

**FRÉDÉRIC MINNER (Geneva)**

**Bridging the Gap between Rationality,  
Normativity and Emotions**

---

**Abstract**

*This paper argues that emotions play a key role in intentional explanation, because they can be conceived as rational. Furthermore, their rationality is specific as they make agents act and react with respect to values and norms. Indeed, emotions have cognitive bases and are reactions to the presence of values and are regimented by epistemic norms that can be constrained by social norms. Additionally, thanks to their action and cognitive tendencies emotions ground rational actions by providing, among other features of rationality, intentions to promote values through norms of action that can also be constrained by social norms. In that sense, emotions seem to bridge the gap between rationality and normativity by articulating the rational detection and production of values related to epistemic and action norms that can be both regimented by social norms.*

**Keywords:** Rationality, values, norms, emotions, intentional explanation

---

**Introduction**

Intentional explanation, according to Elster (1983), seeks to elucidate an action by showing that it was intentionally conducted, in order to bring about certain goals. Intentional actions furthermore, are rational actions: they imply that agents establish a connection between the goals they target and the means that are appropriate to reach them, by way of different beliefs about the means, the goals and the environment (Elster 1983, 2007). But how should we understand intentional actions in the light of philosophical research on emotions, rationality, and normativity? This question is the departure point of this article.

Various philosophers have analyzed the relationships between rationality and emotion (e.g. Elster 1999, 2007; Solomon 2003; de Sousa 1987; Nussbaum 2001), those between emotion and normativity (e.g. de Sousa 1987; Nussbaum 2001; Tappolet 2000; Deonna and Teroni 2012), and those between emotion and intentional action (e.g. Zhu and Thagard 2002; Pacherie 2002). Nonetheless, their theses are scattered and do not offer an integrative view on how rationality, normativity and emotions work from the standpoint of intentional explanation. By using de Sousa's distinction between the epistemic and the strategic modes of rationality as a theoretical framework (de Sousa 1987), this article proposes therefore to remedy this deficit by unifying these philosophical insights with the goal of elaborating a theory of intentional explanation which brings together rationality, normativity and emotions. Roughly said, emotions play a key role in intentional explanation, because they can be conceived as rational and their rationality is specific, as they make agents act and react with respect to values and norms.

To defend this thesis, the paper has the following structure. In §2, I present the distinction between the epistemic and the strategic modes of rationality: the first mode being related to our knowledge of the world, the second one to our actions. In §3, I examine the epistemic mode and argue that emotions can be conceived as epistemically rational. I furthermore argue that from this mode, emotions are value detectors that make us identify values in our environment, and I explain that emotions are regimented by epistemic norms that can be constrained by social norms related to emotion elicitation. In §4, I turn to the strategic mode and claim that emotions can be conceived as strategically rational, because they motivate rational action: they possess action tendencies which tend to motivate types of intentional actions and reasoning about the consequences of the action; they play a role in the short and long-term planning of action by shaping choice and decision. Moreover, emotions are value producers because the actions they provoke aim at promoting values through norms of action that can be constrained by social norms related to emotional actions. In §5, I conclude the paper by arguing that emotions bridge the epistemic and the strategic modes of rationality in relationship to normativity, and that intentional explanations relying on emotions allow making sense of rational actions involving normativity.

## 1. Two modes of rationality

Rationality concerns both *beliefs* and *actions*. This fact leads to the idea that the *abilities to think* and *to make choices* are the central marks of rationality, and that rationali-

ty possesses two intimately interconnected modes (de Sousa 1987): the *epistemic mode* that applies to beliefs and judgment (cognitive states), and the *strategic mode* that applies to action and wants (conative states)<sup>1</sup>. Both modes are distinct, and the distinction dwells on how the mind relates to the world from the standpoint of intentionality and its directions of fit<sup>2</sup>. For the epistemic mode the intentional direction of fit is the mind-to-world direction: representations adjust to the objective world; whereas for the strategic mode the direction of fit is the world-to-mind direction: the world must be aligned with the representations of the goal (de Sousa 1987). The first mode is to be understood as the mode of the *intentional detection* of objects and things: our beliefs, perception, etc. represent the world as *it is* (or seems to be). The second mode is to be understood as the mode of the *intentional production* of objects and things: our desires, wishes, intentions represent the world as it (seemingly) *should be*, and they lead us to act so as to change the world<sup>3</sup>.

But how do emotions and normativity relate to the epistemic and the strategic mode? The first step in answering this question consists in observing that both modes are often (but not always) connected (de Sousa 1987): the actions we perform result from our (true or false) beliefs, the (appropriate or inappropriate) means that we identified in order to achieve the specific goals (good or bad) that we want to realize. Therefore, the model provides what can be called a "minimal structure" of rationality through the identification and the articulation of the epistemic and strategic modes.

## 2. Emotions, the epistemic mode of rationality, and normativity

As a short preamble to the theses that I develop in the following sections, I wish to say a few words about the main features of emotions. Emotions can be characterized as phenomena that affect the whole individual and that can be characterized through: physiological arousal, physiological expressions, subjective feelings, hedonic quality (pleasure-pain), cognitive base (evaluation), intentional objects, action tendencies, concerns and tem-

---

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that at this level of generalization the *strategic mode* is "neutral" because it does not determine any theory of choice (de Sousa 1987).

<sup>2</sup> On intentionality and directions of fits see Searle (1985).

<sup>3</sup> On the question of direction of fit and cognitive states that represent the world as it is and conative states that represent the world as it should be, see Deonna & Teroni (2012).

porality (Frijda 1986, 2007). Since this paper is about rationality, normativity and emotions, I mainly focus on the cognitive and motivational features of emotions.

This section is therefore devoted to the analysis of the relationships between emotions, rationality and normativity from the perspective of the epistemic mode of rationality. I argue that emotions can be conceived as epistemically rational because they have *cognitive bases* (beliefs, knowledge, etc.). Emotions are also related to normativity, because they are *value detectors* which help agents detect the values present in their environment. As such, emotions, through the epistemic mode of rationality, give agents access to values. But how do emotions give access to values? To answer this question, one must examine the intentionality of emotions and its relationship to the intentionality of their cognitive bases.

It is well known that emotions are intentional phenomena (de Sousa 1987; Deonna and Teroni 2012; Elster 1999) that are directed *toward* or are *about* something. For instance, Kate's anger is directed towards Luke who insulted her. Or Mary's fear is about the stock market crash. But the link between emotions and their intentional objects (in my examples Luke and the stock market crash) is not direct, it is mediated by other mental states that constitute their *cognitive bases* (de Sousa 1987; Deonna and Teroni 2012; Frijda 2007). Among those mental states we find, beliefs, knowledge, memories, perceptions, etc. For instance, Kate's anger is aimed at Luke but is mediated by her knowledge that his words were offensive, or Mary's fear is mediated by the belief that the stock market crash may make her lose money. The idea consists in saying that emotions are categorically<sup>4</sup> *rational* when they are anchored in cognitive bases like beliefs, knowledge, supposition,

---

<sup>4</sup> There is a fundamental distinction between two meanings of the notion of rationality that are capital for understanding the relations between rationality and emotions. Rationality has a categorical and a normative meaning (de Souza 1987, 2004). In the categorical sense rational is opposed to arational, whereas in the normative sense it is opposed to irrational. Rationality as a category applies to creatures that have the capacity to think and to make choices (for instance, human beings). Arationality applies to creatures whose behavior does not result from thought or choice. For instance, the behavior of an ameba is arational as well as the accidental fall on the ground of a man that results from gravity. By contrast, in the normative meaning, rationality applies to an agent who displays a flaw in thinking or in achieving an action. In this sense, one would classically say that an action is irrational when the agent pursues an end that goes against her best judgment (e.g. to engage in self-destructive behavior and do it knowingly) or when she fails to select the best means for achieving her goals or still when her action is grounded on false beliefs. In this meaning, irrationality seems to imply that some standards of rationality were violated. In this paper, rationality is most of the time used in the categorical sense, except where I use the expression irrationality.

etc<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, the *rationality of emotions* is indirect for it is mediated by rational thoughts. Thus the rationality of emotions is *derivative* of the mental states that work as their cognitive base (de Sousa 1987); that is why, for assessing the epistemic rationality of an emotion, we have to assess the rationality of its cognitive base. In that sense, if the belief that serves as the cognitive base of an emotion is false and/or unjustified, this belief is normatively *irrational*, and the emotion caused by the belief is, then, also *irrational* (Elster 1999).

More can be said about the relation between emotions and their cognitive bases from the standpoint of intentionality. Indeed, as I have explained, emotions are intentional states that are about something and they are anchored in cognitive states. Yet, these cognitive states have the function of representing the world as it is (or as it seems to be) and they have then the mind-to-world direction of fit (Deonna and Teroni 2012). As such, emotions inherit the intentionality of their cognitive bases and, just as their cognitive bases, they have the mind-to-world direction of fit (Deonna and Teroni 2012; Mulligan and Scherer 2012). Then emotions present the world: they are cognitive states that provide information to the person who experiences an emotion. But the kind of information provided is specific to emotions. Indeed, emotions make us apprehend values (de Sousa 1987; Tappolet 2000): they provide the individual with axiological information. That is why we can say that the intentionality of emotions is specific to them, since emotions present the objects toward which they are directed in an evaluative manner (Deonna and Teroni 2012). And indeed, each type of emotion corresponds to a specific value: for instance, anger is connected to offense, or fear to danger. For example, Kate's anger is directed toward Luke, but it presents Luke's words as an offense; or Mary's fear is directed toward the stock market crash, but it presents it as a danger for her (she faces the risk of losing her wealth). Those examples show that emotions are connected to specific kinds of evaluations and that emotions stand in intimate relationships with values (de Sousa 1987; Deonna and Teroni 2012; Nussbaum 2001; Tappolet 2000). Values connected to types of emotions are technically called *formal objects* (de Sousa 1987; Tappolet 2000). Formal objects play different roles with respect to emotions: they allow individuating kinds of emotions, explaining the occurrence of an emotion, making occurrent emotions intelligible, and assessing the correctness or

---

<sup>5</sup> Since I am interested in the rationality of emotions, I will exclude emotions that are grounded in perceptions like the aesthetical emotions experienced while listening to instrumental music.

appropriateness of emotions<sup>6</sup>. Since I am interested in the rationality of emotion and normativity, I focus on this last role.

Formal objects play a role in the *evaluation* of the (*in-*)*appropriateness* of occurrent emotions by furnishing criteria of *correctness* (Teroni 2007). Indeed, the fear that Peter experiences toward the dog would not be appropriate if this dog is a nice Labrador that just wants to play, for he would not be a threat to Peter. By contrast, Virginia's fear in front of a Pitbull baring his teeth, growling and standing in an attack posture would be *appropriate* because the dog is about to attack. *Correction* criteria are thus determined by formal objects that allow evaluating if emotions fit their particular objects (Teroni 2007). In that sense we would say that fear is correct if the dog is genuinely dangerous. Thus, the issue of the (ir-)rationality of emotions seems to rely on the function that formal objects play regarding correctness conditions. Indeed, emotions can be assessed as (ir-)rational depending on whether they fit their object, and this fittingness seems to depend on whether the cognitive base correctly represents the target of the emotion as exemplifying its formal object<sup>7</sup>. In the case of a fear caused by an unjustified belief (for instance being afraid of a dog that is not dangerous), it is the falsehood of the belief that makes the fear irrational. This is an implication of the idea that emotions inherit their intentionality from their cognitive base: if the belief is unjustified because it does not correctly represent the world, then the resulting emotion is not fitting.<sup>8</sup>

From the standpoint of normativity and the epistemic mode of rationality, this analysis shows that emotions can be assessed as rational according to *epistemic norms* that regiment the appropriateness of a felt emotion to its object through the accurateness of the cognitive base. In that sense, emotions are therefore not only concerned with values but

---

<sup>6</sup> See (Teroni 2007; Deonna and Teroni 2012).

<sup>7</sup> On emotion as fitting attitude, see D'Arms & Jacobson (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Deonna and Teroni (2012) distinguish between “epistemological standards” and “standards of correctness” in order to allow cases of emotions that are rationally unjustified but nonetheless objectively appropriate. For instance, the elation of a person who hears from an unreliable witness that his wife is in good health seems to be rationally unjustified, but the elation can by chance be appropriate if the wife is genuinely in good health. The distinction certainly holds if we consider the objective world, but if we consider the “method” by which this person becomes elated, we would say that since the beliefs that triggered the emotion are unjustified, the felt emotion does not seem to fit its object: the belief does not correctly represent the situation. Thus, from the point of view of how the information was acquired, it seems that the emotion does not fit its object and that it is therefore inappropriate because of the failure of the cognitive base to correctly represent reality.

also involve norms: emotions are reactions to the cognitive detection of (dis-)values and are regulated by epistemic norms.

Here an important distinction between two kinds of norms must be made. Epistemic norms must be distinguished from "emotion norms." Emotion norms are social norms that posit that an emotion ought (or ought not) to be felt in certain social circumstances (sad at a funeral, happy at a marriage) (Hochschild 2003; Thoits 2004). Epistemic norms that regiment the elicitation of emotions are "*intrinsic norms*" (Minner 2015): they belong to the very nature and internal structure of emotions. In comparison, emotion norms are "*extrinsic norms*" (Minner 2015) that do not belong to the internal structure of emotions: they are social conventions by which members of a society assess the appropriateness of their emotional responses. To grasp the contrast between these two kinds of norms, it is worth noticing that epistemic and emotion norms can *conflict*. For instance, an episode of envy is correct according to epistemic norms if envy correctly presents its object as enviable, but this episode can also be socially inappropriate according to emotion norms if envy is considered a vice in a given society (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000). Epistemic norms and emotion norms can also be *nonconflicting*. For example, an episode of indignation can be epistemically correct and socially appropriate if it correctly presents a situation as exemplifying an unjustified wrong (a rape, a murder) and if it is socially required to feel indignation towards this kind of injustice (Minner 2015). In this last case, the emotion norm constrains the emotional response by using the epistemic norm of the emotion: "you ought to be indignant towards rape or murder because they correctly exemplify injustices". In a nonconflicting scenario, the emotion norms seem then to have an epistemic function: they help individuals detect in their environment the (dis)values (injustice, loss, offense) that trigger emotion-types (indignation, sadness, anger) (Minner 2015). On the contrary, in a conflicting scenario, emotion norms do not have any epistemic function: the norm "you ought to not be envious" does not help individuals detect enviable objects.

But is the detection of the relevant (dis)value sufficient to arouse the corresponding emotion? The answer is no; a new element must be added to the picture: *concerns* or states of valuing. Indeed, emotions arise in "responses to events that are important to the individual's concerns" (Frijda 2007, 7). Concerns<sup>9</sup> are to be understood as "personal attachments" to objects or values for which the individual cares (Roberts 2003); that is, as "affective

---

<sup>9</sup> See Roberts (2003) for a very relevant critics of the notion of concern developed in psychology.

sensitivities to some objects or values" (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 111). Thus, if John is afraid because he is threatened, it is because he values his life. If Mary gets angry when she is insulted, it is because she values respect.

The role that concerns play in the elicitation of emotions means that they officiate as "relevance detectors"<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, events that are relevant for the concerns of individuals become salience to which they can react emotionally in order to adapt to circumstances (Frijda 1986): concerns give events their significance and help in the interpretation of their meaning or relevance for individuals. Concerns help individuals detect what is important, significant and thus (dis-)valuable.

Thanks to the notion of formal objects and concerns, we can see that axiology is omnipresent in the elicitation of emotions: emotions, thanks to the epistemic detection of (dis-)values through their cognitive bases and the concerns from which they stem, play a major role in the detection of events that exemplify (dis-)values that are relevant to what agents value. Therefore, emotions, by virtue of being information about the world and especially by virtue of being intentional reactions to the (real or fantasized) presence of (dis-)value, play an *epistemic role* in the detection of *axiological facts*: emotions are *cognition* in the sense that they are "mental states in which the subject is cognizant of some object" (Deigh 2008, 43), which are values. In that sense, emotions are related to the epistemic mode of rationality for they make us apprehend values through their cognitive bases and operate as *value detectors*. But we have also just seen that emotions are not only concerned with axiology because they also involve deontology. Indeed, emotions incorporate intrinsic epistemic norms that regiment the appropriateness of emotions, and these intrinsic norms can further be constrained by extrinsic social norms that might have an epistemic function in playing a role in the elicitation of emotions by guiding the cognitive detection of (dis-)values. These various intimate relationships of emotions to values and norms show that from the epistemic side of rationality, normativity is ubiquitous in the elicitation of emotions.

### 3. Emotions, the strategic mode of rationality, and normativity

The strategic mode of rationality mainly concerns choice and action; that is, the goals that an agent decides upon and the means that he uses in order to achieve the chosen

---

<sup>10</sup> On relevance detection see also Sander, Grandjean, & Scherer (2005).

goal. In this section, I will try to show that emotions, as conations, motivate deliberation and actions and are potential causes for the production of facts instantiating values and norms. According to this view, emotions are not only *dependent upon cognitive bases* and *value detectors*, they also motivate *thought* and *direct action* and can thus be understood as *value producers*. In short, emotions make us think and act in connection to normativity.

Emotions therefore are not simply reactions to objects and events, and even if there is a sense in which we "passively" experience the emotions we feel as English expressions attest—"to be seized with fear", "to be overwhelmed with sorrow"—this passivity is only half of the story, for emotions also move us: when afraid, one wants to flee or freeze; when sad, one wants to get back what is lost. Thus emotions imply activity: they are "motivators" (de Sousa 1987) or "states of readiness", which prepare the individual to accomplish types of actions (Frijda 1986, 2007) and to think in certain ways (Frijda and Mesquita 2000; Lerner et al. 2015). A state of readiness motivates in order to complete the aim that the agent has "in the face of delays and difficulties" and it "seeks precedence over ongoing behaviour or interference from other sources" (Frijda 2007). It persists over time and leads to a filtering of information, keeping the relevant and neglecting what is incompatible with the emotion (Frijda 1986, 2007). Thus, states of readiness direct and focus attention (de Sousa 1987; Frijda 1986, 2007) on things that require attention at a given time. Therefore, emotions focus attention on saliences that are relevant to individuals' concerns (Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991); that is on *axiological information*. Many states of readiness consist of "action tendencies" which are impulses to accomplish types of action: envy prepares one to destroy the advantage of the envied (Elster 2009), and indignation prepares one to punish the wrongdoer (Ranulf 1933-34). Action tendencies are not identical to actions: there are tendencies that are not necessarily actualized in concrete actions (Frijda 2007): someone who is indignant at the wrongdoings of a wrongdoer will not necessarily act to punish him even if this inclination is felt. Each emotion-type possesses its own action tendencies: for instance, the neutralization of the danger for fear, to make amends for a fault in guilt, to hide or disappear for shame. But note that emotions usually do not have only one action tendency. As the canonical example of fear attests, the neutralization of the danger can take the form of fleeing or freezing or of protecting what is in danger.

Action tendencies aim at the achievement of a particular goal (Frijda 2007): emotional actions are therefore *intentional actions* (Frijda 2007; Solomon 2003) that can be

motivated by a 'prior intention', which precedes the action, or by an 'intention in action',<sup>11</sup> which does not precede the action but is realized while performing it (Frijda 2007, 46).

In addition to the generation of intentions, three other features of emotions are related to rational actions: *instrumentality*, *teleology* (Frijda and Mesquita 2000) and *consequentialism*. During an emotional episode, cognitive activity is generated that (1) helps sustain beliefs for determining and selecting the specific goal that should realize the general emotional goal, (2) helps identify and select relevant means for achieving the emotional goal, and (3) helps evaluate the probable implications and consequences of the action (to be performed (Frijda 2007; Sander, Grandjean, and Scherer 2005). These various features show that emotions *shape choice and decisions* by grounding different cognitive activities related to the goal that they activate thanks to their action tendencies. But in addition to this "goal activation", emotions shape choice and decision via cognitive changes in the "depth of thoughts" and the "content of thoughts" (Lerner et al. 2015): emotions influence the depth of information that is processed before making a decision, and types of emotion are associated with different patterns of evaluations.

The "depth of thoughts" is related to consequentialist reasoning and possesses degrees of sophistication. Emotions can trigger weakly sophisticated reasoning based on automatic and very quick information processing about the causes of the emotion and the probable consequences and implications of the action (e.g. when fear is abruptly felt in front of a sudden danger, to run immediately through the first escape route identified), but they can also involve systematic and slow information processing (e.g. out of fear of nuclear catastrophes, imagining a political campaign and proposing bills to ban nuclear weapons and power plants) and lead to the time- and energy-consuming information-gathering that is typical of careful thinking about the triggering circumstances and about how to deal with them efficiently. In that sense, emotions can trigger strongly sophisticated reasoning<sup>12</sup>.

The "content of thoughts" means that, when emotionally aroused, an individual starts to think in specific ways that are anchored in the motivational tendencies of the felt emotion. The kinds of thoughts involved are then dependent upon the type of the emotion felt (Frijda and Mesquita 2000): there is a relationship of *ontological dependency* where the identity of thought depends on the identity of the emotion. Indeed, each emotion type pos-

---

<sup>11</sup> The notions 'prior intention' and 'intention in actions' come from Searle (1985).

<sup>12</sup> On fast and slow thinking see also Schmid (2014).

sesses motivational tendencies that exert effects on judgment, perceptual sensitivity, choice and decision by engendering "goal-directed processes" until "the emotion-eliciting problem is resolved" (Lerner and Keltner 2000, 488). That is why one can speak of the *cognitive tendencies* of emotions that complete the idea that emotions have *action tendencies*. Thus, these *cognitive tendencies* imply for each emotion-type different kinds of judgments, evaluations and perceptual sensitivity<sup>13</sup> that are related to the values (danger, offense, wrong) and concerns (life, respect, justice) of the felt emotion-type (fear, anger, indignation). This relationship to values is precisely what is specific to emotional thinking: emotions make people reason and use normative notions. In particular, emotions generate normative *judgments* (Nussbaum 2001; Prinz 2006; Solomon 2003); that is, value *and* deontic judgments. For instance, judging that something is wrong and ought to cease, and that the person who is responsible for the wrong is a culprit and ought to be punished are normative judgments that seem to be characteristic of indignation (Minner 2018); whereas judging that the rival possessing the coveted good is bad, that one's social standing is diminished because of the rival having the good, and that he ought to lose his good even at one's costs seem to be characteristic of envy<sup>14</sup>.

The fact that emotions can imply slow thinking and careful examination of the various consequences that can follow from acting attests to the fact that emotions are not always short-lived episodes, but can last a certain amount of time. Emotions are dynamic states which have a duration (Frijda 2007): they can last less than a second, a few seconds or minutes, a day, a week, or even several months. They may be interrupted but can be recalled when the person thinks about the eliciting situation: cases of vengeance arising out of resentment after a humiliation that occurred several years ago are very good examples of an emotion that lasts a long time with interruption. Emotions, then, play a role in the *planning* and the *sustaining* of action, another central feature of rational action. Moreover, in some circumstances, the occurrent emotion can even become a "passionate-goal" (Frijda 2007; Frijda and Mesquita 2000). Indeed, occurrent emotions can generate "*long-term*

---

<sup>13</sup> For a psychological understanding of the relationships between emotions and cognitions or judgments of causal attribution, predictions, and perceptual sensitivities see Lerner et al. (2015). More globally for the various kinds of evaluations that emotions imply, see Sander, Grandjean, & Scherer (2005) and Fontaine, Scherer & Soriano (2013).

<sup>14</sup> On envy and inferiority see Ben Ze'ev (1992) and on making the rival lose his advantage even at one's cost see Elster (1999).

goals" that have high "emotional content". From "the transient aim of [their] action tendencies", occurrent emotions can help settle "a stable and enduring concern for achieving the action tendency's specific end-point" (Frijda 2007, 193). This concern acquires high priority in the hierarchy of values of the individual: passionate goals are "major, prominent, and dominant concerns" of the individual who can spend "resources in time, money and energy, and readiness to face risks and other cost." (Frijda 2007, 193–94). For instance, out of indignation, a person can develop a passion for justice; or as a result of his pleasant aesthetic emotions resulting from listening to classical music, someone can develop a passion for this kind of music. Both individuals would then act in order to pursue and achieve their passions, promoting justice by joining a political association or enjoying the different dimensions of classical music by going regularly to concerts.

Passionate goals nevertheless differ from emotions on one crucial dimension. Emotions are occurrent states, whereas passionate-goals are dispositional states that when opportunity is there take center stage (Frijda 2007). Passions can be "pursued coolly, without a sign of control precedence [...]: one can plan one's political strategies and tactics without excitement" (Frijda 2007, 194). The action tendencies of the emotion that gave birth to a passion have generated prior intention, planning and judgments about the emotional situation, but do not need to manifest every time that an individual pursues his passionate goals.

Nevertheless, this picture raises a problem: how can intentions and control precedence depend on the action tendency of the original emotion, if the latter does not directly motivate? The answer can be found in desires. Indeed, one can understand the fact that passionate goals can be "coolly" pursued, without sacrificing the hypothesis that conations motivate thoughts, by noting that desires formed during emotional episodes under the impulsion of action tendencies can play this motivating role. For instance, desires of nullifying wrongs and of punishing wrongdoers—grounded in past occurrent indignations—would motivate the actions and the reflections of people who pursue justice without always experiencing occurrent indignations. In that sense, desires appear to be motive states that operate between the action tendencies and the passionate goal: the original emotions motivate *indirectly* through the mediation of desires. In that sense, emotions do not only motivate *mental* and *motor actions*: they also motivate *wants* (de Sousa 1987). Next to intentions, emotions can give birth to desires and wishes (Elster 1994, 2010; Roberts 2003), and preferences (Elster 2010, 1999) that, grounded in the action tendencies of the emotions, motivate behaviours. Action tendencies also plays a role in organizing and structuring the content of the conations it generates. For instance, indignation toward a given wrong may ground

intentions, desires and preferences about a state of affairs that ought to obtain for stopping and preventing the wrong in order to re-establish justice; and these conations can lead one to act so as to actualize the norm stated (ought to stop), which should help realize the value (justice) that the action targets.

From this discussion one can see that the motivating role of emotions is twofold: emotions, by virtue of having tendencies to act, can motivate actions *directly* or *indirectly*. *Direct* motivation occurs when the felt action tendencies trigger motor action by providing an intention to act without subsequent desires or wishes. *Indirect* motivation occurs when desires or wishes grounded in emotions motivate behaviour.

By tracing back the origins of wants in the action tendencies of emotion-types, an emotional model of action is well placed for explaining why certain types of intentions, desires, and preferences obtain. Indeed, by working as the "conative base" of wants which they motivate (Deonna and Teroni 2012), emotions generate and provide the identity of these wants (desire, wishes for revenge, for safety, etc.). By doing so, action tendencies play an explanatory role for these wants by illuminating their origins, and these motivated wants explain why types of action (revenge, neutralizing the danger) corresponding to types of emotion (resentment, fear) are performed—even when the emotion is no longer felt by the agent.

Since emotions motivate actions, they are not simply reactions to the presence (real or apparent) of (dis-)values; they also provide goals and guidance for actions. In other words, emotions are not only reactive attitudes, they are also *directive attitudes* that transfer their intentionality to wants. It is important to keep in mind that conations typically have the world-to-mind direction of fit: they aim at bringing about some changes in the world by realizing the state of affairs that is represented in their content. In that sense, their content is satisfied if the world acquires the property which they represent the world as having (Proust 2009). In emotions, this property is simply the general emotional goal; for instance, for indignation it would be justice, for fear safety, for anger restoring respect, etc. In fact, this shows that emotions also entertain intentional relationships with further values that are not formal objects. Each emotion-type seems, according to its intrinsic goals or motivational tendencies, to aim to promote in the world a "target-value": justice, safety, respect, etc.

Interestingly, target-values seem to provide *correction criterion* for actions, just like formal objects provided *correction criterion* for the occurrence of emotional episodes. Indeed, from the epistemic side we saw that formal objects provided correction criterion for each emotion-type. Then these criteria stipulate epistemic norms by which individuals can

judge if an emotion ought to be felt (or not) according to the presence (or the absence) of an instance of their formal object in the environment. From the strategic side, emotions through their action tendencies provide goals that aim at realizing target-values in the world. Yet, these goals can be said to be correct if the target-value ought to obtain. In that sense, *target-values provide criterion of correction for emotional actions*, and allow us to say when an *action ought* to be undertaken or not, against whom, and what kind of action is relevant (punishment, defence, restoring respect).

This brings us back to the thesis that emotions are regimented by *intrinsic norms*, but we must add that these norms do not only bear on the object or situation that triggered the emotion, but that they also bear on the different objects of an emotion-type (Minner 2015). In that sense, emotions are not only regimented by intrinsic norms related to the epistemic mode of rationality, they are also regimented by intrinsic norms related to the strategic mode of rationality, which means that the rationality of emotions can be assessed from the point of view of *epistemic norms* but also from the point of view of *norms for action*.

To illustrate this, let us consider, in a Smithian's spirit<sup>15</sup>, resentment and gratitude and the various ways by which these emotions fit their objects. Resentment is a reaction to a harm that was intentionally committed or inflicted by an offender and it inclines the individual experiencing it to punish the offender. But in terms of epistemic norms and action norms, resentment is *correct* if a harm was really done by an ill-willed agent (epistemic norm), and this person is the *correct* target of the tendency to punish if she really was the ill-willed agent responsible for this harm (action norm). The same can be said of gratitude, which is a reaction to the goodness of someone benevolent who helps a beneficiary who is needy, and it inclines the beneficiary to reciprocate the good by a further good. In terms of epistemic norms and action norms, gratitude is *correct* if a benevolent act was intentionally performed by an agent (epistemic norm), and this person is the *correct* target of the tendency to reward if she is really responsible for the good done (action norm). We see it, each emotion-type presents its objects in an evaluative *and* a deontic manner. Indeed, resentment evaluatively presents the action as a harm and the agent as an offender, and it deontically presents the harmful action as requiring resentment and the agent as having to be punished. Gratitude evaluatively presents the action as good and the agent as benevolent, and it deon-

---

<sup>15</sup> This analysis is inspired by Smith's ([1790], 2002) theory of the appropriateness of emotions.

tically presents the action as requiring gratitude and the agent as having to be rewarded. Then, in short, resentment and gratitude *ought to* be felt if their objects were respectively *harmful* or *beneficial* (epistemic norms), and the *agents* of this harm or benefaction *ought to* be respectively *punished* or *rewarded* (action norms). In that sense, the norms apply because of the relevant values: it is because Peter was kind to Jeanne that Jeanne should be grateful, and she should reward him because he was her benefactor. This accounts for the fact that *types of emotion seem to bind and articulate kinds of norms with kinds of values*.

Interestingly, like epistemic norms, intrinsic action norms must be distinguished from extrinsic emotion norms. Indeed, emotion norms do not only constrain the elicitation of an emotion (sad at a funeral, happy at a marriage), they also constrain emotional actions related to an emotion-type (Hochschild 2003; Minner 2015), and then provide action norms that are extrinsic to an emotion-type. For example, if gratitude or forgiveness are socially required in a given society, then it is also mandatory that one respectively reciprocates the good or forgives the offender. To grasp the contrast between these two kinds of norms, it is worth noticing that intrinsic action norms, just like epistemic norms, can *conflict* with emotion norms. For instance, when envious, an individual tends to think that his rival ought to lose his advantage and that equality ought to be restored between them<sup>16</sup>. But in the society of this individual, an emotion norm can oppose these intrinsic action norms by stating that it is not permitted to harm a rival out of envy. Thus, the envious is confronted to a dilemma where he must "choose" between actualizing the intrinsic norms of envy or following the social norm that commands not to act out of envy. Intrinsic action norms can also be *non-conflicting* with emotion norms. Someone who experiences gratitude will tend to think that he ought to reciprocate the good received, and this action norm can be congruent with social norms stating that one ought to be grateful and to reciprocate the good in certain socially appropriate ways (say thank you, offer a gift) to the appropriate person (a helpful seller in a shop, a close friend). In a nonconflicting scenario, social norms seem then to have the function of providing guidance to the emotional normative goal by constraining how the intrinsic action norms and the target-values should be actualized in dependency to social expectations. In a conflicting scenario (the envy case for instance), emotional norms do not have such a function.

---

<sup>16</sup> On the envious' wishes that their rivals lose their advantages in order to establish equality, see Elster (1999).

This analysis shows that similarly to the epistemic mode of rationality, from the point of view of the strategic mode, emotions stand in various intimate relations to values and norms which attests for the fact that normativity is ubiquitous in the actions that emotions tend to generate. Indeed, emotions, by virtue of being motive states, play a *motivating role* in the production of *axiological facts*: emotions are *conations* because they are states of readiness to act which tend to promote target-values. In that sense, emotions are related to the strategic mode of rationality as they make us produce values through their action tendencies: emotions operate as *value producers*. But emotional actions are not only concerned with axiology because they also involve deontology. Indeed, emotions incorporate intrinsic action norms that regiment the appropriateness of emotional actions, and these intrinsic norms can further be constrained by extrinsic social norms that might have the function of guiding emotional actions according to social expectations about the proper way of realizing the normative goals of emotions.

### Conclusion

Let me summarize the main arguments that I have put forward. The idea is to "bridge" the epistemic and the strategic modes of rationality in order to provide a general sketch of a theory of intentional action that respects the intimate relationships that exists between rationality, normativity and emotions.

Emotions operate according to the epistemic mode of rationality because they are anchored in cognitive bases that serve as their causal antecedents. Emotions have the mind-to-world direction of fit that they inherit from their cognitive bases and can be considered reactive attitudes that arise when the individuals identify objects or states of affairs that (seem to) exemplify certain (dis-)values. Resulting from the intentional detection of values, emotions provide the individual with axiological information that is made available through the cognitive base: emotions are then *value detectors*. But emotions are also regimented by intrinsic epistemic norms that can be constrained (but not always) by extrinsic social norms, linked to the elicitation of emotions. Nevertheless, the detection of values is not sufficient for an emotion to arise: they arise from the encounter of a concrete value and a concern of the person. Concerns are states of valuing or attachments to kinds of values. From the epistemic side, emotions imply then that rationality and normativity are related to the acquisition of axiological information.

From the strategic side, emotions work as conative bases: they motivate and structure choice and actions and ground wants. By doing so, they generate intrinsic beliefs and wants. Among the beliefs that are intrinsic to emotions, are normative judgments; that is value and deontic judgments. Thus, emotions present target-values and action norms to the mind and, by giving rise to wants, have the function of actualizing those norms by which the emotional goals should be realized. In fact, the action tendencies of each emotion type motivate individuals to promote through their action target-values via intrinsic action norms, which can be constrained (or not) by extrinsic social norms related to emotional actions. Emotions are then *value producers*. To realize their goals, emotions help focus the attention on salient traits of the environment, they help select the means that can be used for achieving the goal they present to the mind, they monitor the search for information and the sophistication of reasoning, and can transform into passionate goals. In that sense, emotions, by providing short or long-term goals, means-end relations and degrees of sophistication in thinking are essential elements of rational action. Therefore, emotions bridge the epistemic and the strategic modes of rationality by articulating the cognitive detection of (dis-)values *via* epistemic norms and the conative production of target-values *via* action norms. Emotions appear to be the cognitive and conative processes that work as the joint that holds normativity and agency together, by articulating the rational detection and production of values and by being regimented by intrinsic epistemic and action norms that can be constrained by extrinsic social norms. This means that emotions provide intentional explanations of agents' rational actions related to values and norms.

*Dr. Frédéric Minner, Department of Sociology, University of Geneva, Switzerland,  
Frederic.Minner[at]unige.ch*

## References

- Ben-Ze'ev, Aaron. "Envy and Inequality." *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 89, Nr. 11 (1992): 551–581.
- D'Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'appropriateness' of Emotions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 61, Nr. 1 (2000): 65–90.

de Sousa, Ronald. *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1987.

Deigh, John. *Emotions, Values and the Law*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Deonna, Julien, and Fabrice Teroni. *The Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.

Elster, Jon. *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions*. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Elster, Jon. *Alexis de Tocqueville: The First Social Scientist*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Elster, Jon. *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Elster, Jon. *Explaining Technical Change: A Case Study in the Philosophy of Science*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Oslo: Cambridge University Press Universitetsforlaget, 1983.

Elster, Jon. *L'Irrationalité : Traité Critique de l'homme Économique, Vol. II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2010.

*L'Irrationalité : Traité Critique de l'homme Économique, Vol. II*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2010 "Rationality, Emotions, and Social Norms." *Synthese* Vol. 98, Nr. 1 (1994): 21–49.

Fontaine, Johnny J. R., Klaus R. Scherer, and Cristina Soriano (eds.). *Components of Emotional Meaning: A Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Frijda, Nico H. *The Emotions*. Cambridge/New York/Paris : Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1986.

Frijda, Nico H. *The Laws of Emotion*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.

Frijda, Nico H., and Batja Mesquita. "Beliefs through Emotions." in Nico H. Frijda, Antony S. R. Manstead, and Sacha Bem (eds.). *Emotions and Beliefs*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 45–77.

Hochschild, Arlie. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, Twentieth Anniversary Edition with a New Afterword*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003.

Lazarus, Richard L. *Emotion and Adaptation*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Lerner, Jennifer. S. et al. "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* Vol. 66 (2015): 799–823.

Lerner, Jennifer. S., and Dacher Keltner. "Beyond Valence: Toward a Model of Emotion-Specific Influences on Judgement and Choice." *Cognition and emotion* Vol. 14, Nr. 4 (2000): 473–493.

Minner, Frédéric. "From Indignation to Norms against Unjustified Violence in Occupy Geneva: A Case Study for the Problem of the Emergence of Norms." *Social Science Information* Vol. 54 (2015): 497–524.

Minner, Frédéric. "L'indignation, Le Mépris et Le Pardon Dans l'émergence Du 'Cadre Légal' d'Occupy Geneva"." *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* Vol. 56, Nr 2 (2018): 133–159.

Mulligan, Kevin, and K. R. Scherer. "Toward a Working Definition of Emotion." *Emotion Review* Vol. 4, Nr. 4 (2012): 345–357.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Pacherie, Élisabeth. "The Role of Emotions in the Explanation of Action." in Pacherie Élisabeth (ed.) *Emotion and Action*. European Review of Philosophy. Vol. 5. CSLI Publications, 2002. 55–90.

Prinz, Jesse. "The Emotional Basis of Moral Judgments." *Philosophical explorations* Vol. 9, Nr. 1 (2006)

Proust, Joëlle. "Conation." in David Sander and K. R. Scherer (eds.). *The Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 95–96.

Ranulf, Svend. *The Jealousy of the Gods and Criminal Law at Athens, Vol. 1 & 2*. London: Williams & Norgate; Lavin & Munsksgaard, 1933-1934.

Roberts, Robert Campbell. *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Sander, David, D Grandjean, and K. R. Scherer. "A System Approach to Appraisal Mechanisms in Emotion." *Neural Networks* Vol. 18 (2005): 317–352.

Schmid, Hans Bernhard. "The Feeling of Being a Group." in Christian von Scheve and Mikko Salmela (eds.). *Collective Emotions*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Searle, John R. *L'intentionnalité : Essai de Philosophie Des États Mentaux*. Trans. Claude Pichevin. Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985.

Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Solomon, Robert C. *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Tappolet, Christine. *Émotions et Valeurs*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2000.

Teroni, Fabrice. "Emotions and Formal Objects." *Dialectica* Vol. 61, Nr. 3 (2007): 395–415.

Thoits, Peggy A. "Emotion Norms, Emotion Work, and Social Order." in Antony S. R. Manstead, Nico Frijda, and Agneta Fisher. (eds.) *Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Zhu, Jing, and Paul Thagard. "Emotion and Action." *Philosophical Psychology* Vol. 15, Nr. 1 (2002): 19–36.