would rule out the idea that one could have an emotion that conflicts with one's more reflective, considered view of the situation.<sup>135</sup> Recalcitrance would not be possible for, as Greenspan puts it, “a basically rational person,” that is, somebody who does not assent to outright contradictions.<sup>136</sup>

In the normal cases, a “basically rational person” will have certain emotions when and because she judges the emotion's portrayal of its target to be reasonably accurate. The person could provide, given some opportunity to reflect, some account of this emotion, by telling us what about the relevant situation merits feeling as she does. For instance, it is appropriate to expect a person who feels guilt to defend her guilt's target as being, in some way, a moral infraction upon another, and for which she was responsible. In light of this connection, we typically regard emotions as direct expressions of, and answerable to, what a person takes to be true. Were she to concede that there are no good reasons to have the emotion, we expect her to no longer feel that way. But this cannot be exceptionless. In Clara's case, guilt persists despite her sincere denial of responsibility. Other configurations are possible as well. For example, the

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133 D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003, 129, opt for this general definition as when an emotion “exists despite the agent's making a judgment that exists in tension with it.”

134 These broadly fall under the heading of cognitivism. Solomon, 1980, 7-8; Taylor, 1975b; Bedford, 1962;

135 Greenspan, 1980, 247-248; Greenspan, 1988, ;Greenspan, 1992, 289-293; Roberts, 1988, 195-197; Roberts, 2003, 83-106; Calhoun, 1984, 332; D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003, *ibid*.

136 Greenspan, 1980, *ibid*.

reckless driver who caused the accident might think that there is every reason for guilt in the situation, in light of the death of a child, but still not feel guilty. Here the person does not have an emotion, despite her belief that the emotion would be appropriate or reasonable.<sup>137</sup>

The possibility of recalcitrance thus shows that emotions do not always, and even then not perfectly, conform to our reflective judgments. A carefully deliberated judgment about how to feel may fail to bring about the relevant changes in my mental life. These are cases where our capacities for rational self-regulation are exercised imperfectly or incompletely. Furthermore, given the fact that these conflicts can occur for people who are otherwise reasonable individuals of sound mind, they cannot be written off as incoherent failures of rationality, like affirming the truth of a contradiction. To dismiss recalcitrance in this way can only be “a last resort from the standpoint of explanation.”<sup>138</sup>

Due to this failure of conformity, then, recalcitrance initially seems to pose an objection to Rationalist theories. Rationalists claim that emotions express a person's character because they are the direct expression of our judgments regarding what is important, worthwhile, or significant in a situation, and can be regulated in many of the same ways, such as by reasoning and deliberation. As the direct upshots of our judgments about what is important, worthwhile, or significant, emotions are supposed to express our evaluative activity. Thus, emotions manifest who we really are at perhaps the most fundamental level. However, in the case of recalcitrance, the particular emotion fails to conform to the person's reflective, considered assessment about what is important, worthwhile, and so on. In such a case, it would seem we cannot conclude that the emotion expresses our evaluative activity, nor, in consequence, who the person truly is.

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137 A related, negative variant is possible as well. An emotion occurs and persists, despite the absence of the belief that it is an appropriate or reasonable emotion.

138 Greenspan, 1988, 18

In this respect, recalcitrance appears to pose a problem structurally similar to the one *akrasia* does for certain internalist theories of intentional action. According to those theories, an agent can only be rationally motivated to perform what she views as the best course of action.<sup>139</sup> But, pre-theoretically, we think that *akrasia* is possible, meaning that the person freely and intentionally takes the course of action she regards to be, in some respect, worse than another option available to her. Recalcitrance threatens to complicate an internal, conceptual link between rationality and emotion just as *akrasia* threatens to complicate an internal, conceptual link between rationality and action.

### **IV.3. Reconciling Recalcitrance with Judgment-sensitivity**

We must carefully canvass the Rationalist's options for explaining recalcitrance. In the following I will focus on Angela Smith's treatment of recalcitrant attitudes as representative of a more general strategy. Smith's account is of particular interest, in that she acknowledges that there is a problem regarding recalcitrance, and secondly, she draws on the resources of Rationalism to address the problem. However, my ultimate concern will not simply one or another particular version of Rationalism, but its main commitments as a theory.

Smith denies the assumption, implicit in the way I framed the putative objection, that a person's moral character is manifested only by her explicit, reflective deliberation, as opposed to other evaluations she might hold spontaneously or without prior reflection.<sup>140</sup> If who she is, at the most fundamental level, is constituted exclusively by reflective, deliberative judgments, then a

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<sup>139</sup> Socrates says in the *Protagoras* “no one goes willingly toward the bad or what he believes to be bad.” 358d, trans. Lombardo and Bell.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, 2004

recalcitrant attitude would necessarily be an “alien force” or “outlaw” to her.<sup>141</sup> This would be an instance of her being acted upon by some force that stands in a coercive relation to her capacities for agency, rather than an exercise of those capacities. In our example, Clara's guilt conflicts with her reflective judgments about her responsibility for the child's death in the accident. In such cases, Smith suggests, we are “struggling against ourselves” rather than struggling against an alien or outlaw force.<sup>142</sup> How could Clara's recalcitrant guilt be anything other than a coercion in her mental life?

Smith's answer is that recalcitrant attitudes “by their very nature, embody our evaluative responses to the world around us.”<sup>143</sup> By this, she means that despite conflicting with our reflective assessments, recalcitrant attitudes are dependent on our beliefs about what is good, significant, or worthwhile in the relevant situation. She says

even if we end up rejecting the evaluations implicit in our attitudes upon reflection, we cannot ... regard our attitudes as things that just happen to us. These attitudes depend on evaluations that are essentially expressive of our status as moral agents.<sup>144</sup>

The notion of dependence is both causal and constitutive: attitudes, such as emotions and desires, are essentially the sorts of thing which are caused by our evaluative beliefs.<sup>145</sup> This dependence relation is shown by the fact that we hold people accountable for their attitudes. We could ask Clara why she feels guilty, and given an opportunity to reflect, we expect her to be able to tell a story in defense of her guilt. This story might not be detailed, but she could sketch out something of what makes guilt, for her, a comprehensible point of view toward the accident's aftermath. For

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141 Frankfurt, 1977. Cf. also Arpaly & Schroeder, 1999b, 170, although Arpaly & Schroeder are not sympathetic with Rationalism in other ways, especially its emphasis on judgment-sensitivity. On 'outlaw' emotions and desires, cf. Jaggard, 1989, 165ff.

142 Smith, 2004, *ibid.* Helm, 2001, 141, calls this “inherently fragmented” evaluative agency.

143 Smith, 2004, 339. Cf., also Smith, 2005; Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012

144 Smith, 2004, *ibid.*

145 Scanlon, 1998, 23-24; Raz, 1997, 20-21; Moran, 2002, 99

Smith, it is precisely in virtue of this causal dependence of Clara's guilt on her own beliefs about what happened in the car accident that Clara's guilt cannot function as a coercive force in her mental life.

How could recalcitrant attitudes be causally dependent on evaluative beliefs, if recalcitrance is, by definition, a form of rational conflict? The solution is to distinguish between logically different types of evaluative belief. In this way, the recalcitrant attitude could be causally dependent on one type, yet be in rational conflict with another. As an illustration, Smith offers the example of early morning laziness:

I can judge that staying in bed would be good (e.g., pleasant), yet come to the rational verdict that getting up and going to work would be a more important good ... My desire to stay in bed itself depends on my evaluative judgment that it doing so would be pleasant; were I to lose or abandon that evaluative judgment ... I would also cease to have the desire in question.<sup>146</sup>

The distinction being drawn here, to my mind, is that between a defeasible or *prima facie* evaluation, on the one hand, and a final or all-things-considered evaluation, on the other. The former are the inputs into deliberation. They need to be each taken into account, and compared in light of other relevant factors. Significantly, these initial assessments can be outweighed or defeated by others.<sup>147</sup> Staying in bed would indeed be comfortable. But the importance of this comfort must be compared with the importance of those tasks that need to be accomplished at work. The point of these comparisons is to synthesize the initial assessments into a single, comprehensive perspective. Which response or action is the most significant, worthwhile, important in the present situation? The answer to this question is the final judgment.

Using the defeasible/final distinction, Smith can maintain that even the recalcitrant desire

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<sup>146</sup> Smith, 2004, 338

<sup>147</sup> The notion of a defeasible assessment is Davidson, 1970. For a fuller account of “defeating” or “overriding,” cf. Bratman, 1979, 165ff. Inferences from defeasible assessment are *non-monotonic*, which is to say the fact that p supports s doesn't entail that (p & q & r) supports s. Brandom, 1998, 472

to stay in bed depends on an evaluative belief. It depends on the defeasible – not the final – evaluation.<sup>148</sup> My desire to stay in bed persists because that I think that there is, *prima facie*, something good or worthwhile about staying in bed. However, this desire conflicts with the final evaluation. My desire to stay in bed is recalcitrant because I think that what is, *prima facie*, good or worthwhile about staying in bed is ultimately outweighed by the importance of what has to be accomplished at work. On this view then, recalcitrance is a matter of an attitude's causal dependence on a defeated or overridden evaluation.

The general principle underlying Smith's approach has fundamentally two separable claims to it. Firstly, there is a constitutive/causal claim about the explanation of attitudes. In particular, attitudes like desires and emotion are of a sort that occur because the person accepts some evaluation. Secondly, there is an account of how rationally incompatible attitudes can conflict, which appeals to different types of evaluative assessment upon which these attitudes depend. The irrationality is then not fundamentally between the attitude and the final evaluative assessment, but between the final assessment and a defeated assessment. Together, these claims show how recalcitrance is both psychologically real and nevertheless thoroughly irrational.<sup>149</sup>

This general principle applies quite naturally to emotions. Other philosophers of emotion agree with the idea that the emotion's occurrence and persistence causally depends on something less than a full acceptance, on the person's part, of the content of the emotion. Greenspan especially has repeatedly urged that emotions are subject to a weaker standard of warrant or justification than belief. She says

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148 It is worth flagging that I am expanding upon Smith's view by invoking the notion of “defeasible assessment.”

While she is perfectly ready to countenance contradictory evaluations (personal correspondence), many others who write about recalcitrance will only admit such cases to rest on contradiction as a last resort. Davidson's *prima facie*/all-things-considered distinction cuts through this issue.

149 I do not pretend to have explained the nature of the irrationality involved.



what emotions register ... is not necessarily the 'all things considered' view of things by which we assess our beliefs. To say that an emotion is reasonable or rationally appropriate, is to say that a certain evaluative belief that represents the content of the emotion ... would be warranted by a significant subset of the evidence – significant in the sense of “worth holding in mind” perhaps for moral or other practical purposes.<sup>150</sup>

What is important here is that emotions often capture what is, or is admitted to be, a partial view of the situation. These blinkered, undeliberated evaluations are plausibly the inputs, rather than outputs, to reasoning. Return to our initial case of guilt without fault. When Clara feels guilt, she does so because takes herself to be, *prima facie*, deserving of censure, resentment, blame, etc., by having caused the death of a child.<sup>151</sup> Were she to no longer think that she caused the child's death (for example, if the reports were false, and the child had not died), she would no longer feel guilty. And Greenspan's point, as I understand her, is that this explanatory relation is consistent with Clara's reflective judgments varying widely from the assessments that explain her guilt.

This divergence between our emotions and our reflective judgments is actualized in emotional recalcitrance. The evaluation that explains the recalcitrant emotion actually turns out to be defeated or overridden in the person's more considered view of the situation. Nevertheless, the corresponding belief remains efficacious (“hot” or “charged,” as it were) in generating the emotion. Clara, after seriously considering the matter and making up her mind, does not truly believe that she is responsible for the child's death in a more substantive sense. Although she caused the death of a child, and this death remains both horrible and tragic, her causal role was not one for which she was culpable. And so, at least in this case, she does not take herself to be,

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<sup>150</sup> Greenspan, 2004, 128-129. Cf. also Greenspan, 1980, 236; Greenspan, 1988, 88

<sup>151</sup> I appeal to censure/resentment/blame as a way of capturing the evaluation upon which guilt depends. The main idea is that guilt is an internalized self-directed version of censure that people administer to one another. However, it is just an example, and alternate evaluations could be substituted, with the overall point remaining unchanged.

all things considered, deserving of censure, blame, and resentment by having caused the death of a child. Yet, she continues feeling guilt.

#### **IV.4. Emotions, Imagination, and Dreaming, pt. 1: The Problem**

The theory of recalcitrance canvassed in the last section is extraordinarily flexible, because it allows for the possibility of conflict among the person's evaluative beliefs. In this way, each of two conflicting propositional attitudes could equally “embody our evaluative responses to the world around us.” Accordingly, the Rationalist can explain any case of recalcitrance by attributing to the person some evaluative assessment that makes the emotion appropriate, even if it conflicts with other evaluations the person holds. In this way, the Rationalist can explain the majority of examples of recalcitrance.

Yet, I suggest, there remain certain cases of recalcitrance that cut against the very core of Rationalism, i.e., that emotions reflect our moral personalities because they are causally dependent on our evaluative beliefs. The problem here arises concerning what I called the constitutive/causal claim. For the Rationalist, an emotion is recalcitrant because the person continues to defeasibly accept some evaluation corresponding to the content of the emotion, even though he recognizes that this evaluation is defeated or overridden in the present situation. However, I think that there are some cases of recalcitrance where the person does not in any way accept, even defeasibly, the evaluation in the content of the emotion.

Consider a variant of the guilt without fault case. One night Vera has the following very vivid and upsetting dream. Driving recklessly, she runs a red light, colliding at 60 mph with a family driving a minivan. She witnesses the fire department use the jaws of life to rescue both

parents, who have suffered significant injuries and are carted away in an ambulance. Then, she witnesses a child pulled out of the wreckage, whose collapsed body is pronounced dead in the middle of the intersection. In the dream, Vera takes herself to be deserving of censure, resentment, blame in light of the fact that she has caused this child's death, and as a result, she feels guilty.<sup>152</sup>

After waking up, Vera is glad to discover that she was merely dreaming, and that no accident had actually occurred. However, several times during the day, Vera continues to have many of the reactions appropriate for somebody who feels guilt. She starts crying at the sight of a small child accompanied by its parents, a scene which triggers thoughts of the crumpled bodies being pulled out of the car wreck. Vera is also disposed to make apologetic or reparative gestures. Upon witnessing the child with its parents, she looks at them apologetically. She is overcome with appreciation of the value of this child, but her appreciation is one that is colored by regret and self-censure rather than optimism. Moreover, she has feelings of diminished self-esteem, and repeatedly chastises herself as “stupid” or “careless.” Finally, Vera also has momentary attacks of sheer terror while at the driver's wheel, as she realizes how many people's lives are in her hands while she drives down the road, wondering if she had not been adequately vigilant. On this basis, it seems true to say that Vera has continued feeling guilt after she awoke.

Vera's guilt would therefore be recalcitrant. Her more reflective point of view is that the formal object of guilt, i.e., that one has committed a moral infraction upon another, does not apply to her present case. Nevertheless, she continues to feel guilty, at least for a day or so following the dream. However, unlike Clara, who had actually been in a car accident resulting in

<sup>152</sup> There is a tradition of philosophers emphasizing the possibility of emotions towards imagination, Stocker, 1987, 64; Greenspan, 1988, 40-41; Griffiths, 1997, 29, uses this possibility as a reason against thinking of emotions as propositional attitudes. However, as I argue below, nothing in this example essentially turns on the claim that these are genuine, as opposed to pretense, emotions.

the death of a child, Vera's guilt does not depend on her evaluative beliefs at all, even ones that are admitted to be outweighed by others. It is not that there is some evaluation to which Vera is responding, but it is defeated or overridden. She admits that there is not even a *prima facie* case for guilt here, and yet, she feels guilty.

Vera's case seems to pose a problem for the Rationalist. Although Vera can subsequently engage in reflection about whether she should feel guilty, as a way for her to re-assert control over her emotional life, it is much more difficult to argue that her guilt's occurrence and persistence is explained by an evaluation Vera accepts – even one she reflectively judges to be defeated or overridden – at all. But the Rationalist must indeed argue this, if the relation between the emotion and the person's evaluative beliefs is what reveals her moral character. To explain Vera's guilt, Rationalists therefore must find some evaluation Vera continues to accept, at least defeasibly, even after she wakes up from the dream. If this cannot be found, yet Vera's moral character is still revealed in her recalcitrant guilt, then Rationalism must be false.

The kernel of the difficulty here rests in the fact that the pretense or fiction involved in the dream cannot furnish the correct evaluative belief. For the sake of argument, let us allow that there is a suitable sense in which, when certain events, actions are imagined from the perspective of some character who participates in those events and actions, there are pretense beliefs and judgments involved in doing so.<sup>153</sup> Specifically, these are beliefs and judgments belonging to the character whose perspective is being imagined. For example, when I imagine being stranded on a desert island, I might also be said to imagine thinking that nobody is around. As the person who

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153 This is what Wollheim, 1984, 73-74, calls “centrally” imagining, where the imagination is done from the perspective of a protagonist, as opposed to “acentrally” imagining, where the person imagines observing the protagonist from the ‘fly on the wall’ perspective or from no particular perspective at all. Centrally imagining can, but need not, involve strict personal identity between the person doing the imagining and the person being imagined, Wollheim, 1984, 74; Williams, 1966, 43-44. Cf., also Goldie, 2005, 5-6

is engaging in imagination, I do not hold these beliefs, but the character whom I imagine does. In Vera's dream, she imagines herself running a red light and, in this way, causing the death of a child. Furthermore, given the narrative of the dream, she could have avoided running the red light. So, within the dream, Vera thinks or believes that she has culpably caused the death of a child. This would be the right sort of belief to make sense of her guilt.

However, when Vera wakes, this pretense belief is necessarily repudiated. She cannot in any way retain it, as she might retain certain non-veridical visualizations from the dream. There is no room for degrees here: having recognized that she was dreaming, Vera can in no way be said to take as true anything that was part of the fiction, even if the fiction was constructed from her own point of view.<sup>154</sup> Any evaluative belief which might conceivably explain Vera's guilt cannot persist past the recognition that she had been dreaming. Vera's guilt does persist past this recognition. So, the persistence of Vera's guilt cannot be explained by its continued causal dependence on her evaluative beliefs.

Vera no doubt accepts some general principle, such as “causing the death of a child, *prima facie*, renders one deserving of censure, resentment, and blame.” In this way, it could be denied that Vera repudiates this principle, even after waking, because it does not essentially refer to anything fictional. But why was relevant belief efficacious in generating guilt during the dream, as well as shortly afterwards, but does not do so all the time? Presumably, in the day before her upsetting dream, as she eats lunch, she also accepted this general principle. Why did she not have lunch-time guilt? The only answer, as far as I can see, is that there was no particular circumstance that satisfied the antecedent of the principle for her to feel guilty about. Once we

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<sup>154</sup> The assumption here is that to believe that p is to take it to be true that p, in a way that renders one vulnerable to inquiries and criticism regarding whether p is in fact true. Hieronymi, 2006, 49-50.

try to attribute some belief that the particular circumstance satisfying the antecedent obtains, we are again attributing pretense beliefs to Vera in explanation of real-world emotion.

#### **IV.5 Emotions, Imaginations, and Dreaming, pt. 2: Objections and Replies**

In this section, I canvass roughly three strategies for denying that Vera's case illustrates how recalcitrant emotions could sometimes lack the corresponding evaluative beliefs upon which Rationalists supposed them to depend: (I) arguing that the post-waking guilt is distinct from the guilt which was part of the dream, (II) arguing that Vera's guilt is just another emotion towards fiction, and (III) arguing that Vera is not actually feeling guilt at all.

The first strategy is to argue that Vera's guilt upon waking is distinct from the guilt which was part of the dream. In this way, it is not a recalcitrant emotion at all. Upon waking, Vera no longer feels guilt that is embedded in pretense, but begins to have a distinct attitude of guilt independently of the pretense. Here is one way to make this distinctness plausible. Some philosophers, notably St. Augustine, contend that a person is responsible for what she does, including acting immorally, in a dream.<sup>155</sup> Along these lines, it might be argued that Vera (the dreamer) is responsible for the actions she performed in her dream, including running a red light and killing a child. In this way, we can distinguish the following two moments of guilt. In the first moment of guilt, Vera feels dream-world responsibility for her dream actions. Here she may feel that the (dream) parents would have grounds to reproach her, that she would deserve (dream) punishment or legal sanctions. However, in the second moment of guilt, she begins to feel a

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<sup>155</sup> Matthews, 1981, 53-54, attributes this view to Augustine, and shows the inadequacy of several objections to this view.

distinct real-world responsibility for her dream actions.

The trouble with this strategy, however, is that it accomplishes nothing towards understanding Vera's post-waking guilt, at even a minimal level. Even if we grant the Augustinian idea of responsibility for one's actions in a dream, it remains a separate question of what the appropriate attitude is to take towards oneself when one has dreamed of doing horrible, immoral, or salacious things. There certainly are cases where guilt would be appropriate, if for example one dreamed of being unfaithful to one's real-world spouse. But what makes guilt appropriate here is that there actually exists somebody upon whom one's dream action might conceivably constitute a moral infraction. In Vera's case this condition does not hold, because the victim in her dream accident need not correspond to any real person. Although this could plausibly make sense of shame, a negative assessment of oneself simply for being a certain sort of person, it is hard to see where guilt could be appropriate if there is no real person upon whose moral claims one's dream action infringes.<sup>156</sup>

The second strategy is to wonder: why should an emotion towards a dream be any different from emotions felt towards fictions? Surely, when we watch stage productions or read novels, we sympathetically share certain emotions of the characters. For example, in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, we learn of Werther's suicidal intentions when he asks to borrow a pair of antique pistols from the husband of his beloved Lotte. As Lotte herself urges her husband to capitulate to Werther's request, we acutely feel the doomed man's hopeless and world-weary point of view. However, this experience does not require us to believe that Werther exists, or that Lotte has furnished Werther with the weapon of his demise, etc. Nor need we actually have the evaluative beliefs typically associated with hopelessness or world-weariness to

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<sup>156</sup> Smith, 2011, 246

do so.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, the emotions felt towards fictions can outlast the duration of time when we are reading the book, watching a stage production, etc. The next day, after having finished Goethe's novel, I might find myself sharing in Werther's hopelessness and world-weariness. (It is relevant here that the publication of this book did in fact lead to copycat suicides, a phenomenon subsequently termed "The Werther effect.") In this way, an objector may insist that Vera's guilt is no more or less problematic than other emotions felt towards fictions.

It will be difficult to dismiss Vera's case as simply an emotion towards fiction. In reading a novel or watching a movie, nobody mistakes the details of the fiction for truths. However, many dreams (especially vivid ones) do involve, at least while one is dreaming, thinking that certain events are actually occurring, that people are doing and saying certain things, etc. This is why waking up from a dream can often be a relief or a disappointment. So, unlike usual emotions towards fictions, Vera discovers that the corresponding evaluative beliefs were part of a pretense. The better analogy would be a person who had been told a fabricated story about her friend's death, and feels understandably sad and mournful. If she were to continue feeling sad or mournful *after* finding out that her friend was still alive, we would not regard her sadness and mourning as emotion towards fiction. Like Vera, she did not think the story was a fiction when she came to have these emotions initially.

It may be denied that, in having a dream, people ever take the imagined events to be actually occurring, the imagined people to be saying or doing certain things, etc. Any pretense beliefs or judgments are, at some level, recognized as such. In short, this rebuttal insists that Vera's guilt is merely a residue of her self-conscious imaginative project, as one might have after

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<sup>157</sup> In this paragraph I am provisionally assuming, following Carroll, 1992, Moran, 1994 among others in thinking that we have genuine emotions towards fictions. By contrast, cf. Walton, 1978; Walton, 1997 who denies that we have genuine emotions towards fictions, precisely because we lack the relevant beliefs.



reading a novel. But here the relevant idea of “residual” emotion seems to do away with the Rationalist's preferred explanation altogether, according to which an emotion's persistence is due to the persistence of certain underlying evaluative beliefs. The person who has finished a novel has concluded her imaginative project, and so no longer pretends that the details of the fiction are true. So, why would any emotion that was part of the fiction persist past that point? In short, the very notion of emotional residue after the completion of a novel or play is no less problematic than Vera's case.

The third strategy would be to deny that Vera's attitude, whether during the dream or subsequently, is genuinely guilt at all. One argument would be to hold that it is not guilt, because it only involves the qualitative experiences, such as affect or physiological arousal, commonly associated with guilt. Nevertheless, these qualitative experiences fall short of literally qualifying as guilt. What is missing is a structure of cognitions to the effect that there is a real person whose moral claim has been infringed upon, and there is some act performed which constituted the infraction. These, in turn, presuppose background beliefs about the nature of the moral claim, and my own powers of agency at hand in the infraction. It is plainly possible that the qualitative experiences associated with guilt may occur without this structure.

The problem with this argument is that, as the example is described, Vera implicitly makes certain logical connections that would not be coherent if she was in a purely qualitative state. For example, the disposition to apologize only makes sense in light of the cognitive structure of guilt. To apologize is, at some level, to implicitly recognize a relation between oneself, as somebody who has putatively wronged another, and another, as the wronged individual. Once we have attributed this recognition to Vera, there seems little ground to hold

that she only feels the qualitative experiences of guilt. A similar argument could be made regarding the relation between Vera's guilt and terror at the prospect of injuring somebody while driving.

Another argument to deny that Vera was literally feeling guilt is that she was experiencing so-called *off-line* guilt. Many philosophers hold that we engage in mental simulation in order to know the minds of other people, as well as our own future mental states. In mental simulation, a person entertains a hypothetical situation and thinks through the situation as if she were there, including imagining what she would believe, feel, intend, etc. By contrast, somebody engaging in mental simulation does not rely upon inductive generalizations about how people are disposed to think, feel, and intend in the relevant situations, such as would constitute a “folk” theory. The crucial point is this: the person who engages in simulation cannot be literally said to have the relevant attitudes she simulates. If I try to simulate the point of view of a young American male during the draft for the Vietnam war, I imagine I would be angry and intend to draft-dodge. However, in so doing, the anger and intention are off-line. The anger and intention regarding the draft are not attitudes I actually have; they are attitudes I have imagined. Nor is this to deny that the off-line attitudes might have real effects on me, and my actual attitudes. The off-line anger, if imagined sufficiently vividly, may create physiological reactions for me associated with real anger.<sup>158</sup>

Accordingly, it could be argued that Vera's dream is a case of mental simulation. Although she is unaware of doing so, she is simply engaged in an imaginative project of putting herself in the position of somebody who causes an accident in which a child dies. In this way, the

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<sup>158</sup> Wollheim, 1984, 82-85, describes how central imagining can tend to create affective changes in us, the ones who imagine, corresponding either to how the protagonist feels at the conclusion of the episode or how a sympathetic audience would react to the protagonist.

guilt Vera feels is not real, but off-line.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore, her tears and momentary terrors can be explained as genuine affect and physiological arousal due to the vividness of her imaginative project.

Even if Vera's guilt was off-line, the objection would still loom. Precisely the same difficulty recurs: why would even off-line guilt persist past Vera's waking up and discovering she was dreaming? Surely, Vera's imaginative project ended when she awoke, and so, we have no grounds for saying she is still imagining that a child is killed through her actions. Therefore, she is no longer imagining believing that a child is killed through her actions. Why then would she continue feeling even off-line guilt? Here we can see clearly that the problem is about a recalcitrant emotion persisting past the repudiation of any evaluative belief that could make sense of its occurrence. The distinction between real and off-line emotions does nothing to mitigate this problem. Off-line emotions would presumably obey the same conceptual constraints as their real counterparts, i.e., dependence on (fictional) beliefs. After all, they are not radically different kind of mental phenomena, but instead are means of modeling real emotions. In order to play this role, they would need to resemble the real emotions in those respects being modeled.

#### **IV.6. Appealing to Content**

It might be alleged that I have overlooked an obvious rejoinder to this argument. The Rationalist could argue that the guilt itself, in virtue of its content, *is* the missing evaluative belief. As we saw in section III.3, emotions involve propositional content, of the sort that can be consistent or

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<sup>159</sup> Walton, 1997 argues that the emotional engagement we have with works of fiction or movies are instances of mental simulation, 43ff. In this way, he denies that the emotions we feel in response to the fiction are real. Walton, 1978, 6; Walton, 1997, 46-47. By contrast, cf. Carroll, 1992, 384; So, my pity for Ajax is not real pity, but off-line pity, and my fear of Hannibal Lecter is not real fear, but off-line fear.

inconsistent with other beliefs, desires, emotions, and so on. Guilt, we have assumed, involves representing an act as a moral infraction upon another. Accordingly, Rationalists could claim: wherever there is an emotion, there is also evaluative belief. As Scanlon says “what matters is the content of the attitudes, not their origin or susceptibility to control.”<sup>160</sup> If Vera continues to feel guilt, she therefore continues to accept, even defeasibly, that she has committed some moral infraction upon another. Although such a belief may be unwarranted or conflict with her more reflective point of view, it cannot be logically distinguished from the emotion itself.

Admittedly, certain philosophers of emotion sometimes distinguish between emotions which contain evaluations attributable to the person, and hence manifest her moral character, and those whose contained evaluations are not attributable to the person. This tendency is nicely captured in the following quote by Robert Roberts:

emotions do typically 'assert' something about a situation...But what the emotion 'says' is not always agreed to by the subject of the emotion... Speaking metaphorically, we might say that the emotion makes a judgment (a proposal about reality); but this 'judgment' is just an appearance or *phantasia*.<sup>161</sup>

However, we should not make too much of this way of marking the relevant distinction. As Roberts seems to concede, it may simply be a figurative or metaphorical use of language. Rationalists could still hold that literally every emotion contains an evaluation that the person accepts, and hence reflects her moral character, but only some of these evaluations are deep, enduring, or integral elements of that character. The remainder might be, to borrow Helm's evocative expression, “noise”: reactions that are too fleeting or superficial to count for much, as far as showing who the person truly is and what she stands for.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Scanlon, 2002, 174. This idea, I think, is what is behind claims such as that attitudes “by their very nature” constitute our evaluative responses to the world. Smith, 2004, 339

<sup>161</sup> Roberts, 2003, 89. Emphasis original.

<sup>162</sup> Helm, 2001

Even with this qualification, I think that the thesis that every emotion necessarily contains an evaluation which the person accepts is incorrect. According to it, we would have to include emotions that, despite their propositional contents, are fully explained by non-rational causes. This possibility is illustrated by television advertisements and other media content, which are often deliberately designed to elicit emotional reactions directly, frequently by using means of which we are not (or cannot be) conscious. Orwell's *1984* describes a daily ritual, called the Two Minutes Hate, wherein an enemy of the totalitarian regime is depicted on a large screen in order to create negative emotions in those watching, including hatred, anger, desires to hurt and kill, etc.

Winston found that he was shouting with the others and kicking his heel violently in his chair. The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was ... that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretense was always unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of anger and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic.<sup>163</sup>

As Orwell describes it, the video does not convince those watching that the enemy genuinely deserves hatred, anger, retaliation, and so on. The audience is not being shown reasons to feel hate, anger, to retaliate, etc. Rather, these people's emotions are being triggered directly, and so, they have having their evaluative agency circumvented.<sup>164</sup> In short, these people are being brainwashed. This is further confirmed by the following passage, in which Winston admits that the resulting hatred is “abstract, undirected emotion which could be switched from one object to another like the flame of a blowlamp.”<sup>165</sup> If the emotions were being formed by showing the audience grounds to feel hate, anger, and desire retaliation, then the resulting emotion would not

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<sup>163</sup> *1984*, pg 16

<sup>164</sup> Related examples might include phobias, such as somebody who is paralyzed with fear at the thought of getting on a plane.

<sup>165</sup> *1984*, *ibid.*

be so fungible. The relevant reasons would anchor these emotions to a more or less specific target.

Is the propositional content of hatred to be attributed to Winston as an evaluation he accepts, even defeasibly? It does not seem clear why one would think this. What is truly frightening about this vignette is how Winston has been coerced through watching the video. There is a difference between an emotion that occurs because the person thinks the content is true or accurate, and an emotion that occurs because it is the effect of some non-rational cause. In the latter case, the source of the emotion is not the person himself at all, but certain external conditions functioning as efficient causes. This means that Winston's hatred and anger occur despite, not because of, his evaluative beliefs. To argue that every emotion is such that the person accepts, even defeasibly, its content simply disregards this difference.

Perhaps it could be maintained that the hatred is still intelligible to Winston, insofar as he can offer some tentative account of it. Although not perfectly faithful to Orwell's description, let us imagine that Winston can say something about why the enemy of the state is hateful, such as his having betrayed the Party. If so, it would seem that Winston's hatred is attributable to him, and therefore reflects who he is.<sup>166</sup> However, the order of explanation is crucial here. There is a distinction between cases where the offered account genuinely explains why an emotion occurs, and when it is a *post hoc* rationalization that is an effect of the emotion. In the latter, the occurrence of the emotion precedes and explains the belief that certain things are important, worthwhile, or significant. As Goldie points out, this is precisely the way in which having an emotion can skew subsequent thinking. He says “we seek out and 'find' reasons – reasons that are

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166 Cf. Raz, 1997, 16, and my discussion from Ch. 3 on judgment-sensitivity

supposed to justify what is in reality an unjustified ascription of the [formal object]...<sup>167</sup> The content of the emotion is presumed to be true, and as a result, we search for the necessary justifications to support our presumption. Thus, the mere fact that a person can say something in defense of how she feels does not automatically show that the emotion itself reflects her, as a person, as opposed to the certain causal conditions that have nothing to do with her.<sup>168</sup>

Moreover, it is not obvious that the person can offer even a tentative account for the emotion in the truly troubling cases, such as Vera's guilt over her dream actions. There it seemed that the emotion logically came apart from the evaluative beliefs and judgments which would make it intelligible. As a result, the Rationalist needed to show why the emotion's content, on its own, is an evaluation attributable to the person. But she does not make any headway on this problem by retreating back to talk of discursive, rational explanations a person can give of her emotion. Such a move simply re-introduces the same beliefs and judgments that are not available in those cases which genuinely challenge the theory.

Another argument would be to hold that, regardless of whether Winston could in fact successfully account for his hatred, hatred is a type of mental phenomenon for which he can be reasonably expected to account. In other words, Winston is subject to criticism and requests for clarification simply in virtue of the propositional content of his hatred. On this basis, some may wish to conclude that the propositional content of Winston's hatred constitutes a value judgment of his. But surely this argument is invalid. It remains possible that, in response to the demand for justification, the person has nothing to say. This is the more accurate way of understanding Winston's predicament during the Two Minutes Hate. He hates, but has no idea what or why. It

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<sup>167</sup> Goldie, 2004, 99. I substitute 'formal object' for Goldie's "emotion-proper properties."

<sup>168</sup> I set to the side problems having to do with the person's creativity in finding self-serving confabulations

would be incorrect, I think, to attribute the content of the hatred to Winston while in such a position of perplexity as an evaluation he, even defeasibly, accepts.

The Rationalist will protest that the perplexity of not being able to say anything in account of how one feels is not the usual or typical situation. Typically, she would argue, a person can offer some account of her emotion. And I am inclined to agree with her on this point. But these “normal conditions” do not buy any leverage for the claim at issue. Typically, the emotion occurs against a background of beliefs and judgments which support that emotion. In other words, the normal conditions when we attribute an emotion to the person are complex. Due to this complexity, they offer no support for thinking that the emotion's propositional content, when divorced from that background, counts as an evaluative belief attributable to the person.

In light of these difficulties, I do not see any way to avoid for Rationalists to escape the view that when an emotion is attributable to a person, this is because a *relation* holds between an emotional content and separable background evaluative judgments and beliefs upon which that content depends. It cannot simply be based in the fact that the emotion has propositional content in the first place. I have made few assumptions about the nature of this relation, beyond assuming that the background of attitudes must do some explanatory work in showing why the emotion occurs. They cannot simply be *post hoc* rationalizations. But once we have been forced to accept this, the lesson of the earlier arguments is inescapable. There are cases of recalcitrance where that relation does not hold, yet those emotions nonetheless reveal who the person is. Thus, Rationalism fails.



## IV. 7 Conclusion: Kinds of Mental Activity

Rationalism has intuitive appeal as a theory of how we might be criticized for our emotions. It is funded by a pair of very powerful, general theses. The first thesis is that ethical criticism is possible wherever the person or self is disclosed. The second thesis is that the person or self is, at the most fundamental level, comprised by her propositional attitudes. In this way, since an emotion is a propositional attitude, emotions are be subject to ethical criticism.

This theory capably counters one objection to an ethic of emotions: if emotions are not sort of thing that can be altered, whether directly or indirectly, by one's intentional actions, and hence simply happen to us, in what sense could it be criticizable for a person to have them? The Rationalist response, in essence, is the inability to alter our emotions by way of intentional action is consistent with the person being active, because of her propositional attitudes for which she is answerable. I hope to have persuaded readers that there are shortcomings in the Rationalist's account of how we are active in our emotions. In recalcitrance, emotions can fail to be instances of the person responding to reasons in any way, even deficiently or incompletely. Furthermore, the problem remains, even when judgments are not limited to the person's "all-things-considered" conclusions of deliberation or reasoning, and we allow that person's judgments do not form a maximally consistent set.

This does not signal return to a conception of emotions as purely passive. Instead, I suggest the lesson is that not all mental activity is a matter of responding to reasons. I am sympathetic to David Pears when he asks "what is wrong with the idea that emotions and appetites are proper parts of the agent?"<sup>169</sup> On one reading, Pears' question wonders whether

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<sup>169</sup> Pears, 1984, 230

emotions can be attributed to a person, even when they did are not due to explicit deliberation or reasoning. So understood, the question is innocuous. However, there is another more radical way of reading the question. The more radical version wonders whether emotions can be attributed to the person, even when they are not due to his rational nature at all. In other words, certain emotions may be cases in which the person was active, but not because she was responding to reasons in any way, even deficiently or incompletely.

A positive answer to Pears' question does not compel us to deny the importance of rational activity to human life. It may still be true that most, or typical, emotions are responses to reason. Even the ones which are not originally due to our rational natures can subsequently have rational expectations imposed upon them. Nevertheless, the cases of recalcitrance show why we should not be tempted into treating this as the only or the fundamental way in which a person becomes active in her emotions.

## Chapter V: Attentional Voluntarism

### V.1. Introduction

So far, it appears that, if we are to ground an ethics of emotion, we should opt for an Attributability theory, which claims that the emotions one feels are part of the criterion for what sort of moral character a person has. Such a claim may be true, even where the person lacked the ability to alter how he felt, whether simply by trying or intending to feel differently or by engaging in some longer term project of self-management. To defend an Attributability theory, however, it must be explained precisely why emotions are part of the criterion for the moral character a person has. Different answers are possible here. According to the dominant view, dubbed Rationalism, emotions have propositional content, wherein one regards something to be important, worthwhile, or significant. Due to its propositional content, an emotion is an accurate – albeit defeasible – indication of the evaluative outlook one has. For Rationalists, a individual's moral character consists precisely in such propositional attitudes, including emotions.

As I argued in Chapter IV, the Rationalist's account of why emotions are part of the criterion for moral character faces problems of its own. Some emotions are recalcitrant, which is to say, they persist despite the person's contrary judgments. In such cases, the Rationalist must treat the emotion's persistence as the person's continued acceptance of some evaluation. To do so makes recalcitrance an overly intellectual failing, one of having the wrong thoughts or values.

This is problematic, because, as critics of cognitive theories of emotion have reminded us, an emotion can stand in stark conflict with the person's thoughts or values. Some other explanation is thus needed for why emotions are part of the criterion for moral character.

In the present chapter, I present an alternative account of why emotions are part of the criterion for moral character. According to my view, dubbed Attentional Voluntarism, in the course of having an emotion, one performs certain voluntary acts. Specifically, one attends to certain objects, events, aspects of the situation, etc. These acts of attention, I argue, are voluntary but not intentional: “voluntary,” because they are responses due to habituation, but “not intentional” because the person has not intentionally selected what to attend to, and may even lack the ability at the time to re-direct his attention elsewhere. These acts of attention are criteria of the person's character, because they reflect certain stable, deep, durable desires (which I call *concerns*.) Thus, for example, an outburst of anger can reveal a person's character, since the way in which his attention is captured and consumed by aggravation reflects what he really cares for.

Here is how the chapter will proceed. In section two, I describe the philosophical idea that one component, among others, of emotion is attention. In section three, I argue that these are genuinely acts of attention, which are voluntary but not intentional. In section four, I raise an objection that these acts are brute compulsions, responses that are triggered by the environment and are detached from the other things one thinks and wants. Some have argued that compulsions cannot be part of a person's character. In section five and six, I will argue that this objection is mistaken. In section five, I argue that the acts of attention in an emotion manifest the person's concerns. In section six, I argue that concerns are significant aspects of a person's character, because, by manifesting his concerns, they reflect what interests, attracts, and charms him. These

two claims together establish that emotions could not be, or simply be compulsions. This completes the exposition of Attentional Voluntarism. In section seven, I describe how Attentional Voluntarism could be the ground of an ethics of emotion.

## **V.2. Emotions and Attention – Some Preliminaries**

It has sometimes been argued that one component of emotion, among others, is attention.<sup>170</sup> In the course of having an emotion, one's attention is shifted to objects and features that are potentially significant to us in certain respects to which our emotions are supposed to be sensitive.<sup>171</sup> At the broadest level, attention can be characterized as a power of selection: the ability to highlight or indicate an object (hereafter, “the target”) for further reasoning, perception, decision-making and so on.<sup>172</sup> For example, you are walking on a busy sidewalk. A close friend among the oncoming pedestrians calls your name. Upon hearing this, your friend suddenly becomes the target of your attention. Your friend's figure, face, etc., are selected, while the other pedestrian's faces, figures, etc., become peripheral. Accordingly, in being angry, jealous, proud, etc., certain objects or features of the situation relevant to anger, jealousy, pride, are selected. As Ben Ze'ev puts it “like burglar alarms going off when an intruder appears, emotions signal that something needs attention.”<sup>173</sup>

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170 Two possible sources of confusion here. The first is it is not always clear whether this claim is intended as a empirical hypothesis about the causal conditions of an emotion, or a conceptual claim, Faucher & Tappolet, 2002, 131-135. The second source of confusion is that, if the relation between emotions and attention is conceptual, one could think that attention is a single non-exhaustive component of emotion, thereby leaving room for thoughts, desires, bodily arousal, and affect to also be components. Or, one could think of certain kinds of attention as being the essence of emotion. (Cf., Goldie, 2000, 40-41) Here I intend the claim as a conceptual one, but one that only allots attention the role of being a non-exhaustive component.

171 Brady, 2011, 140

172 Watzl, 2011, 847; Jennings, 2012, 536-537.

173 Ben Ze'ev, 2000, 13, quoted in Brady, 2007; Downing, 2000, 252, also claims emotion tells us “about a change,

This reorientation of attention has been argued to be beneficial for the person who has the emotion. De Sousa claims that humans face a deficit he calls the “the strategic insufficiency of reason”: too much information is available to us in any given situation, and since there are costs to deliberation, we run the risk of wasting precious time and resources deciding which information is relevant.<sup>174</sup> For example, when faced with a dangerous predator, it is imprudent to deliberate about which features of the predator are relevant to bodily safety, and then to evaluate all possible responses. However, fear cuts through this problem by presenting the relevant information, strategies, and actions as “salient,” that is, as especially vivid or urgent.<sup>175</sup> These notions of vividness or urgency describe dispositions to attend to and notice certain features. In short, through reorienting attention, and thus making what is important salient, emotions contribute to our epistemic and practical success.

Several clarifications are necessary here. In the first place, despite the frequent emphasis on the person's immediate environment, one need not attend to objects that are, or were recently, physically present. In anger, shame, joy, etc., a person could focus inwardly upon an object that must be somehow imagined or represented so as to be attended to in this way. Similarly, in imagination, a composer might attend to a work she has not yet written. Secondly, attention does not always involve the use of organs of sensation, such as noticing who is at the front door by moving my body or my eyes. Finally, attending is not always a matter of focusing upon some particular target. It could rather be a state of vigilance or heightened alertness, which does not imply that the person is attending to anything in particular.

What is less often recognized is that there is a distinction between between attention that

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about something new we must take into account.”

174 de Sousa, 1987, 194. A similar argument is independently advanced by Damasio, 1994. For a critique of this reasoning, cf. Evans, 2004

175 de Sousa, 1987, 61; 196

is *directed*, where the person knowingly and willfully selects a target, and attention which is *captured*, where the selection of a target happens independently of the person's will.<sup>176</sup> Directed attention is when we intentionally and knowingly pay attention to something, oftentimes for the sake of other ends. It is under our immediate control. Thomas Reid described directed attention nicely:

attention is for the most part in our power. Everyone knows that he can turn his attention to this subject or to that, for a longer or a shorter time, and with more or less intensity of focus, as he pleases.<sup>177</sup>

For Reid, the application of effort is important in determining that to which and in what way we pay attention, and this determination is a mark of the close connection between attention and the will.<sup>178</sup> He illustrates this by the case of a man who tried to distract himself from a painful episode of gout by playing chess: “it required a great effort to give his game enough attention to produce the intended effect.”<sup>179</sup> But not all attention is directed. When attention is captured, the target is experienced not as being selected by the person *per se*, with explicit intention, but instead the target appears to her as particularly vivid, attractive, intense, interesting, urgent, and so on.<sup>180</sup> For example, while working on a frustrating math problem, a student constantly finds himself focusing on noises created by the student next to him chewing gum very loudly. Despite this student's trying not to be distracted by these noises, his attention is continually drawn away from the problem to the noises made by the gum chewer. He is not trying to focus on the noises, but is rather trying focus on the problem.

If emotions make certain features and objects salient to a person, then the attention that is

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176 Jennings, 2012

177 Reid, 1788 “The Will,” Ch. 3, pg. 11

178 Cf. also Marshall, 1970

179 Reid, 1788, *ibid.*, pg. 12

180 Lind, 1980; Wu, 2011

a component of an emotion must be captured rather than directed. This reorientation happens to us, often without prior warning, and frequently interrupts other actions we were engaged in.<sup>181</sup> For example, Phyllis gets very angry when she is stood up by a friend. She may have been talking or trying to watch a television show as her anger begins to boil, and it is not difficult to believe that its more intense registers may interfere with her ability to finish the conversation or remain with the storyline. This is even more evident in the case of fear: suddenly fearing for my safety, I may have difficult time figuring out where I am going.

Furthermore, the person's attention will not simply be captured for a single instant, only to snap quickly back to what she had been previously attending to. Rather, the person will remain focused on the emotion's target or in a state of vigilance, at least while the emotion lasts and perhaps longer. In other words, in having an emotion, one's attention persists in the state of being captured for some time. Michael Brady describes this phenomenon as the “consumption” of attention.<sup>182</sup> He says that, in having an emotion:

objects and events hold sway over us, often times making it difficult to disengage our attention and shift focus elsewhere ... [These emotions] stay with us; they are not simply short-term interruptions to our mental life.<sup>183</sup>

The critical claim here is that it is often very difficult to subsequently re-direct our attention while experiencing emotion. Many other proponents of the idea that emotions have attention concur here. Faucher and Tappolet explicitly argue that short-lived emotions, such as fear of a predator, involve “involuntary” patterns of attention, and as a result “it will prove difficult to attend to things that are unrelated to the object” of one's fear.<sup>184</sup> De Sousa distinguishes the

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181 Peters, 1962, following Ryle, emphasizes the interruptive character of emotion and argues that this shows why emotions are passive. I think that the captured attention goes some way towards accounting for this passivity,

182 Brady, 2011, 141; Brady, 2010

183 *ibid.*

184 Faucher & Tappolet, 2002, 127-128. Long-term emotions, such as fearing one's father for years, must primarily involve these involuntary shifts of attention, because long-term emotions are simply dispositions to have



possibility of entering into an emotion through our direct efforts from the possibility of withdrawing one's attention from an emotion already formed. He says “it is a lot easier to attend at will than to withdraw one's attention at will.”<sup>185</sup>

### **V.3. Why the Attention in an Emotion is Voluntary**

Despite the foregoing, I contend that the modifications in one's attention that occur in emotion are voluntary. The person is literally performing *acts* of attention. These acts, as I will argue, are voluntary but not intentional. On my proposal, dubbed Attentional Voluntarism, such acts are the aspect of emotion in which the person's moral character consists.

The modifications of attention that occur in emotion are voluntary, since they are responses that have been habituated, through repetition and practice. *Habituation*, as I will define it, refers to the processes through which habits are established. In particular, the repeated association of some response with pleasure, or in some cases the absence of pain, will strengthen the disposition to offer the same response in similar situations.<sup>186</sup> On the other hand, the repeated association of an action with pain will weaken or inhibit one's disposition to offer the same response in similar situations. Habituation often occurs as part of formal training, such as being guided by a teacher and praised or chided for one's performances, as well as in the absence of instruction.<sup>187</sup>

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short-term emotions. (Cf. Tappolet, 2002). However, Faucher and Tappolet are willing to allow that long-term emotions may also involve voluntary aspects of attention, “due to the effects of memory and imagination,” Faucher & Tappolet, 2002, 129

185 de Sousa, 1987, 243

186 This view, I assume, is the one endorsed by Aristotle in NE II.1-2

187 Cf. Burnyeat, 1980

To see how habituation has a role, it must be acknowledged that the attention that was claimed to be a component of an emotion is, in fact, internally complex. The course of one's attention being captured and consumed can be broken down into a series of separable steps, each of which is constituted by the person focusing on one determinate aspect of the target in a determinate manner.<sup>188</sup> For example, when Phyllis is stood up by her friend, her anger involves having her attention captured and consumed by details about her friend. Phyllis might focus on where the friend could be at the present moment, her absence, the conversation where plans were made, etc. These details are all parts of a pattern that amounts to the recognition of an undeserved injury in her friend's act. In short, her attention displays an intelligible structure with respect how somebody else's behavior affords being treated as an undeserved injury, and also how to treat it so, including seeking out retribution or retaliation.

The pattern that amounts to Phyllis's recognition of injury was formed because these logically discrete steps, through practice and repetition, have become fused together, as it were, into a coherent order. Facts about which specific features of the situation grab her attention by being vivid, or interesting, or intense point to Phyllis's familiarity with such injuries, gained by experience. The experience has literally established *routines* of attention. This is why Phyllis's attention needs neither to be initiated nor to be directed by any intention, and may even occur contrary to other intentions she has. Through habituation, these steps have become tied to specifiable conditions in the world, and will typically be executed in response to the relevant conditions. By creating routines of attention, habituation thus significantly shapes what one attends to, and how one does so, as part of an emotion.

The relevant steps qualify as conceptually separable acts insofar as each could be directed

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<sup>188</sup> Downing, 2000, 259, says that the “paradigm unit of emotion is an extended complex act”

intentionally, at least in specific (albeit, often rare) circumstances.<sup>189</sup> This potential is most obvious where the attention displays a skill acquired through formal training. As an art expert was learning how to appreciate, she must at some point have knowingly and deliberately directed her attention to individual figures versus the whole composition, materials versus representation, line versus color, etc. This routine remains, even when she is nonchalant or distracted, because there is an intelligible structure wherein specific features of the painting grab her attention by being vivid, or interesting, or intense. Nevertheless, each distinct act could yet be undertaken intentionally in the right conditions, such as when she consciously improves her technique, is teaching another, or suddenly finds difficulty or obstruction in appreciating her favorite works. Yet, even where those conditions do not hold, she is nevertheless still acting voluntarily.

Thus, the wider category of what is voluntary must not be conflated with the narrower one of what one does intentionally. An act can be voluntary, but not intentional, because it is not performed in accordance with a determinate conception of what one is doing.<sup>190</sup> Many of our ways of looking at people, chewing, carrying our bodies, walking, or holding utensils were never taught to us, or adopted knowingly and explicitly. Such acts need not be performed “under a description.”<sup>191</sup> By contrast, intentional actions are such that if there is some true characterization of a person's action of which she is ignorant, or which she has to discover by observation, that cannot be a description under which her act was intentional. Nevertheless, these ways of looking and holding still qualify as voluntary acts, because they remain the sort of performance that

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189 Marshall, 2000, 43-44. A related claim is made by Jennings, 2012, 541-543, drawing on the phenomenological tradition, is that attention is pre-intentional mental activity of “turning towards” the object with our minds. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 34-35, argues that the person must at some level have been aware of the candidate targets of our explicit and knowing attention. What these authors share is the idea that any act of attention can potentially be intentional, but oftentimes is not actually intentional.

190 However, every intentional act is voluntary, insofar as the fact that it is performed in accordance with a determinate conception shows that it *could be* so performed.

191 Cf., Anscombe, 1957, 8, 12-15

*could* be guided by a determinate conception. The person could, at least in the right circumstances, be brought to consciously regard others or hold utensils in accordance with some technique. But where those circumstances do not hold, such as a quick conversation on the street or being engrossed in a delicious meal, we do not deny that the ways of looking or holding are nevertheless acts.

This entails that attending (and *a fortiori* attending that is part of an emotion) can be literally something the person does, even though she is not able to articulate or describe what it is she perceives, appreciates, notices, etc. Some objectors may take issue with this claim. Alan White says that “one cannot give one's attention in any way or to anything without knowing both that one is attending and also what one is attending to.”<sup>192</sup> But White's claim ignores critical distinctions. The person may not already be aware, and may need to discover by observation, how he pays attention. Phyllis may come to discover that she was focusing on previous evenings out with her friend.<sup>193</sup> Having discovered what he was doing, she can continue to do so, perhaps even deliberately cataloging their dates. By continuing to attend knowingly and explicitly, she intentionally focuses on the previous dates with her friend. However, before this discovery, her attention was simply captured by these meetings. They may have simply appeared moderately vivid, intense, etc., to her. If Phyllis can genuinely discover that she was attending, then White's claim is mistaken.

Why exactly does the fact that some response has been habituated constitute evidence for its voluntariness? One might suppose that certain sub-intentional responses (like the firing of a neuron or release of adrenaline) could be habituated as well, and these are such as could never

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<sup>192</sup> White, 1962

<sup>193</sup> Solomon, 1980 says “we 'find ourselves' making and having made such judgments.” Solomon does not say how it is possible to find oneself making a judgment.

performed in accordance with a determinate conception.<sup>194</sup> However, while sub-intentional responses can be conditioned, only actions can be truly repeated, practiced, and mastered. The relevant response need not have been at some point in the past the result of training for it to be voluntary; rather it must, at least in principle, be trainable. It is the sort of thing that a learner could deliberately and explicitly make attempts which later, with a little luck and if conditions are favorable, can become easy, natural, automatic, or skilled. This is why a response qualifies as an action, despite not being intentional. Although experience can alter the likelihood of a certain neuron firing or the release of certain chemicals, these are not the sorts of responses amenable to practice and mastery.<sup>195</sup>

Further, the claim that emotions comprise voluntary acts of attention is consistent with the idea (discussed in the previous section as the “consumption” of attention) that it may be, at the time, very difficult or impossible for the person to direct her attention elsewhere.<sup>196</sup> Separable acts of attention have been fused together into a routine by habituation. But the practice and repetition may have so automated the process that, once initiated, it may even be impossible for the person to stop or re-direct it simply by fiat. To return to our example, in a cooler moment, such as in the therapist's office, Phyllis may be able to be more cognizant of recognizing injuriousness in her friend's behavior, and as a result, be in a better position to consider alternative ways of relating herself to her friend. But, having just been shocked by her friend's

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194 Thanks to Kim Frost for emphasizing this issue.

195 Somebody might think that the information processing involved in what is oftentimes called *mental modules*, such as involved in perception of corners or learning a language, is a sub-intentional response that is amenable to mastery. After all, we can reconstruct and model these processes. I think, however, that the reconstruction is not the same as practice and mastery of the original responses.

196 In contrast with Downing, 2000 who thinks that, although an emotion may be initiated involuntarily, its subsequent progress is substantially a matter of choice, 265. As should be clear, I eschew talk of choice on account of its implications of intentionality, as well as the recognition that a person may literally lack control of her emotion at the time she is having it.

absence, her mental activities may be determined to proceed along the accustomed paths.

Some may object to classifying Phyllis's attention as voluntary. After all, her emotion may be the effect of certain external conditions quite independent of her will. There may have been nothing she could have done, within a reasonable time before the present, to avoid attending in those ways. There are at least two issues here: the first regarding how this routine could be voluntary, and the second regarding whether Phyllis could appropriately be assessed for this routine. I postpone discussion of the second issue for the following sections. But for the present, it is worth questioning why the inevitability, at least in the present circumstances, of Phyllis's routine of attention should undermine its voluntariness. As I contend, this routine can fruitfully be seen as complex, and its parts are responses of the sort that allow for training, practice, and mastery. So, despite the inevitability of Phyllis's consternation in the present circumstances, it was not inevitable in another sense. Phyllis, if she was fortunate enough to have different experiences, teachers, natural tendencies and temperaments, would have been habituated in such a way as respond to her friend's absence differently.<sup>197</sup> It is this latter that grounds the claim that the relevant routine is voluntary.

The view I am calling *Attentional Voluntarism* maintains that these voluntary acts of attention are ultimately the aspect of emotion in which our moral character truly consists. They are what we criticize, assess, blame, etc., when we criticize, assess, blame, etc., somebody's emotion. So understood, Attentional Voluntarism bears certain similarities and differences to the views discussed so far. On the one hand, it denies that ethical assessments of an emotion require

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<sup>197</sup> It has been suggested to me that this commits Attentional Voluntarism to a version of "ought implies can." This suggestion is incorrect. As I understood that principle in Chapter II, it holds that a person must, at some time in the past, have had a reasonable opportunity to avoid some objectionable response. The sense in which Phyllis's consternation was not inevitable is that, if her environment, experiences, and training were different, her habits would be different. This is consistent with denying that Phyllis ever had a reasonable opportunity to avoid or change whether she consternates.

that a person, at some time in the past, have had a reasonable opportunity to have felt any differently. In short, it rejects the principle that “ought implies can.” In this, it is similar to Rationalism. On the other hand, Attentional Voluntarism admits that some action or activity is the ultimate object of ethical assessment of emotion. In this, it is similar to the views described in Chapter II as Accountability theories. However, unlike those Accountability theories, Attentional Voluntarism rejects the assumption that the only way a person could be active in her emotion was via intentional action.

#### **V.4. Objection: Compulsions**

Attentional Voluntarism, as I have presented it, conceives of the ethically assessable aspect of emotions as routines of attention. Yet, this view leaves a crucial question unanswered: if the person could not have avoided, given the circumstances, attending in these ways, why exactly does it furnish criteria for her moral character? In short, *why* are these routines subject to ethical assessment at all? In this section, I will flesh out the objection to Attentional Voluntarism based on this question. The following two sections will be dedicated to answering the objection satisfactorily.

The objection resides in the idea of compulsion. Consider Quinn's famous example of the man with a bizarre impulse to turn off radios: he tends to notice when he is in the vicinity of a radio that is turned on, and when he finds himself in that position, he will try to turn that radio off.<sup>198</sup> For Quinn, the impulse cannot make sense of the person's turning off a radio, because the impulse by itself does not suffice to show why turning off the radio achieved or realized some

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<sup>198</sup> Quinn, 1993, 236-237

good, etc. Thus, it is what I will call a *brute compulsion*, a tendency that is predictably elicited in certain circumstances and is detached from anything else the person may do or want. Quinn's idea was that the missing element that renders the impulse something more than a brute compulsion was an evaluation, “an evaluation of the desired object as good – for example, pleasant, interesting, advantageous, stature-enhancing, as decent.”<sup>199</sup>

Some philosophers have used similar reasoning to argue that brute compulsions, so defined, cannot be criteria for moral character. Sophia Moreau argues that brute compulsions are

just facts about how we tend to be moved. And when we report these psychological facts, all that we are doing is confirming that we will be moved in these ways. [By contrast, when] we report a fact such as “I can’t do that! It would be disloyal!” we are not just announcing that we will or would be moved in a certain way. We are making a claim about facts that we believe are independent of us, facts that determine how we ought to be moved. And this is why these psychological facts seem “internal” to us in a way that mental blocks and phobias are not. We hold ourselves answerable for these psychological facts: that is, we assume that others could legitimately ask us to give reasons for them and that we could fail to get these reasons right.<sup>200</sup>

Like Quinn, Moreau supposes that if some disposition is not an attitude for which the person is answerable, then it is a brute compulsion, and conversely. However, Moreau goes further to argue that compulsions therefore cannot be criteria for moral character, because they are not respects in which the person herself is active: “We cannot ever actively participate in them. And that, it seems, is precisely what we do in the case of the dispositions comprising [*sic*] our character.”<sup>201</sup> The person can, at best, accommodate or work around such compulsions, as she might a proneness to sneezing attacks in the presence of pollen or cats. They could never be the sort of thing that indicates who the person is in a deep sense.

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199 *ibid.*, 247. Cf. also, Stampe, 1987, Quinn includes merely “apparent” goods and goods that are overridden by others.

200 Moreau, 2005, 294

201 Moreau, 2005, 277. Cf., also Moran, 2002, 208ff.;



Hence, the objection is that the routines of attention in an emotion are brute compulsions, and therefore, cannot be criteria for what kind of moral character a person has. Certain causal factors that played a role in one's habituation (including the environment in which one was raised, decisions made by one's parents, etc., one's natural temperament and tendencies) have helped to make these routines inevitable in particular sorts of circumstances. In this way, it might be supposed that the routines of attention in an emotion only indicate the role, for good or for ill, such factors played in one's habituation, rather than being some deep indication for who a person truly is.<sup>202</sup> In short, these routines of attention are not truly subject to ethical assessment at all.

It is important to note that the view I called Rationalism has a principled way of avoiding this same objection. The Rationalist argues that we can countenance ethical assessments of attitudes that the person could not have reasonably avoided. They will maintain, however, that the key feature of such attitudes that makes ethical assessments appropriate is their propositional content. Due to its propositional content, an emotion is an accurate – albeit defeasible – indication of the evaluative outlook one has. It indicates what the person takes to be good, important, significant, worthwhile, etc.

Yet, Attentional Voluntarists cannot help themselves to the same strategy. As we saw in Chapter IV, an emotion might fail to correspond to what the person sincerely believes to be important, significant, or worthwhile. Such a discrepancy can occur in extreme cases of recalcitrance. As was shown by the example of Vera, some emotions have propositional content which conflicts with what the person takes to be good, important, significant, worthwhile. If these extreme cases of recalcitrance disclose the person's character, who she truly is, they cannot

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<sup>202</sup> This is related to the objection discussed in II.7, due to Susan Wolf, that Attributability theories can only ground superficial assessments of a person.

due so in virtue of their propositional content. To account for these extreme cases of recalcitrance, the Attentional Voluntarist therefore must account for why certain inevitable routines of attention are subject to ethical assessment, despite the fact that they not made intelligible as significant, good, or worthwhile. The Rationalist, by contrast, stands in a position to deny that the routines of attention underlying recalcitrance are part of the person's character in any case.

### **V.5. Concerns, pt. 1: Attention and Desire**

The objection to Attentional Voluntarism is: why are the habituated routines of attention in an emotion anything beyond brute compulsions? As I shall argue, it is because these routines of attention manifest our *concerns*, which are foundational, stable desires. So even where one's habits of attention are in no way made intelligible by one's propositional attitudes, they are nonetheless aspects of one's character.

More specifically, the argument I offer on behalf of Attentional Voluntarism has two principal claims: firstly, habituated routines of attention in an emotion manifest one's concerns, and secondly, concerns are part of the criteria for one's moral character. These two claims entail that the acts of attention which involved in an emotion cannot be, or simply be, brute compulsions. Rather, they must necessarily indicate who the person is in a deep sense. Thus, this argument, if sound, would show Attentional Voluntarism to be a coherent, defensible alternative to the views discussed so far. I will defend the first premise in the present section, and I will defend the second in the following section.

To begin, the concept of a concern must be clarified. A concern, as I shall define it, is a

durable disposition both to try to change the world in certain specific ways, as well as to recognize when the relevant types of changes are yet to be accomplished or fulfilled. This definition is intended to include what are sometimes called “cares,” “needs,” “interests,” “attachments,” insofar these all share in common a disposition to act on behalf of what one cares about, needs, is interested in or attached to, as well as to notice whether such action is required or not. For example, in having a concern for his child's well-being, a parent is disposed to try and benefit his child, as well as to notice when benefits need to be rendered to that child. This means, significantly, that concerns are not, or not simply, representations of the way the world as it is.<sup>203</sup> In short, concerns are a type of desire.<sup>204</sup>

What can be said in support of the first claim, that the acts of attention in an emotion manifest one's concerns? I suggest that this claim is supported by the existence of a constitutive relation between desire and certain types attention. Anscombe famously tells us that “the primitive sign of wanting is trying to get.”<sup>205</sup> By 'trying to get', I take her to be referring to some outward physical movement towards the object of one's desire. For example, a person who wants some snacks moves towards the cabinet to procure them. Thus, for Anscombe, desiring something typically involves physically moving oneself towards achieving what one desires.

Although plausible, Anscombe's claim is too strong, because there are many cases where it would be true to say that one has a desire but has not, or not yet, physically moved oneself towards achieving what one wants. The person, immediately prior to physically moving towards

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203 Philosophers are sometimes tempted to put this point about desire by saying that desires do not have what is called “world-to-mind” direction of fit.

204 I do not say much in the text about what *differentiates* concerns from other types of desires. My own view is that desires can be partially ordered with respect to one another, and hence certain desires (such as to do well in school) exist and persist because of other more fundamental desires (such as to be well-regarded). By my lights, calling a desire a “concern” indicates its status foundational, rather than secondary.

205 Anscombe, 1957, 68. Cf., also Taylor, 1979

the cabinet, may simply imagine or visualize the snacks. His attention may also be focused upon the tastiness of the snacks, their proximity, his hunger, and so on. Here the person has not yet set himself in motion. Changing the example somewhat, imagine that the person is on a diet, and is actively resisting his desire for snacks. He remains in place, dutifully committed to his diet, and so will not make any overt movement towards the snacks. Yet, his attention is still focused on snacks, in the ways described above, and this is (at least in part) what his temptation consists in. I think it is true to say in both cases that the person wanted the snacks, despite the fact that there has not been any overt movement towards procuring them.<sup>206</sup>

The truth of Anscombe's thesis, which I will assume, is due to the fact that certain structured patterns of attention are both necessary and sufficient for wanting. These structured patterns of attention underlie the phenomenon of trying. Not any overt physical movement qualifies as trying, but only those that are directed or aimed at what one is trying to get.<sup>207</sup> This direction or aim of the movement, minimally, indicates the fact that the movement is performed with a structured pattern of attention towards the object of one's desire.

Different objections are possible to this constitutive relation.<sup>208</sup> One objector might point out the possibility of noticing a loud noise in the proximity, or noticing who enters the room. The objector would then deny that this attention implies the existence of desire. However, a fruitful distinction could perhaps be drawn between an interruption in attention, after which one returns to the activities that had previously occupied one, and a sustained pattern of attending which is an activity unto itself. The supposed counterexamples are of the former variety. So, when

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206 Cases like this, I think, show that attention is a necessary part of some more minimal stage to the process which also often includes "trying to get." Cf., Thompson, 2008, 131

207 Anscombe, 1957, 68, says "in saying [that somebody is trying to get something], we describe the movement of an animal in terms that reach beyond what the animal is now doing."

208 Thanks to Irene Liu for discussion of these objections.

somebody smashes a pair of cymbals next to my ears, my attention has been interrupted, because it has been immediately drawn from what I had been working on, thinking about, etc. But the noise of the cymbals does not become a new sustaining focus of attention. So, rather than disproving the constitutive relation, this objection shows that not any individual moment of attention is sufficient for there to be desire.

Another objector might maintain that one could pay sustained attention to what one does not want, such as when an unwelcome guest shows up a party. The host constantly finds his attention drawn back to the unwelcome guest, mingling with the others, and he suffers irritation and annoyance. But it would be wrong to conclude from such cases that the host's attention involves no desire at all. True, the host does not want the unwelcome guest to be in attendance. However, his attention may actually constitute a form of aversion: a desire for the guest *not to be in attendance*. The irritation and annoyance reflect the felt frustration of this desire.

If there exists a constitutive relation between desire and sustained patterns of attention, the first premise of my argument looks quite plausible. In other words, it would be quite plausible that the habituated routines of attention in an emotion are of the correct sort to manifest our concerns. To begin, as I claimed in section two, during the process of an emotion, one's attention does not shift to a new target only for a moment. Rather, it is "consumed," which is to say that attention is expended upon the new target for some time and hence resists, at least temporarily, being re-directed elsewhere. This attention would certainly qualify as the sort of sustained pattern of attention that is sufficient for desire.

Furthermore, the same patterns of attention, on the present view, are often involved in one's trying and acting intentionally. This fact helps explain why emotions are often thought to

be motives for certain characteristic types of action.<sup>209</sup> For example, those who are afraid are prone to flee, and the angry are prone to attack. The emotion, as we might say, “facilitates but does not necessitate” the relevant types of action.<sup>210</sup> Anger may sometimes involve attack, but where it does not, that is because the person never moved beyond the phase of attending to the features of the target that would have helped make sense of an attack.

Additionally, the first premise is lent further independent plausibility by the fact that concerns are frequently adduced to account adequately for the experience of an emotion, or what it is like to have the emotion.<sup>211</sup> As Charles Taylor says, what an emotion is about “cannot be neutral, cannot be something to which we are indifferent, or else we would not be moved... [Such a thing must be] relevant or of importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations ... of a subject.”<sup>212</sup> For example, you encounter a growling dog, foaming at the mouth, and understandably fear the dog, thinking he is dangerous. It might be wondered: what is the difference between you, and somebody who comes to the conclusion that the dog is dangerous from a dispassionate, clinical observation, but does not fear it?<sup>213</sup> Ostensibly, both involve a similar thought of the dog as dangerous. It could be argued that the difference has to do with whether the dog, and its dangerous features, are attended to in light one's concerns. More specifically, healthy humans have a concern for their bodily integrity, which means at least that they are disposed to try and prevent imminent and serious threats to their bodies, where possible,

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209 Döring, 2003, Goldie, 2000, 37-47

210 Tappolet, 2010, 335ff. Tappolet also suggests that “fear influences what we do by narrowing the agent's attentional focus,” *ibid.*

211 Marks, 1982, 231-232. Solomon, 1988, 106, says that emotions “enclos[e] a core desire which is both their motivation and their 'conatus'.” Roberts, 1988; Roberts, 2003 calls them 'concern-based' construals.

212 Taylor, 1985, 48ff., describes this as the object having “import” for the person. Cf. also, Helm, 2001

213 This might be called the “Problem of Emotionality”: what makes some thought content a distinctively emotional one? Helm, 2001, 38ff. Stocker, 1987, 61, discusses this problem, and denies that the evidence (or lack thereof) is what makes a thought distinctively emotional. Rather, Stocker thinks that emotionality is a function of whether the thought is “taken seriously,” *ibid.*

as well as to notice when such preventative action is required. In fearing, you experience some situation in light of this concern, that is, in light of its posing an imminent and serious threat of damage to your body.<sup>214</sup> The individual who merely formed clinical observations about the dog does not attend to the situation in a way that brings to bear his concern for bodily safety, which he presumably possesses, even while he forms the judgment that the dog can seriously injure any human being, including himself, who gets too close.

So, it would seem to be impossible to have a genuine emotion which is not also, in virtue of the acts of attention it involves, a manifestation of some concern about its target. Two objections to this claim are worth acknowledging, if only to raise some tentative doubts about them. Firstly, there is the problem of the sociopath. To simplify things, let us define the sociopath as the person who suffers from flat affect and does not feel emotion. Now it would seem, in the case of the growling dog, the sociopath, no less than the non-sociopath, has a concern for his bodily safety. He attends to the dog in ways that bring this concern to bear, but does not feel emotion. Therefore, concerns cannot be what distinctively makes some experience emotional.<sup>215</sup> However, the way we treat this objection will require a more precise description of having flat affect. Does the person genuinely have no anxiety or bodily discomfort at a life-threatening injury? If so, the case may be objection. But this is hardly obvious: “flat affect” may simply refer to cases where a person is noticeably less affected than others would normally be.

Secondly, the view which holds that every emotion involves desire faces a problem about the so-called aesthetic or contemplative emotions.<sup>216</sup> For example, a person is overwhelmed by the beauty of the afternoon sunlight illuminating a rose-window. Unlike fear, where it is clear

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214 Roberts, 2003

215 Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here

216 Thanks to Michael Stocker for pointing this out to me.

that one desires to flee, it is far from obvious what desire being overwhelmed by beauty *constitutively* entails.<sup>217</sup> However, it seems to me that there are in fact desires that can plausibly be ascribed to the one who admires the window. As Marshall points out, following Kant, such emotions may entail the desire to behold.<sup>218</sup> I would add: the desire is not simply to behold, but to persist in beholding. Some may deny that beholding is not an overt action. But the disposition to continue or persist in beholding certainly makes a difference to whether one gets up and leaves the church. The pleasure does not leave one indifferent to whether the pleasure continues.

## **V.6. Concerns, pt.2: On Moral Character**

To review, I am addressing an objection to Attentional Voluntarism. According to that objection, the habituated routines of attention that are part of an emotion may only be brute compulsions, for which the person cannot be ethically assessed. However, my defense of Attentional Voluntarism against this objection appeals to concerns, which are durable, foundational desires. Specifically, I argue that the habituated routines of attention in an emotion manifest concerns, and furthermore, concerns are criteria for a person's character. In the previous section, I offered a defense of the former claim, but now I must defend the latter. That is, even if the habituated routines of attention in emotion manifest concerns, that does not necessarily rule out the possibility that emotions could still be brute compulsions. To establish Attentional Voluntarism as a coherent, viable alternative, then, concerns must be shown to belong to a person's moral

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217 This objection is a common criticism of desire-based accounts of emotion. Marshall, G. D., 1968, 248. Tappolet refers to these, and related emotions, as “contemplative,” Tappolet, 2010, 339, argues that they disprove a desire-based account.

218 Marshall, G. D., 1968, 248



character.

Return to Moreau's argument that brute compulsions do not belong to a person's moral character. She bases this argument on the idea that we are not answerable for compulsions.<sup>219</sup> By contrast, propositional attitudes are such that we are supposed to give reasons for them and that we could fail to get these reasons right. Propositional attitudes do, while brute compulsions do not, indicate what one takes to be important, significant, or worthwhile. In short, modifying a quote from Richard Moran, the person cannot take brute compulsions to be “the expression of his sense of what he has best reason [to do, want, feel] in this context,” and this is why they cannot constitute who he is in any deep sense.<sup>220</sup> This argument draws on a particular view of the self, which I described in detail in Chapter III. On that view, the self is identified with elements the mind that are judgment-sensitive, i.e., those that can potentially be explained by the presence of beliefs (or some weaker propositional attitudes) concerning reasons. In short, the criterion for moral character is the set of propositional attitudes one has. These are attitudes which one can be expected to make sense of by reference to evaluative facts, facts about which one could be incorrect. Such attitudes need not all be consistent with one another, or be supported by compelling or persuasive considerations. As Angela Smith says “the real core of our moral agency resides in our ... basic capacity to evaluate – in complex, spontaneous, and even contradictory ways – the world around us.”<sup>221</sup>

However, this view of the self is not the only, or even the most plausible, option available to Attentional Voluntarists. Elijah Millgram offers the view that the self is identified with our capacities for finding things to be interesting or boring.<sup>222</sup> His argument is that being interested is

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219 Moreau, 2005, 294

220 Moran, 2002, 199

221 Smith, 2004, 340

222 Millgram, E., 2004

not simply one component, among others, of rationality. Rather, the capacity for interest in an important way underlies the very possibility of our being rational at all. He argues that “interest is a kind of photo-tropism which guides us” in the setting and pursuing of ends, as well as making inferences, drawing conclusions, etc.<sup>223</sup> Insofar as rationality, of both practical and theoretical varieties, is typically supposed to be indicative of who a person is, our capacities for interest and boredom must be even more closely bound up with who we are. These capacities need to be regarded as “top-level components of rationality and the soul.”<sup>224</sup>

However, to clarify why Millgram's view is different from that premised by Moreau, we must consider an ambiguity in the notion of interest. Millgram defines interest as follows:

interest and boredom are to be understood as more or less cultivated and more or less articulate responses *to* the interesting and the boring. Interest flowers in response to the interesting – where the ability to stimulate the response can have to do with content, with mode of presentation, and with many other aspects of its object.<sup>225</sup>

The ambiguity is due to two different ways to read “response to the interesting.” On one interpretation, then, interest is an evaluative attitude in which something is regarded to be interesting. Interest would thus be an attitude for which one is answerable. For example, to be interested in the dialogue of a recent movie, one can be expected to account for what respects the dialogue was interesting. However, on another interpretation, the interest is the phenomenal experience of being attracted to, drawn towards, or charmed by something. This phenomenal experience, unlike the attitude of regarding something to be interesting, is not the sort of thing for which one can be expected to account. For example, to be interested in the dialogue of a

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223 *Ibid.*, 183. Millgram draws the analogy between interest and what Aristotle classified as the vegetative part of the soul, which absorbs materials from the environment which are subsequently used in service of the other functions of the soul.

224 *ibid.*

225 Millgram, E., 2004, 177

recent movie is just to be engrossed by it, and to feel an attraction to the dialogue. Especially in those with cultivated tastes, this latter notion of interest often comes together with attitudes of regarding something to be interesting. But what one actually takes interest in could often diverge from such attitudes.<sup>226</sup>

As I read him, Millgram's view is innovative, because interest is not, or not just, an attitude in which an object is regarded as interesting. If it was, his view would simply be a special case of view that identifies the self with propositional attitudes. To the contrary, there is a peculiar experience of being attracted, charmed, or drawn to something. This experience is not reducible to the attitude of regarding something to be interesting. Admittedly, sometimes our interest is in fact guided by our attitudes concerning what is interesting, as in the case of cultivated or refined tastes. But other times, we may take interest in ways that conflict with those attitudes (as when the weak-willed person is irresistibly drawn to the worse option) or take interest in advance of the formation of any attitudes that could guide us.<sup>227</sup> On this view, it is what interests a person, such as being attracted to philosophical conversation, not getting out of bed, or a career as a banker, etc., that constitutes who he is most fundamentally, rather than his judgments, decisions, intentions, and so on.

If, as I believe, the self is properly identified with interests rather than evaluative attitudes, then it is quite plausible to suppose that concerns belong to the criterion for a person's moral character. Concerns are a type of desire, and desires, as I argued in the previous section, stand in a constitutive relation with certain sustaining patterns of attention. When the illuminated rose window, or the dialogue from some movie, sustains an ongoing expenditure of attention (as

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<sup>226</sup> Stocker, 1990, 218-222, describes how attractions and interests can diverge from evaluations

<sup>227</sup> Stocker, 1990, Ch.7

opposed to interrupting one's attention for merely a moment), then one has some desire that bears on the window or the dialogue, and conversely. As I see it, this sustained expenditure of attention is what being interested ultimately amounts to. The language used to describe the phenomenal experience of interest, such as being engrossed, charmed, attracted by the light or the dialogue, ultimately describes certain, oftentimes pleasant, types of sustained attention. Even when the desire is an aversion, such as might be found in negatively valenced emotions like hate, envy, and anger, there is still interest and attention. The interest, however, takes the form of an irritation and annoyance that endures for some time, rather occupying a single moment. Therefore, all desires, including concerns, indicate what kind of character a person has.<sup>228</sup>

Numerous objections are possible to this claim. Moreau might question how a desire could be part of a person's character, when it is entirely unintelligible to him. Such a desire, as in the case of Quinn's man who turns off radios, can only make sense to the person as certain likelihood of being moved. However, I doubt that a desire is necessarily unintelligible in the absence of evaluative attitudes that show its object to be desirable, useful, pleasant, etc. If this claim were true, it would follow that fairly pedestrian cases of weakness of will are necessarily unintelligible to the person, and therefore, outside the scope of what is attributable to her. For example, while driving past a gruesome accident, Fran feels the urge to stare at the mangled cars and injured people. She certainly does not, all-things-considered, judge staring at the accident to be the best course of action. More controversially, she does not even judge staring at the accident

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228 This conception of character is related to, but also different from, that offered by Bernard Williams. Williams, B. A. O., 1976 suggests that character is "having projects and categorical desires with which the person is identified," 14. These categorical, i.e., not instrumental, desires and projects are sources of motivation. That is to say, they are mental states which, when properly engaged, will motivate us to act. Properly engaged here includes, but is not limited to, the deliberative processes described in Williams, B. A. O., 1980. Elsewhere, he says, they provide the "motive force which propels [the person] into the future, or gives him a reason for living," Williams, B. A. O., 1976, 13.

to be pleasant or interesting or good whatsoever. Yet, she wants to stare, and takes interest in the gruesomeness of the accident. If Fran's desire was intelligible to her (at least in some degree), yet was not such that she believed it to be good, interesting, worthwhile, pleasant, etc., in any way, then there must be other types of intelligibility in addition to, and distinct from, that which derives from evaluative attitudes.

Another objection might be that this claim overlooks the possibility of reflectively dissociating oneself from the relevant desire. An objector, following a suggestion from Harry Frankfurt's early work, could contend that if the person has completely dissociated himself from the desire, it will not be his own desire at all, as opposed to being a foreign element that is external to him.<sup>229</sup> When Quinn's man realizes his intense interest in turning off radios, he may reflectively repudiate his desire to turn off radios. A desire from which the person has (entirely) dissociated himself will not speak to the kind of character he is, even if that desire ultimately moves the person to act.

This account of dissociation, as being subject to a force that is external to oneself, is highly contestable. Arpaly and Schroeder have offered an alternative account of dissociation as "alienation." Alienation, they suggest, is "the unpleasant experience of oneself as being other than one takes oneself to be."<sup>230</sup> On this view, dissociation is the intuitive recognition of a desire or emotion being at odds with a deeply-seated self-image. For example, a life-long pacifist may find in himself feeling anger at a rival, which generates a desire to strike that rival. By being dissociated from this anger, the pacifist becomes aware of how far his anger departs from his own ideals. Yet, Arpaly and Schroeder think, the emotion or desire is no less his own.

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229 Frankfurt, 1977, 63

230 Arpaly & Schroeder, 1999a, 381ff.

Dissociation, for them, is “irritation at the self, rather than irritation at an intrusive, alien psychological state.”<sup>231</sup> In fact, if Arpaly and Schroeder are correct, dissociation would actually presuppose, rather than gainsay, the dissociated state being part of the person's character. It is only because the person is already implicated by her emotions and desires that she could ever be alienated from them in the first place.

### **V.7. On the Ground of an Ethics of Emotion**

In conclusion, Attentional Voluntarism provides a coherent story about why an emotion is subject to ethical assessment. According to Attentional Voluntarism, emotions are properly parts of a person's character, since they involve voluntary acts of attention, acts which manifest certain stable, deeply-held desires called “concerns.” For example, the person who is envious will focus on specific points of unfavorable comparison with a competitor or rival, such as having a worse job or being physically less attractive. The person will expend time and energy focused on these unfavorable comparisons, and it may be difficult or impossible for him to re-direct his attention to more productive matters. Nevertheless, the fact that he attends to these details remains a voluntary act, which is due to having been habituated into certain ways of acknowledging social status and its signs. Significantly, this act shows what kind of person the individual is, because it reflects some concern upon which his social status bears.

This story extends to all emotions. According to Attentional Voluntarism, it is part of the inherent structure of an emotion for there to be certain modifications in one's attention. And this attention is, in particular, re-oriented towards what bears on one's concerns. Thus,

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<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, 381

counter-intuitively, there cannot be a sharp distinction between emotions that show who a person is, in a deep sense, and those which can be treated as “noise,” transient and temporary reactions that are written of as merely isolated cases.<sup>232</sup> Even the isolated emotions have the necessary concern-involving attention to them. Nevertheless, the Attentional Voluntarist allow there are differences among these emotions by distinguishing between concerns. Certain concerns can be more central or integrated into a personality than others.<sup>233</sup> So, even if every emotion speaks to the character of the person who has it, by revealing a concern, not all concerns need be equally serious or deep.

Further, many of the emotions Attentional Voluntarism renders eligible for ethical assessment will be the result of moral luck. The concerns that a person has, and whether those are activated in a given situation, could be completely out of a person's control. For example, Phyllis may simply be unfortunate for having formed a close bond with a friend who is at once so charismatic and so flaky. Further, the concern she has for being loved and respected by her friend need not be of her choosing. It may in significant respects be due to natural tendencies, temperament, her relationships with family members, and so on. But nevertheless, when her emotion manifests that concern in response to her friend's absence, this emotion indicates directly the kind of person Phyllis is. The concern to be loved and respected by others shows what interests her, even if it is not her only or her most fundamental interest. Some may recoil at the idea of assessing somebody for these factors that were out of her control. However, in this respect, Attentional Voluntarism is no worse off than other Attributability theories, which deny that a person's lacking a reasonable opportunity to avoid some response makes ethical criticism

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232 Cf. Helm, 2001

233 Arpaly & Schroeder, 1999b, 164, 171-175; Pugmire, 2005, 39-41

or judgment inappropriate.



## Chapter VI: Strategic Irrationality in Emotion

### VI.1. Introduction

The line of argument advanced in this dissertation is that emotions are subject to ethical criticism and assessment because they are parts of the person's moral character. However, this raises the question: why are emotions parts of the person's moral character in this way? So far, I have considered two answers to this question. The dominant answer, dubbed Rationalism, holds that an emotion, by possessing what is sometimes called “propositional content,” shows what a person takes to be worthwhile, significant and important. For the Rationalist, these propositional attitudes are what person's moral character consists in. By contrast, Attentional Voluntarism holds that an emotion, because it involves habituated patterns of attention, shows the person's concerns. Concerns are durable, long-standing desires, and according to the Attentional Voluntarist, these concerns are what a person's moral character consists in.

In the present chapter, I provide an argument for Attentional Voluntarism. In particular, Attentional Voluntarism is the only viable theory for the strategic irrationality of emotions. What I mean by “strategic irrationality” is that the person specifically forms an unwarranted attitude in order to avoid discomfort and anxiety, as well as to promote pleasure and self-esteem. As I contend, emotions are often strategically irrational. They can obstruct or inhibit rationality, rather than promote it, and reveal a moral character that is especially self-protective and childish. I argue that the Rationalist is forced to overlook these structures of character, because it exaggerates how mature, rational, and adaptive the relevant emotions are. On the other hand,

Attentional Voluntarism allows us to see how outright benighted, stupid, and infantile a person who has such emotions actually is.

Here is how the chapter is organized. In section two, I discuss the idea that emotions can be strategically irrational. In section three, I state more clearly what the conceptual tension is in this idea: that there could be purposiveness without intent to deceive. In section four, I argue that Attentional Voluntarism dispels this tension. According to Attentional Voluntarists, there is no need for intent, insofar as the attention paid in the course of having an emotion can acquire a function. However, in section five, I consider how Rationalists can account for strategic irrationality, drawing on Davidson's treatment of self-deception. According to that view, there is an intent to deceive, but it is isolated in a separate mental partition. This view, as I argue in section six, is inadequate, because it makes these emotions more mature than they actually are. It ignores the possibility that these emotions are based in what psychoanalysts call "wishes." Such emotions are, or involve, regressions to an earlier, more primitive form of psychological organization. By contrast, Attentional Voluntarism bases its account of strategic irrationality on capacities shared between adults and pre-linguistic children, and thus, can allow for regression in emotions.

## **VI.2. Non-cognitive Strategic Purposes**

Robert Solomon and Jean-Paul Sartre have famously claimed that an emotion can be explained in terms of its purpose.<sup>234</sup> Solomon says "emotions have a purpose in the sense in which our

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<sup>234</sup> I will here be assuming that the differences between these authors' views are negligible. One important difference is whether we should say, with Sartre, that emotions are always irrational, or, with Solomon, only sometimes. Solomon, 1981. However, both authors endorse the very possibility of these kinds of irrationality,

actions have a purpose – to get something done, to change something.”<sup>235</sup> He offers numerous examples of this phenomenon. Embarrassment, he says, is a way to “be the center of attention, even at the expense of dignity,” indignation a way “to avoid focusing on one's personal weakness and vulnerabilities,” jealousy to “place one's stamp on the things of the earth; 'This is mine.’”<sup>236</sup> Finally, remorse serves to “ward[...] off censure and punishment from other people by first inflicting it on oneself.”<sup>237</sup>

In short, emotions are explained in exactly the same way as actions, in terms of their being brought about “for the sake of” our other ends. Specifically, Solomon thinks emotions are literally acts of judgment. He notoriously claims that “if emotions are judgments, and judgments are actions, though covert, then emotions, too, are actions, aimed at changing the world...”<sup>238</sup> Judgments, like other mental phenomena, are complex. They comprise two separable elements: the content, i.e., what is being judged of, and the judgment itself, in which we take a certain attitude towards that content in thought.<sup>239</sup> Drawing on this uncontroversial distinction, Solomon claims the judgment itself is “something we do,” an “act for which we can be held responsible.”<sup>240</sup>

Judgments, together with beliefs, are customarily assessed according to the standard of the likelihood of being true, or what De Sousa calls “cognitive rationality.”<sup>241</sup> However, meeting

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and it is this possibility which will be the issue in the present chapter.

235 Solomon, 1993, 183: “emotions have a purpose in the sense in which our actions have a purpose – to get something done, to change something.”

236 Solomon, 1993, 247

237 *ibid.*

238 Solomon, 1980, 11. Elsewhere, “an emotion is a judgment ... something we do,” Solomon, 1993, 125. In later writings, Solomon still endorsed this argument: “suffice it to say that I still hold that emotions are judgments and that we make judgments and that judgments are acts for which we can be held responsible,” Solomon, 2001, 210

239 For our present purposes, we can almost entirely disregard details about the content of an emotion.

240 Solomon, 1993, 125; Solomon, 1988, 110-111

241 de Sousa, 1987, 164

this standard is not the primary aim in forming an emotional judgment. Solomon says “anger is not merely a report or a 'reaction' to an offense; ... the comment is offensive by virtue of being an object for anger.”<sup>242</sup> In this way, an emotion is not, or not just, a representation of the world as it stands independently of me, but is rather attempt to constitute a situation as being of a certain sort.<sup>243</sup> And the judgment does not need to be warranted, well-considered, deliberate, accurate, fully objective, etc., to accomplish this goal. Insofar as the person's primary interest in making these judgments is not truth, I shall say that they serve *non-cognitive strategic purposes*. Accounting for these purposes is the problem of accounting for the strategic irrationality of emotions.

The departure from cognitive rationality is often modest, where (as is usually the case with important matters) the evidence for or against some claim is indeterminate, contradicted by other evidence, or non-existent. The person is then in a position to construe the situation in some way that serves her ends, and remain in a position to justify herself. For example, offensiveness is not simply that which causes anger, in anybody, at any time. Some people are too easily aggravated. To the extent that anger is part of what makes for offensiveness, we must rather say that offensiveness is that which makes anger appropriate, where the notion of appropriateness is a standard extending beyond my particular emotion on this particular occasion.<sup>244</sup> This standard may have to with how people in our society would feel about the comment, or how those with refined tastes would feel. Yet, in real life, the evidence may be quite indeterminate or absent about whether others in society or those with refined taste would feel anger in this particular situation. So, the person plumps for the more favorable interpretation, presuming that her anger

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242 Solomon, 1993, 138. Cf. also, Solomon, 1984, 408

243 Solomon actually calls them “constitutive judgments.” Cf. Roberts, 1984.

244 D'Arms & Jacobson, 2000a

is appropriate.<sup>245</sup> And because the evidence is incomplete or missing, she remains within the scope of what is minimally rational (or what can be plausibly denied as being irrational.)

If the situation is serious or urgent enough, the person may commit even more serious infractions of cognitive rationality. In particular, emotions can be a way for the person to convince herself, or (more accurately) serve as a substitute for being adequately convinced, that some false claim is true. Here the naïve presumption that my emotion is appropriate may not simply lead me to 'fill in the gaps' left by the available evidence. By organizing my subsequent thinking and other perceptions, this presumption can lead me to outright ignore available evidence, dismiss reasonable alternative points of view, or to confuse another person's acting like something is true for its actually being true. For example, a possessive husband may all too readily confuse his wife's deferential, submissive behavior for the truth that he has a right of ownership with respect to her. Thus, an emotion may be a way to disregard the truth, i.e., to flout cognitive rationality altogether.

It is important not to confuse one's purposes in actually having an emotion with one's purposes in displaying certain emotional behavior, facial expressions, etc.<sup>246</sup> It is clear that by appearing hurt or angry, I can manipulate a friend or spouse into treating me as if I have received some undeserved injury. But such manipulations are possible without actually being hurt and angry, so long as my histrionics are believable. While the outward manifestations of anger may be enough to convince another person that I am angry, some judgment itself is necessary to convince myself. I must genuinely take to be true, rather than simply pretend or half-heartedly try to accept, the expedient outlook supplied by the emotion. As Sartre says, "the qualities

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245 Goldie, 2004, 96-98

246 Solomon, 1980, 23; Solomon, 1998, 152-153. Solomon, however, would deny that the two are quite as unrelated as this claim seems to suggest.

conferred upon objects are taken as real qualities.”<sup>247</sup> Thus, this outlook cannot remain at the level of a half-sincere rehearsal of some optimistic slogan.<sup>248</sup> I must be genuinely taken in by the emotion, and the dissenting opinions silenced. Accordingly, by adopting the outlook on the situation supplied by the emotion, I escape the tension and anxiety resulting from being unable to get what I want.

At its limit, then, the emotion can be a means for outright self-deception. The paradigm example here is where a person is faced with some intractable problem and is unable to solve it in the usual ways.<sup>249</sup> The person changes his own attitude towards the object of his desire, rather doing anything that would plausibly change the real properties of that object. Sartre says that the emotion was never to “act upon the object as such through the agency of particular means...[but instead] by itself to confer upon the object ... another quality, a lesser existence.”<sup>250</sup> The emotion actually fails to match how things are in the world, but its point was never to get the world right. Instead, the person has this emotion in order to protect herself from anxiety or frustration.

### **VI.3. The Puzzle: Purpose Without Intention?**

Sartre and Solomon's idea is deeply puzzling, not in the least because we regard emotions as events with respect to which we are passive. One cannot become angry or jealous, simply by trying or intending to do so.

The tension here can be further sharpened with reference to an argument due to Mark

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247 Sartre, 1948, 73. Solomon says that “emotion settles for a reconstitution of surreality, sometimes confusing a change in one for a change in another.”

248 Sartre calls the situation in the case of sour grapes a “little comedy” and “half-sincere”

249 Sartre, 1948 discusses this in terms of the fable of “sour grapes,” 59-61; Solomon, 1993, 171-173; Solomon, 1998, 154-155

250 Sartre, 1948, 60

Johnston concerning some conceptual problems regarding the person's role in self-deception.<sup>251</sup>

In particular, Johnston denies that the kind of mental activity involved in self-deception can be intentional. His key assumption is that belief is involuntary, which is to say that one cannot choose or decide to believe something, simply because its truth would be favorable or pleasant.<sup>252</sup>

This assumption has consequences for when we can be self-deceived. If belief is involuntary, then to have successfully deceived myself, I must come to sincerely regard some false but desired content to be true. Moreover, I must regard its truth as grounded in considerations other than the fact that I want it to be true.

Johnston's contention is that these success conditions cannot be realized through intentional action. He assumes that an intentional action is one in which the person is aware of how the act conduces to the further purposes or ends in view of which the act is performed. Thus, if self-deception is an intentional act, then the person must be aware of the relevant means-end relation. In short, one would necessarily have to be aware that the belief is actually false and was formed in order to satisfy (or simulate the satisfaction of) one's desire. With this awareness, one cannot take the belief's content to be, strictly speaking, true. After all, self-deception is necessary in the first place, insofar as there is not enough evidence for this content's truth. Overall, then, the success conditions for intentional self-deception would require a person to occupy jointly the mutually incompatible points of view of both deceiver and deceived.<sup>253</sup> Since this is impossible, Johnston concludes that intentional self-deception is impossible.

In this way, the puzzle about strategic irrationality can be seen as arising from a pair of conflicting claims. The first claim is that to have purposes, emotions would need to be, or be

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251 Johnston, 1988

252 I discuss this aspect of belief in Chapter I

253 Johnston, 1988, 69

essentially related to, intentional actions. This is just a basic conceptual requirement on purposiveness. The second claim is that to be effective as a technique for violating of cognitive rationality, emotions must not in any way be, or be essentially related to, intentional actions. This latter is simply a statement, following Johnston, of the success conditions of self-deception and other violations of cognitive rationality. In short, how does one manage strategic irrationality without intent to deceive?

The puzzle has one additional wrinkle. Johnston does not deny that self-deception is possible. Instead, he explains it in terms of the operation of mechanisms, what he calls “tropisms,” that are essential to the human mind. Along these lines, Johnston conceives of self-deception as more or less automatic process where a frustrated desire, and its attendant anxiety, cause the anxiety-reducing (false) belief that the desire is satisfied.<sup>254</sup> This view entails that self-deception is not an intentional action at all, which would require awareness of means-ends relations, etc. Rather, Johnston thinks, minds like ours come equipped with a certain anxiety-reducing devices. Self-deceptive emotions, because they involve belief or belief-like states, could simply be cases where those devices have been activated.

Although the idea of a tropism may be well-suited to answer the questions biologists or psychologists ask about emotion, the questions occupying us are different. I assume, as do Sartre and Solomon, that emotions, including strategically irrational emotions, a part of the criteria for what kind of moral character a person has. But if the purposiveness of an emotion is simply being the effect of tropisms, strategic irrationality need not show the person's moral character in any deep way. On Johnston's view, minds like ours are equipped with certain self-protective mechanisms, which can result in emotion. The person need not be directly involved in this

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<sup>254</sup> Johnston, 1988, 73



process, just as she is not involved in the operation of other sub-personal mechanisms, such as salivating at the smell of cooking food or eyes dilating in changing light. Accordingly, the puzzle is not simply how do emotions serve non-cognitive strategic purposes for us, without being intentional actions. Perhaps more importantly, how do they do so, while at the same time being subject to ethical assessment as parts of our moral character? To answer this latter question, tropisms will not do.

#### **VI.4. Attentional Voluntarism and Acquired Functions**

I contend that Attentional Voluntarism dispels the puzzle regarding the strategic irrationality of emotions. According to Attentional Voluntarism, emotions are properly parts of a person's character, since they involve voluntary acts of attention, acts which manifest certain stable, durable desires called "concerns." Thus, for example, an outburst of anger can reveal a person's character, since the way in which her attention is captured and consumed by the target of her aggravation reveals what she really cares for.

This view shows how there might be purpose without intention in an emotion. As we saw in Chapter V, the voluntariness of attention is grounded in habituation. The attention payed in the process of having an emotion is actually a routine that has been formed over time through repetition and practice. This routine comprises numerous separable acts of focusing on some determinate aspect of an object, in some determinate manner, any of which could be undertaken intentionally in the right circumstances. Habituation joins these separable acts into a routine. Through practice and repetition, the whole series is tied to certain quite specific conditions, the obtaining of which can then reliably trigger and guide the entire routine without any decision or

intention on the person's part. Now if included among these conditions is the fact that certain desired results are likely to be produced, then the act of attention (and the routine as a whole) could truly be said to occur *because* it has reliably produced these results in the past. Thus, each of these acts (and the routine as a whole) occurs for the sake of producing the desired results.

This argument appeals to the idea of a function in a very precise sense: it explains the emotion's occurrence in terms of the causal effects of relevantly similar emotions in the past. It does not invoke *natural function*, i.e., favorable traits constitutionally shared by all non-defective individuals of some type, simply in virtue of their species membership.<sup>255</sup> Rather, the argument appeals to the fact that within the life of a single individual, certain voluntary responses can *acquire* a functional role through practice and repetition, even where the person is not intentionally aiming at the relevant effects.<sup>256</sup>

Furthermore, these acquired functions cannot be due, or due simply, to the operation of tropisms. No doubt, habituation as a natural process in human beings involves tropisms such as the experimental psychologist might study. Nevertheless, on the present proposal, the relevant acts of attention manifest concerns. And, as I argued in Chapter V, concerns are what a person's character consists in. It is thus the expression of the person's concerns that acquires a function. Repetition and practice have yielded a tendency for the concern to be realized in our mental lives in certain ways, rather than others. Perhaps more importantly, which particular realization eventually becomes habitual is determined, in part, by the favorable or desired results created in the past. And concerns, as stable, deeply-held desires, must be part of the explanation for which results count as favorable or desired in the first place. So, concerns are not simply that which is

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255 Solomon, 1998, 147-148, rejects natural function as a way to account for the purposiveness of emotions.

256 Acquired functions are a part of what is sometimes called the individual's "second nature," the dispositions she possesses as the result of habituation, McDowell, 1995.

subject to the process of habituation, but they also significantly affect how that process turns out.

In short, wherever somebody's emotion has acquired a function, certain concerns have gained a tendency to be realized in her mental life in ways at least partly conducive to their own satisfaction. This tendency, far from being the result of natural self-protective mechanisms, distinctively reveals who that person is. Thus, Attentional Voluntarism can allow for a coherent notion of purpose in emotions, one which is neither due to intention nor the result of tropisms, since the acts of attention in an emotion can acquire functions. It rejects the first claim of our puzzle, that there is no purposiveness without intent.

Given Johnston's argument against the possibility of intentional self-deception, it remains an outstanding issue to show how acquired functions could ever successfully yield cognitive irrationality, up to and including self-deception. Even if emotions literally accomplish purposes for us, it does not obviously follow that an emotion can be a way to flout what is true for the sake of what we want. To see why self-deception can be successful without an intent to deceive, we must consider further the connection between emotions and belief.

As I see it, the success here is accounted for by the fact that emotions create the psychological conditions favorable for certain kinds of belief. The underlying relation is causal, rather than conceptual.<sup>257</sup> In other words, an emotion may positively incline the person to take certain contents to be true. This is accomplished by generating a feeling of confidence or conviction.<sup>258</sup> Sometimes, the feeling of confidence or conviction may lead to the discovery of substantive justifications, and hence, lead to the formation of a justified belief. Other times, it is simply a blind prejudice. But whether the resulting belief is justified or prejudiced, it remains

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<sup>257</sup> Thus, this claim is consistent with the arguments of Roberts, 2003, Calhoun, 2004, among others, that belief is a not constitutive part of emotion

<sup>258</sup> On feelings of confidence in epistemology, see Hookway, 2008

that the emotion has positively disposed the person towards adopting it.<sup>259</sup> Typically, if the person does not have a reflective assessment of her emotion as inappropriate or mistaken, she will believe its content.

Attention is no doubt part of what explains the feeling of confidence or conviction created by an emotion. In having an emotion, my attention is captured and consumed in organized ways, and this expenditure quite naturally leads me to feeling confident regarding truth of certain matters of fact regarding the emotion's target. Such a transition is clearest in cases where the target is physically present, such as fearing a predator five feet away. It should be no surprise that, having been alerted to those respects in which the predator may threaten danger, the person will often come to believe that the predator is dangerous. But she need not do so, if she has mustered and held in mind evidence to the contrary. However, such a transition can also occur when the target is *not* physically present. In being angry at her friend, Phyllis focuses on where the friend might be at the present moment, her absence, the conversation where plans were made, etc. No wonder, then, when Phyllis feels confident that her friend's conduct is injurious: she has been expending time and energy focusing on the determinate ways her friend may have aggrieved her.

If the process of one's attention being captured and consumed in emotion disposes one to form certain beliefs, including those that relieve anxiety and increase self-esteem, then the puzzle described in the previous section is solved. These beliefs are precisely the desirable or favored effects, the production of which becomes the acquired function of the emotion. Crucially, the person's contribution lies not in the the belief itself, but strictly speaking, the belief's causal antecedents. She can, through repetition and practice, become quite adept in manipulating those

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<sup>259</sup> Brady, 2009, 428-429. Cf. also, Goldie, 2004; Goldie, 2008.

antecedents in ways that bring relief from anxiety or increase self-esteem. So, unlike Solomon and Sartre, who thought that strategic irrationality of emotion is due to judgment, I suggest that it is actually due to the skillful exploitation of attention in its role as the cause of belief.

## VI.5. Partitions

So far, I have offered one way to dispel the puzzle concerning the suggestion, owing to Solomon and Sartre, that emotions serve non-cognitive strategic purposes for us, and in this way, are part of the criteria for moral character. I argued that emotions can serve non-cognitive purposes because the attention involved in that emotion can acquire a function. Yet, this account is far from establishing the truth of Attentional Voluntarism. According to Rationalism, introduced in Chapter III, an emotion is properly part of a person's character because of its propositional content, which is an accurate, although oftentimes incomplete, criterion for what the person takes to be worthwhile, important, or valuable. Rationalists too have alternative explanation of strategic irrationality. In particular, I will focus on Davidson's account on self-deception, because he explains it exclusively in terms of propositional attitudes.<sup>260</sup>

Davidson's general formula for irrationality is that “there is a mental cause that is not a reason.”<sup>261</sup> For Davidson, a standard rational explanation has two aspects: (a) certain propositional attitudes, by virtue of their logical relations, make intelligible the action, belief, etc., being explained, and (b) these same propositional attitudes cause the action, belief, etc., in

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<sup>260</sup> Angela Smith, who defends a Rationalist account, cites Davidson as an explanation of irrational emotion. Smith, 2005, 254

<sup>261</sup> Davidson, 1982, 179

the right way.<sup>262</sup> For example, I believe that paprika is a spice, because it is added to food to enhance flavor. My beliefs about the evidence do not just make intelligible my belief about the conclusion, but they also cause that belief. In irrationality, an action, belief, and other attitude is caused by some propositional attitude in the same manner as in a standard rational explanation. But unlike in a standard rational explanation, the action, belief, or other attitude is not made intelligible by the attitude which is its cause. For example, in a case of wishful thinking, my belief that the weather is becoming warmer may simply be the result of a desire for the weather to become warmer. This desire causes my belief, even though its content does not provide any reason at all to think that the weather is getting warmer.

Yet, this description of irrationality faces the following difficulty. On Davidson's view, in order to ascribe any propositional attitude to a person, (i.e., in order for the cause to be mental in any literal sense), we must also ascribe numerous other propositional attitudes, including beliefs, with which the original attitude is consistent. For example, we could not say somebody thinks that paprika is a spice, if he did not know what cooking is, or how spices are used in cooking, or contended that paprika was something one wears. If so, to account for a case of irrationality, we will typically end up needing to ascribe to one person beliefs that are incompatible. In such cases, the person will have some judgment that was inert or ineffective due to the operation of a mental cause which is not a reason. But both the judgment and the mental cause will each require the existence of a background of numerous other beliefs, and these background beliefs will often be incompatible with one another.

Davidson solves the difficulty by claiming that there exists *partitions* in the mind. He

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262 The "in the right way" rider is to rule out so-called deviant causal chains.

says that “the mind is to be regarded as having two or more semi-autonomous structures.”<sup>263</sup>

Within each partition, there exist beliefs, assumptions, intentions, desires that are all rationally related to one another. These attitudes form a consistent set, of the sort that is necessary for the ascription of a propositional attitude in the first place. However, causation is possible *between* partitions. In our example of wishful thinking, the desire for the weather to be warmer renders inert or ineffective the person's better judgment that one's desires have nothing to do with what the weather will actually be. Thus, there can be a genuinely mental cause which is not a reason for that which it causes.

In particular, partitions help account for self-deception. Self-deception, according to Davidson, is a special case of “weakness of warrant,” where the person judges that the overall evidence favors believing in the truth of some claim, and yet does not do so (or alternatively, believes its contradiction).<sup>264</sup> This individual has failed to form a belief in accordance with the total evidence in his possession. There are numerous different possibilities regarding how somebody would fail in this way, but in self-deception, the weakness of warrant is self-induced. Davidson says the person must “do something with the aim of changing his own views, [and] must intend the deception.”<sup>265</sup> This is where partitions help, because the intention must coexist with the belief resulting from the self-deception. If, however, there are separate structures in the mind which make these respective attitudes intelligible, then the intention can influence what belief the person has, even though it is not (and cannot be) grounds for forming the belief.

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263 Davidson, 1982, 184. Davidson offers little guidance on the nature of these partitions. He says that there is no reason in advance to suppose that they are inaccessible to consciousness, are permanent, are endowed with agency, or have any specific origin or function. Rather, they are postulated as the explanation of what makes for irrationality in the first place. He says “the irrationality of the [result] is that it contains inconsistent beliefs; the irrational step is therefore the step that makes this possible, drawing of a boundary that keeps the inconsistent beliefs apart.” Davidson, D., 1986, 211

264 Davidson, D., 1986, 201

265 Davidson, D., 1986, 207

It is similarly available to the Rationalist to use partitions to account for the strategic irrationality of emotions. For example, a cheating husband grows angry at his increasingly suspecting wife for her unkindness and lack of caring, and he does so in order to make her responsible for the dissolution of the marriage. His anger is a way of blaming before he can be blamed, to change the situation into one in which he, rather than his wife, has been wronged. The puzzle we faced is that the notion of purpose seemed to be out of place, because it seemed impossible to consciously regard the emotion's content to be true for some further end or purpose. This puzzle can be dissolved by arguing that the relevant intention and the emotion are isolated in separate partitions. One may genuinely accept the point of view involved in the anger, as the result of an intention. But the intention is a “mental cause that is not a reason,” in that it influences whether the person feels anger without itself making that anger intelligible.

This story supports the Rationalist view according to which it is the propositional content of a person's attitudes that reveals the sort of character she has. The Rationalist will readily concede that many strategically irrational emotions reveal a certain sort of self-protective character in the person who has them. However, she will deny that this fact necessitates a different conception of emotion and character, such as Attentional Voluntarism provides. Rather, she argues, the relevant self-serving character is fully captured by focusing exclusively on propositional attitudes, both of the emotion itself as well as intentions that explain that emotion.

## **VI.6. Emotions as Wish-Fulfillments**

I contend that the appeal to mental partitions ignores important phenomena, specifically where the character revealed by a strategically irrational emotion belongs to the person's unconscious



mental life.<sup>266</sup> To establish this, I will focus on one relatively circumscribed species of unconscious phenomenon, that of *wish* and *wish-fulfillment*.<sup>267</sup> This concept (as I will be using it) is due to Freud, but can be treated as an important and distinctive idea in its own right without accepting other parts of Freud's theory. In particular, wishes (and hence, emotions that are wish-fulfillments) are parts of a deeply immature and even infantile character. This fact is a reason to accept Attentional Voluntarism, since the Attentional Voluntarist's account of strategic irrationality in terms of the acquired functions of attention is the only viable account of these immature, infantile aspects of character. By contrast, the appeal to partitions exaggerates how mature, adaptive, and rational the relevant emotions are.

The concept of wish belongs to a distinction Freud drew between two different types of mental activity. On the one hand, there is primary-process activity, which abides by the “pleasure principle.” This activity, which aims exclusively at one's own gratification as well as freedom from tension, pain, and distress, characterized our mental lives from earliest infancy. Freud thought that infants, in a condition of distress and hunger, would imagine being fed and feeling full.<sup>268</sup> Although this technique does not provide satiation, it provided enough temporary relief to make repetition worthwhile. Only subsequently does the individual become capable of secondary-process mental activity, which abides by the “reality principle.” This mental activity's aim is to represent objective features of one's environment, features which one can by definition fail to have represented accurately. Through it, the individual gains knowledge about how the world works, and thus can alter and manipulate her environment with a view towards actually

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266 Gardner, 1992 argues that psychoanalytic concepts are necessary, not just to explain specific episodes of emotion, but to explain certain types of emotion.

267 I do not suppose that wish-fulfillment is the only, or even the most important, unconscious phenomena.

268 Freud, 1911, 218: “the state of psychical rest was originally disturbed by the peremptory demands of internal needs. When this happened, whatever was thought of (wished for) was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner, just as still happens to-day with our dream-thoughts every night.”

bringing about the satisfaction of her desires.<sup>269</sup> Hence, one important difference between these two types of activity is whether they are subject to “reality-testing,” verifying whether what one perceives, thinks, imagines, etc., corresponds to how the world actually is.<sup>270</sup>

In adults, primary- and secondary-process mental activity coexist together. Even after the relatively more recent advent of secondary-process mental activity, the older tension-reducing uses of the imagination remain in operation, albeit outside of the person's conscious awareness. In particular, there will be certain desires, called *wishes*, that have not been subject to any reality-testing whatsoever, testing which would necessarily have involved rational assessment in light of evidence and other things one believes or wants. Rather, wishes have remained, well into the person's adulthood, exclusively within the purview of primary-process mental activity.<sup>271</sup> Specifically, with regard to a wish, the person will simply imagine its satisfaction. Wollheim says

I wish for something when I desire it: and because I desire it I tend to imagine (in the appropriate mode) my desire satisfied: and when I imagine that desire satisfied, it is for me as if the desire were satisfied.<sup>272</sup>

Hence, wishes are distinctive in that one does not, in any way, attempt reasoning and acting towards actually bringing about the satisfaction of the desire. Rather, these states are remnants from of a period in time predating one's capacity to conceive of and intentionally manipulate the objective features of the world in order to achieve satisfaction of one's desires.<sup>273</sup> The paradigmatic wishes are those whose force and content come from instinctual demands, such as

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269 Freud, 1911, *ibid.*, Freud, 1900, 598-599

270 Freud, 1938, 162

271 Freud, 1924 speaks of a “domain which became separated from the real external world at the time of the introduction of the reality principle. This domain has since been kept free from the demands of the exigencies of life, like a kind of ‘reservation.’” 187.

272 Wollheim, 1984, 90-92; Freud, 1900, 566. It is important that 'imagination' be accorded a wider sense than is usual. Imagination is not simply visualizing, but also includes pretense, as well as the actions and gestures of various sorts necessary to execute the pretense.

273 This is why Wollheim calls wishes “archaic phenomena,” Wollheim, 1984, 90

the need to feed or sleep, felt while one is an infant. But the use of imagination as a tension-relieving technique transfers easily to other strongly felt, serious, urgent desires, such as might be involved in social relationships.

The fact that wish is a variety of unconscious phenomenon means that it is only manifested in some concealed form. The person systematically mis-recognizes the fact that he is attempting, using the imagination, to create the satisfaction of his desire *ex nihilo*, as if by fiat or magic. Wishes, as Gardner puts it, “misrepresent themselves as fulfilled.”<sup>274</sup> I would add: wishes obscure their own nature as wishes, by misleadingly presenting their content as factual. For example, a student who wishes to be the most brilliant mind wherever he goes may systematically misconstrue remarks from the teacher and other students. Passing compliments are perhaps taken as acknowledgment of his prodigious talents and genius, while constructive criticism is perhaps taken as *ad hominem* attacks, unfair attempts to undermine or undercut him. Lear says that such a person does not realize that his “perception of the world is getting distorted in wishful ways. As one sees its effects in adults, the pleasure principle exerts a gravitational pull on reality-testing and practical life.”<sup>275</sup>

The Rationalist's account of strategic irrationality in terms of mental partitions cannot allow that certain emotions might themselves be cases of wish-fulfillment. According to her account, an emotion can serve non-cognitive purposes only insofar as it was caused by an intention that is a “mental cause that is not a reason.” Ascribing such an intention, however, requires ascribing too a consistent set of propositional attitudes which make that intention intelligible, including the desires that will be served by the emotion. Otherwise, we cannot make

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274 Gardner, 1993, 126

275 Lear, 2005, 149

sense of the intention being a propositional attitude at all. This set constitutes a partition that is distinct from that in which the emotion itself, as well as any beliefs formed as result of having the emotion, are to be found.

The relevant set of propositional attitudes is what prevents a Rationalist from allowing for wishes and wish-fulfillment. Return to the example of the unfaithful husband growing angry at his increasingly suspicious wife in order to make her responsible for the dissolution of the marriage. On the mental partition story, the husband's anger is the result of an intention to make the wife responsible, rendered intelligible perhaps by desire not to be at fault for the breakup of the marriage, as well as numerous other expectations, assumptions, and beliefs, such as judgments regarding what would count as being responsible for the dissolution of the marriage, the rights and responsibilities of the separate parties, etc. In short, the set of attitudes to which the husband's intention belongs is internally rational: its elements display a high degree of consistency and justification amongst themselves.

However, if a desire qualifies as a wish, then it has been immune to questions of consistency and justification requisite to be an element in an internally rational set of attitudes. This is precisely what is meant by calling wish-fulfillment a variety of primary-process mental activity. Its point was never to get the world right, but to bring about pleasure and avoid pain, anxiety, and discomfort. It is not amenable to being defended by appeal to evidence or what else one believes and wants. Specifically, wishing is a form of *regression*, that is, “a failure or loss of mastery and maturation and a return to what is developmentally earlier and more primitive.”<sup>276</sup> The person who wishes has retreated back to an earlier, infantile form of psychological organization wherein she imaginatively creates substitute or ersatz satisfactions of desire. This

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276 Stocker & Hegeman, 2000, 140

stage predates the capacity for having attitudes which display relations of consistency and justification with one another.

The friend of mental partitions can no doubt allow that seeking pleasure and avoiding anxiety are among the purposes an emotion might have. But she can only allow this because she thinks that there is an internally rational set of attitudes that causally brings about the occurrence of the emotion, including intentions to get pleasure and avoid anxiety. And her postulation of this set is precisely wherein the problem consists, in that it makes the relevant purposes far too adaptive and mature.

## **VI.7. Attention and Regression**

I suggest that many emotions are in fact cases of wish-fulfillment. Such emotions belong to a moral character that is distinctively immature and even infantile, because they are concealed attempts to blatantly ignore that which is inhospitable to the person's deepest desires. In the previous section, I argued that Rationalists cannot make sense of the idea of emotions as wish-fulfillments. Their account of strategic irrationality, in terms of mental partitions, cannot accommodate the fact that these emotions are, or involve, regressions, wherein one retreats to a developmentally earlier form of psychic organization. In this section, I argue that the Attentional Voluntarist's account of strategic irrationality, outlined in section 4, fares much better in describing such cases.

Adequately capturing how the emotion is, or involves, a regression requires a new tack. The husband's anger must not be, in any way, conceived by him (even when that conception is isolated in a separate partition) as useful towards actually satisfying his desire. Rather, wishes

exert their efficacy upon the person's mental life directly, without the need for an intention or any determinate conception of how the emotion conduces to the end of getting pleasure and avoiding pain.<sup>277</sup> The lack of instrumental reasoning is the critical part of what it means for certain distorted thought, perceptions, judgments to be due to primary-process, rather than secondary-process, mental activity. No reasonable person of sound mind would suppose that imagining something makes it the case.

In this connection, the Attentional Voluntarist already has a more plausible account of strategic irrationality that repudiates intention and instrumental reasoning. As I suggested in section four, the attention that is captured and consumed in an emotion acquires a function. Through repetition and practice, the person forms habits of attending in ways that are conducive to the formation of certain types of pleasure-inducing or anxiety relieving belief. In short, the person comes to skillfully manipulate the causal antecedents her belief. Thus, it is possible to have purposes, and more specifically, non-cognitive strategic purposes, without intention or instrumental rationality.

Admittedly, the defender of mental partitions might revise her view in such a way so as to avoid ascribing intention to the husband. She could instead argue that a desire causally influences the husband's anger directly, though that desire is isolated in a separate mental partition. But this revision would still rule out the possibility of wishes, and emotions as wish-fulfillments. It would still be true that there must be other propositional attitudes which are consistent with the relevant

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277 There is some dispute here about whether wish-fulfillment does in fact require some awareness of the means by which the fulfillment is achieved. Wollheim specifically thinks that wishes "come along with an archaic theory of mind to which the wisher subscribes," Wollheim, 1984, 91. But the theory he invokes is the thesis that thinking something suffices to make it so. Gardner, 1993, 130, denies that such a theory is a necessary part of wish-fulfillment, or that the person need have any awareness of how her imagination serves to bring about the relevant satisfactions.

desire, and help make it intelligible.<sup>278</sup> However, this simply cannot qualify as wish-fulfillment, insofar as no wish, in the sense discussed here, could display the consistency with other propositional attitudes which one must postulate to get the idea of a partition up and running.

In other words, the main objection to Rationalism here is the fact that it appeals to capacities whose very possession requires maturity and development.<sup>279</sup> In this way, the key support for the Attentional Voluntarist's account is the fact that the capacity to attend, and to shift objects of attention, can no doubt be ascribed to infants. When an infant imagines being fed and feeling full, it is specifically his attention that has been shifted away from the pain and discomfort of his hunger. What he does is to substitute an imaginary focus of attention for a real one. Such conflation of what is imagined for what is actual is the hallmark of primary-process activity. In this way, the concept of attention helps us to represent accurately what the infant is actually doing during these moments of discomfort and anxiety.

It is because his account is based on a shared capacity that the Attentional Voluntarist can ground certain continuities between the psychological organization of the infant and that of an adult. To qualify as a genuine regression, the adult must be, at some level, doing the exact same thing as the infant, although she is systematically unable to recognize what it is she does. The concept of substituting an imaginary focus of attention for a real one fits the bill exactly. The adult need not in any way be trying or intending to make such substitutions. Rather, through practice and repetition, she has become accustomed to shifting her attention towards imagined

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278 There are issues here concerning the very nature of desire. On the Rationalist approach, many kinds of desire are also propositional attitudes. Cf., Scanlon, 2002. By contrast, others argue that desires are not propositional attitudes. Cf., Brewer, T., 2006. For the present, I need only assume that the desires properly identified as wishes are not propositional attitudes, and hence, do not require ascribing to the person an internally rational set of beliefs, expectations, assumptions, intentions, and so on.

279 Cf. Deigh, 2004, Deigh, 2010 for the argument that attributing propositional content to an emotion makes this same mistake of grounding the liability to have emotions on a capacity that is a consequence of habituation.

foci at precisely the moments when she is uncomfortable, overwhelmed, flooded with anxiety, and so on. The tendency to make such substitutions is simply a remnant of earlier or more primitive developmental stages, which is activated in conditions similar to those when the infant would turn to imagined objects.

Thus, Attentional Voluntarism is the only viable account of regression at all, because its description of strategic irrationality is the only one based on a capacity that is shared between infants and adults. By contrast, the Rationalist, by appealing to mental partition, presupposes a capacity to have attitudes that stand in relations of consistency and justification to one another. And it is arguable whether our attitudes can be related in this way from earliest infancy, before one has learned a native language.

This argument does not require us to deny that propositional attitudes, such as belief, are ever part of regressions. Surely this happens for adults, and in particular, when the adult is being self-deceived. In our example of the unfaithful husband, he likely comes to believe that his wife is responsible for the dissolution of the marriage. Thus, primary-process mental activity has a distinctively different upshot for adults than for infants: it can alter the adult's thoughts and judgments. (This is no doubt part, but not all, of the explanation for why adults systematically unable to recognize when they are resorting to wish-fulfillment.) However, Attentional Voluntarists have a story to tell here as well, based on the idea that there is a causal, rather than conceptual, relation between what one attends to and what one believes. The husband attends to features of his wife which, through being exaggerated and even fabricated in his imagination, show her responsibility. He confuses this partly-exaggerated and partly-fabricated woman for his actual spouse. Through the process of expending attention on these imagined properties, which



he confuses for real ones, he comes to believe that his wife actually has the features that prove her responsibility.

In brief, then, Attentional Voluntarism is the only plausible account of strategic irrationality, when this is taken to include the possibility of wish-fulfillment. It not only accurately explains the continuities between infantile and adult mental life, but also shows how those continuities can significantly alter the exercise of capacities (such as for judgment or belief) that only arise after infancy. Attentional Voluntarism thus opens up a vantage point from which we can view an entirely distinct aspect of moral character, in particular one that is benighted and infantile, disclosed by emotion. Where this happens, emotions help us to see who the person is, not because they reveal propositional attitudes which the person can be expected to defend as reasonable or appropriate, but instead because they reveal a lapse back to more infantile forms of concern.

## **VI.8. Infants, Children, and Moral Character**

So far, I have defended Attentional Voluntarism on the grounds that it can allow for ways in which a person's character derives from earlier, and especially, more primitive developmental stages. An emotion can constitute an infantile attempt to flee from a reality that is too uncomfortable or overwhelming for the person to deal with. However, this argument raises difficult questions about the scope of ethical assessments. In particular, Attentional Voluntarism shows how it is appropriate to assess the infantile structures of character manifested by wish-fulfilling emotions. The question is: why assume that these infantile structures of character can be assessed at all? Does Attentional Voluntarism imply that it would be appropriate to refer

to, and evaluate, the character of an infant or child as, for example, self-centered or mean?<sup>280</sup>

I think that there is a common intuition that children and infants are not appropriately assessed in the same ways that adults are. Rationalists have a principled explanation of this intuition. They will argue that the forms of psychological organization which predate the capacity to have propositional attitudes are simply, and for that reason, outside what can be appropriately assessed in ethics. This would be a way of saying that infants and children do not, at least not yet, have character at all. Rather, they just have natural tendencies and temperament. These natural tendencies and temperament may be the foundation for character which, when developed, will be within the scope of ethics. But before that time, it makes no sense to criticize here. Furthermore, this strategy is blocked for the Attentional Voluntarist, insofar as they assess people for structures of character which are the residue of these more primitive developmental stages. Since the adult can be appropriately assessed for her childish character, the Attentional Voluntarist would seem committed to saying that the child too be assessed for her childish character.

In response to this objection, it is useful to distinguish between an individual character trait shared between adults and children, such as avoiding what one finds to be anxiety-provoking and uncomfortable, and the whole set of traits that is properly referred to as *the* character of a person. This distinction allows more precision about what exactly the problem is: some adults have, as an element of the set of traits that constitutes their character, individual traits also had by children and infants. This is supposed to be a problem in the following way: if the Attentional Voluntarist maintains that the trait shows the adult to be bad, it therefore is also committed to holding that the trait shows the child to be bad.

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<sup>280</sup> Thanks to Kim Frost for discussion here

However, the implicit premise in this objection is that the relevant traits are good or bad, regardless of the other traits that are elements of the total set that constitutes the person's character. So, meanness or decency would have the same value, no matter what other traits they were found together with. But I see no reason why an Attentional Voluntarist must accept this premise. Instead, they can argue that it is not simply the infantile trait alone, but rather the infantile trait possessed by an otherwise mature adult that the badness truly consists in. If this is correct, the Attentional Voluntarist need not hold that adults and children are evaluated in the same way.

Yet, the objector may insist, concessions must be made here. Even if the infantile trait would, when possessed by a child, warrant different assessments, it still makes the same *pro tanto* contribution to the overall value of the character under consideration, whether in a child or adult. The individual trait thus has some defeasible badness, no matter whether possessed by a child or adult. Would it not therefore warrant the same defeasible assessment, whether possessed by a child or adult? I do not see any reason why an Attentional Voluntarist must be troubled by this defeasibility. Yes, *were everything else equal*, the infantile trait would warrant the same assessment in the adult and child. But among the things that are not, or not yet, equal, is the fact that the child has not yet reached the level of maturation that would make sense of the relevant criticisms.

This dissertation has not been defending the substantive judgments that would be part of an ethics of emotion, rather than trying to show how an ethics of emotion is possible at all. But the argument of the present chapter might be thought to presume one contentious evaluation: one ought not to be childish and infantile. By way of conclusion, I want to say what say something

on behalf of this judgment. As I just argued, it is clear that this need not commit us to criticism of actual infants and children, because the badness of being infantile may distinctively apply to those who reach a certain level of maturity. But in what could that badness consist? Surely, I don't want to say that *any* childishness is, or is always bad. However, it seems plausible to think that the forms of self-protectiveness which show themselves in strategic irrationality are bad, at least in adults, because one has fallen short of possibilities for maturation and development that are available to human beings. Even if a certain amount of self-protectiveness is inevitable and comforting, the person has failed to realize a human ideal achieved by others moderately similar to him.

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# John M. Monteleone

Syracuse University  
 541 Hall of Languages  
 Syracuse, NY 13210  
[jmmontel@syr.edu](mailto:jmmontel@syr.edu)  
 (309) 361-3361

## Education

Ph.D. in Philosophy, Syracuse University  
 December 2013

B.A. *magna cum laude* in Philosophy and Classics, Knox College  
 June 2005

## Areas of Specialization

Moral Psychology, Ethics, Philosophy of Emotion

## Areas of Competence

Action Theory, Practical Reason, Meta-ethics, Applied Ethics (Media, Environmental), Philosophy of Mind

## Dissertation

*Feeling in Character: Towards an Ethics of Emotion*

Committee: Michael Stocker (Syracuse) – chair; Jonathan Jacobs (John Jay College of Criminal Justice), Kenneth Baynes (Syracuse), Laurence Thomas (Syracuse), Kim Frost (Syracuse)

## Recent Presentations

Invited Comments on Daniel Koltonski, “Deferential Friends.”  
 Annual meeting of the Creighton Club, the New York State  
 Philosophical Society. Hobart and William Smith College.  
 Oct. 10, 2008.

“Voluntary Emotions (Or, Where We Forget Childhood)”  
 Syracuse Philosophy ABD workshop  
 Nov. 8, 2012

“Inverse Akrasia and Emotions”  
 Syracuse Philosophy ABD workshop  
 Mar. 24, 2011

“Expressive Acts.”

Syracuse Philosophy ABD workshop.

April 28, 2010.

Comments on Paul Prescott, “What Pessimism Is.”

Syracuse Philosophy ABD workshop.

Mar. 25, 2010.

“On the Intelligibility of Actions.”

Syracuse Philosophy Working Papers series.

Nov. 20, 2009.

Comments on Jussi Suikkanen, “Revising the Buck-Passing Theory of Value.”

Syracuse Philosophy Graduate Student Conference.

Apr. 17, 2008

## Teaching

### As a Solo Instructor

*Ethics, Art, and Literature* (PHL 407) LeMoyne College – Fall '13.

*Environmental Ethics* (PHI 394) Syracuse University – Fall '11.

*Introduction to Formal Logic* (PHL 311) LeMoyne College – Fall '11.

*Issues in Ethics* (PHL 302) LeMoyne college – Spring '13.

*Theories of Knowledge and Reality*. (PHI 107) Syracuse University – Fall '09- Spring '10, Spring '11.

*Great Traditions in Ethics* (PHL 303) LeMoyne college – Spring/Fall '13.

### Online

*Contemporary Ethics* (PHI 393) Syracuse University – Fall '11.

### As a Teaching Assistant

*Ethics and the Media Professions*. (PHI 293) Syracuse University – Fall '10-Spring '11

*Critical Thinking*. (PHI 171) Syracuse University – Spring '09

*Human Nature*. (PHI 197) Syracuse University – Fall '09

*Logic* (PHI 251) Syracuse University – Fall '06, Fall '07, Spring '08

### As a Tutor

*Logic* (PHI 251), *Symbolic Logic* (PHI 252) Syracuse University Athletics) – Spring '07

Latin and *Logic* (PHI 251) Syracuse Tutoring & Study Center – Spring '07



**Languages**

Latin (reading competence)

Classical Greek (reading competence)

**Graduate-Level Courses Taken (All at Syracuse University)**Fall 2009

PHI 830 Emotion and Value (Michael Stocker)

Spring 2009

PHI 690 Psychological Explanation (Robert VanGulick)

PHI 690 Philosophy of Action (Michael Stocker)

PHI 840 Self-consciousness (Andre Gallois)

Fall 2008

PHI 600 The A Priori (Kris McDaniel)

PHI 750 The Language of Thought (Kevan Edwards)

PHI 750 Natural Kinds (Bence Nanay)

Spring 2008

PHI 510 Ancient Metaphysics and Epistemology (John Robertson)

PHI 575 Philosophy of Social Science (Ken Baynes)

PHI 693 Topics in Moral Philosophy (Ben Bradley)

PHI 880 On Equality (Edward McClennen)

Fall 2007

PHI 550 Decision & Game Theory (Edward McClennen)

PHI 600 Kant's Ethical Theory (Ernesto V. Garcia)

PHI 690 Philosophy of Science (Cotaught: R. VanGulick, B. Nanay, T. McKay, K. Baynes)

PHI 860 Death (Ben Bradley)

Spring 2007

PHI 551 Symbolic Logic (Mark Brown)

PHI 615 Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Ernesto V. Garcia)

PHI 840 Metaontology (Mark Heller)

Fall 2006

PHI 583 Metaphysics (Jose Benardete)

PHI 651 Logic and Language (Mark Brown)

PHI 700 Topics in Ancient Ethics (Michael Stocker)

**Memberships & Societies**

Phi Beta Kappa

American Philosophical Association

**Service**

Senator for the Philosophy Department in the Syracuse University

Graduate Student Organization – 2007-2008

**References**

Michael Stocker (Syracuse University)

Jonathan Jacobs (John Jay College of Criminal Justice)

Kenneth Baynes (Syracuse University)

Kim Frost (Syracuse University)

Teaching: Ben Bradley (Syracuse University)