

CRAVING THE RIGHT: EMOTIONS AND MORAL REASONS¹

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I first began working on emotions as a project in philosophy of action, without particular reference to moral philosophy. My thought was that emotions have a distinctive role to play in rationality that tends to be underappreciated by philosophers. Bringing this out was meant to counter a widespread tendency to treat emotions as “blind” causes of action (for the general picture, see Greenspan 2009.) Instead, I thought that emotions could be seen as providing *reasons*. I took their significance as moral motivators to be hard to miss. Of course, philosophers and others sometimes rightly insist that we need to put emotions aside in order to formulate satisfying moral principles, but I would have been surprised to hear anyone deny that moral motivation typically rests on emotion and that we need that basis in early life in order to get to the stage of acting on moral principles.

However, I have since come to think that none of the main philosophical approaches to ethics fully appreciates the significance of emotion, in part because of a misconception of practical reasons. Reasons for action are commonly taken as *prima facie* requirements, so that moral reasons would yield requirements just insofar as they outweigh competing reasons such as reasons of simple self-interest. Someone who recognizes a moral reason as holding “all things considered” would be irrational not to act on it. But I argue in recent work (starting with Greenspan 2005) that even all-things-considered reasons may in one sense be optional: a rational agent can legitimately “discount” them, cancelling their deliberative weight and their force for motivation. What keeps us from setting aside reasons of the sort that underlie moral

requirements – what explains the “binding” force of moral obligation, on the deontological approach to ethics I favor – is not that moral reasons are necessarily our weightiest. Instead, we lack authority to discount reasons that rest on criticism from the standpoints of other agents (see Greenspan 2007 and forthcoming-b). This argument makes no mention of emotions, though it leaves important room for them, by weakening the force ascribed to non-emotional reasons. It rests on what I call the “critical” conception of practical reasons, which interprets reasons as offering or answering criticism, with reasons in favor of something seen in the first instance as responses to a more basic sort of reason that counts *against* an act or other practical option.

The argument I put forth earlier on emotions (Greenspan 1988, ch. 6; cf. Greenspan 2004) took emotions as supplying us with reasons that can reinforce our non-emotional reasons for doing what we ought, even in some cases where emotions diverge from warranted judgment. Anger, for instance, might tip the balance in favor of a timely response to an act that calls for one, though the evidence at hand favors restraint. My aim was to show how emotions figure as factors in practical reasoning, but the argument intertwined normative and motivational elements that later work on reasons has distinguished more clearly. It sometimes spoke of emotions as themselves *constituting* reasons, which fits an interpretation of reasons as states of mind rather than objective facts. It also was illustrated with a case of anger in response to an insult that did not bring out the moral significance of emotional motivation. Indeed, since it interpreted emotional motivation as driven by a need to improve the agent’s own psychological state, it raised questions about how a foundation in self-concern could be compatible with moral motivation. So I now want to try reformulating the argument in terms of my later interpretation of reasons, with particular focus on how emotions can reinforce *moral* reasons.

In general, on my account emotions serve as rational barriers to discounting. Within the moral sphere, they supply reasons against discounting *either* moral reasons themselves or the supplementary reasons we have for taking reliable means to satisfying them. Discounting moral reasons would exceed our rational authority and hence would be illicit, though not strictly irrational. But discounting the instrumental reasons that supplement them would also be inadvisable insofar as it involves taking a risk of moral failure. Later I focus particularly on this inadvisable-but-licit form of discounting, which brings out more fully the rational significance of emotions. As barriers to the illicit discounting of moral reasons, emotions provide important motivational backing to reasons sufficient to require action on their own. But as barriers to the inadvisable discounting of reasons serving to supplement moral reasons, emotions actually supply further normative reasons needed to require action *now*. In slogan form: emotions make the case against moral delay.

These claims will be explained more fully as they emerge in my argument below. For the moment, though, I want to outline briefly my general approach to reasons as I take it to bear on emotions, at this point focusing on the simpler role of emotions as barriers to illicit discounting. Essentially, then, I make out emotions as a source of higher-order reasons, against setting certain first-order reasons aside: declining to take them into account in deliberation, in the way I think we can sometimes do without compromising rationality. But what that role amounts to will take different forms, with different implications for moral motivation, depending on what sorts of reasons are in question. The critical conception of practical reasons makes a basic distinction between reasons that yield requirements and reasons that merely justify or commend (cf. Gert 2004 and Horgan and Timmons forthcoming). Within the moral sphere, this amounts to a

distinction between reasons of the sort that can generate moral obligations – or in virtue-ethical terms, that can capture the requisites of basic moral worth – and reasons for morally good but nonobligatory acts such as ideal instances of virtue. I call reasons of the sort that yield requirements negative, or “critical,” since they count against alternatives to the required act, offering criticism of it as in some way objectionable. The contrast is to (purely) positive, or “favoring,” reasons, which cite valuable features of an act as answers to potential criticism but imply no significant criticism of alternatives to it and hence may be discounted at will.

Now, emotions clearly have a role to play in getting us to satisfy positive or favoring reasons that we otherwise might discount. Whatever independent moral reasons we recognize for an act of generosity, for instance, will be harder to ignore if backed up by emotional concern for the person benefitted by the act. The story is more complicated for critical reasons, but also more interesting, if we take critical moral reasons as sources of binding obligation. All-things-considered critical *nonmoral* reasons, despite their role as sources of nonmoral requirements, will sometimes be subject to discounting by appeal to higher-order “exclusionary” reasons (cf. Raz 1990) such as those based on decisions to set certain priorities. For instance, I might decide to place a priority on single-minded devotion to research that excludes attention to reasons for service on university committees, even if these reasons sometimes happen to be weightier than any opposing reasons, for avoiding distractions from a particular research project. However, while a rational agent might sometimes be inclined to discount critical *moral* reasons on the same basis – essentially prioritizing self-interest – to do so would seem to indicate a failure to appreciate fully their status as reasons whose underlying criticism comes from the standpoints of other agents.² We are authorized to discount only our own criticism, in short. So whatever

emotional qualms we feel about wrongful treatment of others can help keep us from exceeding our rational authority with regard to moral reasons.

Insofar as they reinforce critical moral reasons, then, emotions serve to block a sophisticated rational maneuver from being misapplied to the moral sphere. That, in highly condensed form, is the basic point I want to defend in this paper, as ascribing a normative role to emotions that is compatible with both rationality and genuinely moral motivation. The simpler point about emotions as motivating action on moral “favoring” reasons, adding inducements to virtue, seems fairly obvious. Perhaps this is part of the reason why assigning importance to emotions in ethics usually tends to be interpreted as support for virtue ethics. A number of authors understand emotions as ways of perceiving values (see especially Sousa 1987), which fits particularly well with an Aristotelian approach, and even recent Kantian arguments against taking Kant as dismissive of emotions (see, e.g., Sherman 1990) defend him by bringing out what he had to say about virtue. But I have wanted to make out emotions as significant factors in deontological ethics as well.

My interpretation of practical reasons in terms of criticism is itself intended to support a deontological approach: favoring reasons, however many and however strong, need not add up to a requirement on my account, so the binding force of moral obligation cannot be explained just by the weight of reasons in favor of satisfying it. What I want to say of emotions, then, is not just that they let us perceive values, and in that sense register favoring reasons, but also that they give rise to further *critical* reasons – objective normative reasons, not just motives. Their weight in themselves is relatively trivial – as we have to say in order to avoid “bootstrapping” problems, counting action as rational in cases where the emotions they express are misdirected – but they

can add crucial reinforcement to the reasons that underlie moral and other requirements.

My discussion here will be framed in deontological terms, but the intended contrast to my understanding of moral requirements in terms of reasons is a consequentialist account of them simply as a function of our weightiest reasons. My central points should also apply (*mutatis mutandis*) to Aristotelian theories that eschew talk of obligation but still have room for a threshold of basic moral worth that would demand a modicum of virtue of all moral agents, whether or not they attain the status of virtuous persons or a level of ideal virtue. Taking certain acts as inappropriate will be enough to yield a notion of requirement – and in fact will fit more naturally than talk of obligation with my account in terms of reasons *against* action. But my treatment of moral requirement would have trouble accommodating virtue-ethical approaches that disallow any special place to moral virtue. In this way and others, I also depart from the widespread assumption that a stress on the role of emotion in ethics is essentially Humean.

Elsewhere (in Greenspan forthcoming-a; cf. Greenspan 1995 and 1998) I argue that the role of emotions in early moral learning is what initially supplies moral judgments with motivational force, and that the need for this basis constrains the content of morality, so that emotions figure indirectly among the grounds for moral judgment. In this paper I instead turn back to my earlier and more basic argument for the role of emotions as sources of reasons in adult life, but now formulated more explicitly for moral reasons. First, in Sections 1-2, I extend the argument in light of later work on reasons to try to make better sense of the claim that emotional reasons can be significant factors in rational and moral deliberation, even if relatively trivial in themselves. Then, in Section 3-4, I show why it is important that their independent weight is minimal and that they serve merely to reinforce moral and other non-emotional reasons.

The critical conception of practical reasons will help me answer two major objections to my 1988 argument, from rational bootstrapping and emotional self-concern.

1. *Reinforcing Reasons*

I understand an emotion as a compound of affect and evaluation: pleasant or unpleasant feelings about valued or disvalued features attributed to something that counts as the object of emotion. The evaluative component of an appropriate emotion, while itself a state of awareness, can register a fact that amounts to an objective practical reason: a reason holding independently of anyone's awareness of it. The fact, for instance, that someone has been treated unjustly counts as a reason against standing idly by, if speaking out might make a difference, whether or not anyone recognizes the injustice or is upset about letting it go unchallenged. My claim about emotions is that a further reason is added to this if one does feel upset – not because that implies awareness, but rather as a fact about the well-being of the one who undergoes the emotion. It is a fact with normative implications insofar as it attributes to an agent a bad psychological state: a state of emotional discomfort.

The fact that one is uncomfortable about something counts in itself as a reason for action – action to prevent the feeling from continuing – apart from any properties attributed to its object. So an appropriate emotion, besides having an evaluative component that reflects a practical reason, can add as a further reason a criticism, from the agent's standpoint, of her own state of feeling. The fact that she is in a state of discomfort is normative insofar as it actually counts against her failure to act to relieve it, whether or not the discomfort or her recognition of it also serves as a motive.

Where the evaluative component of emotion reflects a *moral* reason, though, one might ask why it should need any normative reinforcement. What could be stronger than a moral reason? First, let me say that I do not take it for granted, as some philosophers do, that moral considerations necessarily outweigh all others. In any case, moral reasons sometimes compete among themselves. Reinforcement, even by a reason comparatively trivial – the need to improve one’s own state of feeling – may sometimes serve to tip a precarious balance. But secondly, I question whether weight is the only thing at issue in comparing reasons. Another factor that came into my 1988 argument was “pressuring” status: the tendency of emotional discomfort to demand more or less *immediate* action. An emotion may be said to be slanted toward present satisfaction to the extent that action is needed to prevent continuation of its element of discomfort. This need not mean that the weight of the reason or reasons supplied by an emotion adds up over time to something nontrivial. Pressure involves a time-constraint on satisfying a reason rather than simply its importance. My argument here will also illustrate how its position in our overall structure of reasons can give an emotional reason a significance that is not just a matter of weight.

Let us work with an everyday example: John, a department head, unfairly blocks a salary increase for Jack, apparently to get back at him for opposition on policy issues. Simply being aware of an injustice may not give a particular department member, Alice, decisive reason to speak out on her colleague’s behalf, if others could do so instead while she held back. She could save her response until later, in private conversations with other department members, to avoid risking retaliation from John, but by then his remarks will have had their effect. Even if challenging the decision would not do Jack much good, it is called for as a rebuke to John that

would be undermined by postponement, let us suppose. Morally speaking, it would be wrong for John's remarks to go unchallenged. But Alice might have weightier reason to keep silent, at least for the time being, assuming that only non-emotional reasons are in play. However, suppose she is upset at so far failing to respond to an injustice to her colleague. In that case, she has a reason against waiting for others to respond. The need to avoid continuing emotional discomfort may have little weight in itself, but it adds a kind of pressure to act now.

My 1988 argument presented a simpler, nonmoral version of this sort of case, involving a response to a personal insult, with the emotional reason summed up (p. 155) as

I am uncomfortable at the thought that I ought to get back at X.

Before reformulating this for the salary case, some clarification is in order. Despite disclaimers, my representation of the reason by a first-person judgment may have given the impression of an attempt to capture a step in a passage of reasoning on the part of an agent contemplating action. But the aim was just a "rational reconstruction" of the grounds for action, of the sort exemplified by Aristotle's practical syllogism: putting into the form of a first-person argument what in psychological terms may have been just an automatic response to a tacitly accepted reason. Nor was the self-attribution of emotion meant to capture a reason in some subjective sense, dependent on the agent's state of belief about her emotional state, whether or not mistaken. What the indented statement attributes to the agent is a subjective state of emotion, but the fact that someone is in that state can still be said to supply an objective reason in the sense of a reason holding independently of the agent's acknowledgment of it.

The ought judgment represented as an object of thought in the indented statement – "I ought to get back at X" – asserts what I think of as the evaluative content of the relevant emotion.

The emotion in my 1988 example was characterized as personal anger, and the parallel for the salary case would be moral indignation, though discomfort at so far failing to act on the emotion might be seen as a form of *guilt* (cf. Greenspan 1995). The indented statement is somewhat abbreviated: the object of discomfort is not precisely the requirement to get back at X, but rather the fact that I have yet to satisfy that requirement; it might be spelled out further as “the thought that I *still* ought to get back at X.” My claim was that, assuming emotional appropriateness (understood as entailing adequate reason to hold in mind the evaluative component of emotion by making it an object of discomfort), the fact of emotional discomfort could reinforce independent reasons for action on the ought judgment. I now want to ask how my later work on critical reasons might help make further sense of this claim, focusing on reasons supporting a *moral* ought judgment, as illustrated by the salary case.

Let me proceed slowly, at the risk of belaboring a few points. Since I did not undertake the project on reasons with any thought of bringing it to bear on emotions, my task entails combining two somewhat complex arguments, each of which turns on some claims at variance with common assumptions. But a recent extension of my argument on reasons to the notion of imperfect obligation (see Greenspan forthcoming-b) yields a way of explaining how a need to relieve emotional discomfort can add something significant to an agent’s reasons for action despite its own relatively trivial weight.

My general claim is that emotion can supply, not just a motivational influence, but also a normative reason. It can do so even where inappropriate, but in that case its force for action would be negligible: it would provide just as much reason for various other ways of alleviating discomfort that do not satisfy the ought judgment, in the way that a headache provides reason for

taking an aspirin. I have more to say later about such cases, but for the moment we may assume that Alice's emotion is appropriate. On my 1988 account that means that Alice has adequate reason to hold in mind its evaluative component by making it an object of affect (assumed to be proportionate in degree). Let us even assume that a corresponding judgment, that an injustice has been committed and deserves a timely response, would be both warranted and true. The question is why it should matter to Alice's deliberations that she actually feels discomfort at standing idly by. For it is the affective element of emotion on my account that supplies a normative reason.

An understanding of emotions as perceptions of value might see our feelings in such cases simply as serving to make us aware of relevant reasons, so that emotions have epistemic rather than direct practical significance. On that account emotions would not supply but rather just "track" practical reasons (see Jones 2003 and 2004), reasons that in principle could become known to us in other ways, even if affect serves to make them more salient (cf. Rorty 1980, Sousa 1987) and thereby affords us more immediate or reliable access to them. What I propose will incorporate elements of a perceptual account, but I mean to add something further. Nor is it just that emotions have moral significance as signs of good character or praiseworthy motives. I should also spell out that my talk of "appropriate" emotion in Greenspan 1988 did not imply or rest on a judgment of *moral* appropriateness (cf. D'Arms and Jacobson 2000), but rather just "representational rationality," understood as a notion of evidential warrant. Similarly, in my later work on reasons I extend "criticism" beyond moral criticism to any claim that something is bad, possibly just *for* a given agent. What I want to say about emotions, then, is that, besides being "reason-trackers," they also should be seen as "reason-*contributors*." Besides alerting us to moral reasons by registering them in affect – or even thereby backing them up with a further

motive for action, a practical “push” of the sort suggested by psychologists’ talk of the “valence” of emotions (cf., e.g., Frijda 1986, p. 207) – emotional discomfort reinforces moral reasons with nonmoral criticism for failure to act, criticism from the agent’s standpoint, that yields a further reason. On this account emotions play an integral role within practical rationality, rather than merely serving as external inducements to it, in the way that feelings of curiosity or worry about evidence might help promote theoretical rationality.

Importantly, emotional discomfort can be seen as adding a layer of criticism to moral reasons that are not critical themselves. Consider again Alice’s reason to challenge John. A moral reason against failing to respond to an injustice essentially offers a criticism of failure to respond, but from a standpoint other than the agent’s – in the first instance, that of the victim of injustice. So Alice could not legitimately discount such a criticism on her own, though she might counter it with other reasons for remaining silent, at any rate for the time being. For one thing, there presumably are other members of the department to whom she might leave the job of responding, assuming that the requirement plus other facts of the case do not pick out her in particular. But the thought that she ought to make some response may still be appropriate for her to hold in mind with emotion, even if the corresponding judgment is not strictly warranted in the terms that apply to belief. Insofar as the thought is an object of discomfort, moreover, the fact that a failure to respond would keep that feeling in play constitutes a further, nonmoral criticism of inaction: that it would prolong her state of discomfort.

In general, then, in a case of collective obligation, emotion can add a critical reason to what amounts merely to a favoring reason for action, as applied to an individual agent, with no criticism specifically of *her* failure to act. It would not just add weight to a preexisting reason,

but rather introduce a different sort of reason, thereby getting a general moral requirement to devolve on a particular agent.³ I now want to apply this model to what might be called “multi-temporal” cases, in which the agent gets to choose *when* to act to satisfy an obligation.

2. *Rational Pressure*

What we have in both collective and multi-temporal cases is an *imperfect* obligation, which yields reasons, but merely favoring reasons, for various particular ways of satisfying it (see Greenspan forthcoming-b), restricting criticism to a failure to satisfy it at all. A collective obligation can be satisfied by different individuals, whereas in multi-temporal cases there are several different *times* for satisfying an obligation. Let me now use this model to explain the sense in which emotions introduce a slant toward the present into individual practical reasoning. Even if a response to John’s comments in the salary case were required of Alice in particular, an immediate response might not be specifically required. Any delay is risky – besides the threat of postponement until too late, it might weaken the force of the response – but any of several times during a certain period would be acceptable, let us suppose. However, the prospect of emotional discomfort introduces a further criticism of even slight postponement and in that sense adds an element of urgency or pressure to Alice’s reasons.

Taking action right away may be advisable for Alice, not just commendable, in this multi-temporal case, if otherwise she would risk compromising the effectiveness of her response. Even before introducing the element of emotion, that is, we might suppose that Alice would be subject to rational criticism for failing to respond immediately, if she would thereby risk failing to respond in time. She would not be subject to *moral* criticism, since all she is morally required to

do is to fulfill the obligation somehow, not necessarily to take reliable means to fulfilling it. She can be said to have a moral *reason* to take reliable means, but in my terms this amounts to a favoring rather than a critical reason. However, instrumental considerations do suffice to yield a critical *nonmoral* reason that might be said to supplement the moral reasons in play, apart from any emotional reinforcement.

Even where it is not needed to supply a critical reason, though, emotion may still add reinforcement to one in the form of a further critical reason, appealing to the agent's own psychological state as a barrier to discounting her other reasons. Discounting, remember, amounts to setting a reason aside, cancelling its deliberative weight while still acknowledging it as a reason: deciding not to be moved by some consideration. For instance, in assigning grades, you ignore a student's need for a passing grade in order to graduate; or during last-minute preparations for a class, you put out of mind the various other tasks pressing for attention. In such cases discounting involves a refusal to take certain reasons into consideration, but not necessarily a low estimate of their importance in relation to competing reasons, or their preexisting weight. In some cases, you might acknowledge that the discounted reason is weightier but simply be exercising an option, rationally speaking, of imposing your own structure on the relevant reasons: setting priorities, in short.

Discounting on this basis involves appeal to higher-order considerations: reasons for setting certain priorities, favoring certain first-order reasons above others.⁴ But you cannot legitimately set aside others' criticisms while claiming to recognize them as reasons that would otherwise require action on your part. To the extent that we sometimes might be inclined to discount moral reasons illegitimately, however, emotions that make this harder have a role to

play in moral reasoning, just insofar as they help to keep it on course.

However, my treatment of emotional reasons in cases involving imperfect obligation extends the role of emotions beyond correcting an error in moral reasoning. In multi-temporal cases emotions provide *both* a further reason for action and a further higher-order reason against discounting the reasons that supplement critical moral reasons, bringing them to bear on a specific moment of action. Discounting is legitimate where it is applied to either noncritical or nonmoral reasons: either reasons that count in favor of some particular way of satisfying an obligation but imply no criticism of alternatives, as in cases of collective obligation, or reasons that imply a rational but not a moral criticism of alternatives, as in multi-temporal cases. So besides making it harder to shift responsibility, emotions provide reasons against moral delay.

This amounts to more than simply spurring or goading us to act, as I often put the matter in 1988. Emotional pressure on my account is meant to be part of the *justification* for immediate action, not just part of its cause. Alice's emotion in the salary case, for instance, gives her further reason for an immediate response to John, rather than merely increasing the probability of a response that may be justified on other grounds. I do not take this point to be incompatible with perceptual or other accounts of emotions, but I doubt whether existing accounts can accommodate it as they stand.

I explain the legitimacy of discounting critical reasons in terms of higher-order "exclusionary" reasons, in Raz's (1990) term, which I apply to reasons based on an agent's decision to exclude certain first-order reasons from consideration. That decision in turn may be made on the basis of further reasons – possibly just favoring reasons, where discounting is optional rather than required.⁵ In the salary case, for instance, Alice might just think she could

phrase her comments better (though let us assume they would not be more effective) if she took more time to respond. Her reason for discounting should not be confused with the exclusionary reason she would have by virtue of having discounted or with the first-order reason that discounting would give her reason to set aside. To help make such distinctions clearer, I have provided a sketch in Figure 1 of the various reasons in play in a case where Alice does discount. The figure assumes that Alice acts in accordance with her reasons; her primary (moral) reason appears in capitals, and space is left to fill in later her emotional reasons against discounting in a figure set up for contrast.

Discounting means putting on blinders of a sort, making oneself insensitive to certain first-order reasons, as indicated by the line struck out in the figure. While still acknowledging it as a reason, Alice would decline to take it into account in her current deliberation – as distinct from taking it to be outweighed by opposing first-order reasons, reasons in favor of postponement. If anything, her decision would be to *put* greater weight on opposing reasons – by discounting the reasons they oppose – rather than simply acting in accordance with their pre-given weights. Unless she leans on the scales, as it were, by discounting – which the case assumes to be rationally as well as morally permissible, but not required – she might be thought to have *less* reason to phrase her response better than to make sure it comes in time. She is within her rights to accept a certain risk of waiting too long for the sake of abiding by a commitment to verbal clarity or the like, as long as she indeed manages to respond in time.

As thus described, discounting amounts to a legitimate maneuver *within* practical reasoning, not a failure to abide by its conclusions, or an instance of weakness of will, of the sort that is often involved in procrastination. This is not to deny that there are limits to how much

motivated to act on, the sorts of reasons that stand behind the ought judgment in R(em), on the order of

R(mor) John's treatment of Jack deserves challenge.

But it also reinforces supplementary critical nonmoral reasons incorporating rational advice about how to satisfy the ought judgment, as summed up in

R(sup) Postponement would risk making action on R(mor) ineffective.

Even if R(mor) is true, warranted, and acknowledged by Alice, that is, she might be inclined to put off acting on it, or on the ought judgment in R(em), by discounting R(sup) – perhaps quite legitimately, on the basis of reasons such as

R(disc) Discounting reasons against postponement would let Alice phrase her response better.

The legitimacy of discounting need not reflect the comparative weights of preexisting reasons: a well-phrased response may be less important than ensuring a timely response. The decision to discount may be optional, then, but once made, it would give rise to a further, critical reason, against failing to abide by it.

R(em) gives a reason against making the decision: The threat of continuing discomfort until Alice acts, besides reinforcing the ought judgment in R(em), or the reasons given for it in R(mor), also figures as a reason against discounting R(sup) whose significance also does not depend solely on weight. Here is where we can make telling use of the perceptual theorists' point that emotions affect salience: given the tendency of emotional discomfort to absorb attention, emotional reasons are not so easily set aside. We may sometimes have good reason for excluding them from deliberation, as noted, but presumably that applies to cases where they pull

against other practical or moral requirements, whereas on our assumption discounting R(sup) is optional, not required.⁷ What is at issue at this level is the comparison of R(em) as a higher-order reason with other reasons operating at the same level, such as R(disc). Since by hypothesis these are not decisive, even weak reinforcement may carry the day.

In short: it is the position of emotional reasons within an overall structure of reasons, rather than their independent weight, that gives them a significant role on my account. Emotions yield reinforcing reasons on two levels (cf. the account of decision in Raz 1990, pp. 37-45). Besides reinforcing first-order moral reasons with a motivational barrier to discounting them illicitly, they also yield higher-order reasons against a form of discounting that is licit but inadvisable: discounting the supplementary reasons that narrow our options for fulfilling moral reasons, such as reasons against delay. A rough picture of the role of emotional reasons as reasons against discounting is given in Figure 2. We should note that their role also depends on theoretical reasons that do not appear in the figure: the fact that emotional discomfort tends to absorb attention is a reason for thinking it hard to abide by a decision to discount reasons against postponement. But the upshot is a practical reason against making the decision – against an act of self-legislation that would yield an unworkable law.

The third-party formulation of the salary case makes it clear that its conclusion is not just a claim about what is likely to motivate Alice or how she is likely to assess her reasons while in the grips of an emotion. Anyone in a position to attribute the emotion to Alice can attribute to her the same reason for action. One might object that this would give other members of the department a reason not to speak up themselves: “Let Alice be the one to address the issue, since she feels so strongly about it.” In fact, that does make sense, though it ignores the question

whether others really ought to share Alice's emotional reaction. In any case, we should bear in mind that even Alice's reinforced reason need not be decisive: it might be countered, say, by reasons against allowing her to be exploited by others – for her heightened moral sensitivity, in effect. Or alternatively, if others did share Alice's reaction, there might also be reasons against *too many* people responding. But let me bypass further possible complications in order to see how the general idea this case is meant to illustrate can deal with major objections.

3. *Misdirected Emotions*

The general idea is that of emotions as *cravings*. It is important that we can capture their force for action, then, without assigning any significant weight to them as independent reasons, just because, like cravings, they can often be misdirected. They do have normative force – a craving for a certain snack counts as a reason against passing it up, just insofar as leaving the craving unsatisfied would tend to be uncomfortable and distracting – but how much it amounts to depends on that of other reasons for action. A craving for a *healthful* snack would add a reason for having it now to the fact that it is good for you. But instead of acting to satisfy a craving for junk food, say, you would have a reason, in light of its distracting aspect, to do what you can to get rid of it *without* satisfying it. Similarly for an inappropriate emotion.

Suppose that, in the salary case, Alice's thought that John is treating Jack unjustly amounts to an unfounded suspicion. If we took her feelings of outrage to give her a serious reason for action, that would threaten to "bootstrap" into rationality (cf. Bratman 1987) a response that intuitively would be both irrational and unjust.⁸ The emotion itself would remain irrational in the sense of inappropriate, but action on it might seem to be rationally justified as a

way of alleviating discomfort. Instead, on the present account, we can say that whatever reason Alice has for venting her feelings would be so weak that it would be reasonable to act on only in the absence of serious reasons to the contrary. But the fact that an emotion is inappropriate would itself constitute a reason not to express it – normally supplementing further reasons in situations like the one envisioned, where expression would be unwise or unjust.

Moreover, even if these opposing reasons balance out, or if we imagine a case in which a reason based on an inappropriate emotion is unopposed (a reason for venting when no one is around, say, which presumably will do no harm), the emotional reason will not be decisive – will not make action on it rational in the sense of rationally *required* – given that the critical conception of practical reasons allows the option of discounting nonmoral reasons. The most anyone could bootstrap into on the basis of an inappropriate emotion, then, is a rational permission: it is “within reason” to vent one’s feelings in cases where there is no reason not to. Surely that claim sits perfectly well with intuition.

It might initially seem odd to suggest that one can have a reason for discounting an emotional reason that one has no reason not to act on. Emotional discomfort is supposed to supply a critical reason, after all, and discounting a critical reason requires appeal to a higher-order exclusionary reason on my account. However, the fact that an emotion is inappropriate also seems to be a reason to discount whatever reasons it yields – but a favoring reason, so that discounting would merely be an option. (Remember that it is the affective element of emotion one would thereby be discounting.) Note, too, that, with reasons understood as objective facts, the higher-order reason to discount is not limited to emotions the agent *recognizes* as inappropriate. So we can say both that an agent has the option of discounting an inappropriate

emotion and that the emotion gives her a reason against failing to act on it, albeit of only minimal weight. In the rare case where she has no opposing reasons, she can take her choice.

This assumes that discounting is something she can manage to do. Discounting requires control of attention, but in a practical sense involving, not just awareness of the emotion, but also control over its influence on deliberation: attending to it *as a reason*. The analogy to cravings might help here. Even if you cannot get rid of your craving for a Big Mac and fries when you pass McDonald's in the shopping mall, you might still refuse to assign it any weight as a reason to stop for lunch there. My argument in the previous section appealed to the difficulty of discounting emotional discomfort insofar as it tends to absorb attention, and the transition from awareness to practical attention is natural and hard to resist. But it is not impossible. You can refuse to be moved by an urge you cannot ignore. That is what it would mean to discount the reason based on an inappropriate emotion that persists as a state of discomfort.

Instead, as with a food craving, emotional discomfort would seem to yield a reason for doing something else to get rid of the emotion. Similarly, the discomfort of a headache is a reason to take an aspirin. However, we need not conclude from this that an emotion is reason-giving only in the unfocused way that a headache is. We can take an emotion as yielding a reason specifically for action to satisfy its evaluative component, but a reason that will normally be overridden, and can always be discounted, in cases where the emotion is inappropriate.

The analogy between emotions and cravings needs careful interpretation in light of the concern in recent literature with the question whether desires can be reason-giving. Cravings are desires, of course, but they involve more than what contemporary philosophers typically have in mind by desire. Desire in the philosopher's sense – what my 1988 argument calls “affectless

desire” – amounts just to another propositional attitude figuring alongside belief in the explanation of action. It is often said to differ from belief in “direction of fit”: whereas beliefs are supposed to fit the world, the world is supposed to fit our desires, or if not, to be modified by action on our desires. But it should be evident from the role of emotional discomfort in my argument that this is not all I think there is to an emotion, or to the practical reason based on emotion. (For that matter, I argue in Greenspan 1995 that emotions exhibit a *mixed* direction of fit, insofar as their evaluative elements are belieflike.) An affective element is essential to a craving, as an instance of the commonsense conception of desire as involving felt discomfort unless satisfied..

The reference to discomfort provides a basis for reasons in facts that may be independent of desires in the philosopher’s sense. My 1988 argument interpreted discomfort as a state an agent would naturally want to escape, but even on that reading it would remain open whether an agent on a particular occasion wants to escape some instance of discomfort. I take discomfort to be a state of feeling that is picked out as such, but is not therefore constituted, by the desire, on typical occasions, to escape it. We can see it as providing a *reason* for action to escape it, even if we would deny that the mere fact of wanting something, without discomfort at not yet having it, would provide a reason for action to attain it. In the absence of discomfort, what provides a reason for satisfying a desire might instead be the value attributed to its object, or to the experience of attaining its object, rather than the present state of desire.

One thing emotions and cravings have in common, though, in contrast to standard states of desire (cf. Pettit and Smith 1990, esp. pp 576f.), is that they yield reasons only as long as they continue. My current desire (in the philosopher’s sense) to finish this paper by the deadline is a

desire that I meet the deadline whether or not I retain the desire. If desires were reason-giving, it would presumably yield a reason I now have for meeting the deadline even if I should change my mind as the deadline approaches. But *worry* about missing the deadline, considered just as a state of discomfort, apart from any independent reasons why I ought to meet the deadline, would yield only a reason conditional on continuing to worry. So in the case of an inappropriate emotion, reason-giving force would not extend beyond the emotion's element of discomfort – just as a craving for a Big Mac and fries while walking past McDonald's would give you no reason to go back there later, if the craving dissipates after you walk by.

This limitation applies in the absence of further reasons for retaining an emotion or craving. In some cases there may be such reasons, despite the intrinsic disvalue of discomfort. An emotion or craving may be valued for its motivational effect or its tendency to heighten enjoyment of attaining the desired object. Consider curiosity of the “driven” sort, involving an itch to know that would be frustrating not to satisfy, rather than just pleasure at satisfaction. There also may be non-instrumental reasons, most notably moral reasons, for emotion – for guilt in response to wrongful action (or even just wrong-making features of action that are serious enough to hold in mind with affect) or for grief or sympathetic sorrow or some other instance of the kind of concern for others that is essential to moral virtue.

A different sort of problem besides rational bootstrapping might seem to be raised by the possibility that appropriate emotions (in the sense, once again, of rationally appropriate) might sometimes reinforce *contra*-moral reasons. In a conflict between moral and self-interested reasons, could a stronger emotion on the side of self-interest manage to tip the balance in its favor, when otherwise moral reasons would have been decisive? The relatively trivial weight of

emotional reasons counts against this in general, but there might be cases where weighty enough self-interested considerations, such as reasons against abandoning or interrupting one's life-project, have enough weight as supplemented by emotion to carry the day against moral considerations. However, the kinds of moral reasons for emotion that were just mentioned presumably include requirements to feel strongly enough about fulfilling our more serious moral obligations. The fact that the agent in a particular case might happen not to care whether she harms others, say, will not mean that she ought to favor self-interest at their expense. But let me now address another objection to my account, focusing on the role of self-concern in cases where emotions reinforce moral reasons.

4. *Nonmoral Motivation*

If emotions motivate by way of a need to alleviate one's own discomfort, that might seem to mean that agents acting out of emotion to satisfy a moral obligation are acting on the basis of "ulterior" motives of a sort that undermine moral worth. Emotions may merely serve to reinforce moral reasons, but cases where they are essential to motivation – for instance, if Alice in the salary case would not have spoken up in time without the pressure to improve her own state of feeling – might seem analogous to familiar examples of apparent moral virtue that really manifests morally unworthy motives: honesty or charity motivated by a desire to look good in others' eyes, say, rather than by concern with truth-telling for its own sake or with others' welfare. Or at best, the agent would have mixed motives, some of them moral but compromised by others that bring in self-interest.

One response available to us immediately, on the basis of the preceding discussion, is an

appeal to the slight weight of emotional reasons in comparison to the moral reasons that primarily motivate the agent in such cases. It would seem to take an over-scrupulous concern with purity of moral motive to object to an agent's placing even minimal weight on her own state of feeling. But I think we can also see that the emotions in play in such cases *are* moral *motives*, even though they supply us with nonmoral reasons on the account I have defended. I understand an emotion as a compound of affect and evaluation, and R(em) should make it clear how integrally the two components are connected: the affective state of discomfort is *about* a moral evaluation that amounts to the content of the emotion. The result is a moral emotion – an emotion with a moral content – that motivates via self-concern. The mechanism is complex: what we have is an emotion incorporating a moral reason but reinforcing it with a nonmoral reason – the fact of emotional discomfort – that helps give rise to action. But this is not to say that the agent thus motivated will be focusing on his own state of feeling rather than on moral considerations (cf. Pugmire 2007). The point of emotional affect is to convey attention to what it is about: in this case, a moral reason.

I see emotions in such cases as the way we essentially build awareness of moral reasons into our individual motivational resources. An agent deserves moral credit for being open to the emotions in question – for indeed feeling discomfort about unsatisfied moral requirements, instead of being emotionally indifferent to them, or taking steps to get rid of any emotional discomfort at them without satisfying them, in the manner appropriate to a headache. This depends on acknowledging that we have a degree of control over what we feel, but I think that claim can be defended (cf. Greenspan 2000). The point for present purposes is just that moral credit does not depend on keeping our motives unpolluted by self-interest but rather on being

ready to harness our complete stock of motivational resources to moral ends.

So the problem raised for moral motivation by the self-interested nature of emotional reasons seems to evaporate on closer analysis. But one might think that a different problem about emotions as nonmoral motivators arises in cases of conflict between moral and emotional reasons, of the sort that came up briefly at the end of my previous section, but viewed from the opposite angle. That is, some might want to say I have conceded too much to the moralists in working to explain the moral relevance of emotional reasons without assigning them more than minimal weight in comparison to moral reasons. A “bolder” view would allow for cases where strong enough feelings rightly rule the day against at least some nontrivial moral requirements.

I am reminded particularly of an example in McFall 1987 of an adulterer who might still be seen as acting out of integrity (personal, rather than moral, integrity) insofar as she acts in obedience to her principles rather than impulsively. Her principles demand even moral sacrifice for the sake of a great love. However, I think one could grant this – and even that she might thereby be acting in accordance with her all-things-considered reasons – without assigning any great weight to emotional reasons per se. That is, what might be held to justify her act is presumably not just the fact that she would undergo discomfort if she failed to follow her principles. It is the value the principles attribute to romantic relationships that bears the weight here. Alternatively, one might cite some ill effects of romantic frustration – a debilitating sense of personal conflict, say, possibly even undermining the marital relationship – as serious enough to warrant compromising moral integrity. But again, this goes beyond the fact of current discomfort, which is the source of the emotional reasons at issue in this paper.

We also sometimes place non-instrumental value on emotions themselves, considered not

just as aspects of our well-being or as accompaniments of valued relationships, but also as manifesting a valued sensitivity. Feelings of love, even where painful, might be encouraged as signs of a kind of vulnerability to others that we regard highly: being “a person who needs people,” in the words of the popular song. Or in the case of driven curiosity mentioned earlier, the very craving for knowledge may be seen as an ennobling trait, quite apart from its effects. Moral emotions as states of discomfort also have a general moral value just insofar as they are directed at the right objects. One ought to feel something for those in need, say, even where one can do nothing to help them. Presumably, though, the ennobling quality of such feelings should not prompt us to maintain them by withholding acts that *could* help others. There will be enough occasions for sympathy later on.

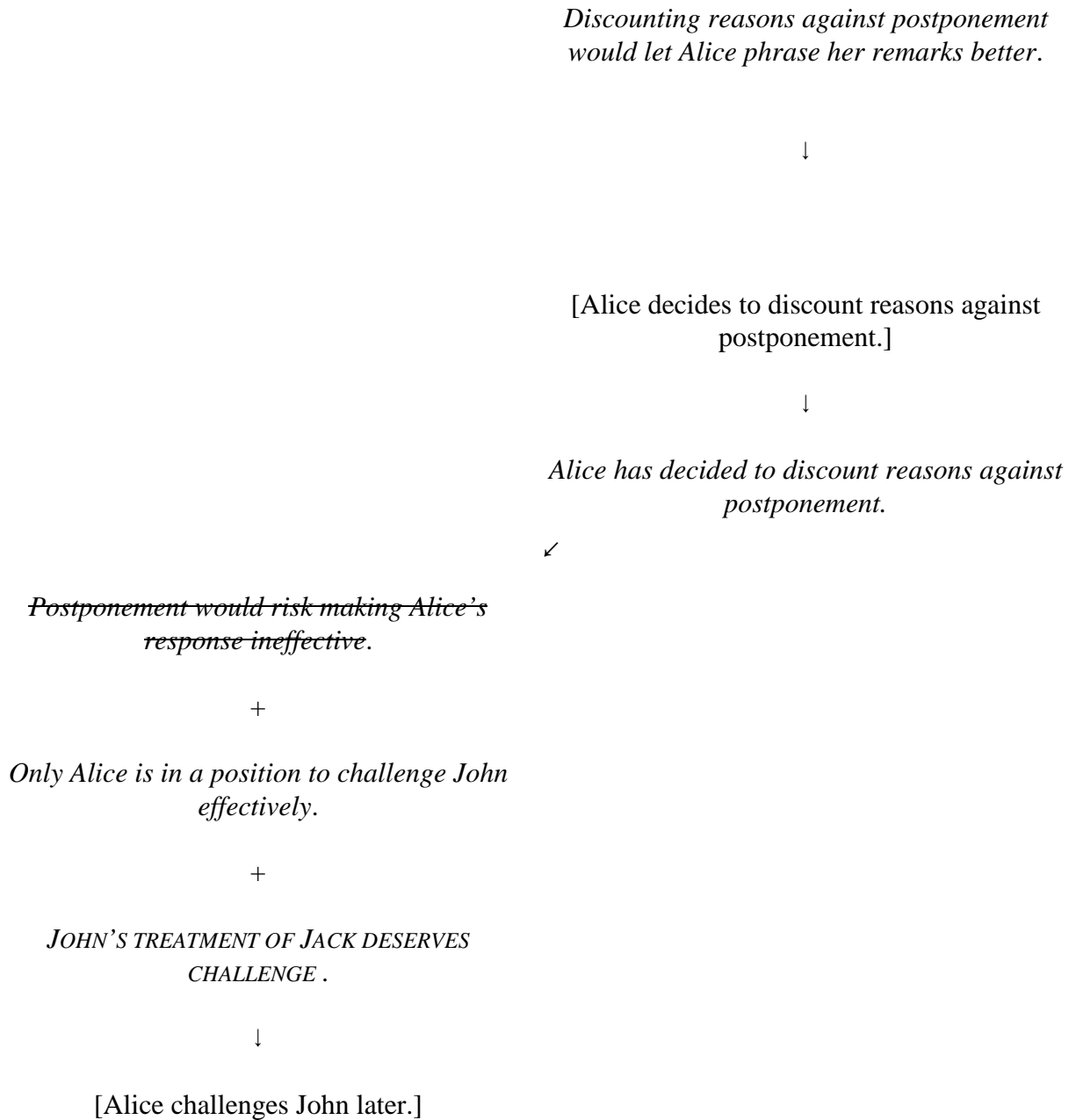
Some who value emotions as aspects of moral virtue apparently mean to favor only the more pleasurable manifestations of love or sympathy for others, without the element of emotional discomfort that my argument turns on. But in the way that active love of learning involves a craving to find out, the impact of feelings like these on moral action would seem to depend at least on an element of envisioned discomfort as long as one fails to satisfy them. As with ordinary cravings, they might not entail actually feeling discomfort in situations where one can satisfy them easily, without thought or effort (including moral debate). But in normal cases, they would seem to be unalloyed states of pleasure only as passive states, whereas a propensity to act is surely an essential part of moral virtue. What emotional discomfort does on my account is to back up the propensity with a felt need.

It is indeed a kind of self-concern that gets us beyond passivity to moral action. I do not see this as morally compromising. Instead, it adds a naturalistic motivational base to conceptions

of morality framed in terms of reasons or other abstract normative notions. Part of what motivates a behaving organism is the betterment of its own state, simultaneously with a focus on changing the external situation. We are beings complex enough to combine inner and outer sources of action. I have argued accordingly that emotions add to moral motivation what amounts to cravings for the right: moral motives reinforcing moral reasons with weak but crucially positioned nonmoral reasons against moral delay.

Figure 1:

DISCOUNTING REASONS AGAINST POSTPONEMENT



Bracketed entries amount to acts, rather than reasons. Same-level reasons are separated by “+”, with vertical arrows between reasons indicating a change in level (from second- to first-order reasons or the like). The diagonal arrow indicates the effect of discounting.

Figure 2:

EMOTIONS AS REASONS AGAINST DISCOUNTING

Alice is uncomfortable at the thought that she ought to challenge John.

Discounting reasons against postponement would let Alice phrase her remarks better.

↓

A decision to discount reasons against postponement would probably be ineffective.

↓

↘
~~[Alice decides to discount reasons against postponement.]R~~

Postponement would risk making Alice's response ineffective.

+

Only Alice is in a position to challenge John effectively.

+

JOHN'S TREATMENT OF JACK DESERVES CHALLENGE.

↓

[Alice challenges John now.]

The reason given on the upper left amounts to R(em), Alice's emotional reason; the horizontal arrow indicates its bearing on a decision to discount, with R(disc), the reason for making that decision, at the upper right. Among the first-order reasons given below on the left, the topmost corresponds to R(sup), which gives nonmoral advice as to how to satisfy the moral reason R(mor), appearing in capitals. Though not indicated on the chart, R(em) also counts directly in favor of immediate action but adds little in terms of weight to R(mor) and R(sup).

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2. My account here is in broad sympathy with the “second-personal” view of moral reasons in Darwall 2006; it was originally based on reflection on Thompson 2004.
3. Note that I do not hold that critical reasons necessarily outweigh favoring reasons – consider the reasons someone with a reasonable memory might have for taking a slightly bitter memory-enhancing tonic – but just that only critical reasons can yield requirements. Indeed, the division into critical and favoring reasons in itself counts against a weighting model; cf. Gert 2007.
4. This may sometimes just involve lessening the deliberative weight of opposing reasons rather than completely cancelling it: degrees of discounting, on the model of economists’ talk of a “discount rate” for value over time (see esp. Ainslie 1992), or in familiar terms a bias toward the present that sometimes prompts us to give inadequate weight to future harms. In my treatment of reasons I rely on an all-or-nothing notion of “discounting.” I should note, though, that my argument here for moral reasons might have a prudential analogue, in which emotions serve as a check on the tendency to discount future harms, introducing a present bias in the opposite direction – if we now feel anxiety about them (e.g., about ill health or indigence in old age).
5. A simple example, on the level of first-order reasons, may help motivate the view of favoring reasons that I take for granted in this paper (for extended discussion see Greenspan 2005 and Greenspan 2007): a good movie is showing on TV now, so I have a reason to turn the TV on; but

I do not need a strong enough competing reason to justify not turning it on. That I have no need to be entertained right now would be adequate justification, even if there were nothing else I had reason to do, and I had no objections to watching the movie.

6. Note, however, that on my account one would indeed need a reason to justify discounting the sort of critical emotional reason that is at issue in my argument here. That would not be so, I take it, if emotions served merely as motivational barriers to discounting, without supplying reasons.

7. I do assign value to discounting as a general assertion of control over our decision-making by imposing a distinctive structure on our reasons: setting our own priorities, in short. One might think emotional discomfort would have little weight against this, but normally there would be no reason to weigh it against this. We can retain the value of a general practice while declining to apply it to particular cases, at any rate up to a point..

8. A difference from Bratman's bootstrapping worries about intention, though, is that emotions and other cravings do seem to rationalize acts for which there is otherwise no reason.