

## CHAPTER 13

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# EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATION: RECONSIDERING NEO-JAMESIAN ACCOUNTS

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EMOTIONS are notorious for their irrationality, and nowhere does this irrationality show up more clearly than in their effects on motivation. Thus, to take some stereotyped examples, fear, anger, and jealousy frequently seem to move us to act contrary to our better judgment. Recently, however, there has been increasing emphasis on the rationality of emotions and their place in practical reason. Thus, while deliberating about what to do, although we may be able to articulate reasons for and against each option, we may not be able to say why the weight of these reasons favor one over the others; in such cases, we may simply go with the one that “feels” right—that resonates more fully with our emotional sense of our circumstances—and such an appeal to emotions seems appropriate.

My claim will ultimately be that emotions are fundamental to motivation and practical reasoning. In particular, I shall argue that emotions motivate not because they involve mere dispositions to behave but rather because they are rational responses to things we care about, responses that sometimes rationally demand

intentional action. This, together with the way our linguistic concepts can inform these emotional responses, makes for rational interconnections with evaluative judgments that allow our emotions to play a significant role in our determining what to do. I shall argue for this by first, in §13.1, laying out a former orthodoxy in philosophical understandings of emotions and what I shall call “neo-Jamesian” responses to it. In §13.2, I shall argue that these neo-Jamesian accounts are inadequate, and that much more is demanded of an account of emotions and motivation. In §13.3, I shall offer the outlines of my positive account of how emotions motivate, an account I shall elaborate in §13.4 by a consideration of the connections between emotions and judgments.

### 13.1 COGNITIVIST AND NEO-JAMESIAN ACCOUNTS

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In the 1970s and early 1980s, the prominent philosophical account of emotions was largely reductionist: emotions, it was widely thought, are to be understood in terms of antecedently intelligible beliefs and desires, together with some extra ingredient—a certain sort of bodily sensation, for example—that makes intelligible what is distinctively emotional about the subject’s mental state. Thus, such *cognitivist* accounts of the emotions argued that fear is, roughly, a belief that something is dangerous, a desire to avoid the danger, and a sinking feeling in one’s stomach. Such cognitivist accounts were an improvement on earlier “feeling” theories by acknowledging the intentionality and therefore potential rationality of emotions; they did so by understanding emotional intentionality and rationality to be parasitic on that of the beliefs and desires that, they theorized, composed the emotions.

At this point it can seem that what does all the work—at least all the positive work—of emotions is the underlying belief and desire. Emotions, it might seem, are irrational when the extra ingredient that accounts for the emotionality of emotions takes over, distracting us or having us put too much weight on the belief or desire, all with potentially disastrous consequences: we may freeze from fear or lash out from anger in ways that run contrary to what we think is best to do, thereby undermining our rationality as agents. Consequently, Jerome Shaffer confidently concluded:

From a rational and moral point of view, I can see no possibility of a general justification of emotion. And it is easy enough to imagine individual lives and even a whole world in which things would be much better if there were no emotion. [1983, 169]

And this seems right *if* emotions are understood on the cognitivist model, for on this model whatever is distinctive of the emotions themselves would seem to be

pointless or worse. Emotions, we might think, are simply an evolutionary vestige, the mental equivalent of human appendixes or ostrich wings.

Of course, this conclusion is too hasty. The way emotions motivate action is distinctive and seemingly cannot be understood in terms of desire, as when we are motivated to tear at the photo of someone we hate or when we celebrate out of joy (Hursthouse, 1991; Döring, 2003). Moreover, Damasio (1994, 1999, 2003) has argued quite persuasively that the empirical evidence reveals emotions to have an important and distinctive function in our practical lives. Patients with damage to the ventromedial region of their prefrontal cortex—the classic example is Phineas Gage—often suffer from dramatic personality changes but do not tend to suffer any changes in their cognitive functioning as measured by standard IQ tests. Damasio argues that these changes can be traced to a loss of emotional responsiveness that are critical to practical reasoning, and to better understand this he develops a revised version of James' theory of emotions (1884; 1950).

According to Damasio's neo-Jamesian theory, when things go well or badly for us, our bodies are naturally tuned to respond in some way—including both overt behavioral responses and inner physiological responses; this bodily response is then felt, and the combination of response and feeling is the emotion. Thus, when we are thrust into a dangerous situation, our bodies respond, pumping adrenaline into our bloodstreams, tensing our muscles, etc., and these bodily changes together with our perception of them constitute our fear.

It should be clear that the neo-Jamesian model is not a retreat to feeling theories; rather, emotions are understood to be about the type of circumstances in the world that cause them. This is clearest in Prinz's neo-Jamesian account of emotions as *embodied appraisals* (2004). According to Prinz, the bodily responses relevant to emotions are, as the result of evolutionary pressures, reliably causally connected to certain types of environments relevant to our well-beings. Following Dretske (1981), Prinz argues that such causal connections mean the bodily changes *represent* the corresponding "organism-environment relation" and given the bearing of this relation on our well-beings it is appropriate to understand these representations as *appraisals* (Prinz, 2004, 77). Indeed, the content of these appraisals—danger, offense, etc.—is part of what distinguishes one emotion type (fear) from another (anger).<sup>1</sup>

By understanding emotions to be appraisals, neo-Jamesians think they can explain how emotions motivate. The basic idea is that evolution guarantees that these bodily attunements to circumstances affecting our well-beings are themselves positively or negatively reinforcing of certain types of actions; Damasio calls these reinforcers "somatic markers" (Damasio, 1994, Chapter 8), and Prinz calls them "valence markers" Prinz (2004, 173). Thus, Damasio says:

In brief, the [emotional] signal *marks* options and outcomes with a positive or negative signal that narrows the decision-making space and increases the probability that the action will conform to past experience. [Damasio, 2003, 148]

Or, as Prinz puts it, valence markers “serve as a command that says something like ‘More of this!’ [or] . . . ‘Less of this!’”, where “this” is the emotion itself: “Positive emotions are ones we want to sustain, and negative emotions are ones that we want to get rid of” (Prinz, 2004, 174). Consequently, “the somatic component of an emotion prepares us for action, and the valence marker disposes us to act” (Prinz, 2004, 194). In this way, emotions motivate actions both directly (as dispositions to behave) and indirectly (through their influence on our attention and practical judgments). This leads to Damasio’s conclusion:

The emotional signal is not a substitute for proper reasoning. It has an auxiliary role, increasing the efficiency of the reasoning process and making it speedier. [Damasio, 2003, 148]

In short, emotions play a role in practical reasoning insofar as they are quick and dirty mechanisms that adapt us to features of our environments that bear on our well-being, thereby complementing our ability to reason slowly and carefully about what to do. As Horst (1998) describes it, emotions are the “junk-yard dog of the soul”: quick to respond, but with many false positives.<sup>2</sup>

This is, surely, an improvement over cognitivist theories, which seem to leave no room for a distinctive emotional contribution to motivation and practical reason. But is it the right way to understand that contribution? In the next section, I shall argue that it is not.

## 13.2 AGENCY AND IMPORT

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In order to assess the neo-Jamesian account of the place of emotions in motivation and practical reason, we need to be clear on what the problem about motivation is—about what the interesting questions in the area are. In particular, if the target is to understand human action, as it clearly is for Damasio and Prinz, we need to be careful to distinguish full-blooded action from mere goal-directedness.

Now this demand may seem strange to anyone who buys into a broadly Humean conception of motivation. On the Humean view, what distinguishes cognitive states like belief from motivating states like desire is their respective directions of fit. Beliefs and other cognitions, the Humean claims, have *mind-to-world direction of fit*

<sup>2</sup> LeDoux (1996) supports this conception neurologically: the amygdala, central to our capacity for emotions, is what provides the quick and dirty response.

insofar as what they represent is the world as it is independently; when we notice a discrepancy between the world and what we believe to be the case, we rationally ought to change our beliefs to get them to conform to the world. Motivating states like desires do not work this way; rather, they have *world-to-mind direction of fit* insofar as, when we notice a discrepancy between the world and what we want, we rationally ought to change the world to get it to conform to our desires. Indeed, Humeans construe desires simply to be states with world-to-mind direction of fit (Smith, 1994, 116). Given this, no meaningful distinction can be made between having a desire and being in a state of goal-directedness—i.e., having a kind of disposition, mediated by cognitive states, to achieve a goal. Indeed, this Humean conception of motivation—of desire as simply goal-directedness—is implicit in neo-Jamesian understandings of the connection between emotion and motivation (Damasio, 2003, 34–7; Prinz, 2004, 196).

This is, I believe, fundamentally mistaken, for it implies that all practical rationality is instrumental rationality. Given a particular goal, we can understand actions to be rational insofar as they are instrumental to achieving that goal; but what makes it rational to pursue the goal in the first place? What reasons can we have for this desire? One answer might be that this goal is instrumental to other, superordinate goals, but this only pushes back the question one step further. Another answer might be that this desire is one we would continue to have under idealized conditions of perfect knowledge and rationality. But if desires are sharply distinguished from beliefs in terms of their direction of fit, then this idealization can only reveal possibly hidden, perhaps contingent conflicts among desires, e.g., that we can't both pursue the desire for a third helping of chocolate cake and the desire to lose weight by eating healthier foods, and so given our preference for health we ought to drop our desire for more cake. Once again, however, this enables us to understand the rationality of desire only in terms of their coherence with other desires, but the rationality of any of these desires is simply presupposed.

What is missing from this Humean picture, I submit, is the idea that desires are for things that are *worth* pursuing, so that the rationality of desire is to be assessed in terms of whether their objects really are worth pursuing. In making this claim, I am of course sidestepping an enormous debate in metaethics concerning the source(s) of practical rationality. However, this claim seems phenomenologically correct and it enables us to make distinctions we want to make. Thus, chess-playing computers exhibit goal-directedness in virtue of representational states with world-to-mind direction of fit and structured by instrumental rationality, but we would not consider such goal states to be genuine desires precisely because these goals are not worth pursuing to the computer: they don't *matter* to it, it does not *care* about them. When genuine agents—whether persons or other animals—pursue goals we do so because we care, because they are worthwhile, because, as I shall say, these goals have *import* to us.

This suggests that we cannot understand motivation simply in terms of representational states that have world-to-mind direction of fit, as Humeans do, but rather must do so in terms of the subject's appreciation of import as a *reason* for acting. One central question of understanding the nature of motivation then becomes that of understanding how such an appreciation of import can, by providing us with reasons, move us to act.

It might be thought that neo-Jamesian accounts of emotions are able to accept and respond to this central question. After all, they understand emotions to be evaluations in light of the subject's well-being. Thus, fear provides a reason for hiding because fear is a bodily appreciation of the bearing some danger has on the subject's well-being; indeed, it is only because of this that emotions can play the role in practical reason they do. However, a closer look at how neo-Jamesians understand the nature of such evaluations reveals this is not the case. Thus, on Damasio's account, emotions are appraisals insofar as they involve positive or negative signals: they "signify optimal physiological coordination and smooth running of the operations of life" (Damasio, 2003, 137), a kind of homeostasis that constitutes our well-being (Damasio, 2003, 35).<sup>3</sup> Yet this tying of well-being, of emotional appraisals, to a biological notion of well-being is surely too narrow. For the point of the notion of well-being is to convey the idea that the relevant circumstances bear on what is in some sense worthwhile to the subject, but we need not suppose that the relevant notion of worth will always be something we can spell out biologically.<sup>4</sup>

Prinz recognizes this limitation and offers a more general and more sophisticated account. According to Prinz, things mattering or having import to us has two sources:

[Embodied] appraisals represent things that matter to us, but they do not represent the fact that they matter. That's where valence markers come in. When one couples an embodied fear appraisal with a state that serves as a negative reinforcer, one represents the fact that the situation inducing the fear matters. [(Prinz, 2004, 178)]

It should be clear, however, that valence markers are simply positive or negative *reinforcers*: "states that get associated with representation of stimuli" (Prinz, 2004, 173) that "increase [or decrease] the probability of response" (Prinz, 2004, 169). Consequently, the valence markers do not themselves provide *reasons* for responding in a particular way; that must fall to the embodied appraisal. Here Prinz claims that embodied appraisals are evaluative insofar as they represent in some way circumstances having a bearing on what we value. Thus, sadness represents the circumstances as involving a loss, where a loss "is the elimination of something valued by an organism"

<sup>3</sup> See also LeDoux (1995, 220) for similar claims about the pleasantness or unpleasantness of emotions.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Tappolet (this volume) argues somewhat more carefully for a similar claim.

(Prinz, 2004, 63). This certainly seems to provide an account of how emotions can involve an appreciation of import as a reason for acting and so play a role in motivation, and the key to this is the relation of one's circumstances to something valued.

The promise of this account is dashed, however, when we see what Prinz says about valuing: "If one represents something as valued, its being so represented constitutes its being valued" (2004, 63). It is not clear what this could mean or how this could help make sense of reasons for action. For if such a representation of value is under our control, as with a judgment, then simply judging something is valuable makes it be valuable, and we can generate whatever reasons we want at will. This implies that such "reasons" impose no normative standard over us at all. Yet if such representations of value are not judgments, then it is not clear what they are. Moreover, it is not clear how the emotion itself enters into the picture of providing reasons for action, for it would seem that could be done simply by making judgments about how one's circumstances bear on one's values. Why must this connection to motivation run through the emotions rather than through evaluative judgments directly? In short, Prinz's account, like other neo-Jamesian accounts of emotions, fail directly to address the central question of motivation, and they do so at their peril, or so I shall argue.

Before doing this, we first need an explicit account of import and of emotions and judgments in relation to import. It is to this that I now turn.

### 13.3 EMOTIONS, IMPORT, AND MOTIVATION

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For something to have import to you—for it to matter to you, for you to care about it—is for it to have a kind of worth. Thus, for a goal to have import to you is for you to find it worth pursuing, but things other than goals can have import as well: objects, states of affairs, activities, relationships, causes, etc. In general, at least part of what it is for something to have import is for it to be worthy of attention and action. That something is worthy of attention means not merely that it is permissible or a good thing to pay attention to it; rather, it means that paying attention to it is, by and large, required on pain of giving up or at least undermining the idea that it really has import to you. Thus, it would not make sense to say that having a clean house has import to you if you never or rarely notice when it gets dirty. Of course, you might sometimes be distracted by other things that are more important and so sometimes not notice its getting dirty. What is required, however, is a consistent pattern of attending to the relevant object: in short, a kind of *vigilance* for what happens or might well happen to it. Similarly, that something is worthy of action means that acting on its behalf is required, other things being

equal: for a clean house to have import requires not only vigilance for cleanliness but also a *preparedness* to act so as to maintain it.

The relevant modes of vigilance and preparedness necessary for import are primarily emotional, desiderative, and judgmental, and I shall argue that we can understand the sense in which objects of import are *worthy* of attention and action in terms of the rational interconnections among these modes. I begin with the emotions, which I shall understand to be intentional feelings of import.

Emotions have several kinds of objects. First is the emotion's *target*, namely that at which the emotion is intuitively directed: when I'm angry at my kids for tracking mud into the house, they are the target of my anger. Second, each emotion type has a characteristic way in which it evaluates the target: what makes fear be fear and distinct from anger is that in fearing something we implicitly evaluate it to be dangerous, whereas in being angry at something we implicitly evaluate it to be offensive. Such characteristic evaluations are these emotions' *formal objects*. Finally, and often overlooked, is the *focus* of emotions: the background object having import to which the target is related in such a way as to make intelligible the target's having the evaluative property defined by the formal object. For example, in being angry at my kids, what makes intelligible how they have offended me is the relation between them and my having a clean house, which has import to me; hence, having a clean house is the focus of my anger.

Given this, emotions are intelligible as *warranted* or not in terms of the implicit evaluation of their targets, where such warrant has two conditions. First, the focus must really have import to the subject: my anger at my kids would be unwarranted if having a clean house did not matter to me. Second, the target must be, or intelligibly seem to be, appropriately related to the focus so as to have the kind of import defined by the formal object: my anger would be unwarranted if the kids did not offend me by intentionally or negligently harming the cleanliness of my house (because someone else tracked in all that mud). Given these conditions of warrant, emotions are intelligible as a kind of sensitivity or responsiveness to the import of one's situation: emotions are essentially *intentional feelings of import*.

So far this sounds much like Prinz's understanding of emotions as responsive to "values". My claim, however, is that emotions are not simply responsive to import; they are a kind of *commitment* to import, as is revealed when we consider the rational interconnections they have to other mental states, including other emotions. Thus, to experience one emotion is in effect to commit oneself to feeling other emotions with the same focus in the relevant actual and counterfactual situations because of the import of that focus. If I am angry at my kids for tracking in mud, I ought also to be worried about whether I can get it cleaned up before our dinner guests arrive, relieved when I do (or embarrassed when I don't), and so on. Moreover, it would at first blush seem inconsistent with these emotions to be afraid of cleaning up or upset with my kids for picking up their toys without my asking because these latter emotions would seem to involve a contrary commitment to import.



Such emotional commitments define a pattern of emotions with a common focus, patterns that are both rational and projectible. Such patterns are *rational* in that, other things being equal, one rationally ought to have emotions belonging to the pattern, so that the failure to experience emotions that fit into the pattern when otherwise appropriate is a rational failure. Thus, my anger at my kids would be unwarranted unless I would also feel the worry, relief, embarrassment, etc. Consequently, being such as to have these emotions in the relevant actual and counterfactual situations is rationally required, and the resulting pattern of emotions therefore ought to be *projectible*. Of course, one need not feel emotions every time they are warranted in order for the relevant pattern to be in place; isolated failures to feel particular emotions, though rationally inappropriate, do not undermine the rational coherence of the broader pattern so long as these failures remain isolated.

Insofar as each particular emotion is an intentional feeling of import by virtue of the conditions of its warrant, it may seem that import is conceptually prior to these emotions and therefore to the patterns they constitute. This would be a mistake. For if something is the focus of such a pattern of emotions, the projectibility of that pattern ensures that one will typically respond with the relevant emotions whenever that focus is affected favorably or adversely. In effect, the projectibility of the pattern of emotions is an attunement of one's sensibilities to the well-being of that focus, and this just is the sort of vigilance normally required for import. Moreover, such emotional vigilance is not merely a disposition to attend to the focus; insofar as the pattern itself is rational, one *ought* to have these emotions—one ought to attend to the focus—precisely because the past pattern of emotions rationally commits one to feel these subsequent emotions when otherwise warranted. Consequently, the projectibility and rationality of the pattern makes intelligible the sense in which to have import is to be *worthy* of attention, and so import itself presupposes this pattern of emotions: it is hard to make sense of someone as caring about something if he or she does not respond emotionally no matter what when it is affected favorably or adversely.

Of course, to have import is to be worthy of action as well. Once again this is intelligible in terms of the kind of commitment to import these patterns of emotions essentially involve. For if the commitment to import that emotions essentially involve is to be genuine, it must involve not merely a commitment to attend to that import but also to act on its behalf. Thus, other things being equal it would be rationally inappropriate for me to be afraid that my kids will track mud into the house again and yet not be motivated to act accordingly, and never or rarely to be motivated to act out of fear would bring into question whether I in fact have the capacity for fear.

It might be thought that fear motivates behavior arationally: by simply causing us to tremble, for example. Although this is possible, I set such *arational expressions* of emotions aside to focus on the more interesting cases in which emotions

motivate action as a motive: by making the action intelligible within a broader context of rationality through the commitment to import they essentially involve.

Emotions can rationally motivate action either directly or indirectly and in ways that are goal-directed or not. Thus, emotions motivate us to act directly as when we duck out of fear, jump for joy, or cry out of sadness. Unlike cases of the arational expression of emotions, in these cases our actions have a point revealed to be worthwhile by the emotion itself through its commitment to import. Thus, the point of ducking is made intelligible by fear insofar as it is by ducking that I avoid the looming danger to which I respond in feeling fear: fear motivates ducking as a goal-directed intentional action. Similarly, jumping for joy or crying out of sadness each have a point—celebration or mourning—where the jumping or crying just are the celebrating or the mourning rather than means to it; in these cases, the jumping and celebrating are non-goal-directed intentional actions, which we can understand to be *rational expressions* of these emotions insofar as these emotions reveal their point to be worthwhile in light of their commitment to the import of their focuses. In each case, we can highlight this motivating role of emotional commitments through a more precise specification of their formal objects: to feel fear, joy, or sorrow is to find its target to be a danger worth avoiding, a good worth celebrating, or a loss worth mourning. Thus, it is a condition of the possibility of having a capacity for emotions that, through the exercise of this capacity, one normally both attends to the import of one's circumstances and is thereby motivated to act accordingly.<sup>5</sup>

Emotions also motivate us indirectly through their rational interconnections with desire. For the commitment to import involved in having an emotion, insofar as that commitment is to the focus as worthy of action, is not only to having other emotions with the same focus but also to having the relevant desires to act on its behalf. Thus, in fearing that my kids will track mud into the house, I ought to desire to take means to prevent this: by talking to them, posting notes, imposing rewards or punishments, buying a doormat, etc. As before, a failure to have such desires would be a rational failure, and consistently to fail to have such desires indicates that one is not prepared to act on behalf of that focus, thereby undermining one's commitment to its import and so the rationality of the pattern of emotions. Conversely, insofar as to desire something normally is not merely to be disposed to pursue it as an end but rather to find it *worth* pursuing,<sup>6</sup> desire itself is a commitment to import and so also to feeling the

<sup>5</sup> This understanding of the rational expressions of emotions provides an alternative to the common idea that emotions motivate us either to arational behavior or (via desire) to goal-directed action. (See, e.g., Tappolet, this volume.) Consequently, unlike Tappolet I see no reason to think that emotional motivation, insofar as it is rational, essentially involves desire.

<sup>6</sup> Of course it is possible to have a desire that is for what is not in fact worth pursuing—what does not in fact have this kind of import. Such desires will be defective in the same way emotions that respond to things that do not in fact have import to us are.

relevant pattern of emotions: if one did not normally feel fear when a desired end is threatened, relief when that threat does not materialize, anger at those who intentionally impede your progress, disappointment at failure, etc., it would be hard to make sense of that end as having import and so as being an appropriate object of desire. In short, the projectible, rational pattern of emotions with a common focus includes desires as well.<sup>7</sup>

This understanding of the way emotions and desires motivate through their commitments to import reveals how (a) the projectibility of such a pattern of emotions and desires with a common focus makes possible not only one's vigilance for import but also one's preparedness to act on its behalf, and (b) the rationality of the pattern makes intelligible its focus not only as worthy of attention but also worthy of action. Because to have import is to be worthy of both attention and action, I conclude that *to have import just is to be the focus of a projectible, rational pattern of emotions and desires*. Emotions and desires thus not only respond to import but also thereby constitute that very import.

One might object that this account is viciously circular, for I have said both that import is constituted by our emotions and that it serves as a standard of warrant for our emotions. So which is it?—Which comes first, import or the emotions? Indeed, it looks as though on my account emotions and desires exhibit both mind-to-world and world-to-mind directions of fit, which is impossible insofar as these are mutually exclusive. In reply, I reject the idea, implicit in the notion of a direction of fit, that one or the other of import or our emotions must be ontologically or conceptually prior to the other, and so I reject this notion of direction of fit as it applies to import. Rather, on my account, import and the emotions emerge together as a holistic package all of which must be in place for any of it to be intelligible. The circularity of the account is therefore a normal part of such holism and is not at all vicious.

Several important implications of this account are worth drawing out. First, intentional action must be distinguished from mere goal-directedness in that action is essentially motivated by import; in particular, emotions and desires rationally motivate action because of the way they involve commitments to import. Indeed, such motivation by import is what distinguishes us as agents from things like chess-playing computers: to be an agent is to be a subject of import and so to have the capacities not merely for belief and desire but also for emotion.<sup>8</sup> Second, given the nature of such commitments to import, emotions are not, as neo-Jamesian accounts encourage us to think, states of feeling we can understand in isolation

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that emotions and desires are each species of the genus felt evaluations; see Helm, 2002 for details.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that there is no reason at all to think that what has import to you must always be yourself. This bolsters the argument Tappolet offers (this volume) against the thesis of motivational egoism.

from one another; rather, they are essentially interconnected with other emotions and desires so as to constitute import. Consequently, it is not possible to have the capacity for one emotion type without also having the capacity for many other emotion types and for desire: fear is unintelligible apart from other emotions like relief, disappointment, joy, anger, and hope, or apart from desire. Finally, it should be clear that emotions are not simply responses to already existing concerns to which they can provide epistemic access of a distinctive sort (namely, quick and dirty), as on neo-Jamesian accounts. Rather, emotions are at least partly constitutive of our concerns—of import—and, as I shall argue below, it is in part because of this that they are fundamental to practical reasoning in ways neo-Jamesian accounts cannot acknowledge.

It might be suggested that Prinz makes room for these interconnections among emotions with his notion of a sentiment (Prinz, 2004, 188ff.). According to Prinz, a sentiment (e.g., a like or dislike) is an “affective disposition”: “If you like something, interactions with it should cause joy or other positive affects. Conversely for dislikes” (189). A sentiment, therefore, might seem to involve the kind of interconnections among emotions that I have just argued we need. However, Prinz has no clear understanding of what the relevant connections among emotions would be. Interactions with something I like *rationaly ought* to cause positive affects *only if* the circumstances involve positive import; if instead my interaction with my prized Ming vase results in its shattering on the floor, joy or other “positive affects” would hardly be appropriate. Understanding which other emotions are interconnected here and why these emotions *ought* to come together as a group requires understanding a “sentiment” to be an evaluative attitude like caring: an attitude comprised of a projectible, rational pattern of emotions and desires, a pattern defined by the commitment to the import of its common focus—by its evaluative content—and that thereby both constitutes the import of its focus and rationally motivates the appropriate actions on its behalf. Nothing like this is in view from Prinz’s neo-Jamesian account of emotions. Indeed, with merely biological, dispositional substitutes for a genuinely evaluative notion of import, neo-Jamesian accounts seem to assimilate all cases of emotional motivation to arational expressions. I shall return to this point below.

### 13.4 EMOTIONS AND EVALUATIVE JUDGMENTS

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I have argued that emotions and desires motivate by virtue of being commitments to import—by virtue of their evaluative content, we might say. At this point, one might raise an objection I raised for Prinz at the end of §13.2 concerning the role of emotions

in motivation: if the commitment to import that is implicit in our emotions and desires is what explains how they rationally motivate intentional action, why not think that evaluative judgments can motivate action directly? Cannot evaluative judgments be just as much commitments to import as emotions or desires are?

The short answer is yes: evaluative judgments can motivate us to act both directly and indirectly, in precisely the same way emotions and desires do, *if* they succeed in committing us to import. Understanding this requires delving more deeply into the rational interconnections among emotions, desires, and evaluative judgments and so into the place evaluative judgments have in constituting import. Of particular importance is the way, by virtue of these interconnections, the linguistic concepts of evaluative judgment come to inform our emotions, thereby making intelligible how emotions can play a much more substantial role in practical reason than the merely “auxiliary” role as quick and dirty adaptive mechanisms that neo-Jamesian accounts allow.

### 13.4.1 Single Evaluative Perspective

Emotions are commitments to the import of their focuses and thereby to their targets having the evaluative property expressed by their formal objects. Such evaluations made within the patterns of emotions and desires define what we might call the agent’s *evaluative perspective*.<sup>9</sup> Of course, in making evaluative judgments, we also articulate an evaluative perspective, and my claim is that our evaluative judgments, emotions, and desires together define a single evaluative perspective: it is possible to make judgments with the same intentional content as our emotions and desires, and vice versa, such that each is a commitment to the same import. That this is so is revealed by the kinds of rational interconnections among them, as I shall now argue.

Consider first a simple example from Solomon (1976, 185): if I believe you have stolen my car, I am liable to get angry at you, thereby evaluating you, the target, as having offended me. If I subsequently discover that you did not steal it, my anger ought to disappear: this revised understanding of my circumstances ought to alter my emotional response, which is based on that same understanding. Consequently, if I continue to be angry even after making these new judgments in light of further information, then my anger is irrational, other things being equal.

<sup>9</sup> Of course, the notion of an agent’s evaluative perspective must take into account not merely the various things that in fact have import to him or her but also the way in which such import is structured in light of preferences and priorities; for details on how I think this ought to be understood, see Helm (2001), especially Chapter 4. However, this complication is not relevant to my discussion here, and so I shall ignore it.

The claim here is not that if I judge you to have offended me then I ought to feel anger, and vice versa; there are, after all, other reasons you might have for not feeling anger, such as that other things here and now are more important so that such an offense is not worth attending to now. Moreover, the standards for the warrant of an emotion are appropriately less stringent than the standards of correctness of evaluative judgment, so that there need be no rational conflict involved in, for example, being afraid and feeling the target to be dangerous and yet failing to judge that it really is dangerous. Indeed, it may seem here that the idea of emotions as “quick and dirty” responses to one’s circumstances has some applicability. Yet the claim is not simply that judgments can in some cases overrule emotions and reveal those emotions, if they remain, to be irrational. For we should not interpret the alleged “dirtiness” of emotional responses to indicate that in cases of conflicts between judgment and emotion it is always the emotion that is irrational. Surely this can be true in some cases, as with phobias, for example. Yet in other cases a rational conflict between emotion and judgment can cast doubt on the judgment itself. Thus, walking down an unfamiliar street late at night, I may feel afraid, even as I tell myself that everything is fine, that I’m perfectly safe. In this case, the persistence of my fear may reveal my judgment to be merely wishful thinking, such that I ought to resolve the conflict within my evaluative perspective by giving up (at least by withholding) on that judgment. Consequently, the rational interconnections between emotions and judgments are bi-directional.

This may make it sound as though the rational interconnections between emotions and judgments involve simply the avoidance of manifest conflict, that one’s evaluative perspective on the world ought not to contain conflicting elements, such as the feeling that you have offended me together with the judgment that you have not. However, the demands of consistency across emotions and judgments are more rigorous than that. I have already argued that each emotion involves a commitment to the import of its focus (and of its target) and thereby to having other emotions with the same focus in the appropriate circumstances. Such commitments are in effect commitments to sustain a particular evaluative perspective on the world. Now particular emotions may be unwarranted precisely because their focus does not have import—because the relevant evaluative perspective is not sustained—and so the commitment to import they involve is a false commitment. When the relevant evaluative perspective is sustained by a projectible, rational pattern of emotions with a common focus, the commitment is *genuine*, a commitment that ought to be sustained within our evaluative perspective quite generally.<sup>10</sup> This has a couple of implications for the rational interconnections between emotions and evaluative judgments.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to distinguish two senses in which such a commitment “ought” to be sustained: one insofar as it is the rational continuation of a pattern of such commitments that constitute its focus as *in fact* having import to you; and another insofar as this focus is something that *ought* to have that

First, if something has import to me by virtue of a projectible, rational pattern of emotions with it as their common focus, then, other things being equal, in the appropriate circumstances I ought to judge that it has that import. For, an agent's perspective on the world is normally unified rather than bifurcated and so to fail to judge this is to fail in my genuine commitment to sustaining this evaluative perspective. Second, and conversely, to commit oneself in judgment to the import of something is, other things being equal, to commit one to sustaining the relevant evaluative perspective not only by making further evaluative judgments when appropriate but also by having the relevant emotions. This is true not merely when the judgment corresponds to the focus of an emotion but also when it corresponds to the emotion's formal object. Thus, suppose my daughter is asked to give a presentation of her science fair project to her whole school. She may initially find it frightening—a danger to her self-esteem and social standing given the risks of making a fool of herself. However, after thinking (and talking) it over, she comes to judge that this is an exciting opportunity to learn and grow rather than a danger, and such a judgment ought, other things being equal, to alter her emotions and, thereby, her motivation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, without a general resonance between evaluative judgments and emotions, the commitment to import she undertakes in judgment or feels in emotion would be defective, such that there is no clear fact of the matter of what her evaluative perspective really is—what really has import to her.

The upshot is that emotions and evaluative judgments are rationally connected not merely insofar as they can come into conflict that the subject rationally ought to resolve by modifying one or the other but, more fundamentally, in that they together define what is normally a single view on the world—a single evaluative perspective—that can diverge only irrationally. For creatures like us with a capacity for evaluative judgment, then, import is constituted by projectible, rational patterns not merely of emotions and desires but also of evaluative judgment.

This conclusion is inconsistent with neo-Jamesian accounts of emotions. For neo-Jamesians understand the interconnections between emotions and judgments fundamentally in causal or dispositional rather than rational terms. Thus, Damasio, after asserting that “the *essence* of emotion [is] the collection of changes in body state”, claims that:

import. My intent here is to appeal merely to the former. (For a detailed account of how to make sense of the latter partly in terms of the rational interconnections between emotions and evaluative judgments, see Helm, 2001, especially Chapter 7.)

<sup>11</sup> Of course, her emotions can be recalcitrant and fail to fall in line with this judgment. As I have argued, such a conflict between emotion and judgment is irrational and so ought to be resolved: either by giving up on or rethinking the judgment or, if she is convinced the judgment is correct, by exercising control over her emotions to conform. For details on how such control can be exercised, see Helm, 1996.

emotion is the combination of a *mental evaluative process*, simple or complex, with *dispositional responses to that process*, mostly *toward the body proper*, resulting in an emotional body state, but also *toward the brain itself* (neurotransmitter nuclei in brain stem), resulting in additional mental changes. [Damasio, 1994, 139, emphasis in the original]

The problem here is the dispositional analysis: if our evaluative judgments merely dispose us to have the bodily process—the emotional essence—then it is hard to see how changes in judgment of the sort described above *ought* to result in changes in emotion, and it seems inconsistent with Damasio’s understanding of the one-way connection between the two that the persistence of an emotion in the face of revised judgments should provide a reason for changing that judgment. Of course, Damasio would say that the emotion, as a somatic marker, can direct our attention to features of our environments that can influence our judgments. However, once these features are “marked” as relevant, and once we have taken them into account in judgment, there is for Damasio no further role for emotions to play our reasoning processes, and so Damasio is unable to make sense of how the persistence of one’s emotions can itself either be irrational or impose rational pressure on one to revise one’s conflicting evaluative judgments.<sup>12</sup> All of this means that Damasio cannot make sense of the role emotions and judgments each play as parts of a pattern of rationality that constitutes import, thereby assimilating all emotional motivation to arational expression.

One final consequence of this account is worth drawing out. I argued in §13.3 that emotions and desires motivate intentional action by virtue of the commitments to import they involve. I have just argued that evaluative judgments, like emotions, are commitments to import and so can affect our motivations indirectly through their rational interconnections with our emotions—and, it should be added, our desires as well. Yet it is a condition of the possibility of our being committed to import that, other things being equal, we are motivated to act in the appropriate circumstances, and this is true whether that commitment is emotional, desiderative, or judgmental. Consequently, by making evaluative judgments and thereby committing ourselves to import, we have the capacity directly to move ourselves to act; such a capacity just is the *will*. Of course, that we have such a capacity does not mean its exercise will be successful: weakness of will and listlessness are persistent possibilities, and the genuineness of one’s judgmental commitment to import can be called into question by the failure of judgment to motivate.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Prinz’s account of emotions is more subtle, for he makes room for the intentional content of emotions to be modified by the concepts we deploy in judgment; I shall come back to Prinz’s view in §13.4.2.

<sup>13</sup> This is, of course, a controversial thesis. For a defense, see Helm, 2001, especially Chapter 6.



### 13.4.2 Conceptually Informed Emotions

I have argued that emotions, desires, and evaluative judgments together form an evaluative perspective that is normally unified but can involve rational conflicts. Yet such harmony or conflict is intelligible as such only if what is judged and what is felt in emotion is potentially the same thing, and that requires that the linguistic concepts we bring to bear in judgment inform the intentional content of our emotions. Thus, by making evaluative judgments we commit ourselves in part to having certain emotions in the relevant kinds of situations: kinds of situations we define in judgment in terms of linguistic concepts. Consequently, in order for us to be properly emotionally responsive to the perspective on the world to which we are committed by judgment, our emotions must respond to kinds of situations delineated by these concepts: our emotions are shaped by the conceptual and inferential skills our capacity for judgment brings with it. Of course, this conclusion applies only to creatures that have a language and are capable of evaluative judgment; non-linguistic animals like dogs and cats do have the capacity for a variety of emotions and so are subjects of import without linguistic concepts. However, once we linguistic animals acquire the capacity for judgment, our emotions are transformed by virtue of these rational interconnections, so that our capacity for discrimination need be no less refined in our emotions than it is in our judgments.

All of this suggests that we should not be so impressed, as neo-Jamesians are, by the supposedly animal nature of emotional capacities—by the thought that emotions are merely “quick and dirty” responses that can have merely an “auxiliary” role in evaluative thought by virtue of the way they direct our attention. We should not think that because animal emotions are “quick and dirty” in this way that human emotions must be no different. For the biological grounding of our emotions does not preclude their transformation by capacities we develop through language and culture; indeed, it is only once emotions have been transformed by our linguistic concepts so as to acquire this refinement and discrimination that we can understand them to have a more fundamental rational role in evaluation and reason.

Prinz would surely object that I have given short shrift to neo-Jamesian accounts by failing to recognize the resources they have for understanding the relations between emotions and judgments and so the role that linguistic concepts can play in the emotions. For, Prinz argues, our linguistic concepts can come to inform our emotions through the mechanism of a calibration file. A *calibration file* is a set of representations—including but not limited to those we use in judgment—that each dispose us to have a particular bodily response the perception of which is an emotion. For example, my calibration file for anger may include judgments about lack of respect, and it is for this reason that we should understand my anger in these cases to be about lack of respect rather than some other feature of my circumstances. Thus, Prinz says, “by establishing new calibration files, an embodied appraisal can be said to represent something beyond what it is evolved to represent” (2004, 100), and this explains not merely how we can fear

things like exams that do not pose any immanent physical danger but also how we can come to have non-basic emotions like jealousy, which is a particular refinement of our basic emotion of anger in light of its unique calibration file.

This understanding of the connection between emotions and judgments can be deepened when we consider not just emotions but sentiments like caring, which Prinz understands to be “disposition[s] to experience different emotions” (2007, 84). For judgments about import—that respecting others is good, for example—*express* sentiments in two respects.<sup>14</sup> First, in making a judgment of import, we describe the relevant dispositions that sentiments are, so that when I judge that some behavior exhibits a lack of respect, I am describing that behavior as apt to cause an emotional response in me. Second, such judgments themselves can cause me to have the relevant emotions, so that these judgments thereby come to be a part of the calibration file not just of the individual emotions but also, we might say, of the sentiment itself. Given that such judgments use linguistic concepts, we can now see that it is not just emotions but also sentiments that come to be shaped by the linguistic concepts we bring to bear in judgments. Neo-Jamesians like Prinz, therefore, may seem to make sense of the kind of transformation and refinement of emotions I have made so much of. Indeed, such an account can seem to grant emotions a significant role in practical reason, for Prinz argues for a form of motivational internalism that runs through the emotions: by making judgments that express sentiments, we cause ourselves to have emotions and thereby motivate ourselves accordingly (Prinz, 2007, 102; cf. Döring, 2003, 2007).

Nonetheless, there is considerable sleight of hand here, which can be revealed by thinking about cases in which things start to go wrong. Consider the example of Mary, which Annas (2005, 640) uses to criticize Doris (2002)’s account of the moral relevance of situationist social psychology. “Mary”, Annas writes, “treats her colleagues at work with respect and courtesy, is collegial and friendly to work with.” One of Mary’s colleagues, we might expect, would say that Mary cares about being respectful—has a positive sentiment towards respect—given the dispositions to a variety of emotions she reliably displays at work. Upon seeing Mary being “demanding and rude to shop assistants”, this colleague would be surprised and puzzled—even “*shocked*”, as Annas says (2005, 640)—but he might write it off as an aberration. However, upon discovering that Mary consistently “humiliates waiters in restaurants, screams at her son’s soccer coach”, and so on, he ought to revise his understanding of her: she does not, after all, care about respect, but some surrogate notion, understanding “respect” to mean something like politeness and courtesy owed to her social equals (or betters). At this point, assume Mary’s colleague confronts her and convinces her that she has

<sup>14</sup> I am here generalizing Prinz’s discussion somewhat, for Prinz in fact talks more narrowly about *moral* judgments expressing moral sentiments. It seems reasonable, however, to think he would say similar things about sentiments more generally being expressed by what I would call judgments about import.

misunderstood what respect is and should instead understand it in more Kantian terms. With her newfound understanding of respect, Mary is able reliably to distinguish respect from disrespect and so is able to apply the concept correctly, and she judges with apparent sincerity that she ought to respect all persons. However, let us assume, this does not change her emotional dispositions or her motivation: she continues to humiliate waiters, judges that she ought not, and still does not feel bad about it. This is, I submit, a live possibility, although something has clearly gone wrong with Mary. How are we to understand it?

One tack for Prinz to take is to understand the emotional responsiveness to be at fault: Mary has the disposition to respond emotionally to such judgments concerning respect, but for whatever reason this disposition fails to be activated. This approach would make sense of isolated failures to respond emotionally, but we cannot sustain the idea that she has *this* disposition—this pattern in the causal relationships between judging and feeling—when there is such a widespread pattern to the failures, as in Mary's case. Another tack is to say that Mary is simply mistaken in judging that she ought to respect all others given that this judgment does not accurately express the sentiment, for what she cares about is still just politeness to her social equals. The trouble here is that this seems to suggest that she ought to give up on her judgment that she ought to respect others in order accurately to describe the dispositions to emotions she finds herself with, which is clearly the wrong conclusion to draw. What we need to say instead is that she *ought* to change her sentiment, that the failure is a *rational* failure with her emotions. Once again, we are back to the conclusion that the interconnections between emotions and judgments must be understood in rational rather than dispositional terms.

On my account, this rational interconnection is straightforward, at least in its outlines. In judging that respect for others has import—and doing so not just as a matter of giving it lip service on one occasion but rather consistently as appropriate to a variety of situations—is to establish a rationally structured pattern of commitments to the import of respect that, other things being equal, ought to include emotions and desires as well. Of course, in Mary's case it does not, and the absence of emotional response in a wide range of cases reveals a troubling irrationality within her evaluative perspective. Now the question arises as to how this rational conflict can be resolved. Here, as I have argued, Mary can bring her explicit understanding of respect and the reasons for respect to bear on her perception of particular circumstances in an effort to come to feel, say, shame and remorse for her poor treatment of her waiter, thereby imposing rational pressure on herself to have these emotions, an effort that can be more or less successful.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, there is no guarantee that her lack of emotional response is the source of irrationality here: that failure may instead indicate that she ought to rethink her judgment and, in particular, the concept of respect it involves.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 7.

This is clear if we imagine that things went the other way around: Mary initially did exhibit proper respect for others, but was convinced by her colleague, through appeals to rational egoism, that she ought instead to care merely about politeness to her social equals. Now, faced with the rational conflict between her judgment that self-interest, not respect, is what matters and her recalcitrant emotions, it is much more plausible to suppose that her emotions have gotten things right, thereby correcting her faulty judgment.<sup>16</sup>

Now fleshing out the details of how such deliberation about import works is terrifically complicated, and I cannot do it here. But what I have said is enough to show that our emotional capacities involve a kind of sophistication and refinement that merits their having a significant role in practical reasoning and motivation: a role to which neo-Jamesian accounts are simply blind by their focus on bodily responses. Indeed, this is, in effect, the kind of emotional sophistication and refinement to which Annas appeals in her criticism of Doris. Empirical evidence about how people are disposed to respond to certain types of situations of the sort both Doris and the neo-Jamesians appeal to cannot so easily dislodge an understanding of these rational interconnections that, I have argued, are central to our ability to find things to be worthwhile and motivate ourselves to act accordingly. Of course we are embodied creatures and our emotional capacities must therefore be somehow grounded in our bodies. But to think that we can understand the emotions as such in terms of that bodily response is to ignore their manifest rationality.

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<sup>16</sup> Such a case is similar to that of Huck Finn, who judges he ought to turn Jim in but finds himself emotionally unable to do so. For further discussion, see, e.g., Bennett, 1974; McIntyre, 1990.

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