

EMOTIONS AS STANDING DISPOSITIONAL STATES

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Abstract. *What kinds of mental states are emotions? A common philosophical view says that they are episodic states. Some philosophers conceive of these states as bodily feelings or experiences of some sort, others as judgements or states very similar but not identical to judgements. I argue that emotions are not episodic states; like beliefs and desires, they are standing dispositional states that may manifest themselves in consciousness and behaviour. But emotions are neither beliefs nor desires; they are sui generis mental states. We understand the nature of these states when we consider the role they play in ordinary folk-psychological explanations.*

Keywords: emotions, dispositions, feelings, intentionality, psychological explanation

1. Introduction

What kinds of mental states are emotions? I will answer this question by considering the distinction between episodic and standing mental states. Episodes are conscious mental states that last for limited periods of time. This is to say that they have conscious character – whether experiential or otherwise – and that they typically come and go, wax and wane. Examples of episodic states include experiences – perceptions and bodily feelings for example – and conscious occurrences like thoughts and judgements. Standing states, by contrast, lack conscious character and often last for extended periods of time. This means that they are neither experiences nor conscious occurrences. In Wollheim’s words, they are “underlying modifications of the mind which are possessed of intentionality but not of subjectivity”. (2003: 20). Standing states are often described as mental dispositions, for they dispose those who have them to undergo conscious episodes. For example, the standing belief that France has adopted the Euro as its currency disposes you to think that you should purchase Euros before travelling to Paris and also to behave accordingly. Episodic and standing states also differ in that they bring about different types of behaviour. Thus, the standing belief that you should not scratch your chickenpox blisters leads to a different type of behaviour from the one brought about by an itchy sensation on your back. While, in one case, you simply scratch your back, in the other, you carefully avoid scratching and continue to do so until the blisters have healed.

Granted the distinction between episodic and standing mental states, what kinds of states are emotions? A common philosophical view – I shall refer to it as the ‘episodic view’ – maintains that emotions are conscious episodes. Some philosophers (e.g., James 1884; Prinz 2004; Whiting 2009) think that the view is best understood as saying that emotions are experiential episodes such as bodily feelings. Let’s call this version of the episodic view ‘the

feeling view'. Other philosophers accept the episodic view but reject the idea that emotions should be identified with bodily feelings. Some of them (e.g., Döring 2003; Tappolet 2005) think that emotions are evaluative perceptions; others (e.g., Helm 2001, 2009) that they are experiential episodes different from perceptions and irreducible to bodily feelings. Most philosophers, however, take emotions to be non-experiential episodes. In line with this view, some (e.g., Nussbaum 2001; Solomon 1976) maintain that emotions are evaluative judgements; others (e.g., Roberts 2003) that they are not judgments but states very similar to judgments. Other philosophers argue that the episodic view is best understood as saying that emotions are non-experiential episodes like thoughts (e.g., Greenspan 1988; Neu 2000; Robinson 1983) or desires (e.g., Marks 1982). Finally, some philosophers (e.g., Goldie 2000) describe emotions as compound episodic states that involve other mental states including feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and dispositions to experience further emotional episodes.

In opposition to the episodic view, I argue that emotions are *standing dispositional mental states*, to use the terminology that D.M. Armstrong (1973) applies to beliefs. In his account, Armstrong argues that most beliefs are standing dispositional states and that, as such, they may manifest themselves in consciousness and behaviour. They are standing states in that they are enduring properties of the mind. (The belief that squares are regular quadrangles, for example, is an enduring content of my mind.) They are dispositional states in that they may manifest themselves in many different ways. (Thus, the thought and the assertion that my kitchen tiles are square manifest – one in consciousness, the other in linguistic behaviour – what I believe about a number of things including the geometrical properties of squares and the shape of my kitchen tiles.) In analogy with Armstrong's account of belief, I will argue that emotions are standing dispositional states that may manifest themselves in consciousness and behaviour.

This view of emotions – let's call it the 'dispositional view' – is not new to philosophy. Richard Wollheim (1999) argues that *all* emotions are dispositions. My account differs from his in that, while Wollheim focuses on the conditions that bring about emotions – what he calls "the history of emotions" (1999: 15-95) – I focus on the role that emotions play in folk-psychological explanations of actions. The paper has the following structure. In section 2, I present the dispositional view of emotions and show that it best explains the relation between emotions, on one hand, and consciousness and behaviour, on the other. In the second half of the paper, I discuss the implication of the dispositional view for the explanation of emotional actions. More precisely, I show that if we think of emotions as standing dispositional states, we can account for features of emotional actions that we would not be able to explain if we thought of emotions as episodic states. In particular, in section 3, I argue that the dispositional view provides the best account for long-term emotional actions, while, in section 4, I develop the view that emotions are endowed with motivational power of their own and, as such, can motivate various types of actions.

2. Emotions as Standing Dispositional States

I will start by outlining a general theory of standing dispositional mental states.¹ These are states like belief, memory, knowledge and desire. The theory claims that states of this kind may manifest themselves in consciousness and behaviour. For example, the thought that I should purchase Euros before travelling to France manifests, at the level of consciousness, the belief that France has adopted the Euro as its currency. Similarly, the question "Do we have

¹ Examples of the theory can be found in Armstrong (1968, 1973), Price (1969), Wollheim (1984, 1999, 2003), among others.

any Euros left from our last trip to France?” manifests the same belief in linguistic behaviour. Some theories maintain that dispositions cause their manifestations; others deny that dispositions are causes.² In what follows, I will assume that the relation between a standing dispositional state and its manifestation is to be understood in causal terms. This means that, when a manifestation occurs, the state is causally responsible for it. If we take causal links to be contingent, it follows from this that a standing dispositional state may fail to produce a manifestation.

But when exactly does a state fail to manifest itself? We need to distinguish situations where the state produces a manifestation that, for some reason, the subject cannot access (e.g., Block 1995) from situations where no conscious episode reveals the underlying standing state. In the former case, one may have a conscious episode – a feeling for example – of which one is unaware. Thus, I can feel tired without being aware that I feel so. In the latter case, by contrast, one has a state that, for some reason, does not lead to any conscious episode. Suppose I notice that I am running out of milk and I make a mental note that I should buy milk next time I go to the supermarket. If I go to the supermarket and forget to buy milk, my mental note – whether we take it to be a memory, a belief, or an intention – fails to manifest itself in my consciousness and, consequently, in my actions.

The theory makes a second claim. It says that standing dispositional mental states may last for extended periods of time. Memories and beliefs, for example, can last for days, months or even years. This claim, however, makes no prediction about the exact duration of these states. While some may be long-lasting, others may last for short periods of time. In some cases, if a state produces a manifestation, the state may last just as long as its manifestation. Consider the following example. My watch is slow but I do not know it. When someone asks me the time, I look at it and tell her the time – for example that it is two o’clock. Since I have no reason to doubt my watch, what I say reports my belief about the time. In other words, my assertion is a linguistic manifestation, or an expression, of what I believe about the time. Now suppose that another person, who knows the exact time, hears my assertion and immediately corrects it by pointing out that, in fact, it is quarter past two. If I accept what he says, it follows that my belief that it is two o’clock lasts only as long as my assertion.

What I have so far observed has implications for the epistemology of standing dispositional mental states. Manifestations are events that allow us to *identify* the dispositions that they manifest. Thus, the fact that a glass shatters when struck tells me that the glass is brittle. The same is true of standing dispositional mental states, for manifestations allow us to identify these states both in first and in third-person cases. For example, the thought that I should buy Euros before travelling to France tells me what I believe about a number of things, including the fact that France has adopted the Euro as its currency. Similarly, if someone heard me asking “Do we have any Euros left from our last trip to France?”, they would learn some of the things I believe. In short, there is an *evidential relation* between manifestations and standing dispositional states such that manifestations provide evidence as to what states we and others have. It goes without saying that having evidence about emotions does not amount to having knowledge of them, for the evidence can be misleading or subject to misinterpretation.

² D.M. Armstrong (1968) maintains that dispositions are causes. This view, however, is controversial. For example, Prior, Pargetter and Jackson (1982) argue that dispositions are not causes in themselves but second-order properties that have some causal bases. Prior (1985) goes even further and argues that dispositions are causally impotent.

This is, in a nutshell, what a theory is most likely to say about standing dispositional mental states. Of course there are other claims that the theory could make – for example it could say that episodic states may terminate standing dispositional states (see on this point Wollheim 1999: 8-11). Thus, the experience of bungee-jumping from an airplane may terminate forever my fear of heights. I believe that the claims I considered here will be sufficient for developing a dispositional view of emotions.

What claims does the view make? First, it says that, as standing dispositional states, emotions may manifest themselves in consciousness, in the form of episodes, and in behaviour.³ Is this claim true of emotions? I will first consider conscious episodes. It is a fact about *certain* bodily feelings that they tell us what emotions we have. For example, the characteristic feeling of butterflies in the stomach can tell me that I am worried or anxious about something. Of course, this is not to say that all bodily feelings say something about emotions, for there are bodily feelings – joint pains and toothaches for example – that have no connection with emotions. Neither is it to say that we are never wrong about feelings and what they tell us about emotions. For example, I can mistake a feeling of physical malaise for one of sadness and thus falsely believe that I am sad about something. The point is that *certain* specific bodily feelings provide us with evidence as to what emotions we have. These are feelings that, when we experience them, give us reason to say that we have certain emotions. It makes good sense to say that, as episodic states, these feelings are experiential manifestations of emotions or, to put it in other terms, that emotions may manifest themselves in the form of bodily feelings. In this view, bodily feelings are ways of experiencing, and thus becoming aware of, our emotions. So far, it seems that the claim that standing dispositional states may manifest themselves as conscious episodes is true of emotions.

We may suppose that other kinds of episodic states may manifest emotions. Consider the following examples. We often speak of sad or depressing thoughts and memories. We also describe some of our perceptions as bleak and gloomy. In most cases, these episodic states cause us to have emotions (emotions that we can then experience as feelings), rather than being caused by emotions. But it is certainly possible that, in some cases, episodic states such as thoughts, memories, and perceptions may also manifest emotions. For example, the thoughts I have when I am sad are certainly very different from the ones I have when I am happy. Similarly, the fact that I am happy may facilitate the occurrence of happy memories, funny or amusing thoughts, and perceptions in which things look exciting and beautiful. It is therefore plausible to think that emotions may manifest themselves in thoughts, memories, and perceptions.

There is an important difference between these kinds of episodic states, on one hand, and feelings, on the other. While certain feelings provide us with evidence as to what emotions we have, other conscious episodes do not seem to have the same evidential value. Thoughts and memories, for example, do not make us aware of our emotions in the way feelings do. At most, they help us understand our emotions and what they are about. Suppose I feel sad but I cannot say what my sadness is about. As a matter of fact, I keep thinking about the news that a friend of mine is seriously ill. I also keep thinking about my friend and the fact that I missed the chance to see her during my last trip home. These thoughts certainly help me

³ It should be noted that the view makes no claim as to whether all the different mental states that we usually group into the category of emotions are standing dispositions. In what follows I assume that all states that are emotions are also standing dispositions, leaving open the question of exactly what states belong to the category of emotions.

to understand what my sadness is about – my friend and her illness in this case – but they do not make me aware of my sadness in the way a feeling does.

What about perceptions? There is a sense in which the impression that things look ugly and worthless tells me something about my state of mind – that I am sad or depressed in this case. Similarly, an anxious performer may see the audience before him as unfriendly. The problem is that, usually, we do not examine the content of our perceptions to know our emotions. This is because we take perceptions to carry information about the world, and not so much about what goes on in our mind.

The theory also makes another claim. It says that standing dispositional mental states may manifest themselves in behaviour. Is this claim true of emotions? It should be noted that the claim is linked to the claim that emotions may last for extended periods of time. This is because it is the observation of behaviour – in particular of long-term actions – that provides us with evidence that people have emotions that last for extended periods of time. For example, it is when we notice that two people who used to be friendly do not greet each other any more that we say that they are angry. When we say this, we take their anger to be a state that will last, or has lasted, for an extended period of time.

I will discuss long-term emotional actions more in detail in the next section. For now it suffices to observe that some actions – holding a grudge or behaving in an unfriendly for example – confirm that emotions can both manifest themselves in behaviour and do so over extended periods of time. This is not to say that all emotions are long-lasting states. Rather, it is to say that, as standing states, emotions are *capable of* lasting for extended periods of time. This is one of the features that distinguish them from episodic states. But it is perfectly possible that some emotions can be short-lived. Consider the case of surprise. It normally lasts for short periods. This does not mean, however, that surprise is an episodic state, for it can behave like a standing dispositional state. Suppose I receive a postcard from an old school friend and this makes me very surprised. My emotion can outlast its immediate manifestation and manifest itself again, later in the day or in the week, when I report the surprising event to another friend. In this view, emotions are standing states capable of lasting for extended periods of time. When they do so, they can lead to long-term actions.

Of course, emotions can manifest themselves in other kinds of actions. These are expressive actions like smiling, laughing, or jumping for joy. It is interesting to note that these actions provide us with evidence as to what emotions others have. Thus, when I see a man frowning and hanging up the phone abruptly, I can tell that he is angry or annoyed about something. Of course, I may be wrong. But this is a common problem with evidence from perception. What I have so far observed confirms that two claims – the claim that standing dispositional mental states can manifest themselves in behaviour and the claim that these states can last for extended periods of time – are both true of emotions. In sum, the dispositional view makes various claims about emotions. What I have so far observed shows that all these claims say something true of emotions.

I would like to conclude this section with some general remarks about the contrast between the episodic and the dispositional view of emotions. People often think of emotions as episodic states – states that wax and wane. What justifies this view is the fact that feelings are the most noticeable aspect of emotions. As a result, when we think of emotions, we think of them as states that we experience for limited periods of time. This means that we build our conception of emotions out of the evidence that is available to us when we experience emotions. In turn, this way of thinking of emotions is reinforced by the evidence we acquire from other people's expressive behaviour and actions – actions like smiling and jumping for joy. When we observe these actions in others, we are led to think that they have the emotions

that they are expressing and that they have them in the exact moments when we observe the expressions. The fact remains that we do not know whether the emotions that we see in others coincide with the expressions or, in fact, last much longer. All we know is that the emotions seem to be occurring when we observe them in other people's expressions.

This is not sufficient to conclude that emotions are not standing states. If we consider the kinds of actions that we explain in terms of emotions, we will notice that, in many cases, they are actions that last for extended periods of time. Thus, we say that people hold a grudge because they are angry, that they seek revenge because they hate, or that they care for their partners because they love them. If we consider these explanations and we take them to be evidence for emotions, it is clear that we do think of emotions as standing dispositional states – states that last for extended periods of time. We are simply less aware of this evidence than we are of the evidence that support the episodic view. It is on these kinds of explanations – explanations of long-term emotional actions – that I will focus in the next section.

3. Emotions and Psychological Explanations

Mental states explain behaviour. Different kinds of mental states yield different kinds of explanations. Suppose I want to explain certain actions in terms of the mental state *M*. If I take *M* to be a standing dispositional state, I devise explanations that differ from the ones I would devise if I took *M* to be an episodic state. It is plausible to think that only one way of conceiving of the state is correct and, consequently, that only one type of explanation provides the best account for the actions that I want to explain. These considerations suggest that the way in which we conceive of a given mental state matters to good psychological explanations.

In what follows I will show that thinking of emotions as standing dispositional states allows us to best account for explanations of certain specific actions. I take good explanations to be ones that are both exhaustive and psychologically plausible. My discussion will focus on long-term emotional actions like avoiding objects and situations because of fear, holding a grudge because of anger, seeking revenge because of hatred and so on. These kinds of actions differ from short-term emotional actions – like having a row or welcoming a friend – in that they last for extended periods of time. During these periods, the actions display two key features – features that a good explanation needs to account for.

One is the fact that these actions make reference to specific objects – where the objects often coincide with the intentional objects of the emotions that produce them.⁴ Thus, if I avoid flying because I am afraid of it, the experience of flying is the intentional object of my fear. It is to this specific object that my long-term avoidance behaviour makes reference. The claim that the specific objects of actions often coincide with the intentional objects of emotions is true even when the intentional objects are things that do not exist. Suppose that I am afraid of ghosts. My actions will make reference to ghosts in that they will be aimed at avoiding all those situations that, according to what I believe, may expose me to the danger of ghosts. It should be noted that long-term emotional actions refer to objects in a way that is coherent over time. For example, if I avoid ghosts today, I will do it again tomorrow and again the day after. As a result, my actions continue to make reference to a specific object for as long as my fear of ghosts lasts. A good explanation will be one that can account for the fact that my actions continue to refer to the same specific object over extended periods of time.

The other feature of long-term emotional actions is that they can be, and often are, recalcitrant. This means that they may not change even when the agent is given evidence that

⁴ For a discussion of the idea that actions make reference to objects see Peacocke (1981: 204-210).

he should not behave the way he does. For example, if people are afraid of flying, they will continue to avoid travelling by plane even when they know that flying is not as dangerous as they think. A good explanation of long-term emotional actions will be one that, as well as explaining how they can make reference to specific objects, can also do justice to their recalcitrant character. In what follows I show that the dispositional view of emotions allows us to best explain both features of long-term emotional actions.

Consider the following example. My neighbour has recently bought a dog. For some reason, I do not like the animal and I am afraid of it. As a result, I begin to behave in ways that aim at avoiding any encounter with the dog. I do not walk by my neighbour's garden any more and I take a different route on my way home. Sometimes, to avoid the area that the dog patrols, I catch the bus and get off a few blocks down the road. This complex set of actions continues for as long as I am afraid of the dog. The question now is: What kind of state provides the best explanation for my long-term emotional actions?

I will start by considering the feeling view. There are two reasons for thinking that this view cannot provide a good explanation for my actions. One is that episodic states cannot explain – *by themselves* – actions that last for extended periods of time. This is because, as states that come and go, they are unable to affect behaviour in the long term. To put it in other terms, a state that ceases shortly after its onset cannot influence, by itself, behaviour and actions that will occur long after the offset of the state. It is only in connection with non-episodic states – states that last for extended periods of time – that the episodic state can have a lasting influence upon behaviour and actions.

It should be noted that all versions of the episodic view of emotions face this problem. Some views avoid it by saying that emotions are episodic states that correlate⁵ with standing dispositional states like beliefs and desires. I will consider this approach later in this section.

The other reason for thinking that the feeling view does not provide good explanations for long-term emotional actions is that it cannot explain how these actions can make reference to specific objects – my neighbour's dog for example – and do so over extended periods of time. As we know, the view claims that emotions are just bodily feelings. It is a characteristic feature of these kinds of feelings that they have the body⁶ as their intentional object.⁷ In saying this, I assume that bodily feelings are intentional states and not, as Hume (1739) held, sensations devoid of intentionality. It follows from this that, since emotions are just feelings, emotions have the body as their intentional object. This conclusion is clearly implausible, for emotions are directed at all sorts of things other than the body. Some of these things exist; others do not. The body is only occasionally the intentional object

⁵ I use the term 'correlate' to refer to the assumption, common to these views, that there is a specific relation between beliefs and emotions. Different views describe the relation in different ways. Some (e.g., Davidson, 1976; Gordon 1987; Lyons 1980) say that beliefs are preconditions for or causal antecedents of emotions. Others (e.g., Solomon 1976) argue that emotions have these states as their components or constituents.

⁶ In line with this view, some philosophers (Armstrong 1962, 1968; Martin 1998) have described feelings as perceptions of the body.

⁷ Not everybody agrees with this conclusion. Peter Goldie (2000: 58-62) argues that certain feelings can be directed at objects and situations in the world. He refers to these kinds of feelings as 'feelings toward' and describes them as "*thinking of* with feeling" (pp. 19 and 58). In his view, what provides feelings with outward intentionality is the fact that they often correlate with thoughts. This view is similar to the one I consider later on in this section when I discuss the idea that feelings correlate with beliefs.

of emotions – for example, when I fear I might have a cancer.⁸ These considerations show that the feeling view is committed to an implausible conception of the intentionality of emotions. As a result, it cannot explain a key feature of long-term emotional actions. This is the fact that they make reference to specific objects – objects that do not necessarily coincide with the body.

What about the view that emotions are non-bodily episodic states, whether experiential (e.g., Döring 2003; Helm 2001; Tappolet 2005) or non-experiential (e.g., Solomon 1976)? As I noted above, this view faces the objection that episodic states cannot, by themselves, explain long-term actions. One may try to avoid this objection and thus salvage the episodic view – including the feeling view – by saying that emotions are episodic states that correlate with standing states such as beliefs (e.g., Davidson, 1976; Gordon 1987; Lyons 1980; Solomon 1976) and desires (e.g., Marks 1982; Robinson 1983). The appeal to these states provides two elements that the previous explanation did not afford. Belief and desire are both intentional states, though they have different kinds of intentionality. Beliefs, in particular, have states of affairs as their intentional objects. As a result, they can explain how long-term emotional actions can make reference to specific objects. In addition, as standing dispositional states, both belief and desire can explain how these actions can coherently last for extended periods of time. Finally, as a motivational state, desire – the desire not to be attacked by the dog, for example – can provide reasons for actions.

The problem with the view that emotions correlate with beliefs is that it cannot do justice to the fact that long-term emotional actions can be, and are often are, recalcitrant. Suppose we explain my long-term avoidance in terms of the correlation between two states: fear of the dog, and the belief that the animal is dangerous. As a standing dispositional state that is also intentional, belief explains both the fact that my actions make reference to a specific object and the fact that these actions last for an extended period of time. Now, it is a characteristic feature of beliefs that they are sensitive to new evidence.⁹ Suppose I look outside and believe that it is raining while, in reality, it is only overcast. My belief will change as soon as I step outside and notice that the weather is not as bad as I thought. As a result, my actions will also change. This means that if, following my false belief, I took my umbrella with me, I will not use it, for I no longer believe that it is raining.

Now, if we take belief to be responsible for the fact that my actions make reference to the neighbour's dog and that they last for an extended period of time, we assume that my actions would change their course if I were to acquire evidence the dog is not as dangerous as I think. This, however, is not what happens with long-term emotional actions, for it is a feature of these actions that they do not change in accordance with what we believe and know. For example, people who are afraid of flying continue to avoid travelling by plane even when they are given convincing evidence that flying is not as dangerous as they think. It follows from these considerations that an explanation of long-term emotional actions in terms of beliefs cannot do justice to the fact that these actions can be, and often are, recalcitrant. This is not to say that emotions do not correlate with beliefs, for it is often in response to what we believe that we form emotions. The point is that there is a difference between what causes (or

⁸ For a detailed account of the intentionality of emotions see Montague (2009). Peacocke (2003) provides a useful conceptual framework to discuss the intentionality and representational content of emotions.

⁹ Emotions, by contrast, are not sensitive to new evidence (Döring 2009). This feature of emotions is linked to another one – namely the fact that, as some philosophers (e.g., Peacocke 2003) put it, emotions are belief-independent states.

partly constitutes) emotions, and what explains emotional actions. It is the emotion – not what causes it – that is most likely to play a role in the explanation of emotional actions.

The dispositional view of emotions allows us to attempt a different approach to the explanation of long-term emotional actions. As we have seen, beliefs are often appealed to in the explanations of these actions because, as mental states, they have two properties. One is that they are standing dispositional states, namely states that can produce actions over extended periods of time. The other is that they are intentional states, namely states directed at intentional objects. It is interesting to note that, if we accept the dispositional view of emotions, we then think of emotions as states that have the same two properties as beliefs yet are not the same states as beliefs.

As a theory that describes the kinds of states that emotions are, the dispositional view makes no claim about the intentionality of emotions. Yet, the claim that emotions are standing dispositional states is compatible with any account of their intentionality. In other words, there is nothing in the claim that prevents emotions from being intentional states. Beliefs and desires, for example, are both standing and intentional states. This does not, of course, say what type of intentionality is characteristic of emotions. This is something that only a theory of intentionality can determine. But we do not need such a theory to explain the fact that long-term emotional actions make reference to specific objects. All we need is to acknowledge that, as intentional states, emotions have intentional objects. These objects may be all sorts of things. Some exist; others do not. In other words, if we think of emotions as standing dispositional states that are also intentional, we think of emotions as kinds of states that explain both the fact that emotional actions can last for extended periods of time and the fact that, over these periods, these actions continue to make reference to specific objects – objects like my neighbour's dog.

The dispositional view of emotions can also do justice to the recalcitrant character of emotional actions. Some philosophers (e.g., Peacocke 2003) explain this feature in terms of emotions being belief-independent states. Now, there is nothing in the claim that emotions are standing dispositional states that prevents them from being belief-independent. Desires, for example, are standing dispositional states that are, sometimes, also belief-independent. Thus, I may desire to eat chocolate even though I know that there is no chocolate in the house. It follows from this that we can explain the fact that long-term emotional actions are recalcitrant simply in terms of emotions being both standing dispositional and belief-independent states.

What I have so far observed confirms that if we think of emotions as the sorts of states that the dispositional view describes, we can provide good psychological explanations of long-term emotional actions. These explanations account for key features of these actions and avoid the problems that other views of emotions face.

4. Emotions as Motivational States

In the previous section I have shown that emotions are like beliefs and other standing dispositional states in that they can explain long-term actions. In this section, I will argue that emotions can also motivate actions. It is a common philosophical view that volitional states – desires and wants, for example – give us reasons for actions. In this view, beliefs are not sufficient to motivate actions. This is generally explained in terms of beliefs and desires having different kinds of representational content. While beliefs say how things *are*, desires say how they *should* be. Thus, the belief that it is raining gives me no reason to take my umbrella with me; it simply tells me how things are in the world, provided that the belief is true. It is to fulfil a desire – the desire not to get wet, for example – that I take the umbrella. In line with this view, one may argue that emotions alone do not provide reasons for actions.

In recent years, philosophers of emotions have begun to challenge this view and have argued that emotions have motivational power of their own (Döring 2003, 2010; Helm 2001, 2009; Tappolet 2002). In arguing for this approach, philosophers generally accept the episodic view of emotions. More precisely, they make two assumptions common to that view. One is that emotions are episodic states with evaluative representational content. This content represents the objects of emotions as having certain values – as being dangerous or offensive, for example. The other is that emotions have felt phenomenal character. In this view, the motivational power of emotions is to be found in the relation between the felt character and the evaluative content of emotions.¹⁰ For example, what gives me reason to avoid my neighbour's dog is the fact that my fear represents it as dangerous and makes me feel – in the form of an experience of fear – that the danger bears upon me. It is the conjunction of content with the felt character that gives me reason to behave the way I do. This is because, when taken in isolation, the content does not make me feel that the danger bears upon me, while the felt character or feeling does not tell me what the object of my fear is.

There are two main problems with the attempt to explain the motivational power of emotions from the perspective of the episodic view. One is the assumption that, in order to motivate actions, emotions need to involve feelings or felt character. It is, however, far from obvious that every time we perform an emotional action we experience a certain feeling, as shown by the fact that people can perform emotional actions without experiencing any feeling. Of course, it is possible that, in these cases, we are not aware of our feelings (on this point see Goldie 2000: 63-70). Yet, it is difficult to see how an unconscious feeling can play the motivational role that the episodic view attributes to it.

The other problem is that the episodic view cannot explain what motivates long-term emotional actions like avoiding my neighbour's dog or seeking revenge. This is because long-term actions require enduring or standing motivation – a kind of motivation that emotions cannot provide if we think of them as episodic states. It should be noted that the episodic view is by no means committed to explaining what motivates long-term actions, for it is more likely to confine itself to the explanation of short-term actions. It is, however, plausible to expect that a theory of emotions will account for all aspect of emotions, including long-term emotional actions, and not only those aspects that the theory can easily handle.

In what follows, I argue that emotions, understood as standing dispositional states, are able to motivate actions because they have motivational power of their own. This is to be found in the intentionality of emotions and, more precisely, in the way in which emotions *relate to* their representational content. This feature of intentionality is sometime referred to as *force*.¹¹ I argue that the motivational power of emotions resides in the force with which emotions relate to their representational content.

¹⁰ In her review of Peter Goldie's book *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (2000), Christine Tappolet observes: "...we must conclude that what really does the explaining is the emotional experience, or more precisely, the feelings they involve and the correlated evaluative properties, and not the emotions understood as long-term states." (2002: 158). Sabine Döring is of the same view when she observes that "...the motivational force of emotion is to be explained in terms of the feeling-dimension of emotion: emotions are capable of motivating because their representational content is at the same time felt, i.e., because they are affective perceptions." (2003: 224). Bennet W. Helm (2001: 75-80) develops a similar approach when he argues that emotions are able to motivate actions because we feel in them the worth and import that objects and situations may have for us.

¹¹ Gotlob Frege introduces the notion of force in his "Begriffsschrift" (1879) and discusses in his later writings (1918-19). York Gunther (2003) is the first to discuss the relation between force

I will start by considering a recent account of the relation between certain bodily experiences – itches and pains in particular – and the actions that they produce. Why is it that you cannot help but scratch an itchy spot on your back or try to relieve a sore muscle in your neck? In other terms, what explains the close connection between certain bodily sensations and certain actions? A traditional answer – one put forward by D.M. Armstrong (1962) in his account of bodily sensations – is that itches and pains involve the desire to behave in specific ways and that the connection between these sensations and desire is conceptual. In recent years, philosophers (Hall 2008; Klein 2007) have developed a different approach to the problem. For reasons of space, I will give only a brief outline of the view. The idea is that itches and pains are experiences that relate to their representational content with imperative force. This is to say that itches and pains make people behave the way they do because the relation they have to their representational content is analogous to the one that imperative sentences like “Scratch it!” or “Do it!” have to their content. It is interesting to note that this view explains what motivates certain actions without appealing to desires. You scratch the itchy spot or massage the sore muscle because your bodily sensations tell you to do so – that is, they order you to take care of those parts of your body that feel itchy or sore.

I believe that a similar approach can be developed for emotions. The difference is that emotions, in my view, do not have imperative force; they have reactive force. If this is correct, then emotions motivate us to behave the way we do because they relate to their representational content as to something to react to. Christopher Peacocke anticipates this idea when, comparing emotions with perceptions, he observes that

A perception presents the world as being a certain way; the phenomenology of a perception is presentational. An emotion, by contrast, is experienced as a reaction to some perceived or represented state of affairs. The response itself involves a state with representational content, but the content is an element of a state which is experienced as being a reactive state of affect. To capture this difference between perception and emotion we may speak of perception as having a presentational relation to its representational content and emotion as having a reactive-affective relation to its representational content. (2003: 259).

What considerations support the idea that emotions have reactive force? Emotions are often sudden and overwhelming responses to objects and situations. This is particularly clear in the case of emotions that conflict with knowledge. Consider the following example. Even though you know that the spiders that live in your region are innocuous, you cannot help becoming afraid every time you see one. When this happens, you are overwhelmed by an emotion that takes no notice of what you know. The emotion just seizes you as soon as you see a spider. This is unsurprising if we think that emotions are belief-independent states. But belief-independence only explains why you continue to fear spiders even when you know that the spiders in your region are inoffensive. It does not explain why fear takes hold of you the way it does. The explanation for this is that fear is, or involves, a *reaction* to how it represents its object. More precisely, if you *see* or *think* of spiders as dangerous, your fear reacts to the representational content that spiders appear or seem dangerous to you. If, on the other hand, you *believe* that spiders are dangerous, your fear is reacting to the content that spiders are

and content in the case of emotions. He argues that emotions violate Frege’s assumption that content is independent from force.

taken to be, or put forward as being, dangerous. In this view, emotions are reactions to evaluative representational contents.

Now, can we say that reactive force explains what motivates emotional actions? I will start by considering expressive actions. Rosalind Hursthouse (1991) has argued that expressive actions – jumping into the air and hugging someone in happiness, for example – are arational in that they resist traditional explanations in terms of desire and means-end beliefs. This is because it is often difficult to determine what specific beliefs are involved in the explanation. What does someone who jumps into the air and hugs a friend in happiness believe about his actions? It is unclear. It is perfectly possible that the person has no means-end belief about his actions and that he behaves the way he does because he wants to and because he is happy. Thus, Hursthouse's view is that expressive actions are explained by emotions and the desire to express them.

This, however, is not the only possible explanation. It is plausible to think that, if the reactive-force view is correct, we may explain expressive actions simply in terms of emotions and their force. Consider Hursthouse's example of a grieving man who presses himself to his deceased wife's clothes. What motivates his action? Following the reactive-force view, we may say that man behaves the way he does because he is in a state of grief. This state represents his wife's death as an irreparable loss and relates to this content as something to react to. By holding his deceased wife's clothes close to his body, the man is reacting to the content that he has suffered a loss. In this view, what motivates his action is not so much the desire to express his grief, but rather the fact that, as an emotion, grief is a state with reactive force.

It is important to note that reactive force does not tell the man *how* to react; it simply tells him *to react* to the content that he has suffered a loss. In line with this account, the fact that the man presses his wife's clothes close to him is one of the many different ways in which he could react to that content. It would make no difference if, instead of doing what he does, the man pulled out his hair, sat in tears, or – like the infamous character in *Psycho* – wore the deceased person's clothes. Any action performed in the grip of grief would be a reaction to the content that the man has suffered a loss.

The same considerations apply to other expressive actions. Think of what people do when they are in the grip of anger. A prisoner may kick the door of his jail cell; a man may knock everything off the mantelshelf; a child may hurt himself against a table corner and hit the table back. It is difficult to make sense of these actions in rational terms. But we can still explain them in terms of anger being a state that relates to its representational content as something to react to. These considerations preserve Hursthouse's original intuition that expressive actions are fundamentally arational. In addition, they offer an alternative way of thinking of expressive actions as motivated by the reactive force of the emotions that they express.

How do these considerations bear on the explanation of what motivates long-term actions? In reply it should be noted that we can explain what motivates these actions in two ways. One is to say that they are motivated by a combination of desires and emotions. In this view, what makes me avoid the neighbour's dog is my fear of the animal together with the desire not to be attacked. The other is to say that the reactive force of emotions motivates my actions. In this view, I behave the way I do because my fear represents the dog as dangerous and relates to this content as something to react to. Are the two explanations equivalent? I do not think so.

Desire motivates my actions because, in order to fulfil it, I behave in ways that prevent me from being attacked. But there are many ways for me to fulfil this desire. For

example, I could poison the dog or I could call the authorities and report that the dog is being neglected. Although these are all things that I could do in some cases, these are not the actions that I would normally perform if I were afraid of the dog. This is because, when I fear something, what I do is avoid it. In this view, the best explanation for what motivates my actions is that my fear represents the content that the dog seems, or is, dangerous as something for me to react to. Avoidance is the best way to react to this kind of content. This explains why I do not engage in other actions – actions like poisoning the dog or reporting my neighbour for neglect of his dog – that would equally fulfil my desire not to be attacked. These considerations show that the explanation of what motivates my actions in terms of reactive force is preferable because it best accounts for the specific actions that I perform when I fear the dog.

Reactive force may also explain another feature of emotions. It is a characteristic of the feelings that we experience in correspondence with emotions that they feel like reactions or responses to objects or situations.¹² Thus, when I am angry with a friend, I experience my body as if it was directed toward, or drawn against, my friend. By contrast, when I am afraid of something, I feel as if I want to turn away, escape or avoid it. Since feelings are experiential manifestations of emotions, it is plausible to think that the way they feel to us is influenced by the structure of the emotions they manifest. In particular, they may be influenced by the fact that emotions relate to their content with reactive force. A bodily experience that makes me feel drawn to, or torn away from, something is an experience that makes me aware not only of my emotion but also of the force with which my emotion relates to its representational content.

5. Conclusion

I opened this paper with the question of what kinds of mental states emotions are. I answered this question by means of the distinction between standing and episodic states. I argued that emotions are standing dispositional states that may manifest themselves in consciousness and behaviour. This way of thinking of emotions has the advantage of explaining various features of these states. First, it accounts for the relation between emotions and episodic states like bodily feelings, thoughts, and perceptions. Second, it explains the relation between emotions and various types of behaviour. I focused on long-term emotional actions and showed that the dispositional view best explains key features of these actions. Finally, I have shown that if we think of emotions as standing dispositional states with a specific type of intentionality – one whereby emotions relate to their representational content with reactive force – we think of emotions as states capable of motivating various types of actions.

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¹² See Goldie's discussion of the notion of feeling toward (Goldie 2000: 58-62).

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