

Mary Carman¹

Intentional Feelings, Practical Agency, and Normative Commitments

Abstract: *A dominant approach to conceptualizing a role for emotions in practical agency has been to focus on a relation between emotions and reasons, whereby emotions are claimed to track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content. Yet, if we reflect on the phenomenology of emotional consciousness and take seriously a growing consensus that emotions involve intentional feelings then, I argue, such a reason-tracking approach at best only provides part of the story and at worst is fundamentally misguided. This does not mean that emotion has no role in practical agency, however. I tentatively propose that the normative category of commitments offers a promising alternative for thinking about the role of emotions in practical agency, an alternative that has the potential to do justice to intentional feelings while avoiding the problems of a reason-tracking approach.*

1. Introduction

‘There is no more miserable Slave’, writes the seventeenth-century French philosopher, Jean-François Senault, ‘than he who suffers to be guided by his passions’ (Senault, 1649). As this quotation illustrates, the passions, or emotions more generally, have long been opposed to reason. But, as our scientific and philosophical understanding of

Correspondence:
Email: Mary.Carman@wits.ac.za

¹ Department of Philosophy, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

emotion has increased, this tension has become unsustainable. For instance, a general consensus has arisen that emotions can in fact play a crucial role in our practical agency (de Sousa, 1987; Damasio, 1994; Jones, 2006), at the very least on a functional level in enabling us to act regardless of whether the emotion is conscious or not. But once we reflect on the phenomenology of *conscious* emotional experiences, we find that emotions potentially have a role in practical agency in a richer way, too. Here, I am interested in the phenomenal character of paradigmatic conscious emotional experience and am setting aside questions of whether an emotion can be unconscious or what role unconscious emotion might play in practical agency. In this paper, then, I assume and do not defend that such conscious emotional experiences can and do play a rationally rich role in our practical agency. The project is to conceptualize what that role is.

Core to our conception of ourselves as rational agents is that we act for reasons where, as rational agents, we guide our actions by the reasons we take ourselves to have. Call this rational guidance. While there is disagreement about what the nature of a reason for action is, we can follow Scanlon in agreeing that it is, minimally, ‘a consideration that counts in favour of’ the action (Scanlon, 1998, p. 17). When looking at rational guidance, then, our concern is with the considerations the agent takes herself to have that count in favour of her action, which are motivating reasons (*ibid.*; Wallace, 1999; Jones, 2003; Alvarez, 2017).² Guiding one’s action in this way requires at a minimum that an agent has the ability to critically reflect on her reasons and actions, is disposed to do so when required, and is disposed to let the results of her critical reflections inform her subsequent behaviour (Scanlon, 1998; Jones, 2003). As such, rational agents guide their actions by considerations that they take to count in favour of so-acting and have the relevant dispositions and abilities for being able to do so.

A standard way of cashing out how we guide our actions by reasons is by way of beliefs or judgments about what our reasons are. This is what Jones (2003) calls an ‘intellectualist reading’ of rational guidance. Intellectualist readings like these, however, have been

² We are not necessarily concerned with normative reasons, which are reasons that would justify the action or for which an agent ought to act independent of whether she also takes herself to be acting for those reasons (Alvarez, 2017). That said, motivating reasons and normative reasons are closely connected in that what the agent sees as a reason she sees as a normative reason, one that would justify her action (Jones, 2003; Alvarez, 2017).

challenged in recent years because it seems that mental states other than belief could play the relevant or similar role (Velleman, 1996; Pacherie, 2002; Arpaly and Schroeder, 2012). Within this context of challenging the dominance of intellectualist readings, a driving approach to conceptualizing a role for emotion in practical agency has been to flesh out the role of emotions as providing us with reasons in a way relevant for rational guidance, or something equivalent to it (Arpaly, 2002; Döring, 2003; 2007; Jones, 2003; Tappolet, 2016; Carman, 2018a).

When we reflect on features of paradigmatic emotional experience, for instance, one uncontroversial feature is that emotions are intentional, in that they are about an intentional object as being a certain evaluative way (see Deonna and Teroni, 2012, pp. 5–6; Scarantino, 2021). If I am afraid of the dog, to use a simple example, my fear is about the dog, the intentional object, as dangerous. If emotions are intentional like this, the thinking goes, then emotions can be about reason-giving considerations for action. The dangerousness of the dog is, indeed, a reason-giving consideration in favour of backing away from it. And if emotions can be about reason-giving considerations, emotions could plausibly have a rich role in practical agency: they could track putative reasons for action through what they are about and, when we act on the basis of an emotional experience, we could be guiding our actions by those reasons. So, on the basis of my fear, I may back away from the dog because it is dangerous. When I do so, my action can be intentional in that it is under my control and awareness as something that I do, even if I do not first form a belief about what my reasons are (Pacherie, 2002).³ When we act emotionally, then, we could in an important sense be acting for reasons. Both Jones (2003) and Döring (2003; 2007; 2010) propose accounts like these, based on the idea that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content.

Reflecting on emotional consciousness, however, exposes how paradigmatic conscious emotional experience isn't just intentional. Another important feature is that emotions are affective and have a distinctive phenomenology. Further, there is a growing consensus that

³ The use of 'intentional' when referring to intentional action is different to the use of 'intentional' when referring to the intentionality of a mental state. Where the latter is about the 'aboutness' of a mental state, the former refers to an action that is under the agent's awareness and control, in execution or initiation or both. See Raz (2002) and Pacherie (2002).

the intentional and affective natures of emotion are intricately connected, where emotions are thought to be *intentional feelings* (Müller and Döring, 2022, p. 1). If we accept this intricate connection, it is quite plausible that the feeling side of emotion isn't merely motivational in a way divorced from reasons but is itself a core part of the role that emotions play in practical agency. As such, focusing on the way in which emotions can be about reason-giving considerations potentially only captures one aspect of emotion's role.

So, if conscious emotional experience is both intentional *and* affective, how should we understand its role in practical agency, really? By reflecting on emotional consciousness, I argue that accounts of the role of emotion in practical agency based on the idea that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content, like those of Jones and Döring, fail to do justice to intentional feelings and the phenomenology of emotional actions. Nevertheless, I tentatively propose that the nature of intentional feelings and the way in which emotions form part of larger patterns of response expose a promising alternative for conceptualizing emotion's role: as commitments to action.

I begin in Section 2 by introducing the intentional and affective features of conscious emotional experience, as well as the growing consensus that they are intricately linked: conscious emotional experience is a form of emotional engagement with the world and involves what can meaningfully be called 'intentional feelings'. If this is the case, then we cannot divorce the intentional and affective elements of emotion. In Section 3, I then introduce two existing accounts of a role for emotion in practical agency, those of Jones and Döring, and illustrate how they rely on a perceptual claim that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content. But, as I argue in Section 4, this kind of approach fails to do justice to intentional feelings and is inadequate for delineating a role for emotion in practical agency. This leaves us with the question of how we should instead understand emotion's role, and I end the paper in Section 5 by putting forward a tentative proposal that is both sensitive to intentional feelings and that avoids the problems facing the reason-tracking approach. In particular, I propose that we should understand emotions as commitments to action. While the proposal needs more development than I have the space for here, I hope to show that it is one with much promise.

2. Intentionality, Affect, and Intentional Feelings

Most philosophers working on emotions agree that paradigmatic conscious emotional experiences have at least two features. The first is that emotions are intentional. The second is that emotions have an affective character and a distinctive phenomenology. While these features are relatively uncontroversial, there is also a growing consensus that the intentional and affective features are intricately connected to the extent that emotions are plausibly a *sui generis* state involving ‘intentional feelings’ (as examples, see Goldie, 2002; Müller, 2019; Teroni and Deonna, 2020; Mitchell, 2021; Müller and Döring, 2022). In this section, I expand on the intentional and affective features of emotion, as well as on the notion of intentional feelings. I will give examples of how different schools of thought aim to explain the intricate connection but, for the purposes of this paper, I will not settle what the best account is. Rather, I give the examples to illustrate that the intricate connection found with intentional feelings is indeed something that is accepted as needing to be explained. This section thus lays the background for my main argument in the rest of paper, namely that existing accounts of a role for emotion in practical agency that focus on the intentional content of emotion fail to do justice to intentional feelings and the phenomenology of emotional actions.

So, then, what are these two relatively uncontroversial features of emotion? The intentionality of emotions is typically interpreted as the claim that emotions, like other mental states, are about something at which they are directed (de Sousa, 1987; Scarantino, 2021). If I am afraid or angry, for instance, there is something I am afraid of or angry about and at which my emotion is directed. That ‘something’ is the intentional object of the emotion, what is sometimes called the particular object. If I am angry at you, for instance, my anger is about and directed at you. Further, the intentional object is experienced as having evaluative properties, such as being dangerous in the case of fear or being offensive in the case of anger. So, when I am angry at my friend, I experience her as having caused me some offence or, to return to the simple example from the introduction, if I am afraid of the dog, I experience the dog as dangerous.

My phrasing of ‘experiencing the object as having some evaluative property’ is deliberate because this is an area where different approaches to emotion offer competing accounts of the evaluative intentional nature of emotion. On a feeling theory like Prinz’s (2004),

for instance, the evaluative property is represented via bodily changes. In contrast, on a perceptual approach that models emotion after perception (Döring, 2007; Tappolet, 2016), the evaluative property is represented in the emotion's intentional content in an object-content structure that attributes properties to the object. If I am afraid of the dog, on this approach, my fear is about the dog represented as dangerous. On an attitudinal account like that of Deonna and Teroni (2012), however, an emotion is an evaluative stance taken towards a non-evaluative content. In whatever way we choose to cash out the intentional nature of emotion, the lesson is that paradigmatic emotions are intentional and the intentional nature is evaluative.

What, then, is the affective feature of emotion? This is the feeling of an emotion, where the affect of emotion could consist of different aspects, from bodily feelings to hedonic tone (for a discussion of affect, see Carman, 2018b). For instance, emotions typically have a motivational edge to the way they feel and close links to behaviour, such as how one might feel driven to lash out when angry. The motivational edge of an emotion is often cashed out in terms of emotions' having an action tendency or an action readiness (Frijda, 1986). This motivational edge could just be a feeling of being compelled to act and, when we think of emotions driving us to act in *irrational* or *arational* ways, the motivational push of emotion is often what we have in mind.

When we talk of the affect of an emotion, however, we might not be talking about any one particular aspect in isolation but instead the overall 'what-it's-like-ness' to undergo an emotional experience of a certain kind. Reflecting on the overall phenomenology, philosophers working on emotion increasingly accept that emotion is a kind of *sui generis* state wherein the intentional and affective elements are intricately linked. We can meaningfully talk about emotions as a kind of intentional feeling (Teroni and Deonna, 2020, p. 110; Müller and Döring, 2022), or as an 'emotional engagement' with the world, to use Goldie's (2002) evocative description.

Just as there are different accounts of the intentional nature of emotion, so too are there different accounts of intentional feelings. For instance, Goldie, who influentially introduced the notion of emotions involving what he calls a 'feeling towards', describes feeling towards as 'unreflective emotional engagement with the world beyond the body' but which 'is not consciousness of oneself, either of one's bodily condition or of oneself *as* experiencing an emotion' (Goldie, 2002, p. 241). Unlike Goldie, however, Prinz gives bodily awareness a

key role in his account of emotions as ‘bodily appraisals’ that represent an evaluative property through changes in the body. Deonna and Teroni in turn propose an attitudinal theory according to which emotions consist ‘in specific types of felt bodily stances directed towards objects’ (Deonna and Teroni, 2012, p. 76).

The intricate connection between the intentional and affective nature of emotion is also sometimes put forward as a consideration in favour of adopting a perceptual approach to emotion (Naar, 2022, pp. 4–5). For perceptual theorists, emotions have a representational content that informs the overall phenomenology of an emotion, much like with perception. As Döring writes, for instance, ‘an emotion’s intentionality is best understood by analogy with perception. This is at least so if it is agreed that a perception also possesses both phenomenology and intentionality, and that its intentional content is also part of its conscious, subjective character’ (Döring, 2007, p. 376).

We thus see that reflecting on conscious emotional experience draws out how the phenomenology of a conscious emotional experience involves an intentional element. Different theoretical approaches to emotion may explain these intentional feelings in different ways, but at the baseline is the recognition that it is an important feature of emotion. Without settling the question of how best we should understand the phenomenon, I will use ‘intentional feelings’ as an expansive term to capture the idea that we have a felt emotional engagement with the world. As such, when unpacking a rational role for emotion in practical agency, we must not overlook these intentional feelings.

3. Emotions, Reasons, and Rational Guidance

If emotions are intentional and affective, and if these two features are intricately linked, how should we understand a role for emotion within practical agency? As mentioned in the introduction, a core part of our conception of ourselves as rational agents is the idea of rational guidance, where we need to have the requisite abilities and dispositions to guide our actions by reasons. A key motivation for allowing emotion to have a role in practical agency is thus closely tied to the idea that emotions are intentional and can potentially be about reason-giving considerations, setting the scene for a form of rational guidance. To illustrate, in this section I introduce two existing accounts of a role for emotion in practical agency that are grounded on the idea that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their

intentional content. In the following section, however, I argue that these accounts fail to do justice to intentional feelings and the phenomenology of emotional actions.

Now, emotions are plausibly like perception in the way that both have a reactive character whereby the world impresses itself on us. Just like we cannot simply decide to see a tree and see a tree, we cannot simply decide to experience fear and experience fear.⁴ The tree or the dangerous situation instead impress themselves on us. Further, by having an intentional nature, our emotional experiences can draw our attention to the things around us that are impressing themselves on us, and because the intentional nature is also evaluative, emotional experiences can draw our attention to things that matter to us. In this way, emotions plausibly draw our attention to things that could serve as reason-giving considerations for action. When I am afraid of the dog, for instance, my fear draws my attention to the dangerousness of the dog — a reason-giving consideration to get away.

Indeed, sometimes our emotions track the considerations that matter to us better than do our more typical rational states, such as belief or judgment. Arpaly (2002) and Jones (2003), who both defend a rational role for emotion within practical agency, discuss the example of Emily the PhD student to illustrate this reason-tracking nature of emotion. The example goes like this:

Emily's best judgement has always told her that she should pursue a Ph.D. in chemistry. But as she proceeds through a graduate program, she starts feeling restless, sad, and ill motivated to stick to her studies. These feelings are triggered by a variety of factors, which, let us suppose, are good reasons for her, given her beliefs and desires, not to be in the program... One day, on an impulse, propelled exclusively by her feelings, she quits the program, calling herself lazy and irrational but also experiencing a (to her) inexplicable sense of relief. Years later, happily working elsewhere, she suddenly sees the reasons for her bad feelings of old, cites them as the reasons for her quitting, and regards as irrationality not her quitting but, rather, the fact that she held on to her conviction that the program was right for her for as long as she did. (Arpaly, 2002, p. 504)

In this example, Emily's emotions track reason-giving considerations for her to quit her PhD studies. On this kind of reason-tracking view of emotion, emotion is understood as analogous to perception where

⁴ We could still induce or mitigate an emotion in indirect ways, such as by directing or redirecting our attention.

emotion, like perception, can track considerations that could serve as normative reasons that justify the action, or for which the agent ought to act.

However, simply tracking reasons is not sufficient for acting rationally from those reasons, as Jones (2003) argues. Remember that our conception of rational agency is one of rational guidance, whereby we guide our actions by reasons seen as reasons. Here, the relevant kind of reasons are motivating reasons, or the reasons that the agent takes herself to have for acting. Further, as rational agents we must also have the relevant dispositions towards, and abilities for, guiding our actions by reasons (Scanlon, 1998; Jones, 2003). These include the ability to critically reflect on our reasons and actions, the disposition to do so when required, and the disposition to let the results of our critical reflections inform our subsequent behaviour. To guide our action by considerations seen as counting in favour of action, then, we need at the very least to be aware of those considerations as possible reasons and as having normative force, and we need to be able to respond to those reasons as reasons. Simply tracking reasons is not yet to show that we are also responding to reasons *seen as reasons*, as Jones (2003) argues.

Consequently, Jones aims to give an account of how we can stand in the right kind of relation to reasons so that we can act for those reasons *seen as reasons* when acting emotionally. To do that, she engages with our broader conception of rational agency and argues that an agent who conceives of herself as a rational agent must be committed to rational guidance, else she is not the type of agent she takes herself to be (*ibid.*, p. 191). Crucially, a commitment to rational guidance should ‘be understood as the commitment to the ongoing cultivation and exercise of habits of reflective self-monitoring of our practical and epistemic capacities’ (*ibid.*, p. 194) So, not only must an agent have the relevant dispositions towards, and abilities for, guiding her actions by reasons, such as the ability to critically reflect on her reasons and actions, the disposition to do so when required, and the disposition to let the results of her critical reflections inform her subsequent behaviour, she must also monitor and cultivate the mechanisms that allow her to have and to exercise her rational capacities and dispositions. One such mechanism is perception, another is all-things-considered judgment, but another, for Jones, is emotion. Indeed, as Jones argues, the normative authority of even something like all-things-considered judgment does not come ‘for free’ because even that has to earn its authority ‘in virtue of being the product of a

conscious reasoning self that has itself been subject to regulation by reflective capacities' (*ibid.*, p. 194). So, if an agent has these capacities and dispositions, and cultivates and monitors her emotional responses to ensure that they respond to reason-giving considerations as best as possible, then when she acts on the basis of her emotional experience without further reflection or judgment, she can be acting rationally. This is our first illustrative account of a role for emotion in practical agency.

Such a picture, however, may tell us what would be required of ourselves for us to guide our actions by reasons in general but it doesn't tell us whether a particular action was rationally guided. This is potentially a problem because it would seem to allow that even cases of akratic action, where we act against what we judge to be our best reason, could in fact be instances of rational action, a verdict that many would reject (Döring, 2010; Carman, 2018a). Focusing on the level of individual actions as a way to avoid such a counter-intuitive outcome gives us our second illustrative account of a role for emotion in practical agency, Döring's account.

At the level of individual actions, Döring argues that a rational agent must still 'guide and control his actions via his normative judgements' (Döring, 2010, p. 283). The role of emotions is in justifying those judgments, where Döring argues that emotions can non-inferentially justify judgments or beliefs (Döring, 2003; 2007; 2010). In what she calls the 'default mode', where the agent does not question her emotion, the agent takes her emotion at face value, meaning that the agent judges that things are as they are represented in the emotion's intentional content. As such, she has a *prima facie* reason for action that is justified by the emotion, but it is the taking at face value that allows the agent to guide her actions. In cases of conflict of *prima facie* reasons where an agent questions her emotion, such as when her emotion and other beliefs stand in tension, then she ought to deliberate and reflect on her *prima facie* reasons. In such a case it will ultimately be her deliberative judgment that guides her action. While Döring does not require that all action is explicitly authorized by deliberative judgment as in a case of conflict, she does require that an agent takes her emotion at face value and that 'an agent must satisfy the condition that he *would* so authorize the action, were he asked to do so' (Döring, 2010, p. 295).

These are two illustrative accounts of how philosophers have sought to conceptualize a role for emotion within practical agency. While I have previously argued against both accounts — Jones for failing to

deal adequately with individual actions and Döring for unnecessarily requiring beliefs for rational guidance (Carman, 2018a) — I wish now to put pressure on a similarity to their approaches in a different way. Specifically, once we draw on our reflections on the phenomenology of conscious emotional experience from earlier, these accounts fail to do justice to intentional feelings and, by extension, our emotional actions.

4. What about Intentional Feelings?

Both Jones' and Döring's accounts turn on the claim that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content, where the way in which they do so makes emotion akin to perception.⁵ What both do, successfully, is highlight the connection that emotions plausibly have with reason-giving considerations because of their intentional nature. This puts emotion in the right ballpark, so to speak, for having a rationally rich role in practical agency. But is that role correctly conceived of as a reason-tracking one? Remember the intentional and affective features of emotion introduced in Section 2, and the growing consensus that these features are intricately connected. If emotions are intentional feelings, then describing the role of emotion within practical agency ought to be sensitive to intentional feelings. And here, I argue in the current section, the kind of perceptual model of Jones and Döring is inadequate because emotions do not simply, or only, track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content, and their role in practical agency is more complex. At best, such an approach offers only a partial account of the role of emotion, but at worst it is fundamentally misguided, as I argue now.

To see this, let's grant that emotions do have an evaluative intentional content, as per Jones' and Döring's accounts, and return to the example of Emily. Emily, remember, feels sad and ill-motivated to continue with her studies and, when she acts, she is 'propelled exclusively by her feelings' (Arpaly, 2002, p. 504). For Jones, Emily acts rationally if she has the capacities and dispositions of a rational agent, and cultivates and monitors her emotional responses to ensure that they are responsive to reason-giving considerations. By being responsive to reason-giving considerations, the intentional content of

⁵ In fact, Tappolet, who also puts forward a form of a reason-tracking account, suggests that reason-tracking 'follows from the Perceptual Theory' (Tappolet, 2016, p. 165).

Emily's emotion would be something like 'the PhD is bad for me'. She could be responsive to a reason-giving consideration like this through her other reason-giving mechanisms, where she might form a belief with the same content and still act for the same reason. For Döring, in turn, Emily would only be acting rationally if she authorized her emotion in a deliberative judgment because there is a conflict between her emotion and her beliefs. In a tweaked scenario where Emily's emotion does not conflict with a belief that she ought to carry on with her studies, Emily could be acting rationally simply by taking her emotion at face value. In either case, her emotion would non-inferentially justify a belief with the same content, such as 'the PhD is bad for me'.

The problem arises, however, in that being presented with a reason via that content is not the same as being motivated to act. After all, weakness of will is a real phenomenon where we have reasons, recognize the force of those reasons, yet lack motivation to act for those reasons. Indeed, standard accounts of explanations of rational action that centralize beliefs bring in motivational states like desire to give a full explanation of an agent's action, even defining motivating reasons as belief–desire combinations (Everson, 2010). Yet, what seems special about emotional experience, especially when we reflect on the phenomenology of emotional actions, is that we are both presented with a reason *and* we are motivated to act — Emily is 'propelled' to act by her feelings. But there is nothing inherent to having a reason that one is motivated to act on it.

An account like Jones' or Döring's need not overlook this fact. One option to capture the motivating element is to add a motivational edge in combination with the reason-tracking, much like we have beliefs and desires taken together on a standard account. However, this ignores a distinctive feature to the phenomenology of emotional actions that sets them apart from other actions, in that we are both presented with a reason *and* motivated to act *by the same intentional state*. This is where those intentional feelings become relevant. A simple combination approach would be insufficient for capturing the nuances of emotional experience and, by extension, the nature of emotional action with which we are concerned.

A second option could be to argue that emotions are intentional feelings in a very specific way, namely because emotional affect is

itself representational.⁶ Remember that, for Döring, the intentional content of an emotion ‘is also part of its subjective character’ (Döring, 2007, p. 376). If we interpret this as the claim that emotion represents reason-giving considerations in an inherently affective and motivational manner, then it would just be part of the intentional nature of emotion that the emotional content is represented affectively. On a weaker reading, the content is affectively-neutral while the vehicle is affective. Alternatively, we could adopt a stronger reading and maintain, like Mitchell (2019), that the content is itself affectively charged. As Mitchell writes, if we were to remove ‘the power to motivate affectively’, we would ‘lose something essential to the content one is trying to individuate as manifest in emotional experience. Specifically, it is to lose the way the value is experienced as having the power to intelligibly motivate the specific felt valenced attitude that it does’ (*ibid.*, p. 16). Either way, the idea is that intentional feelings could form part of a reason-tracking approach, so long as we make explicit that either the vehicle of representation or the content is inherently affective.

While I am sympathetic to this kind of view of emotional representation myself, I do not think that it helps the reason-tracking approach. This is for two reasons. Firstly, both accounts seek to explicate how we can guide our actions by reasons. On Jones’ account, emotion is one reason-giving mechanism amongst others. Emily’s reason that ‘the PhD is bad for me’ may be tracked by the emotion, may even be affectively represented by the emotion, but is not itself affectively charged. Emotion is incorporated into an account of practical agency because it forms one kind of mechanism that can be suitably regulated such that it ‘can express the agent’s commitment to rational guidance via reasons’ (Jones, 2003, p. 196). The nature of the representational vehicle is beside the point on this picture of emotion in practical agency. Even if we were to adopt a view according to which the content is inherently affective, the way emotion factors into rational guidance is still independent of that nature.

On Döring’s account, in turn, the reason-giving considerations that are tracked are not themselves affectively charged. We see this in the fact that, for Döring, the emotion non-inferentially justifies a belief

⁶ I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pushing me to clarify my position on this option.

with the same content. Again, the nature of the representational vehicle is beside the point on this picture of emotion in practical agency. This time, however, it is harder to reconcile a view according to which the content is affectively charged, as doing so changes the content and requires a different kind of story for how emotion, with an affectively charged content, can non-inferentially justify a belief with an affectively-neutral content.

Nevertheless, for both accounts, it may well be the case that emotion is only able to track reason-giving considerations in the first place because of their affective nature, and this I am not denying. But how emotion tracks reason-giving considerations is distinct to how emotion then functions to enable a form of rational guidance — either by being a suitably regulated reason-giving mechanism or by being capable of non-inferentially justifying a belief with the same, non-affectively charged, content. The involvement of affective representation in the former need not entail the involvement of affective representation in the latter. Yet, it is not just our emotions that are affectively charged but also our emotional actions. By relegating the affective nature to the reason-tracking part of the account, we would not be doing justice to the action part of the account because we would fail to explain the distinctive phenomenological nature of our emotional actions.

Admittedly, my explanatory demand of the reason-tracking approach might be rejected here as requiring too much. After all, intentional feelings could still play a role in the tracking aspect of the accounts, and the tracking aspect is a crucial first step. Perhaps that is sufficient, despite my claims above. However, this leads me to my second reason for why an affective representation account of emotion does not help the two tracking accounts of emotion in practical agency. There is a deeper problem facing the approach, in that a perceptual theory of emotion on which the accounts are based doesn't capture the right relation between emotions and reasons in the first place.

The perceptual model on which both Jones and Döring build their accounts is increasingly under attack. In general, emotions and perception appear to differ in crucial ways that undermine the attractiveness of such an analogy where, for instance, emotions but not perceptions are dependent on other cognitive states, can stand in rational conflict with belief, and appear to have different kinds of appropriateness conditions (for review, see Naar, 2022). One difference between emotion and perception, however, poses a direct threat to the viability

of the reason-tracking approach in particular. This is the difference that we have normative reasons for our emotions but not for our perceptions, seen in the fact that we can be criticized for not responding in an appropriate emotional way (Brady, 2013). If you really care about your health, for instance, then something that threatens your health is a reason to experience fear and we can find you lacking if you are not at least somewhat afraid. Alternatively, if you are angry at your friend for something they did not do, your emotion is not supported by a normative reason and we can criticize your emotion for being badly founded. In contrast, if you did not see the tree in front of you, you might be criticized for being unobservant but there is not the same normative sense in which you ought to have seen the tree.

If emotion is different to perception in this way, where emotions are had for normative reasons but perceptions not, then we risk running into a form of what Brady calls a ‘bootstrapping’ objection whereby an emotion becomes self-justifying. Brady’s focus is on emotions and belief or judgment where he argues that, if emotions are had for normative reasons, then:

...the considerations that constitute good reasons for an emotional response are *equally* good reasons for the relevant evaluative judgement; and, by the same token, considerations that constitute good reasons for some evaluative judgement are equally good reasons for the relevant emotional response. (Brady, 2013, p. 113)

But if this is the case, Brady continues, then it looks like ‘such experience would appear to be capable of justifying itself’ (*ibid.*).

Before proceeding, let us clarify that Brady is focusing on normative reasons, reasons that would justify an emotional response or evaluative judgment. When we are looking at rational guidance, in contrast, we are concerned with motivating reasons and the reasons the agent takes herself to have. Further, Brady is examining the relation between emotion and belief, whereas my focus is on the relation between emotion and action. As such, the bootstrapping objection might not be immediately relevant to our accounts of the role of emotion in *practical* agency.

However, Brady’s bootstrapping objection can still take hold. Firstly, the relation between emotion and action and between emotion and belief under discussion is the same kind of reason-giving relation. So, while belief and action may differ in kind, in both cases the idea under examination is whether emotion can provide reasons *for* something, either a belief or an action. Secondly, motivating reasons are derivative off normative reasons in the sense that, when an agent takes

herself to have a reason, she takes herself to have a normative reason — one for which she ought to act (or believe) or one that would justify the action (or belief) (Alvarez, 2017). As Jones puts it, a requirement for guiding actions by reasons seen as reasons is that the agent ‘possess the concept of a reason as something that justifies the performance of an action’ (Jones, 2003, p. 189). Lastly, the idea that emotions *track* reason-giving considerations is the idea that emotions track normative reasons, reasons for which one ought to act (or believe). When Emily realizes that her emotion better tracked her reasons than her beliefs, for instance, she recognizes that there were independent considerations that counted in favour of her quitting her PhD programme. As such, the bootstrapping objection remains relevant as it potentially undercuts the theoretical grounding of both Jones’ and Döring’s accounts by showing how emotion does not stand in the right relation with reasons.

To close this section, I will discuss the implications for each account in turn, starting with Döring’s account.

With regards to Döring’s account, if emotions are responses to normative reasons, then they can’t — at least not in a way like perception — non-inferentially justify a belief, which is what Döring requires. If feeling fear, say, can non-inferentially justify a belief that the dog is dangerous when taken at face-value, then according to the bootstrapping objection, feeling fear can also justify feeling fear. Before we even get into guiding our actions, it looks like we are standing in the wrong kind of relation to those reason-giving considerations.

Jones doesn’t require that emotions justify beliefs in the same way and so her account need not run into the same problem. However, core to Jones’ theoretical basis is that emotion is a reason-giving mechanism, where other reason-giving mechanisms include perception. Yet, because emotions are had for normative reasons it looks like emotion would have to function in quite different ways to other reason-giving mechanisms that are not responses to normative reasons, but because of bootstrapping it looks unlikely that emotion would function in such a way at all.

If emotions are intentional feelings and have an evaluative intentional content, then it looks like an approach that centres on the idea that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content at best only gives us a small part of the picture. But given the differences between perception and emotion, the theoretical basis for such an approach is under threat. At worst, we end up with a situation

where emotions do not stand in the right kind of relation to reasons for those reasons to have a justificatory role, with implications for whether emotion is a reason-giving mechanism by which we can rationally guide our actions in any straightforward sense.

5. Looking Beyond Reason-Tracking via Intentional Content

As discussed in Section 2, emotions are intentional states involving a felt engagement with the world. Further, they are responses to things of importance to us and, unlike perception, are had for normative reasons. As such, it is quite plausible that emotions have a role in practical agency that is not simply as mere motivators, disconnected from considerations that count in favour of our actions. While those like Jones and Döring expand on this role as a reason-tracking one, I argued in Section 4 that such an approach fails to do justice to intentional feelings and the phenomenology of our emotional actions. On one hand, an approach that focuses on the intentional content of emotion cannot simply add on affect. Doing so overlooks the nuances of the self-same state's being both intentional and motivational. On the other hand, emotions do not stand in the right kind of relation to reasons for us to act for those reasons in a non-bootstrapping way. Does this mean that emotions do not have a role in practical agency?

In this final, exploratory, section, I suggest that emotion can still have a role in practical agency. Because my complaint is at heart that a reason-tracking approach fails to do justice to intentional feelings, we need to look more closely at intentional feelings. Once we do so, we uncover the background role of cares and concerns in our emotional responses. Given this background, I argue that emotions form part of wider patterns of response, including behaviours and actions. Rather than unpacking emotion's role in practical agency as a reason-tracking one, therefore, I propose that we focus on this pattern of response. Doing so allows us to conceptualize emotions as involving commitments to action and thereby avoid the bootstrapping objection, as I outline in this section. But let us go through each of these steps more slowly, beginning by going back to intentional feelings.

As discussed in Section 2, the idea that emotions involve intentional feelings is the idea that we have a felt engagement with the world. Considering this, I argued in Section 4 that in an emotional experience

we are both presented with a reason and are motivated to act by the same state. But this raises the question: why would this be the case?

Crucially, we don't undergo an emotional experience in response to just anything. We react emotionally to things that have putative significance to ourselves. As Brady puts it, it is 'a platitude that emotions constitute reactions to objects, events, and states or affairs that are potentially significant or important to us' (Brady, 2013, p. 10), where what is significant is couched against our background cares and concerns — the things we care about. When we experience an emotion, then, we engage with the world in terms of how the things we care about are apprehended as being affected (this idea can be found in various forms in, for example, Clore, 1994; Helm, 2001; Roberts, 2003; Carman, 2018a; Müller, 2019). Having cares or concerns, however, is an inherently affectively-infused phenomenon. Because of this, we can make sense of why emotions involve intentional feelings at all: emotions are intentional in that they are about things at which they are directed but, quite crucially, they are responses to how the things we care about are apprehended as being affected. A picture of intentional feelings grounded in a person's background cares and concerns thus helps to make sense of the felt engagement of the world so familiar with emotions.

Note, however, that emotions do not simply manifest in isolated events. Rather, we have rich and interconnected emotional lives where what a person experiences at any one time connects to other emotional episodes, dispositions, and traits, at that time and over time (Helm, 2001; Betzler, 2007; Carman, 2018a). If you get upset when one of your parents is suddenly taken ill, for instance, you are typically disposed to feel relief when they are discharged from hospital, but also to enjoy their company and relish in their successes. A common thread to our emotional lives is that we respond to things that have significance to us given what we care about. In this example, your background care is for your parents where, if you were to fail to respond emotionally when they are at risk or when they have successes, we would question whether you really do care about them.

Indeed, responding emotionally is only one way in which someone might be disposed to react to how her cares and concerns are apprehended as being affected, where she might also be disposed to behave or act in certain ways (for discussion, see Carman, 2018a). Just as we might question if you care about your parents when one suddenly falls ill but you have no concomitant emotional response, we might

question if you care if you weren't motivated to act to protect them, such as to rush to the hospital to be with them.

Uncovering the background role of cares and concerns in our emotional responses thus does two things. Firstly, it can make sense of why emotions involve intentional feelings in the first place. Secondly, it exposes how emotions form part of a larger pattern of response motivated by how one's cares and concerns are apprehended as being affected. This pattern of response, as I shall now discuss, is potentially what we should focus on if we are to conceptualize a role for emotion in practical agency that is sensitive to intentional feelings and the phenomenology of emotional actions.

Before going any further, though, let us be quite clear that we are concerned with the emotional experiences of rational agents. Responding emotionally against a background of cares and concerns is potentially something that even non-human animals and human infants do, yet we tend not to think of these as rational agents. As such, we must narrow our focus. As we saw in the introduction, rational agents act for reasons seen as reasons. Rational guidance like this, however, requires that an agent has the ability to critically reflect on her reasons and actions, is disposed to do so when required, and is disposed to let the results of her critical reflections inform her subsequent behaviour (Scanlon, 1998; Jones, 2003). So, we are concerned with the emotional experiences of agents like these, not just any creature that might experience an emotion.

Further, otherwise rational agents may not reflectively identify with the care that underlies an emotional response. Someone brought up with racist values, for instance, may come to reject those values but still experience fear when faced with a person of another race on a dark street. While we can explain her emotion as evidence of the persistence of ingrained values, her emotion nevertheless conflicts with what she reflectively takes herself to care about. As rational agents we need to ensure that our emotions do align with the cares and concerns that genuinely do form part of our values, illustrating the importance of Jones' contention that, as rational agents, we need to monitor and cultivate our emotions so that they do reflect the considerations we endorse as reason-giving. As rational agents who monitor and cultivate our emotions, then, it is not enough that we have background cares and concerns; we also need to identify with the things we care about (Carman, 2018a).

Once we do identify with the things we care about, when we undergo an emotional experience we express a commitment to those

cares as well as to a pattern of response appropriate to how those cares are apprehended as being affected.⁷ And here we start to get the wherewithal for capturing how emotions, as intentional feelings, could feature in a rationally rich role in practical agency: not as reason-trackers but as commitments to concomitant action.

Emotional commitments, then, offer a promising route for capturing the nature of intentional feelings. Would emotional commitments also avoid problems like the bootstrapping objection? If a commitment is different to having a reason, then it would. And, indeed, rational agency is governed by normative categories other than reasons, including categories such as requirements, obligations — or commitments (see Shpall, 2014; Liberman and Schroeder, 2016). Shpall, for instance, identifies two types of commitment that are part of the same normative relation: rational and moral commitments. A rational commitment is ‘a commitment to believing what you believe to follow from the things you already believe’ (Shpall, 2014, p. 147) and a moral commitment is a commitment to perform some action or actions, where a paradigmatic moral commitment is the normative pressure that arises from promises (*ibid.*, p. 148). Crucial for current purposes, however, is that a commitment is not the same as a reason. Being committed to believe the things that follow from one’s belief or being committed to act on one’s promises does exert normative force on us, but it is not the same as having a reason to believe the things that follow from one’s beliefs or having a reason to act on one’s promises. For instance, commitments do not justify a belief or action in the way that a normative reason would in the sense of making the belief or action right, which we can see using Shpall’s example of Adam. If Adam believes that everything in the Bible is true and believes that the Bible says that the world was created in six days, then he is rationally committed to believing that the world was created in six days. But the two beliefs do not make his subsequent belief right.

⁷ This is similar to an idea that Helm (2001) develops, according to which to have an emotion is to be committed to the import of the things one cares about, and this comes with emotional commitments to undergo other related emotions. Note that, according to Helm, we are committed to the import of the things we care about simply by experiencing an emotion, where failing to respond in relevant emotional ways can constitute a rational failure. My proposal is different because I do not agree that failing to respond in relevant emotional ways is inherently a rational failure. As rational agents with the relevant abilities and dispositions, and who cultivate and monitor our emotions, we need that additional reflective identification with our cares.

If an emotional commitment is a form of normative commitment, like rational and moral commitments, then it too would be a different kind of normative category to a reason. This is relevant because a reason-tracking approach puts emotion into the wrong kind of relation to reasons. Specifically, if the considerations that are tracked are normative reasons for an emotional experience and are also normative reasons for a belief, and vice versa, then an emotional experience could be self-justifying. But if a normative commitment is not the same as a reason, then a rational agent who identifies with their background cares and concerns may still experience a normative force to respond in ways appropriate to how her cares and concerns are apprehended as being affected, where the normative force and commitment to other elements of a pattern of response may be a crucial part of her internal rationality. But a commitment is not in itself a normative reason for a belief or an action. Understood as commitments, then, an emotional experience does not risk being self-justifying.

Prima facie, then, expanding on emotions as a kind of normative commitment promises both to accommodate intentional feelings and the phenomenology of our emotional actions because of the role of background cares and concerns, but also to avoid the problem of bootstrapping. Of course, what I have outlined here is just that: an outline. Much more needs to be said about how — and, indeed, whether — emotional commitments are a form of normative commitment, but I hope to have motivated the case for taking the option seriously.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have explored what impact reflections on conscious emotional experience could have for how we conceptualize a role for emotion in practical agency. If our conscious emotional experiences are both intentional and affective, where emotions are a felt engagement with the world and involve intentional feelings, how should we understand its role in practical agency?

Two existing accounts of the role of emotion in practical agency draw on the idea that emotions track reason-giving considerations via their intentional content. I argue, however, that this kind of approach at best only gives a small part of the picture, but at worst faces substantial problems arising from their theoretical bases. Instead, by reflecting on emotions as intentional feelings and how they form broader patterns of response held up against our background cares and concerns, I propose that a model of normative commitments may be

better able to capture the insights from emotional phenomenology. For such an account to take off, we do have to set up some constraints, such as requiring that rational agents cultivate and monitor their emotions and identify with the things they care about. But once those constraints are in place, then it looks like emotional commitments could both be sensitive to the nature of intentional feelings and avoid problems facing a reason-tracking approach. Of course, more work needs to be done to develop this picture that I have only outlined here. Yet, given the way in which emotions are intentional feelings and the challenges this creates for an approach that centres on reasons, I hope to have motivated the case for taking commitments seriously as an alternative approach with much promise.

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