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Emotional actions: A new approach

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Abstract

The recent philosophical literature on emotional action is divided between Humeans, who think that emotional action, for all its peculiarities, can in fact be explained along Humean lines, that is, with belief–desire pairs; and emotionists, who think that emotional actions can only be explained by appealing to emotions and some of their special features. After reviewing this philosophical discussion, I will argue, first, that none of the philosophical accounts of emotional action analysed, whether Humean or emotionist, is satisfactory enough. Second, I will argue that this philosophical debate has reached a stalemate, which does not allow further progress and which has not been able to provide us with a compelling account of such emotional actions where it is not obvious which is the goal involved. Third, I will argue that in order to overcome this stalemate, we need to approach emotional action in a radically different way. Drawing on ideas from some psychologists, I will suggest that the relevant philosophical issue should be whether emotional action is, or is not, goal-directed. Finally, I will suggest how emotional actions, particularly the most puzzling ones, can be accounted for according to this new approach.

KEYWORDS

emotional action, emotions, expressive actions, intentional action

1 | INTRODUCTION

The recent philosophical literature on emotional action is divided between Humeans, who think that emotional action, for all its peculiarities, can in fact be explained appealing to Humean motivating reasons; and emotionists, who think that emotional actions can only be explained by appealing to emotions and some of their special features. It has proved to be notoriously

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difficult to offer a satisfactory account of so-called expressive emotional actions and to show what is the purpose, if any, of such actions.

In the first section of this paper, I will review the essentials of the recent discussion on emotional action. My conclusion here will be that none of the philosophical accounts of emotional action analysed is satisfactory enough. In the second section, I will argue, first, that this philosophical discussion, centered around the dispute between Humeans and emotionists, is bound to leave us in a stalemate where no further progress seems possible. Second, I will argue that this situation can be overcome if the focus is shifted to the different issue of whether emotional actions are, or are not, goal-directed. Drawing on the distinction made by psychologists between goal-directed and stimulus-driven behaviour, I will suggest how some of the most puzzling cases of emotional actions can be treated. Finally, in the third section, I will discuss some other views on emotional actions and highlight some aspects of my suggested account.

2 | REVIEW OF THE RECENT DISCUSSION ON EMOTIONAL ACTION

In this section I will summarise what I think are the most significant philosophical contributions to the topic of emotional action. In relation to this review, it is important to keep in mind that, in order to keep the paper within the limits of an appropriate length, I will not try to be exhaustive. The aim here is to mention only those things which I deem essential in order to understand the present state of the art. Also, in the second and third sections, when developing my view, I will also address some other views on emotional action, or expressive behaviour.

2.1 | The Humean account and its problems

Until very recently, the topic of emotional action in philosophy has been completely dominated by the so-called Humean account of action (Davidson, 1963; Smith, 1987). It is very important to highlight from the very beginning that Humeanism is intended to be a general account for actions, not just emotional action. Its main aim can be taken to be an elucidation of the distinction between actions and happenings, in other words, between things that we do and things that merely happen to us, as when we are pushed by someone else. Defenders of this general account for actions, or 'Humeans' as I will henceforth call them, have approached emotional action as the problem of how to best make emotional action fit into the mould of their general theory of action.

According to the Humean view, an action is caused by a belief–desire pair according to the following general schema: a desire to pursue a certain goal *G* and a belief that the action *A* is the best available means to attain *G*. This belief–desire pair constitutes what Humeans call the motivating reason that the agent had for the action and would be revealed in a correct rationalisation. According to this view, a rationalisation is a causal explanation where the purpose of the action is revealed (through the desire which is part of the explanans) and which accounts for the action as having been done because it was, by the agent's own lights, the best available means to attain the goal or purpose desired. What is crucially mentioned in a typical rationalisation is the purpose of the action because the rest of the motivating reason, the instrumental belief, can be easily inferred from the desire. Consider: 'Jones did so because he wanted to kill Smith', or simply 'Jones did so in order to kill Smith'.

So, according to the Humean view, a behaviour by an agent constitutes an action if, and only if, it can be correctly explained by a true rationalisation, that is to say, it is caused by a motivating reason, where the desire would give the goal or purpose of the action.¹ The Humean

¹Also, the causal connection should be outright and not 'wayward' (see Chisholm, 1966; Davidson, 1963; Pacherie, 2002; Searle, 1983). I will not discuss this complication for Humeanism in this paper.

proposal is then that an agent acts if, and only if, her behaviour is instrumentally rational, that is to say, she regards her action as being instrumental for the attainment of the purpose set by the desire constituting her motivating reason.

When considering how emotional action, an action performed because the agent is in the grip of an emotion, fits into the Humean account, a first difficulty is that we often rationalise an action by attributing an emotion to the agent. We commonly say things such as: 'Mary ran away from the fence because she was afraid of the dog', or 'Smith is being unkind to Jones because he is jealous of him', or 'Jones has invited Smith to his wedding because he admires him', and they all sound fine as they stand. This suggests that the emotion sets the purpose or goal of the action when the action is emotional. There are two reasons for this conclusion. One reason is that emotions are commonly thought to be strong motivators for action: fear makes us avoid; disgust makes us expel; admiration, or interest, make us approach, to mention a few clear cases. The other reason is that, as just noted, typical rationalisations mention only the purpose or goal of the action. So, it makes sense to think of fear in one of the examples above as setting the goal of avoiding the dog, something which the agent would then be trying to fulfil by running away from the fence. The trouble is that emotions are not in general regarded as desires, nor as being constituted by the combination of belief and desire that makes up a Humean motivating reason, so they cannot be motivating reasons according to the Humean account.

Some Humeans have reacted to this difficulty by pointing out that we simply should not take at face value our custom of mentioning emotions in rationalisations of actions. Only a desire, and not an emotion, is part of a motivating reason for action, including emotional actions. If by rationalising an action we mention the emotion, this is due only, they claim, to pragmatic reasons. By mentioning an emotion, we give a crucial clue about the origin of the desire actually setting the goal or purpose of the action. We thus give extra information, about the origin of the desire, which we would not obtain should we stick to a more austere explanation. The assumption at work here is that we can infer the relevant desire from the emotion. Thus, if we are told that Mary ran away from the fence because she was afraid of the dog, we can infer that she wanted to escape from the dog, as this is a desire typically caused by an emotion of fear, or so the Humean thinks, and hence we have all the relevant information to grasp Mary's motivating reason, including of course the instrumental belief that Mary thought the best way to escape from the dog was running away from the fence, with extra valuable information about the origin of such reason (Goldie, 2000).

The next problem posed by emotional action, however, gives to the Humean more reason for concern. It is the problem of explaining so-called expressive emotional actions, or expressive actions, for short. Expressive actions can be defined as actions that reveal or express an emotional state on the part of the agent. They rank from such simple behaviours as banging a desk out of anger, ruffling the hair of a child out of affection or jumping up and down out of joy, to slightly more complicated ones such as covering one's face out of shame, to definitely more complex ones such as rolling around in one's deceased wife's clothes out of grief, or gouging out holes in the eyes of the photograph of one's rival in matters of love.

Rosalind Hursthouse was the first to bring up this issue of expressive action in the discussion of emotional action. She not only offered all the above examples but also, and quite insightfully, saw their potentially devastating effect on the Humean account. Hursthouse argued quite plausibly that emotional expressive behaviours are indeed actions, and not mere happenings. So, they are things that we do, not things that merely happen to us. She also claimed that in most cases the agent does not seem to regard them as a means to attain a valued end. According to Hursthouse, the agent just has the desire to perform the action, a desire which would have been caused by an emotion. So, it is the emotion and the desire that explains the action and in particular there is no belief to the effect that the action is a good way to attain a certain goal or purpose. If so, then these expressive behaviours cannot be instrumentally rational, and if they are not instrumentally rational, then they

are not actions, according to Humeanism. But they indeed are actions, so Humeanism is in trouble here (Hursthouse, 1991).

When assessing Hursthouse's argument it is important to bear in mind that there are instances of expressive actions which are clearly amenable to a Humean explanation. These occur when the action is caused by a desire to express the emotion as when one, for example, ruffles a child's hair because one wants to express one's affection for her or one wants the child to recognise such affection. These are then cases where the action is done as a means to fulfil the expressive end. But Hursthouse, who actually brings attention to this point in her paper, argues that in many other instances of expressive actions such expressive desire is lacking. And she seems quite correct about this. For example, when I bang my desk as I learn that my insurance car company has increased my fee once more, I do not seem to have any expressive goal in mind.

Smith (1998) responded to Hursthouse's challenge by insisting that all emotional actions, including expressive actions, obey Humean motivating reasons. He agrees with Hursthouse that the action is caused by a desire to perform the action, whence it follows that in such actions the goal or purpose is the action itself. So, there is also a valued end involved in the action, only that the end is the action itself. Against Hursthouse, he further argued that the explanation includes also an instrumental belief which, together with the desire, constitutes a Humean motivating reason. So, if we take up the example of someone, Jane, gouging out holes in the eyes of her rival Joan's photograph, Smith contended that the goal of Jane's action is the action itself, her motivating reason just being that she wanted to gouge out holes in the eyes of Jane's photograph and she believed that she could attain such a goal by just performing the action. A similar story would apply to the case of the saddened widower rolling around in his deceased wife's clothes.

Now Smith acknowledges that there is something unsatisfactory about such rationalisations. He thinks, however, that this is due to the fact that they leave us wondering about the origin of the agent's desire. For this reason, Smith claims that the explanation should be supplemented with an attribution of an emotion to the agent, for instance, in the case of Jane, an attribution of hatred as a source for her desire to perform the action. Smith thinks of emotions as states of 'being disposed to think, and to desire, and to do all kind of things' (Smith, 1998, p. 22).

Peter Goldie agrees with Smith that the true motivating reason in the case of Jane's action is the one that Smith envisages, according to which the purpose of the action is the action itself, and he also agrees that a rationalisation giving us such a motivating reason is explanatorily unsatisfactory. It is only that for Goldie such explanation should be supplemented differently. The reason for this is that merely attributing to Jane her hatred for Joan does not explain why she desires to gouge out holes in a photograph depicting Joan. One would rather expect Jane, according to Goldie, to desire to harm Joan's real eyes on account of her hatred, rather than wanting to tear out the eyes in a photo of Joan.

Goldie's suggestion is that such actions as Jane's or the widower's are expressions of a 'wish', a technical term meaning desiring something and imagining, or being disposed to imagine, the desire to be satisfied (Goldie, 2000, p. 28). So, Goldie's explanation of what goes on in the case of Jane is this. Jane hates her rival Joan and, as a result of her hatred, she desires to harm her, or her eyes. Yet, due to certain civilising constraints Jane wants to abide by, she does not want to satisfy such a desire. But still her desire is intense and so she indulges in wishing and thus she imagines herself satisfying her desire to harm Joan by scratching out the eyes in Joan's photograph. In this way, through an exercise of wishing, Jane's desire to harm Joan gives rise to the desire featuring in the motivating reason for her expressive action, namely her desire to gouge out holes in the eyes of Joan's photograph. A similar story would be fit for the widower's case. The widower's deep grief does not directly cause a desire to roll around in his wife's clothes but rather his desire to be in the company of his wife. As this second desire cannot, alas, be satisfied, he just imagines himself satisfying it by rolling around in his wife's clothes.

This Humean move of identifying means and end in an expressive action has raised the criticism that the resulting explanation seems too poor and easy. Kovach and De Lancey (2005),

for example, object that ‘so long as it can be assumed that one is aware of performing a certain action, it is possible to explain the action in this way’ (p. 117). The idea is here, I think, that the attribution of such a belief–desire pair (the agent wants to perform the action and thinks that she can do this by simply performing the action) would be entirely ‘ad hoc’, as it would seem to be entailed by the claim that we are dealing with an action done by the agent, and not a happening, and, moreover, we would lack any independent evidence for it. As for Goldie’s more elaborate explanation, critics object that a state of wishing is not sufficient to cause the relevant expressive behaviour. Jane may indeed imagine herself satisfying her desire to harm Joan’s eyes, without actually doing anything at all about it, in particular, without scratching out the eyes in Joan’s photo. It is necessary, it would seem, that her wishing actually causes her desiring to scratch out the eyes in Joan’s photograph. Hence some authors conclude that Goldie’s account of Jane’s expressive action is still unsatisfactory, as it should be supplemented with the said causal relation between the wish and the desire (Kovach & De Lancey, 2005; Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015).

I think that this last objection to Goldie’s account is not fatal and that his main idea can be recovered in a more worked-out account which is, I think, free from this objection. Here is my suggestion. To begin with, I think that critics are right when they point out that one may indulge in wishing without even feeling inclined to act. Jane may indeed imagine herself satisfying her desire to harm Joan’s eyes, without actually doing anything at all about it. I think that there is indeed a missing causal link in Goldie’s explanation, something that connects the state of wishing with the action. My suggestion is that this missing link is the desire to pretend that one is fulfilling the desire caused by the emotion. In the case of Jane, it is her desire to pretend that she harms Joan’s eyes. The widower’s case would be amenable to the same explanation. The relevant desire in the case of the widower would be his desire to pretend that he is in the company of his wife.

It seems reasonable to attribute such a desire to pretend in these cases. Thus, Jane would probably stop damaging Joan’s photo if she were to learn that somehow her act is actually hurting Joan² and the widower would be left bewildered if he were persuaded that his act somehow makes him be in the company of his wife. This encourages the thought that Jane or the widower are not acting out of their respective desires of hurting Joan or being in the company of the widower’s wife, but rather out of their desires of pretending to be fulfilling them.

In fact, I think that this is the correct explanation for all cases of emotional action where the agent makes a symbolic identification of the object of the action with the object of the emotion, for instance, Joan’s photo with Joan. Of course, a desire to pretend that one is fulfilling a certain goal, or satisfying a certain further desire, is a quite complex mental state. But I understand it makes sense to attribute to the agent such a complex state when she performs the sort of symbolic identification which is characteristic of this type of actions. So, I do not think that my account can be accused of overintellectualization.

My account entails that expressive actions, when they are symbolic, are amenable to an outright Humean explanation, for an agent would perform such an action as the best available means, by her own lights, to satisfy her desire of pretending. For instance, in the case of Jane, her motivating reason would be this: she wants to pretend that she satisfies her desire to harm Joan and she thinks that a good means to attain this goal is by gouging out holes in the eyes of Joan’s photograph. In sum, symbolic expressive actions would then have a goal or purpose other than the action itself, pace Hursthouse, Smith and Goldie. They are actions that the agent regards as instrumental to attain a further end, a desire of pretending.

Still, nothing like this sort of explanation in terms of wishes and desires to pretend would work for simpler expressive actions, where no symbolic identification seems to be in place, such

²Unless, of course, Jane is a believer in voodoo. But in this case, her action would be perfectly Humean as well as she would be acting under the belief that her action is a means to fulfil her desire to harm Joan.

as covering one's face out of shame or slamming a door out of anger, and this is readily acknowledged by Goldie, who claims such actions do not involve wishes (Goldie, 2000, p. 31).

Christopher Bennett has argued instead that all expressive actions are symbolic, although the sense in which they are symbolic differs from Goldie's sense. According to Bennett, these actions are performed in order to do justice to the emotional situation the agent is confronting (Bennett, 2021) and they actually symbolise or correspond to the emotional situation or the way such a situation is represented by the agent's mind (Bennett, 2016). It is unclear, however, how to understand the goals of such actions according to this view. Bennett says that these actions are done for the sake of them (Bennett, 2016, p. 80) but he also says that they are done in order to do justice to the emotional situation (Bennett, 2016, p. 74) thus suggesting that they are performed as a means to fulfil such a goal and opening then the gate to an outright Humean treatment.

Moreover, there is an important difference in terms of sophistication and lack of spontaneity between actions like those by Jane or the widower and simply banging a desk when one receives bad news from one's car insurance company. This makes a Humean explanation of banging the desk out of anger in terms of a sophisticated desire less compelling and more vulnerable to the complaint of overintellectualization.

Also, Bennett's account does not make it clear enough exactly how the agent makes a symbol out of her action. For instance, jumping up and down out of joy is, according to Bennett, a symbolic representation of the joyful emotional situation one is in as the display of energy involved in such action corresponds to 'the position of power and activity, of readiness, of open possibility' which would be typical of a joyful state. That would contrast with opposite emotions like sadness where the corresponding symbolic expression would instead symbolically represent 'resignation, passivity, inactivity' (Bennett, 2016, p. 91). This does not seem, however, correct. Deep grief can be typically expressed by such actions as hitting one's chest strongly and by other behaviours displaying as much, if not even more, energy and activity than the expression of joyful states. For all these reasons, I do not find it compelling to treat all expressive actions as symbolic.

As for the most general concern levelled against Humeanism, I agree with critics that Humeans do not succeed in explaining expressive action (unless when it is symbolic, or there is a desire to express the emotion). But the reason is not that the move of identifying means and ends renders the explanation 'too poor and easy' but rather that it renders such actions, implausibly, as autotelic. A standard example of autotelic action may be following the flight of a bird just for the sake of it. Now it seems quite clear that actions like Jane's or the widower's are not like this. It is not the case that Jane is scratching at Joan's photo just for the sake of it. And the same holds, I think, for the rest of expressive actions, like banging the desk out of anger.

Moreover, Smith and Goldie, as we have seen, acknowledge that their explanation is unsatisfactory and needs to be supplemented by an extra account which involves the emotion at stake. But in standard cases of autotelic actions, actions whose genuine purpose is the action itself, we do not find the explanation unsatisfactory. Saying that I'm following the flight of a bird just for the sake of it looks fine as it stands, we do not feel that such explanation needs to be supplemented in any way. This strongly suggests that such expressive actions cannot be treated as autotelic.

So, our conclusion so far is that Humeanism is not able to offer a satisfactory account of emotional action, at least not of some expressive actions. Let us then now turn to the emotionist side.

2.2 | The emotionist account and its problems

An alternative to the Humean account is the view that emotional action is explained by the emotion causing it, and not by belief–desire pairs. According to such alternative account, therefore, when acting emotionally the action is not the causal result of a motivating reason, in the Humean sense. This has recently been dubbed the 'emotionist' account.

The best worked-out emotionist account I know of has been provided by Scarantino and Nielsen. Scarantino and Nielsen think that the main problem with the Humean account is that it does not explain the impulsivity which is characteristic of every emotional action (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015). By impulsivity, these authors, drawing on ideas by psychologist Nico Frijda, understand two things: first, when we act emotionally, we make use of only part of the information that is relevant to us, for instance, when feeling enraged and fighting a hated enemy, we may fail to notice that he is much stronger and well trained than us (Frijda, 2007, p. 29); second, emotional action involves a sense of urgency ‘comprising both an expectation of gain after completing the action, and haste to fulfill it’ (Frijda, 2010, p. 571) such that ‘in some cases, the urge to act does not abate even after the goal of the action has been achieved’ (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2983). This latter effect is called ‘postfunctional action’ (De Lancey, 2002), and it is indeed characteristic of certain emotional actions. An example would be a person shooting a dog which has killed his child and who keeps shooting it long after the dog is dead.

The Humean account leaves impulsivity out because ‘whatever belief and desire pair may be said to motivate an emotional action, there is a non-emotional “twin” version of the action caused by the very same belief and desire pair’ (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2985), where this non-emotional twin lacks any of the impulsive marks of emotional action. So, the conclusion of the authors is that in order to explain emotional action we need an account where emotion takes centre stage.

Scarantino and Nielsen think that action tendencies are pivotal when it comes to understanding emotions, drawing again on ideas by Frijda. Frijda contended that all emotions ‘are geared to actions’ (Frijda, 2007, p. 26); they crucially involve a state of action readiness. This is understood as a disposition to establishing, maintaining or modifying a relation with an object, an event or the whole world. Approaching, withdrawing, caring for, hurting or suspending action, are all examples of action readiness modes, according to Frijda. Some of these modes show a tendency for action (action tendency), others (like our last example) do not (inaction tendency). Following Frijda, Scarantino and Nielsen think emotions crucially involve action tendencies (or inaction tendencies) with control precedence, that is to say, ‘which clamor for attention and execution (...) tend to persist in the face of interruptions (...) tend to interrupt other ongoing programs and actions; and they tend to preempt other information-processing facilities’ (Frijda, 1986, p. 78). According to this, ‘fear involves an avoidance tendency with control precedence, anger involves an attack tendency with control precedence, disgust involves an expelling tendency with control precedence, and so on’ (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2988). The end result aimed at in an (in) action tendency is the relational goal of the corresponding emotion: ‘fear has the relational goal of avoiding a certain target appraised as dangerous, anger has the relational goal of removing a certain obstacle appraised as blameworthy, disgust has the relational goal of removing an object appraised as noxious, and so on’ (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2988).

Let us see now how the authors put their account to work in order to explain emotional action and, in particular, the troublesome expressive actions. According to Scarantino and Nielsen, all emotional actions are either instrumental or displaced. Instrumental emotional actions are simply ways to achieve the relational goal of emotion. These would include all garden-variety cases of emotional action. For instance, running away from a dog would be explained as an action fulfilling the relational goal of fear, according to the authors, namely, avoiding a certain target – in this case, a dog – appraised as dangerous. According to the authors, some expressive actions are also instrumental. Ruffling a child’s hair may be a way of achieving the relational goal of love, namely, seeking proximity with the loved object; covering one’s face may be a way of achieving the relational goal of shame, namely, to hide from the world; jumping up and down may be a way of achieving a relational goal of joy, namely, communicating an intent to interact.³

³Scarantino and Nielsen distinguish between directly instrumental emotional actions and communicatively instrumental actions. In the latter case, the relational goal of the emotion is fulfilled by an act of communication. Later on, we will discuss the possibility of communicative goals for actions caused by states of shame, joy or anger.

Displaced emotional actions are ways to achieve a goal symbolically related to the relational goal of emotion (symbolically displaced actions) or a goal that diverts attention away from the relational goal of emotion (radically displaced actions) (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2990). Examples of symbolically displaced actions are the already discussed cases of Jane or the widower. For instance, in the case of Jane the relational goal of her hatred is hurting Joan, but instead the action is displaced to attain a symbolically related goal, namely, damaging a photo of Joan. An example of a radically displaced action would occur when you bang your desk as you get news about the increase in the price of your car insurance.

Kovach and De Lancey (2005) observed that some non-human animals, especially mammals, also seem to exhibit this sort of displaced emotional action. A good example is the lioness that diverts her state of anger with her cubs by scratching a tree trunk (Tinbergen, 1939). Scarantino and Nielsen go a step further as they suggest that the mechanisms leading to displaced actions in humans are the same that operate in non-human animals as described by Zeigler (1964). There are two such mechanisms: either the animal confronts incompatible motivations (conflict); or the animal is prevented from doing what it is motivated to do (thwarting). In the case of Jane, conflict would be responsible for her displaced action, conflict between the action tendency of hatred and certain ethical and social constraints she wants to abide by; the action of the widower, by contrast, would be a case of thwarting, as his relational goal of seeking proximity to his beloved wife cannot be attained.

So much for a description of Scarantino and Nielsen's account. Let me now lay out the issues about their account which I find problematic.

First, I agree with them that an explanation of emotional action simply in terms of a belief–desire pair leaves out the impulsivity that is characteristic of emotional action. It is indeed important to take into account impulsivity in order to explain special features which may occur when we act emotionally. Postfunctional action is one such feature. As an objection to the Humean account, however, I think that this point misfires. The reason is this. We should here recall that the Humean account is intended as an elucidation of the action/happening distinction. The crucial claim is that all actions are caused by a belief–desire pair (motivating reason). Now the fact that the same belief–desire pair may both account for an emotional action and a 'twin' non-emotional version of the action (thus leaving out an account of the impulsivity features of the emotional action) does not question this crucial claim. The Humean can defend herself by arguing that all she is claiming is that all actions are caused by Humean motivating reasons and this includes all emotional expressive actions. The impulsivity of emotional actions can be accounted for by resorting to the fact that in such actions the motivating reason (at least part of it) is caused by an emotion, while in the twin non-emotional version of the action this is not the case. In sum, the Humean may point out that the impulsivity of emotional actions can be explained by resorting to the emotion causing the motivating reason in such cases in a way which is therefore quite consistent with the Humean view. Namely, the idea would then be that emotional actions are just Humean actions caused by emotions. And this reply seems to me to be well taken. In order to argue against Humeans one needs to show that the sort of motivating reason they offer for expressive actions cannot be sustained, not that it cannot account for special features of such actions. This is exactly what I think my previous objection to the Humean view does, namely, it tries to show that rendering such actions as autotelic is simply wrong.

Second, some of the emotional goals suggested by these authors appear doubtful. Thus, I fail to see why covering one's face may be a way of achieving the relational goal of shame, namely, according to the authors, to hide from the world. By covering my face I do not hide from the world, I rather remove the world from sight, which is altogether different. As I cover my face, I remain there exposed to the inquisitive and severe gaze of my peers. Should I have the goal of hiding from the world, I'd better flee from the scene (as is indeed the case in some instances of shame) or hide in a remote place, only known to me. But not cover my face. Also, I cannot quite see why jumping up and down may be a way of achieving the alleged relational

goal of joy, namely, communicating an intent to interact. Notice that such an action may occur also when we get extraordinarily positive news but we are alone, and we are fully aware of that. What is the point of communicating our intent to interact if there is not anyone around to interact with? Some authors suggest that the agent may have an imagined audience in mind (Fridlund, 1994). Well, this might be so in some cases, as when the agent considers how she would behave when in the presence of certain people or imagines herself being in the presence of certain people when getting the news, but I submit that in most cases of jumping up and down out of joy such explicit imaginings are absent. I think that in most cases such actions are too spontaneous for that. To postulate then some ‘implicit’ imagining has the air of an ad hoc move (we will go back to this suggestion when discussing Moor’s account at the end of Section 4).⁴

Moreover, it is not clear, at least not to me, what Scarantino and Nielsen think about the goals involved in what they call displaced expressive action, both in the symbolic and in the radical variety. I have already put forward my view that in symbolically displaced action (actions like Jane’s or the widower’s) there is indeed a goal which is set by a complex desire, a desire to pretend. As I said above, if this is correct such actions can be offered an outright Humean explanation. What Scarantino and Nielsen say about this issue is just that displaced emotional actions are ‘ways to achieve a goal that is symbolically related to the relational goal of the emotion or that diverts attention from the relational goal emotion’ (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2990). The first disjunct in this quote seems to apply to symbolic action and the second one to radically displaced action. The authors do not say, however, which states are supposed to set such goals. It seems clear that such goals are not set by the emotion causing the action. They are defined as goals that are symbolically related to, or divert attention from, the relational goals of emotion. Are they then set by some of the agent’s desires? If so, then all displaced actions, not just the symbolic ones, would in principle be amenable to a Humean treatment. Also, it is unclear what these new goals would be. Goals symbolically related to the emotional goal are perhaps easier to devise. For instance, in the case of Jane one could think of the goal of damaging Joan’s photo as symbolically related to the goal of hurting Joan. Yet with radically displaced actions it is not obvious which goal the authors have in mind. Scarantino and Nielsen also suggest that in some instances of displaced action the goal involved is simply venting the emotion. Again, if this goal is set by a desire the explanation would seem to fit the Humean view. Moreover, Scarantino and Nielsen seem to face a sort of a quandary here since, in any case, regardless of how these goals are settled, those actions would be then instrumental in the attainment of such goals, or at the very least akin to instrumental actions, since they would indeed be ways of achieving such goals. In this way, the alleged difference between instrumental and displaced actions appears to be blurred.

Let us consider now a third problem. Scarantino and Nielsen’s account of displaced action is also incomplete in an important respect. They say that this behaviour arises, just as it happens with non-human animals, in thwarting or conflicting situations. Yet, we are in conflicting situations all the time. Harbours conflicting desires (e.g., wanting to watch my favourite TV programme versus wanting to finish my paper) almost defines the human condition. Actually, the standard account of deliberation has it that we engage in it precisely when we need to ponder conflicting desires. Also thwarting situations are quite common. I may want to be taller but, alas, there is nothing I can do about it. However, in most of these cases, no displaced behaviour ensues. So, the mere fact of confronting a thwarting or conflicting situation may be necessary but it is not sufficient for issuing a displaced behaviour.

Moreover, the analogy of some expressive behaviour in humans with the sort of displacement observed in other animals should not be overemphasised, since there are important disanalogies as well. One chief difference is that among non-human animals typically the displaced behaviour is not the sort of behaviour recommended by the emotional system but rather a quite

⁴Thanks to Agnes Moors for raising this issue.

unrelated type of behaviour. Thus, for instance, hungry fowls exhibit displacement pacing when being prevented from eating (Duncan & Wood-Grush, 1972), and male sticklebacks perform ventilating acts of an empty nest when sexually thwarted (Tinbergen, 1951). There do not seem to be cases like this in humans, at least not when it comes to emotional actions. My banging the desk involves the sort of aggressive behaviour recommended by my infuriated state. It is the object on which I act which is displaced, not the type of behaviour itself.

3 | A NEW APPROACH

The discussion of the previous section was intended to show that none of the accounts of emotional actions reviewed in the first section, whether Humean or emotionist, seem to work properly. Of course, there are interesting suggestions from both sides, but a full-fledged fully satisfactory account of emotional actions is still pending. In this section, however, I will argue for a more ambitious conclusion, namely, that the philosophical discussion on emotional action is framed in terms which do not allow for further progress. If we want to offer a compelling account, I think, we need a different approach, one in which the focus is shifted from whether either emotions or belief–desires pairs explain such actions to whether such actions are goal-directed or not. In what follows, I will try to develop these points.

As we have seen, all contenders in the previous philosophical discussion simply assume that all emotional actions involve a goal and are placed as a means in order to fulfil such goal. According to Humeans, all goals involved in emotional actions are set by desires and all actions are explained by a motivating reason, a belief–desire pair, and their only concession is that in some cases the goal is the action itself (a concession, by the way, which I have given reason to reject). Emotionists like Scarantino and Nielsen, on their part, also seem to think that all emotional actions involve goals. In most cases, such goals are set by emotions, while in others, as we saw, it is unclear which conative states are supposed to set them.

So, the discussion so far has revolved around what provides for the goals involved in emotional actions, whether this job is always served by desires or whether emotions are indispensable in this regard. However, when the discussion about emotional action is framed in these terms, we are liable to reach a stalemate where no contender has the resources to persuade her rival. The main reason why this is so is the following. When an action, whether emotional or not, is placed in order to fulfil a goal, it is hard to tell whether it is amenable to a Humean treatment or not. Admittedly this crucially hinges on one's views about the nature of desires (and beliefs), but on most standard accounts of these states the point can be made all the same. I can only illustrate the difficulty here, given the limitations of space, with one particular philosophical account of desires, the motivational view. According to the motivational view, a desire is roughly a disposition to bring about its satisfaction. Elsewhere, I have defended this view from its main rivals (Pineda-Oliva, 2021). Their dispositional nature makes desires states which can run unconsciously sometimes or such that the agent is at times not fully aware of them or cannot access them by introspection. So, in practice it is hard to assess whether the sort of goals involved, for example, in what Scarantino and Nielsen call displaced actions are or are not set by a desire. The same goes for beliefs, which are standardly thought of as dispositions too. Given again their dispositional nature, it is hard to assess, in most cases of emotional action, whether suitable instrumental beliefs are present or not. Also, and for the same reason, it is hard to discern whether in those cases in which, according to emotionists, a goal is set by an emotion there is no intervening desire which actually sets the goal for the action. Therefore, as soon as two philosophers agree that an emotional action is placed in order to fulfil a goal, then to decide the further question whether it admits of a Humean explanation or not presents itself as an impossible task. We reach a stalemate in which both sides, Humeans and emotionists, dig their heels in. By way of illustration, I have been suggesting in this paper that

when the agent symbolically identifies the object of her action with the object of her emotion, it makes sense to think that the action is guided by a desire to pretend that she is satisfying the desire originated in her emotion. I have offered what I take to be some behavioural clues for this claim, but of course the emotionist can counterattack and point out that in many cases such a desire to pretend is not accessible to introspection and that we should infer from this that there is no such desire. To this, of course, the Humean may retort that in some cases the agent may not be fully aware of such desires to pretend. Once the discussion reaches this point, it is really hard, if not impossible, to make it go further.⁵

The problem is compounded by the fact that the emotional actions which seem more untreatable are precisely those where it is utterly unclear which is the goal pursued in them, like in covering one's face or jumping up and down when one is alone or in banging the nearest thing at hand when one is enraged.

In what follows I will argue for a way to overcome this stalemate situation which, at the same time, offers promising prospects in relation to the emotional actions which appear harder to explain. These two features make this approach, or so I will argue, worth considering. My suggestion is to look into the psychological literature on action. Some psychologists classify actions as being either goal-directed or stimulus-driven depending on the types of mental representations mediating the action (Dickinson & Balleine, 1994; Moors, 2017). Goal-directed actions occur when the action is mediated by a representation setting a goal and is the result of a calculation, on the part of the subject, of the expected utility of such action. We can think both of the Humean model and of the emotionist model defended by Scarantino and Nielsen as fitting into the goal-directed framework in the psychologists's sense.⁶ The difference between them, as I tried to stress in the first section, lies on whether the goal involved in emotional actions is set by an emotional state (Scarantino and Nielsen) or is set by a desire which may be caused by the emotion and whether motivating reasons are effective causes of the action (the Humean view). By contrast, the mechanism underlying a stimulus-driven action occurs when the action is prompted by a representation of the stimulus or an aspect thereof. As the stimulus is perceived, this is the idea, an associative link between the stimulus and an action tendency is activated which may translate into overt behaviour. Such associative links may be either innate or originate in associative learning procedures.⁷ Habits suggest themselves as paradigm cases of stimulus-driven behaviour, albeit they may originate, as most theorists think, in a purposeful or goal-directed behaviour.⁸ Notice by the way that habits are actions, that is to say, things that we do, not things that happen to us. Some of the skilled behaviour is also stimulus-driven although it may be under the overall control of an overarching goal; consider, for instance, the incredibly fast and precise finger movements performed by a piano virtuoso playing a piece at presto tempo. Psychologists defending this view also think that some innate behaviours belong to this class of stimulus-driven actions.

Psychologists differ as to what is the exact relation between these two types of mechanisms. The more standard view is that the default mechanism is the stimulus-driven and that the goal-

⁵I think that the same point holds for alternative conceptions of desires, although I can only sketch the argument here. Consider, for instance, the evaluative view of desire. According to such a view, for an agent A to desire X is for X to appear as good to A, where such appearances may be non-conceptual states and may run unconsciously as well.

⁶Indeed, Scarantino and Nielsen's account of emotional action includes a phase of rational control in which 'the emoter must determine whether the relational goal of the emotion should be pursued and, if so, how (...) translating the abstract goal of emotion (...) into a set of situated subgoals that achieve the abstract goal in a concrete context' (Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015, p. 2989).

⁷Notice that actions brought about by a stimulus-driven mechanism need not involve goals in an implicit sense, meaning that they are driven until satisfaction of such implicit goals is achieved. In fact, I will argue, as we will see, that this is precisely the case with some of Hursthouse's examples, as when one bangs a desk out of anger with someone one cannot harm or warn with such behaviour. When the action is the result of a stimulus-driven mechanism the only goal involved, if any, is that set by the action tendency associated to the stimulus, and such would then be an explicitly represented goal. Thanks to Tom Cochrane for raising this issue.

⁸Notice that not all habits are emotional. I have the habit of pacing up and down when answering the phone. I acquired it when I was young. In my parent's place, the phone hung at an aisle and I had to stand when answering it. Hence, in long conversations I felt the need to stretch my legs. Nowadays, when I answer the phone, I soon find myself pacing up and down even if I'm comfortably sitting on a chair at the time of the call.

directed mechanism steps in only to regulate the correct production of action or to correct mistakes which would lead to suboptimal actions (as in Wood & Neal, 2007). Another view portrays the two systems as running in parallel and competing between them to issue the corresponding behaviour. Also, within this view theorists differ as to which of the two processes tends to win when run in parallel. Some think that it is the stimulus-driven process because it is more automatic (Daw et al., 2005); others hold instead that the goal-directed mechanism tends to win because it is automated enough and it is more adaptive (Moors et al., 2017).⁹

Fortunately enough, we do not need to take a stand on which of these three views about the mechanisms for action is the correct one. All we need to acknowledge is that psychologists working on action consider a stimulus-driven mechanism as a distinctive possibility at least in some cases. My suggestion would then be to explain the most challenging of Hursthouse's cases as being the result of a stimulus-driven mechanism. In this way, my suggestion steers clear from the dispute between Humeans and emotionists, since both views are supposed to explain all cases of emotional action as subserved by goal-directed mechanisms.

At first sight it might seem that we cannot accept this suggestion. When one thinks of cases of emotional action where the goal allegedly pursued by the action is less obvious, for instance, when I bang the desk out of anger about my car insurance company (and I'm not trying to vent my emotion), it is hard to think such cases fit into the mould of stimulus-driven behaviour. For it does not seem that such a behaviour is under the control of any specific stimulus. It is behaviour, one would say, that may arise in the most varied stimulus situations. Yet such a diagnosis would seem to be too quick. Some psychologists warn that the aspects of a stimulus under which an action can be controlled may be extremely abstract, like their goal-obstructive or goal-conductive character (Moors, 2017, p. 68). So perhaps one could say in this case of banging the desk that the action is under the control of the mental representation of a stimulus, of whatever nature, as being goal-obstructive.

This looks more promising. For one thing, it is clear that we get enraged when, among other things, we are confronted with a stimulus which we find goal-obstructive. It seems hardly deniable that obstructive stimuli give rise to emotions such as frustration or anger which in their turn tend to bring about aggressive behaviour. So, it is quite plausible to think that at some point our brain has forged a link between obstructive stimuli and aggressive behaviour. Then, the present proposal would be that, when this link is in force, we act out of it without the intervention of desire or any goal-representing state.

I would suggest a similar explanation for jumping up and down out of joy. My proposal will then be that this is, in many instances (very clearly when one is alone), a case of stimulus-driven behaviour too, which is under the control of a representation of a stimulus as being goal-conductive. Such a behaviour will occur whenever the brain has forged a link between appraising a situation as being goal-conductive and the forceful display of energy that an agent shows typically when in a joyful state.¹⁰ It is important to insist that stimulus-driven actions are still actions, and therefore not happenings, albeit they are not goal-directed. This is of course at odds with the theses held by Humeanism, according to which an action is by definition goal-directed. Yet, it is worth noting that this is a position difficult to maintain even if one leaves to one side the vexed issue of emotional actions, given the undeniable existence of habits or skilled actions which do not seem to fit into the Humean mould either. Actually, many philosophers of

⁹One thing that needs to be taken into account when reviewing the psychological literature on action is that in principle no distinction is made between what philosophers call actions or intentional actions and such involuntary behaviour like motor expressions of emotions (like some facial expressions or autonomic effects) which escape the conscious control of the subject and hence tend to be happenings. Of course, the present discussion concerns only actions in the philosophical sense, and not motor expressions. I will mention this issue again whenever it is relevant.

¹⁰Many psychologists working on emotions favour the view that emotions are caused (or, depending on the versions, even constituted) by such appraisals as goal-congruency. This makes it only the more understandable that some emotional actions are stimulus-driven and under the control of such appraisals. For a review of so-called multidimensional appraisal theory of emotion, see Scherer et al. (2001).

action have argued that we should abandon Humeanism on account of habits and skilled actions (consider, among others, Pacherie, 2000; Rietveld, 2008; Searle, 1983).

Also, the fact that stimulus-driven actions are nonetheless actions means that, no matter how forceful is the associative link that our mind has forged between certain appraisal features of stimuli and types of action, the actions themselves can be pre-empted and discarded in favour of other courses of action typically produced by the alternative goal-directed mechanism. For instance, even though my appraising a situation as being strongly goal-obstructive may prompt in me a powerful tendency to aggression (on the nearest thing at hand), in virtue of a strong associative link between these things, still I can decide to resist such aggressive behaviour, if I consider that it will cause me trouble for whatever reason.

4 | OTHER ACCOUNTS

I will finish by discussing three other accounts by Cochrane, Green and Moors which raise some relevant issues which will help me in further exposing my view.

Although there is no systematic discussion of emotional actions, only of automated bodily responses (what psychologists call motor expressions), like facial expressions or postural changes, Tom Cochrane (2018) suggests something along the lines of what I am claiming when he briefly considers such actions as shouting at a slowly loading computer. Cochrane's view is that emotions are built upon what he calls valent representations. Valent representations are *sui generis* mental states, inspired in Millikan's pushmi-pullyu representations (Millikan, 1995), which both detect a concern and trigger a response which regulates it (increasing or decreasing its presence according to the cases).¹¹ According to Cochrane, anger is directed at objects which are predicated as obstructive, in this case, the slow computer. This elicits the regulative response (which will be aimed at decreasing the obstruction). The fact that the response, in this case clenching one's fists and yelling at the computer, is totally ineffective invites, according to Cochrane, consideration that the mechanism underlying emotional responses is somewhat modular in the Fodorian sense. The case we have been discussing throughout the paper, hitting a desk out of anger, is, however, slightly different from the one Cochrane discusses since in his example both the emotion and the action are directed at the computer. A parallel case would be that my anger at the slow computer would make me hit the desk on which my computer lies but not the computer itself. Cochrane also envisions cases like this as he allows that higher cognitive processes may regulate the emotional response to the point that sometimes the action is deviated or redirected.

Now, when comparing my account to Cochrane's, it is important to highlight that, though we agree on some important issues regarding the most puzzling of Hursthouse's actions, the account I am defending here does not appeal to modularity of any kind nor valent representations but to a stimulus-driven mechanism as postulated and defended in some of the psychological literature on actions. According to this, if hitting the desk in frustration because a computer is working too slowly (or because one's insurance fee has been increased again without obvious justification) becomes an ineffective action, as Cochrane puts it, this is not because the mechanism underlying the response has modular features, but because it is a stimulus-driven mechanism. Such mechanism activates an action tendency, an aggressive one in this particular case, without the intermediation of any representation of any goal. This is the sense in which I think we can properly speak of actions such as these as being goalless or ineffective. Then, of course, some higher cognitive regulation occurs, as the action is directed at the desk and not at

¹¹Also, emotions, according to Cochrane, represent situated concerns, meaning that they track a concern along a contextual dimension, which can be either temporal or modal (among others). For instance, fear represents a harm which is about to be but not yet present. I cannot properly discuss here all the interesting details of Cochrane's view. I hope that none of these omitted details compromise the discussion in the main text.

the computer (presumably, because the agent does not want to break it). The fact remains, however, that the action is the result of the activation of an action tendency without the intermediation of the representation of any goal, but simply by the activation of an associative link between obstructiveness and aggressive behaviour. Also, a minor point concerns what explains the fact that such goalless or ineffective actions can occur even as a response to stimuli which are novel to the agent (I may react with frustration and hit the desk even though, lucky me, this is the first time ever I have encountered a slow computer). On my account, this is simply due to the fact that the slow computer arouses frustration since it thwarts an important goal of mine (suppose I have to meet an important deadline and I am running short of time), and both frustration and anger involve an appraisal of the object of the emotion as being obstructive, according to many views on emotions. This is enough to activate the associative link between obstructiveness and an aggressive action tendency by way of a stimulus-driven mechanism. On Cochrane's view, one has to explain why the emotional response is caused by something (the slow computer) which is not an innate elicitor. In his book, Cochrane suggests some associative mechanisms, but these would not account for the case in which the aggressive response is caused by a first-time encounter with a slow computer. If I am not mistaken, Cochrane would need to invoke here another mechanism: conscious thought. Thus, the response would be triggered in this case by the conscious deployment of the concept of being obstructive on the computer. Now, this need not be so on my account, since the appraisal of the computer's behaviour as obstructive may be automated and in any case not require a conscious conceptual representation.

Mitchell Green's work on self-expression encourages the thought that expressive behaviour (including not just motor expressions like facial configurations, but also emotional actions like those involved in Hursthouse's cases) has a social signalling function (Green, 2007). This naturally suggests the possibility that all of Hursthouse's actions actually involve the goal of signalling the agent's emotional state. Let us discuss then this possibility as an alternative to my account.¹²

According to Green's definition (2007, p. 43), an agent A expresses her emotion E if, and only if, A is in E and some action or behaviour of A both shows and signals her E. A signal is defined as a feature of an organism that is designed, by either evolution or the agent, to convey information. Showing is allowing others to know about E (to give enough evidence for it, in the contextual circumstances). I suggest that we forget about this showing clause for two reasons. First, Green makes some claims about how emotions are showed by expressive behaviour, like that sometimes the emotion can be perceived through them, or that emotions (at least the basic ones) have a physiological signature. Yet these claims are controversial.¹³ Second, and more to the point, because the fact that in many cases expressive emotional actions give reliable evidence for the emotional state of the agent does not by itself entail that they are performed in order to fulfil a communicative goal.

We will therefore concentrate on the signal part of Green's definition. Let us then consider the claim that all emotional expressive actions have the goal to communicate the agent's emotional state, and, in turn, to communicate to others the presence of that which typically elicits such emotional state. To borrow one of Green's examples, it is plausible to think that an agent's behaviour expressive of fear may indeed communicate to others surrounding her not just her emotional state but also that there is something dangerous in the vicinity. Can we then explain the most challenging of Hursthouse's cases, those which I suggest to explain by appealing to a stimulus-driven mechanism, as cases in which the action is performed to fulfil the goal of

¹²Thanks to Tom Cochrane for making this suggestion. Cochrane also suggests that Green may treat some of the most puzzling cases, like banging a desk out of anger, not as cases of expression of emotion but as cases of betrayal of emotion, meaning (I understand) that the emotion is thereby shown but not signalled. I entirely agree with the claim that most if not all emotional expressive actions clearly reveal the agent's emotional state. My concern, however, is to explain how such actions, through which psychological mechanism, are produced.

¹³For instance, at present there is no consensus as to whether the evidence for pancultural facial expressions for basic emotions is compelling enough (see, for a review, Nelson & Russell, 2013).

signalling the agent's emotional state and the presence of the property tracked by such emotional state? I do not think so, at least not in all cases, and this for three reasons. First, an agent may come to associate with an appraisal an action tendency which is not designed by evolution nor by the agent to convey information about E: perhaps, for some contingent process of association, the agent has come to associate goal-obstructiveness with a movement of her hand which lacks any special meaning for her (consider, for instance, the case of cultures like the Japanese, which strongly disallow the overt expression of some emotions). It is true that someone aware of such association may exploit it and infer the emotion from the behaviour, so this person can use the behaviour as an indication of the emotion, but this is a far cry from saying that the behaviour was done by the agent in order to fulfil the goal of communicating her emotion.

Second, for some of Hursthouse's cases the hypothesis of the signalling goal seems clearly incorrect. Consider, for instance, banging the desk out of anger. It is highly dubious that aggressive behaviour, when in anger situations, has been designed, either by evolution or the agent, to convey information about one's anger state and to warn others about the presence of offenders. In normal circumstances at least, when we are enraged, we direct our aggressive behaviour to the alleged offender, which makes it odd to claim that the purpose of such behaviour is to communicate and warn others about offences. It makes more sense to think that the purpose of aggressive behaviour is to restore respect and, potentially, to warn other possible witnesses of our behaviour that we will not easily tolerate offences.

Third, even if we were to allow that expressive emotional action has the goal of communicating one's emotional state, what is the point of performing it when an agent is alone and knows this and has complete control on her action? Again, the explanation in these cases, I think, is that there is an associative mechanism that is activated and the agent, quite simply, lets it go without interrupting it until it translates into overt behaviour. So, I stick to my stimulus-driven account for the most challenging of Hursthouse's cases.^{14,15}

My suggestion as to how to overcome the stalemate mentioned above in the discussion of emotional action can then be summarised as follows. Given that the existence of a stimulus-driven mechanism for action, one which is not mediated by mental states representing goals, seems to be seriously considered by empirical scientists as a genuine possibility, I would suggest that for those cases of emotional action where it is not obvious which is the goal served by such actions (e.g., jumping up and down out of joy when one is alone; or banging the desk when one is enraged with one's insurance company), we should consider the action as being the result of a stimulus-driven mechanism. It is true that, in many instances, as we have seen, the proposal will only be plausible if we further assume that the stimulus features controlling such emotional

¹⁴Tom Cochrane suggests that Green may perhaps explain such cases as by-products of adaptive behaviour. In response, I would first emphasise that in the cases we are discussing the agent is in full control about the onset of the action. So, it is hard to see these cases as simple by-products. Second, and relatedly, at the very least one should I think agree that an explanation should be given about how these actions occurs as by-products, about which mechanism underlies them. Now, my view tries to spell out the relevant mechanism involved in these actions. In my view, it does not need to involve an adaptive behaviour in all cases, as my example of the arbitrary movement of the hand in the main text tries to show.

¹⁵It bears mention that for symbolic actions such as Jane's, Green recommends a treatment along the same lines as I have defended. According to Green, Jane acts out of a motivating reason involving her desire to make as if to mutilate Joan. The cause of such desire is that 'it allows one [Jane] to imagine that she is doing x [mutilating Joan]' (Green, 2007, p. 37). As it stands, however, the account seems vulnerable to the objection that we saw some theorists raise to Goldie's account since imagining oneself giving satisfaction to one's hatred need not result by itself in any action. This is perhaps why Green adds that by performing the action Jane obtains some of the satisfaction that actually mutilating Joan would procure. In my view, as you may recall, the mechanism here is that Jane's (strong) emotional desire, caused or involved in her hatred of Joan, causes (together with certain beliefs she happens to have, namely, Goldie's 'civilising constraints') her desire to pretend that she is satisfying it. In relation to these symbolic cases, Green also says that 'attacking something associated with an object of rage is a widely used signal of one's rage'. This need not be so, however, in all symbolic cases. As rightly pointed out by Scarantino and Nielsen, such actions may involve quite arbitrary symbolic relationships. For instance, I may symbolically identify the blue cushion on my favourite sofa with the manager of my insurance car company and hit it with violence, in spite of the fact that there is no objective relation between that thing and this person. On my view, all symbolic cases respond essentially to the same psychological mechanism, no matter how arbitrary the symbolic relation established by the agent.

actions are abstract enough and take the character of an appraisal, like being goal-obstructive or goal-conducive. But this seems a reasonable assumption to make given that again many psychologists have emphasised the important role such appraisals have in the unfolding respectively of such emotions as rage, or frustration, and joy.

I indeed think this new approach is more promising than the discussion between Humeans and emotionists which, for the reasons I have suggested, seems to leave us in a stalemate where no further progress appears possible and which, as we have seen, does not seem able to provide us with a compelling account for those emotional actions where it is far from obvious which is the goal involved in them.

In order to show the strengths of this new approach, let me discuss one loose-end we still have to address: the strange behaviour of covering one's face out of shame, when one is alone. I already argued that I cannot see how covering one's face serves the purpose of hiding from the world, as Scarantino and Nielsen would have it. Perhaps a better suggestion is this. It seems undeniably true that an experience of shame involves a tendency to avoid social contact (see, for instance, Haidt, 2003, p. 860). Now, removing the world from sight may be seen as a crude (and desperate) way of achieving this. It is true that the world remains out there, populated with the inquisitive gaze of our peers, but as we cannot see them, we avoid in great measure direct causal interaction with them and our gesture makes people also understand that we are willing to refrain from causal interaction with them.¹⁶ It is also true that we can undergo such behaviour even when we are alone and we know we are. But this can perhaps be explained by the fact that in such cases we typically imagine or re-enact our clumsy behaviour in the presence of our peers and covering our face is then arguably a reaction to the imagined or remembered presence of this crowd. And, one may now add, this behaviour occurs because a stimulus-driven mechanism is in place. When one appraises that something one has done, or has failed to do, simply does not live up to one's ego ideal, typically an experience of shame arises (see, for instance, Lazarus, 1991). It is then natural to think, again, that our brain may have forged a link between such an appraisal and such a radical behaviour conducive to avoiding social contact as covering one's face. Hence, in virtue of the existence of this link, the mere re-enactment in our mind of the scene deserving such an appraisal may be enough to produce the ensuing behaviour, even when we are alone. It is again, of course, another case of emotional action which is stimulus-driven and therefore not goal-directed.

Psychologist Agnes Moors has recently defended the view that all emotional actions, including all Hursthouse's cases, are goal-directed actions. Let me conclude by briefly discussing her view (Moors, 2022a, 2022b, chapter 7). First of all, Moors thinks, against some other psychological views, that the prevailing mechanism for action is the goal-directed one, and not the stimulus-driven one. According to her view, actions, no matter whether emotional or not, are caused by the subject pondering ways to maximise satisfaction of a preferred goal. In fact, Moors goes even further and argues that not just actions issuing from emotional states but the emotions themselves are goal-directed processes. An emotion is just a process where the subject chooses such action or action tendency maximising expected utility. The only important difference is that in the case of emotions and emotional actions the goal at stake has higher value for the subject than other mundane goals the subject may harbour and which may be involved in the explanation of non-emotional action. Yet, as Moor says, this difference is just a matter of degree. In other writings (Moors et al., 2017) Moors emphasises also that, against what is currently assumed, such goal-directed processes as involved in emotional actions may run unconsciously and be automated.

¹⁶Tom Cochrane suggests that the goal involved in covering one's face out of shame is signalling to others one's acknowledged inferiority. I agree that in the circumstances in which shame arises, and especially when it is judged as correct or appropriate, a behaviour which indicates that one refrains from social contact can easily be understood also as an indication of one's inferiority. But this does not mean that in all cases such behaviour is performed to fulfil the goal of communicating one's inferiority, especially when the agent is knowingly alone.

Now, the problem I find in this account is similar to the one I raised for Humean theories or an emotionist theory like Scarantino and Nielsen's: some instances of expressive emotional actions do not seem to be the result of a goal-directed process. According to Moors, however, appearances are misleading here, and she suggests a number of ways in which her theory could accommodate these problematic cases. First, she explains different ways in which a goal-directed action may be maladaptive or irrational. One possibility is that the real goal involved in an action is not the one assumed by the audience or the subject herself, as when someone shouts at her boss because her preferred value is being respected rather than keeping her job. Another suggestion is that the subject may make some mistakes along the way, as when one miscalculates about the right action option in order to fulfil the preferred goal. A third suggestion is that something unexpected and out of the subject's control may ruin the fulfilment of the goal, as when, say, a big hurricane occurs and one cannot fulfil the goal of getting home by hiring a cab. Now, here it is important to keep in mind that, as I mentioned above when presenting Humeanism, the sort of rationality involved in this discussion is instrumental rationality, not rationality in a more robust, normative sense. A surprising ranking of goals on the part of the subject may issue actions which are not rational in this more robust sense, but they will be rational in the sense that matters to the Humean all the same. To take a crude example, if it is correct that Hitler invaded the Soviet Union because he wanted to enslave the Slavic race and thought military invasion was the best means to ensure this, then his action was not only goal-directed but actually perfectly Humean as well, no matter the dubious rational credentials of Hitler's beliefs and desires involved in such an action. Mistakes, understood as miscalculations of the expected utility of an action, are a different and trickier matter. I think that the sense of instrumental rationality handled by the Humean should allow for some miscalculation, provided the mistake is not gross. I do not think, however, that expressive emotional actions originate in such gross mistakes which would render the behaviour as instrumentally irrational. As for accidents, I think a Humean would say that the agent has a motivating reason in these cases, though the action is blocked by circumstances which lie beyond the agent's control. Again, I do not think that most expressive emotional actions are like this.

The only remaining suggestion made by Moors which could be used to deal with Hursthouse's cases is that they may involve the goal to communicate with a real or imagined audience. Actually, she mentions this as her explanation for one of the cases I find more problematic: slamming a door out of anger when getting news about the increase of one's car insurance and one is alone and knowingly so. Now, it seems to me that this explanation is too *recherché*. It is one thing if, before I slam the door, I think: 'this is what I would do if that guy from the car insurance were in front of me right now'. In this case, it is clear that I have an imagined audience in mind and hence I would agree that the action is goal-directed (actually the explanation would not be very different from the one I suggested above for symbolic actions). Or I may have an expressive goal in mind. But, as Hursthouse argued, in the majority of cases, the agent does not seem to have an expressive goal nor an imagined audience in mind, nor is the action produced as the subject re-enacts a scene involving her in front of the person responsible for the rise in the insurance fee. In all these cases I think it is very forced to insist that there is a partly unconscious goal of communicating something to an imagined audience and, as mentioned above in my discussion of Green's views, aggressive behaviour in circumstances perceived as obstructive does not seem to serve any communicative goal. I find, in sum, that my explanation is more natural, namely, that the detection of a highly goal-obstructive stimulus activates an association with an aggressive action tendency and that the subject lets it translate into overt behaviour, even though she retains control on the onset of action. Hence, the resulting action is arational even in the instrumental sense of rationality. Notice, by the way, that my account does not require taking a stand on which of the two mechanisms, the stimulus-driven or the goal-directed, is the prevailing determinant of behaviour. It is in fact perfectly consistent with the thesis that the goal-directed mechanism is the prevailing

mechanism. All I am claiming is that in some cases emotional actions are the result of a stimulus-driven mechanism. And yet they are still actions, and not mere happenings, as the subject retains control on the onset of them.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

In the first section of this paper, I have reviewed at some length two different accounts of emotional action. The main conclusion there is that none of these accounts, for different reasons, is good enough and that the shortcomings are serious enough to abandon the idea that we can cope with them by simply refining one of these accounts. We rather need, I claimed, a different approach.

In the second section, I have done three things. First, I have argued that the philosophical discussion on emotional action, dominated by the debate between Humeans and emotionists, is bound to leave us in a stalemate where no further progress is foreseeable. Second, I have suggested a radically different approach, where the focus is shifted from the until now dominant issue, namely, whether the goals of emotional actions are set by desires or by emotions themselves, to the issue whether emotional actions are, or are not, goal-directed. I have explored the prospects we face in this regard when taking into consideration an idea which is familiar in the psychological literature on action, namely, that some actions are brought up by a mechanism which is not mediated by mental states representing goals. I have suggested that considering this stimulus-driven mechanism as a producer of some emotional actions seems a good way of overcoming the said stalemate. Third, I have put to work this idea and offered what I think are reasonable suggestions about some of the cases of emotional action which have proved to be the hardest to explain.

Finally, in the third section, I have discussed some further views on emotional action and compared them to my account. Still, it is worth stressing here that most cases of emotional action, like running away from something feared, can be expected to take place through a goal-directed mechanism, although the discussion whether this requires a Humean account of them or an emotionist one, once again, is very likely to leave us in a stalemate for the reasons already discussed.

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