**Penultimate Draft:**

**Emotions as Modulators of Desire (Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies)***

**Abstract**: We commonly appeal to emotions to explain human behaviour: we seek comfort out of grief, we threaten someone in anger and we hide in fear. According to the standard Humean analysis, intentional action is always explained with reference to a belief-desire pair. According to recent consensus, however, emotions have independent motivating force apart from beliefs and desires, and supplant them when explaining emotional action. In this paper I provide a systematic framework for thinking about the motivational structure of emotion and show how it is consistent with the Humean analysis. On this picture, emotions are not reducible to beliefs and desires, instead their primary motivational force comes from their role as modulators of desires – they control the strength of our occurrent desires. Emotions therefore motivate actions through the belief-desire system instead of overriding it.

**§1 Introduction**

We commonly appeal to emotions to explain human behaviour: we seek comfort out of grief, we threaten someone in anger and we hide in fear. According to the standard Humean analysis (Smith, 1987, 1994), intentional action is always explained with reference to a belief-desire pair. This raises the question of how emotions, beliefs and desire motivate and explain action. No doubt, emotions *may* occasionally affect action through the belief-desire system but according to recent consensus (Döring 2003; Hursthouse 1991; Kovach and de Lancey 2005; Scarantino 2014; Wiegman 2020) emotions also have independent motivating force apart from beliefs and desires, and supplant them when explaining certain kinds of emotional action. In this paper, I provide a systematic framework for thinking about the motivational structure of emotion and show how it is consistent with the Humean analysis. On this picture, emotions are not reducible to beliefs and desires, instead their primary motivational force comes from their role as modulators of desires – they control the strength of our occurrent desires. I will show how this framework, along with the resources of belief-desire psychology, can explain the features of emotional action that suggest the independence of emotional motivation from the belief-desire system. Emotions therefore motivate actions through the belief-desire system instead of overriding it.

I will begin by examining why many theorists have been dissatisfied with the Humean explanation of emotional actions and the features of emotional motivation that they believe need accounting for (§2). I will then outline a framework for understanding the motivational role of emotions (§3) and show how the framework accounts for the features of emotional motivation (§4). Finally, I respond to a couple of objections one might raise to this proposal (§5).

**§2 Emotions, Beliefs and Desires**

**2.1 The Humean story**

According to the standard account, an agent performs an action when her action can be explained by a certain belief-desire pair. (Davidson 1963) When Francine turns on the lights by flipping a switch, her action can be explained by her desire to illuminate the room and her belief that she can illuminate the room by flipping the switch. An action is therefore explained by some goal and a means-end belief that performing said action allows one to attain that goal.

What are beliefs and desires? It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with the literature here, but I take it that they are representational states that play certain functional roles.[[1]](#footnote-1) Beliefs aim at representing the way the world is while desires represent how the world should or ought to be. What it means to represent how the world is or how it should be is often interpreted by the Humean in functional terms. This means, for example, that a belief and desire with propositional content p differ in terms of their counterfactual dependence on a perception that ~p – ceteris paribus, a belief that p tends to go out of existence whereas a desire that p persists. (Smith 1987) More crucially, beliefs and desires interact in various ways to produce action. This interaction can cover processes that are relatively automatic as well as processes such as deliberation where one slowly goes through one’s beliefs and desires before selecting an action. An example of such interaction would be that a desire that p and a belief that ϕ-ing will increase the probability that p tends to generate the action ϕ.

Furthermore, our beliefs and desires are standardly taken to be part of the mind’s central processing system, which is the realm of theoretical and practical reasoning.[[2]](#footnote-2) On the standard view (Fodor, 1983), the central processing system is a non-modular domain general system. This means that it can process inputs from a wide range of sources. For example, the contents of our beliefs and desires are not restricted to a single domain, but can run the gamut from being about banal concerns such as a desire for food to abstract ones about the rationality of certain numbers. According to Fodor, the central processing system also has the properties of being isotropic and quinean. In the domain of theoretical reasoning, both terms refer to the epistemic interconnectedness of all our beliefs in the sense that each belief is potentially relevant in determining what else to believe (isotropy) and that the degree of confirmation of each belief depends on its relation to other beliefs in the system (quineaness). We can extend what Fodor says about the properties of theoretical reasoning to practical reasoning as well and this implies that all our beliefs and desires are inferentially related and may combine to produce action. To fully specify the functional properties of beliefs and desires would then require describing how they would interact in such a network. To give one example of such a property, given that desires may come in different strengths; if I believe that ‘p if and only if q’, and I have a weak desire that ~q and a stronger desire that q, this would generate a desire that p. If on the other hand, I have a stronger desire that ~q and a weaker desire that q, this might generate a desire that ~p. Thus, interaction of individual beliefs and desires never occurs in isolation from others in the network.

Not all behaviours engage the central processing system. As mentioned, involuntary behaviours such as shivering appear to be largely insensitive to our beliefs and desires. Nonetheless, such behaviours are not actions. The Humean claim is that insofar as a behaviour is an action, it will engage the system of beliefs and desires. We can thus restate the claim: when an agent performs an action, her action is the result of a type of processing such that a desire and a means-end belief can be picked out to explain that action.

* 1. **The Challenge of Emotional Action**

I show in this section how emotional actions present a challenge to the Humean thesis. Theorists have marshalled two groups of objections against the Humean theory. We may call them the ‘over-intellectualisation’ objection and the ‘unemotional twin’ objection.

**2.2.1 The ‘Over-intellectualisation’ Objection**

In Hursthouse’s (1991) seminal paper,[[3]](#footnote-3) she cites a number of emotional actions that she claims resist Humean explanation. To make our discussion concrete, let me describe two such examples:

JANE’S ANGER: Jane, in a wave of anger at Joan, tears at Joan's photo with her nails, and gouges holes in the eyes of the picture.

JOHN’S GRIEF: John, in the grip of grief over his recently deceased wife, takes his dead wife’s clothes out of the closet, buries his face in them and rubs them against his cheeks.

According to Hursthouse it is implausible to attribute a means-end belief and a desire to the agents that explains their actions. The agents do not perform their actions as a mean to accomplish some further goal. For example, one candidate desire that may explain the above actions are that the agents desire to express or vent their emotions and that they believe they may do so by doing the actions they are doing. Perhaps Jane desires to express her anger at Joan and believes that she can do so by tearing at Joan’s photo. The attribution of a desire to express one’s emotion, however, over-intellectualises the agent’s mental process. It may be plausible in certain situations to ascribe to agents a desire to express their emotions, but it is implausible to imagine that agents are always thinking about how to vent their emotions and seeking means to do so. Some agents perform the above actions without ‘ulterior’ motive. If so, the Humean appears to be unable to identify the relevant belief-desire pair that explains the emotional action.

In response to this, Smith (1998) suggests a simple solution: we simply ascribe to them a desire to perform whatever action they are doing as well as a belief that they can satisfy their desire by doing exactly that. Thus, Jane tears at Joan’s photo because she has a desire that she tear at Joan’s photo and believes that she can bring this about by doing so. The emotion explains why they have these sorts of desires and appeal to emotion to explain their action presupposes the ascribed belief-desire pair. It is thus true that the actions were not performed for some ‘ulterior’ desire.

I believe that this response is on the right path, but so far it is dissatisfying. Simply citing the relevant belief and desire pair appears insufficient to make their action intelligible. For example, although Goldie accepts the attribution of a belief-desire pair to the agents above, he points out that “it does not really make it at all clear why someone should be disposed when hating or in anger to desire to do such a ‘bizarre’ thing as scratch the eyes in a photo of the person they hate or are angry with.” (Goldie 2000) Furthermore, without some account of how emotions generate the relevant desires, the explanation becomes ad hoc and thus deeply suspect (Kovach & de Lancey, 2005; see also Scarantino & Nielsen, 2015). After all, for any action cited by opponents of Humean theory as a counterexample, the Humean can simply ascribe to the agent a desire for that action.

**2.2.2 The ‘Unemotional Twin’ Objection**

The next objection to the Humean thesis is what Scarantino dubs the ‘unemotional twin’ objection. The objection is simple: “Whatever belief, desire, and intention combos may be said to motivate an emotional action, there will be a non-emotional ‘twin’ version of the action caused by the very same belief, desire, and intention combos, namely a version that fails to manifest [certain characteristics of emotional action]” (Scarantino 2014). Scarantino takes this to show that a different and separate emotional system is doing the work of generating emotional action.

Scarantino asks us to imagine two agents, Regular Matt and Twin Matt. Regular Matt and Twin Matt have roughly the same psychological profile with the exception that Twin Matt is Delta-force trained and conditioned not to feel fear even under life-threatening circumstances. Regular and Twin Matt are at a circus when a tiger escapes from its enclosure, and both agents form a desire to avoid getting eaten by the tiger, and both have the memory, from a documentary they watched, that the best way to neutralise a tiger is to avoid eye contact and sudden movements. However, they perform their actions in drastically different ways. Regular Matt is panicky and trembling, he forgets where the closest exit is and despite having watched the documentary he cannot help but stare at the tiger and run wildly. Delta-force trained Twin Matt, on the other hand, calmly analyses the situation, avoids eye contact with the tiger and moves calmly but swiftly towards the exit.

There are a few features of emotional motivation here that any account must capture. Firstly, emotional motivation appears to come with **impulsivity**. There is a sense of urgency that comes with performing certain emotional actions (Frijda 2010) as well as a “preference for early over late action” (Elster 2010). Regular Matt thus rushes to move while Twin Matt collects himself and analyses the situation before acting.

Secondly, agents in the grip of an emotion typically display **partial informational access**. Emotional agents may perform actions that are sub-optimal in the sense that it does not reflect consideration of all the relevant information the agent possesses. Furthermore, agents in the grip of emotion manifest certain attentional biases. They may be unable to recall or notice features of the situation that might be helpful to them. (Elster 2010) Regular Matt, for example, has forgotten the location of the closest exit and may not realise that the information he has gotten from the documentary bears on what to do in the situation.

Thirdly, the actions performed by agents out of emotion display **constrained flexibility**. Emotions are not simple reflexes but demonstrate some flexibility in the actions they produce. For example, anger may lead to shouting or punching or even restrained scheming against the offender. However, this flexibility is also constrained: the actions of an agent appear to be insensitive to at least some of their relevant beliefs. To see this, notice that even if we assume that Regular Matt has the occurrent belief about avoiding eye contact and moving slowly in the situation – perhaps Twin Matt even conveys this information to him just as the tiger breaks lose – there is still no guarantee that Regular Matt can move calmly and avoid eye contact. It seems that his desire to escape is unable to combine with his belief about what he should do to produce the action that Twin Matt performs. This seems to suggest that emotional action does not engage the belief-desire system. For recall that that system is supposed to be domain general and that all our beliefs and desires are inferentially connected. If emotional motivation worked via generating a desire for safety in Regular Matt, why then can this desire not combine with his beliefs to perform the action that satisfies his desire?[[4]](#footnote-4)

Finally, emotional motivation displays certain **bodily underpinnings**. These include changes in our facial expressions, tensed muscles and so on. For example, Regular Matt and Twin Matt may both be moving towards the door, but Regular Matt is sweating and does so in a panicky manner, while Twin Matt is relaxed and moves calmly.

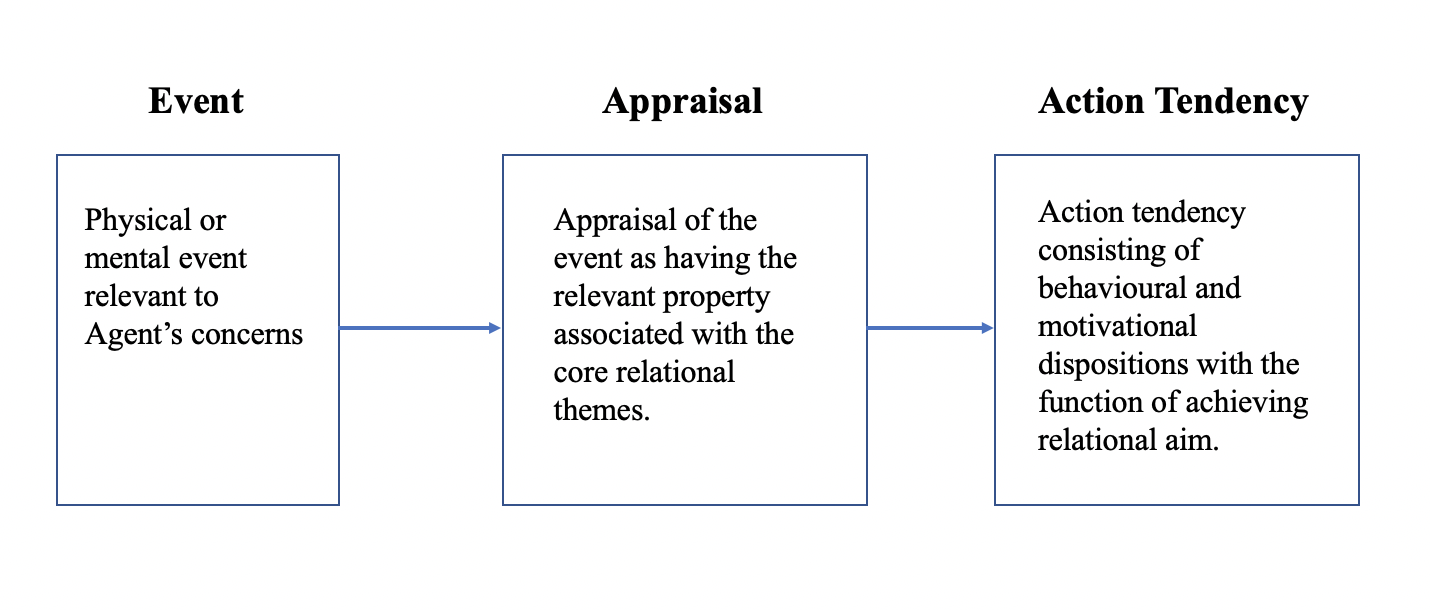
Scarantino is right that for the Humean response to be satisfying, it needs to show how one can account for these different features of emotional motivation. To do this, I will offer a framework for thinking about the motivational structure of emotion and then show how the framework, combined with the resources of belief-desire psychology, can account for these features.

**§3 Emotions as Modulators of Desire: A Framework**

**3.1 Appraisal and Motivation**

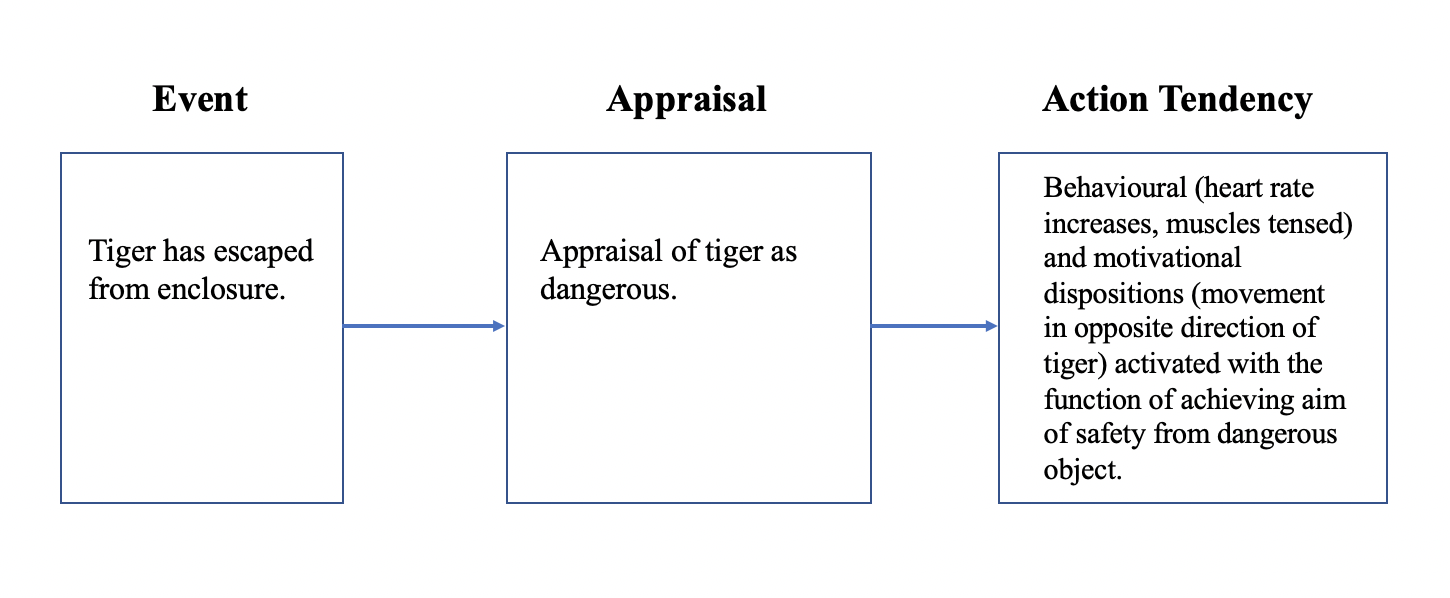
There are two parts to a typical emotion episode. When Matt sees the tiger coming towards him, he appraises the tiger as dangerous and he is disposed to act in certain ways. An emotion therefore typically involves (1) an appraisal of some object and (2) a typical set of motivational and behavioural dispositions. Following a number of recent theorists (Döring 2007; Roberts 2013; Tappolet 2016; Yip Forthcoming), I understand the appraisal to be a form of evaluative perceptual state. This perceptual state directly triggers a set of motivational and behavioural dispositions. These two parts can be conceptually distinguished but they occur together in a typical emotional episode. My focus in this paper will be on the second motivational aspect of emotions. I thus take the following account to be consistent with those who reject the perceptual view for a judgmentalist view (e.g. (Nussbaum 2001)) or who believe that emotions should be defined primarily by their motivational role (e.g. Scarantino 2014; Deonna and Teroni 2012; 2015).

Following Lazarus (1991), we may describe the appraisal component as responding to core relational themes: features of the environment that impinge on an agent’s concerns. For example, fear includes an appraisal of *danger*, anger includes an appraisal of *offense* and so on. These appraisals trigger a set of associated motivational and behavioural dispositions. And following Frijda (1986), we may understand these dispositions as what he calls action tendencies, “tendencies to establish, maintain, or disrupt a relationship with the environment.” These tendencies are structured to respond to the core relational themes detected by the appraisal, we may thus say that they are structured around a *relational aim*.[[5]](#footnote-5) For example, the action tendency of anger is to remove the offending obstruction, the action tendency of fear is to achieve safety. What I describe as the aim of the action tendency here should be understood from the ‘design’ perspective – i.e. it is the *function* of the action tendency to achieve these relational aims, regardless of the specific goals the agent may be led to adopt. The relationship between the appraisal and motivational aspects of the emotion can be represented as follows:



*Fig 1. Appraisal and Motivational Aspects of Emotion*

To make this concrete, we may observe how this works in the case of fear:



*Fig 2. Appraisal and Motivational Aspects of Fear*

**3.2 The Motivational Structure of Emotion**

I now develop a framework to understand the motivational aspect of emotion. The emotional state helps the agent achieve its relational aim in two ways. First, the emotional state generates several associated autonomic changes as well as behavioural reflexes. For example, one’s muscles may be tensed and primed for action, adrenaline may start coursing to increase alertness and so on. These changes, which we may call behavioural dispositions,[[6]](#footnote-6) may serve partly to modify the *manner* in which action might be carried out to allow the agent to better respond to the situation (e.g. one’s muscles are primed for subsequent action to be executed more efficiently).

Secondly, the emotional state generates full-fledged actions that serve its relational aim. Thus, fear causes the agent to have the disposition to perform actions such as crying for help or running away from the feared object. As I’ve pointed out, many theorists think that the emotion does this independently of the belief-desire system and have cited a few features that suggest this. I suggest instead that we can account for these features by having the emotion modulate the agent’s occurrent desires and their strengths, thereby generating action through the belief-desire system. In other words, when in the grip of an emotion, the agent’s profile of occurrent desires is modified; this modification can include the presence of desires that were not present before the emotional incident or it can involve strengthening or weakening his current desires. For example, fear generates and strengthens a desire to cry for help and a desire to run in the opposite direction of the feared object and so on, and perhaps it decreases the desire strength of other irrelevant desires (e.g. the desire to look courageous in front of someone one admires may no longer be as pressing in the face of danger). The suggestion here is that fear modulates these desires *directly*. It is not the case that it generates a desire in the agent to achieve the relational aim and then leaves the agent to work out via means-end beliefs what is the best way to achieve the relational aim.[[7]](#footnote-7)

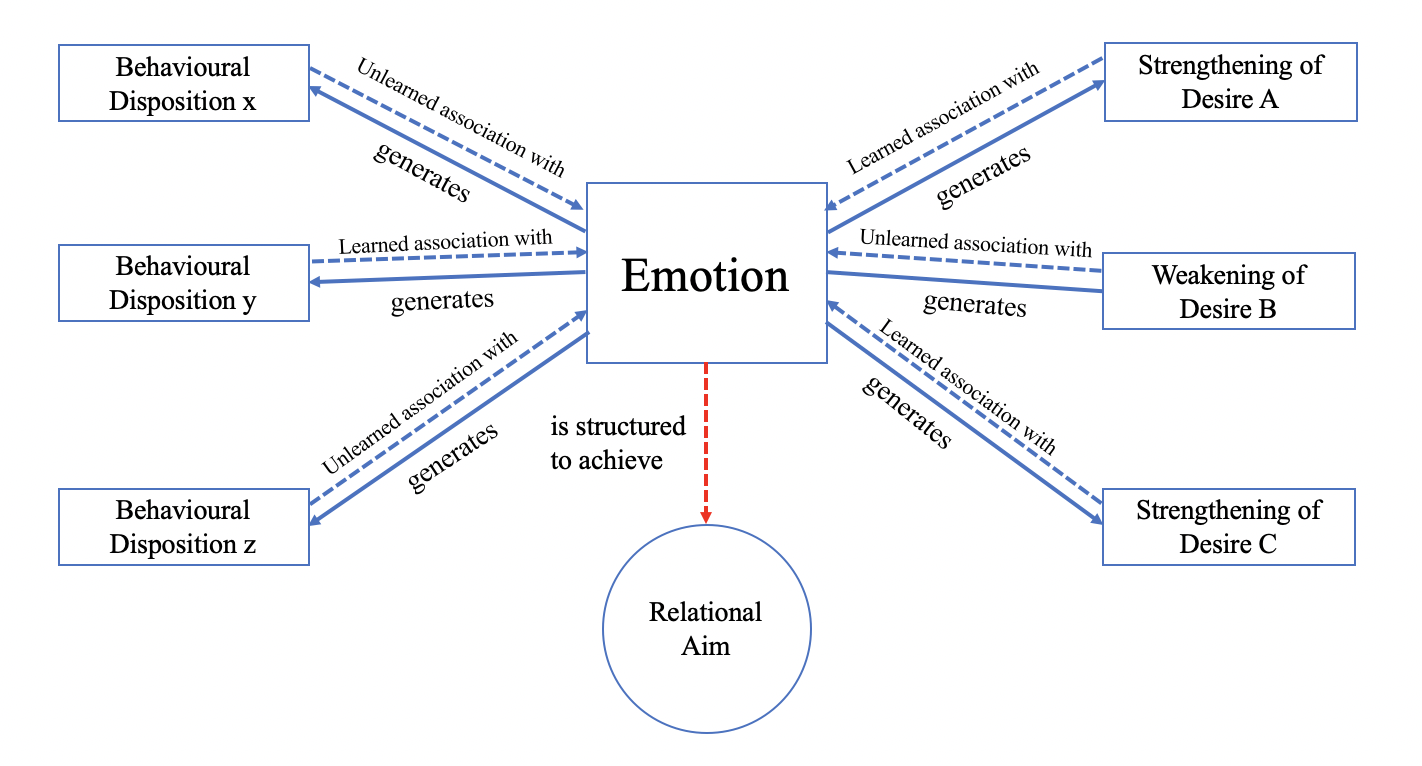
One may worry at this point that the kind of modulation I am proposing is a sui generis process and may wonder if there are any other precedents of such psychological processes that modulate our desires.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full account of this process, but it is significant to note that there are a number of other psychological processes that appear to modulate our desires directly. To begin with, the literature on automaticity suggests examples where perception of some stimuli triggers not just a reflex but causes the agent to adopt some goal and generates goal-directed action (See Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Moors and De Houwer 2006).[[9]](#footnote-9) Indeed, given that I think the perceptual account of emotion is the right one, it may be that emotion is simply a particular case of the general phenomenon of certain perceptions automatically eliciting some goal. Furthermore, other affective states such as pain and hunger[[10]](#footnote-10) may also generate action in the same way. Pain, for example, has the effect of interrupting our current pattern of attention and action and redirecting us to deal with it urgently (Eccleston and Crombez 1999). The kind of modulation I propose that emotion generates then, is not a sui generis postulation.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Now, exactly which desires are modulated when the emotion is in effect? I claimed earlier that the desires are modulated to dispose the agent to perform actions that serve the relational aim of the emotions, but this is only true in general. In fact, the associated desires will be those that have been genetically and developmentally associated with the relational aim of the emotion. We discuss these in turn.

Some of the associated desires may be hard coded into the emotion, so that we can call them unlearned desires. These may, in the genetic history of the organism, have been adaptive in the past to achieving the relational aim of the emotion and so have continued to be hard coded into the emotion’s functioning itself. Probably a desire to move in the opposite direction of the feared object would be one such unlearned desire.

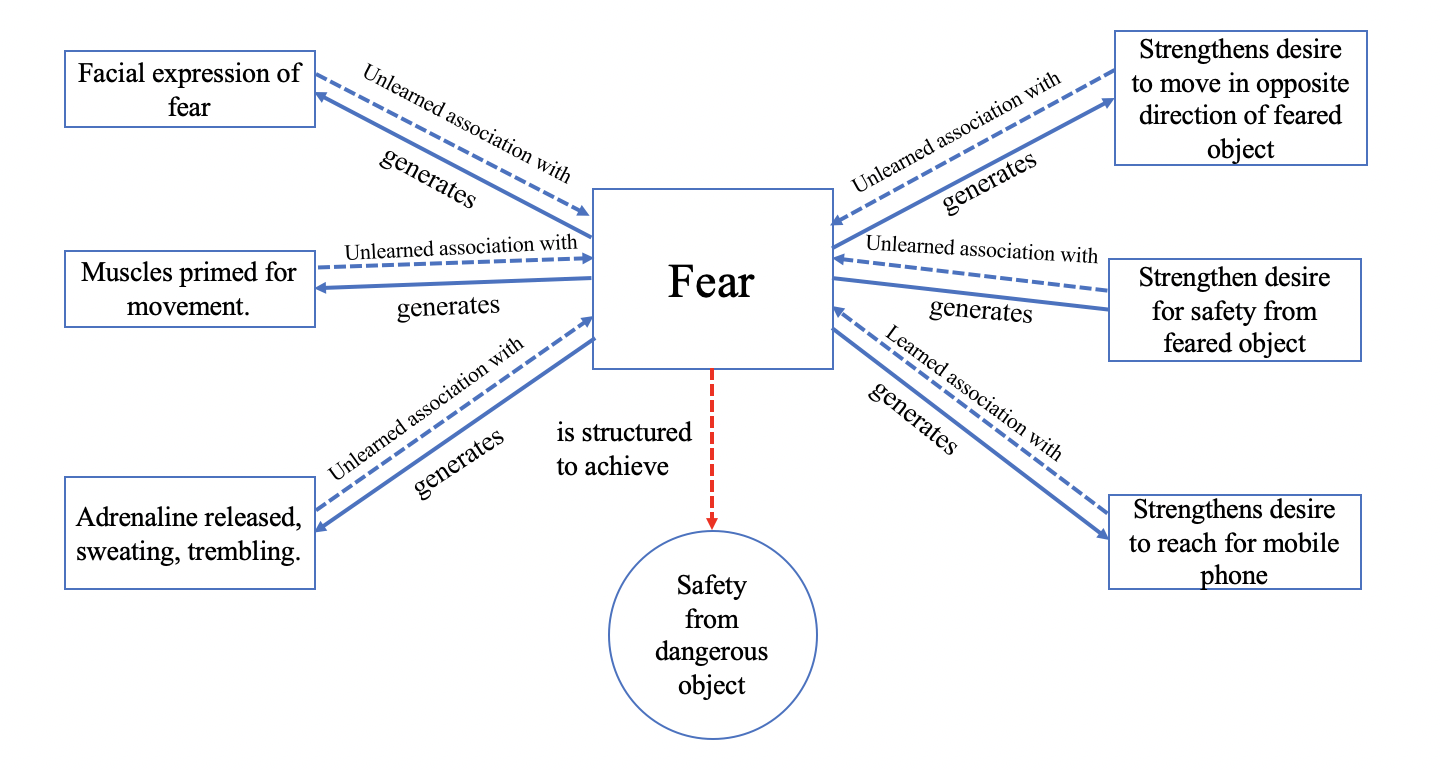
More interestingly, however, are the desires that become associated with the emotion through the developmental history of the agent herself. As Bargh and Chartrand (1999) have noted, there is remarkable plasticity in the goals that can come to be automatically adopted in certain situations. A choice to adopt a goal, when repeatedly made in the same situation, results in the goal being directly elicited by perception of the situation itself. This may happen intentionally (as when one desires to pick up a skill) or unintentionally as one just happens to repeatedly make the same choice in the situation. There may be more pathways by which a desire comes to be associated with a situation – for example an especially traumatic experience may generate an association between similar events with a particular desire even if it happens only once. Most of these desires are probably instrumentally related to the relational aim of the emotion at some point in the past, but it is possible for desires that are symbolically related to the relational aim to be adopted in this way as well. Attachment theorists, for example, have suggested that at some stage in the child’s development, the child may turn to symbolic substitutes to cope with the anxiety of separation from his parent.[[12]](#footnote-12) The tumults of growing up and the variegated experience of children and their relationships with their parents and peers thus shape the modulatory effects of our emotions. The shape of our emotions is therefore determined not only by our phylogenetic history, but also by the social world and our choices within it.

We can therefore sketch out the motivational structure of an emotion in this way:



*Fig 3 The Motivational Structure of Emotion*

In this figure, the solid blue lines represent causal generation, while the dotted blue lines represent either learned or unlearned associations with the emotion. Another way to think about this is that the dotted blue lines represent the diachronic history of the emotion, while the solid lines refer to its synchronic effects. The dotted red line represents the overall function of the emotion, which is to achieve its relational aim. To flesh out this model, let’s consider how it might work in the case of fear:



*Fig 4. The Motivational Structure of Fear*

The relational aim of fear is to achieve safety from a feared object. The behavioural dispositions here are unlearned and most of them involve getting the agent prepared to quickly move. Additionally, this instance of fear generates an unlearned desire to move in the opposite direction of the feared object as well as safety from the feared object, and a learned desire to reach for one’s mobile phone. It is easy to imagine why reaching for one’s mobile phone is a learned feature: calling for help via mobile is an action that is likely taken often in the context of fear and so would become associated with it. What is more interesting here, are the first two desires: to move in the opposite direction of the feared object as well as to obtain safety from the feared object. Both I have supposed are unlearned associations, but this is not necessarily so. In fact, I am somewhat inclined to think that the desire for safety may well be a learned association. After all, the notion of safety is somewhat abstract – it refers to being in a position where the feared object is no longer able to do harm. Whereas to move in the opposite direction from the feared object is straightforward.

What is crucial is that these two desires may come apart. There may be situations where to obtain safety from the feared object it is in fact required to move toward the object of fear. For example, if one is afraid of a tiger, but the closest exit is right behind it, then to obtain safety may be to require moving towards the tiger instead of away from it. Such complexity furthermore appears in a myriad of social situations as well: when one is afraid of a bully, retreating in fear may lead to one being picked on, whereas standing up calmly may result in driving her off.

Let me address another worry here in order to clarify my proposal.[[13]](#footnote-13) It seems plausible to think that there are some emotional states without any occurrent desires in the vicinity which the emotion might be plausibly described as modulating. For example, sadness or nostalgia do not really seem like they prime an individual for some action and appear in some cases to be even de-motivating, and perhaps certain kinds of aesthetic and admiration emotions similarly appear to have no obvious motivational profile. There are two ways I can respond here. First, while it is true that some emotions do not seem to prime an agent for immediate action, they do typically alter the kinds of actions an agent would take. Thus, for example, admiration typically leads to emulation of the person admired or at least an attempt to promote the kind of value associated with the admired object (See e.g. Archer 2019) and in their review of empirical work done on aesthetic emotion, Menninghaus and others note that “contrary to widely held assumptions, aesthetic emotions also include motivational tendencies of approach or avoidance, most notably the tendency to end, extend, or repeat exposure” (Menninghaus et al. 2019). These are desires for states that are not as easily attainable as a desire to run away or to scream but are instead of longer-term actions. They therefore do not necessarily constitute a counterexample to the framework. Second, it is crucial to note that modulation includes both increasing *and decreasing* the strength of occurrent desires. It may well be that the modulatory effect of certain emotions involves mainly reducing desire strengths. In the case of sadness, the emotion may be reducing the strength of a range of desires to allow the agent to process and cope with loss. To achieve its relational aim, an emotion may thus primarily modulate an agent’s desires to make immediate action less likely. I thus believe the framework can handle these cases just as well.

Finally, note that the framework that I provide here is consistent with the Humean explanation of action. For emotion motivates action here by modulating the desires in the agent which will then combine with the beliefs available to generate action. Now that we have the structure of emotion in place, we can see how it explains the features of emotional motivation.

**4. Capturing the Features of Emotional Motivation**

**4.1 Revisiting the ‘Over-intellectualisation’ Objection**

Hursthouse’s objection to the Humean story is that it ‘over-intellectualises’ the agent’s state of mind. It is not the case that Jane has a desire to express her anger, instead, when in the grip of anger, Jane simply desires to tear at Joan’s photos. The account of emotion as modulating our desires captures this, as the emotion directly generates desires that are associated with the emotion instead of a more general desire to achieve the relational aim of the emotion.

Furthermore, this explanation is not ad hoc, contrary to the objection against this Humean response. This account allows one to give a developmental story as to why a specific desire becomes associated with that emotion which can be held accountable to the actual developmental history of the agent. For example, one can tell a story about how a desire to gouge out the eyes of one’s enemy becomes associated with anger. As Goldie and Döring (Döring 2003; Goldie 2000) have pointed out, it is not sufficient to explain the particularity of the action simply by reference to anger alone. If anger has the relational aim of removing a certain offending object, it may lead one to attack the offending object, but it is not obvious why it would lead one to tear at someone’s *photo*. Furthermore, Döring notes that tearing at someone’s photo is a response to anger that is particularly feminine. Goldie tells a story of how ‘civilising constraints’ make it unacceptable to fulfil one’s desires to attack another, leading to the symbolic fulfilment of the desire, and to this may be added Döring’s observation about how gender norms also influence the action one takes. These can be part of the story that we tell to explain the action.

What is important here is that we must not imagine the agent performing some sort of means-end reasoning to figure out that tearing at the photo of one’s enemies is the best way of satisfying civilising constraints and conforming to gender expectations, rather those feature as part of the developmental history of the subject which explains how the desire comes to be in a learned association with anger. This developmental explanation fits snugly into this account and does not supplant the Humean explanation.

**4.2 Revisiting The ‘Unemotional Twin’ Objection**

Let’s now turn to the ‘unemotional twin’ objection. Before I show how my account can capture these features, however, it would be good to briefly discuss Scarantino’s (2014) proposal. Scarantino’s solution is to postulate a separate system apart from the belief-desire system that implements the action tendencies of an emotion. Interestingly, this system includes what he dubs ‘rational control’ that performs functions that look suspiciously like the standard belief-desire system. The rational control system performs two functions. Firstly, it performs the function of ‘compatibility control’ which “involves monitoring that the emotion’s relational goals and sub-goals are compatible with the emoter’s other goals and value system.” Secondly, it performs the function of ‘executive control’ which “involves securing that the emotion’s relational goal is translated into a set of sub-goals that is instrumentally adequate.” The first function appears to be standard domain-general reasoning, and the second appears to be means-end reasoning. Both can be performed by the belief-desire system.

These similarities may prompt one to question whether there is any real difference between my framework and that of Scarantino’s. Insofar as Scarantino takes himself to be presenting an alternative to Humeanism, I believe that he is mistaken. However, one might take my sketch as a Humean *interpretation* of the mechanisms that Scarantino describes. In which case, we are merely describing the same functional structures slightly differently. Still, there may be one substantial difference: Scarantino seems to suggest that emotion primarily results in the agent adopting the emotion’s relational aim as a goal which is then processed via the rational control system. On my view, the relational aim, while describing the function of the emotion, is but one among many desires that the emotion modulates and has no privileged place among them.[[14]](#footnote-14) Regardless, by showing that my framework and the resources of belief-desire psychology can explain the features of emotional motivation, we dissolve the need to postulate any additional system.

**4.2.1 Bodily Underpinnings**

We turn first to the feature that is simplest to explain: the fact that when one is in the grip of an emotion, the agent undergoes bodily changes that cannot be accounted for by the mere ascription of a belief-desire pair. Thus, Regular Matt is trembling, has his muscles tensed and moves in a panicky manner. The reason for this is simple: the same emotional state which modulates Matt’s desires also generates several associated behavioural dispositions. In the case of fear, this includes the kinds of dispositions that Regular Matt undergoes. Twin Matt, who is not in the grip of an emotion despite having the same belief-desire pair, will not share any of these bodily underpinnings.

**4.2.2 Impulsivity**

The next feature that Scarantino cites is impulsivity, which is the fact that when one is in the grip of emotion, there is a sense of urgency to complete a certain action and a preference for early over late action. There are two ways to account for this in the Humean framework.

The first way is to build the preference for early over late action directly into the content of the desire. In other words, the desire that is generated in the grip of fear does not just have the content of moving in the opposite direction of the feared object, but the content of moving in the opposite direction of the feared object *as soon as possible*. This would easily explain the impulsivity that characterises some emotional actions. One, however, might be sceptical that our desires have such specific content. Perhaps such a desire is itself ‘over-intellectualised’. Nonetheless, there is another way to account for the feature of impulsivity.

Notice that the time agents spend reasoning before acting is inversely proportional to the strength of a desire and their subjective probability that performing a certain action would satisfy that desire. To put it simply, if one desires something more strongly than anything else, and one is *certain* that performing some action would allow one to satisfy that desire, reasoning tends to be cut short so that action takes place quickly. In most situations, slow deliberation takes place because one needs to weigh the strength of one desire vis a vis other desires as well as the probability that performing certain actions would satisfy those desires. This means that the actions that tend to be performed with little deliberation are those that are generated by strong desires and are held with the belief that performing some action would satisfy that desire with high probability. In the case of most of the actions that emotions generate, both criteria are met. When the agent is in the grip of fear, for example, the emotion generates a strong desire to move in the opposite direction from the feared object. The content of this desire is such that it is quickly combined with a means-end belief that guarantees its satisfaction. One is certain that by moving in the opposite direction of the feared object, one satisfies one’s desire to move in the opposite direction of the feared object. This therefore explains why agents act impulsively in the grip of certain emotions.

I leave it open which of these two explanations best captures the reason why agents in the grip of emotion act impulsively. The point is that one can account for the feature easily within the scope of Humean psychology.

**4.2.3 Partial Information Access**

The third feature that Scarantino cites is Partial Information Access, which refers to the fact that agents do not use all the information available to them when deciding what action to take. Part of the reason for this stems from the fact that impulsivity results in the agent cutting short deliberation, perhaps prematurely, to act. However, agents in the grip of emotion also have their attention influenced in various ways that are not reducible to impulsivity. One solution here would be to attribute to the emotional state an independent influence on attention that causes this effect, but I believe we can account for this by appealing merely to the desire modulating function of the emotion.

We do so by exploiting what Sinhababu (2009, 2017) calls the attentional aspect of desire: “Desire that E disposes one to attend to things one associates with E, increasing with the desire’s strength and the strength of the association.” Sinhababu justifies this claim by drawing on the work of Derryberry and Reed (1997), who note that “states related to appetitive and defensive needs appear to bias attention in favor of stimuli capable of satisfying or blocking that need”. The basic thought is intuitive, when we desire something we are disposed to shift our attention to beliefs, memories or features of the environment that are associated with that desire, and the stronger our desire, the more our attention tends to be shifted this way.

How does this explain Regular Matt’s behaviour? We postulated that Regular Matt may have not noticed where the closest exit is and may not realise that the information in the documentary is helpful in his present situation. This might seem initially puzzling if we consider desire’s attentional aspect. After all, if Regular Matt desires to achieve safety from the tiger, would not these be most relevant and deserving of his attention? However, recall again that the emotional state generates not just one desire to achieve the relational aim of the emotion, but a host of other desires which may be stronger than the desire to achieve the relational aim. We can imagine that this is so in Regular Matt’s case: his desire to move in the opposite direction of the tiger may be much greater than his desire to achieve the more abstract aim of safety from the tiger. This stronger desire commands his attention away from information that may be relevant to achieve the aim of safety and his attention is therefore consumed in tracking the position of the tiger and thinking about the best route to move away from the tiger. By contrast, Twin Matt, who is not in the grip of fear and so does not have a strong desire to move in the opposite direction of the tiger, has more attentional resources to recall the relevant information that will help him to achieve safety from the tiger.

When one is in the grip of an emotion, one’s attentional resources are directed to whatever is associated with the desires generated by the emotion. These desires may not all be helpful or relevant in the present situation to achieving the relational aim of the emotion. This drains one’s attentional resources away from information about how best to achieve the relational aim of the emotion, and so results in the feature of partial information access.

**4.2.4 Constrained Flexibility**

The last feature that needs to be accounted for is constrained flexibility. This refers to the fact that the actions performed by an agent in the grip of an emotion display some flexibility which is constrained in the sense that the agent’s reasoning appears insensitive to certain beliefs that may have a bearing on that situation. We can see this by noting that even if Regular Matt fixes his attention on the information in the documentary (that he should not have eye contact with the tiger and move slowly) he seems unable to utilise this information to avoid eye contact with the tiger and move away calmly. We noted that this would be an especially severe threat to the idea that emotional action utilises the domain general belief-desire system, given that he seems to be unable to utilise information clearly relevant to his desires.

I begin by explaining flexibility before explaining why emotional action appears to be constrained. The current framework is well positioned to explain the flexibility of emotional behaviour. In fact, flexibility enters the picture at two separate points. In the first place, the actions produced display some flexibility because which desires are modulated by the emotion depend on the developmental history of the agent. Depending on the contingent history of each agent, different agents may well find different desires associated with the same emotion. Secondly, flexibility enters because the same desire can combine with a myriad of means-end beliefs to produce an array of actions. Agents that have the same desire as the result of the same emotion may still have different beliefs and so perform different actions.

The more difficult feature to explain would be why the flexibility appears to be constrained. Why are Regular Matt’s actions are somehow insensitive to the information he is occurently attending to? The explanation for this rests, once again, in the fact that the emotion can generate a desire with a greater strength than the desire to satisfy its relational aim. Suppose that in this case Regular Matt’s desire to move in the opposite direction of the tiger is greater than his desire to obtain safety from the tiger. In general, we tend to perform the action that satisfies our *strongest* desire. Therefore, in this situation, the belief that Matt can attain safety if he avoids looking at the tiger and moving slowly does not feature in the belief-desire pair that determines his action because the desire for safety is outweighed by his desire to move in the opposite direction of the tiger, combined with the belief that he can satisfy that stronger desire by tracking the movement of the tiger (thus keeping his eye on it) and running quickly away from the tiger. This, to Regular Matt’s detriment, is how he then acts.

My proposed framework can therefore account for the features of emotional motivation in a manner consistent with Humeanism. In the next section, I consider and respond to two objections one might raise to my proposal.

**§5 Objections and Replies**

**5.1 Objection 1: Why not have emotions generate action directly?**

The first objection one may have is to ask why we ignore the possibility that emotions may generate the associated actions directly. There may be two motivations behind this objection. One might believe that emotions generate actions directly because one believes they operate via a stimulus-driven as opposed to goal-directed process, or relatedly, because one believes that the route from emotion to action is thoroughly modular. Those who are drawn to this objection might claim that the only reason why one would opt for my view is because it saves Humeanism. Let me briefly respond to the two motivations behind this objection.

The first reason why one might hold that emotions generate actions directly is that one is drawn to a picture whereby emotions work via a stimulus-driven as opposed to a goal-directed mechanism. According to the standard dual process model that psychologists use to explain action, action is produced via either a goal-directed or a stimulus-driven process (See Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). A goal-directed process is one where action selection takes place that involves the representation of the degree of value of the outcomes of each action as well as the likelihood that each action would produce the valued outcome, with the result that the action with the highest utility gets selected. A stimulus-driven process, on the other hand, is one whereby a presentation of a certain stimulus is associated directly with the representation of a corresponding action, causing the agent to tend to perform that action apart from any representation of the expected value of the outcome. Now, an action that is produced by a goal-directed process is one that is amenable to Humean gloss, for the process can easily be interpreted as reasoning involving desire strength and means-end beliefs. A stimulus-driven process, however, appears to be one which is insensitive to one’s beliefs and desires. Some psychologists hold that our actions are primarily the result of stimulus-driven processes, with goal-directed processes playing a role only in special situations (Evans and Stanovich 2013; Wood and Rünger 2016). Given that stimulus-driven processes cannot be understood in terms of belief-desire psychology, it suggests that any account of emotional motivation that is based on Humeanism is mistaken.

Empirically speaking, however, it is not a straightforward matter to draw conclusions about whether a process is goal-directed or stimulus driven simply because it occurs automatically. Automaticity itself is a fraught concept, and a process may have certain features of automaticity without others (Moors and De Houwer 2006). Furthermore, theorists have noted that in many domains that involve automatic processing, those processes have been found to be sensitive to the agent’s other cognitive states. For example, in the literature on skill, the automatic processes underlying skilled action have been shown to be sensitive to the intentional content of the agent’s beliefs and goals (Fridland 2017). This suggests that automatic goal-directed processes are not uncommon.

In the domain of emotion, Agnes Moors and her colleagues (Moors, Boddez, and De Houwer 2017) have recently argued that much of the data that has been used to show that action is driven by stimulus-driven processes can in fact be understood on the goal-directed model. The argument for a stimulus-driven process usually rests on evidence of automatic elicitation of action from perception of a stimulus. Automaticity, however, need not necessarily imply that a goal-directed process is absent. More rigorous testing which involves changing the value of the outcomes as well as the belief in the likelihood of achieving the valued outcome in addition to presentation of the stimulus is required to determine when a goal-directed process is present. They note that studies which have enforced such rigorous criteria suggest that in most cases changing the value or expectancy of the outcome does indeed affect the action produced and action insensitive to these changes is instead the outlier (Colwill and Rescorla 1985; Klossek, Yu, and Dickinson 2011). On Moors’ own account of emotional motivation (Moors and Fischer 2019) emotional behaviour is explained via goal-directed processes. Emotional effects are explained via modification of the value associated with a certain outcome or modification of one’s expectancy regarding the likelihood of an action producing some outcome. If one accepts my Humean gloss of goal-directed processes, this would be equivalent to modulation of desires and its corresponding attentional effects. The truth of Humeanism is therefore an empirical matter, but I suggest that it is one which continues to be a live possibility.

Another reason one might hold that emotions generate actions directly is if one thinks that the route from emotion to action is thoroughly modular. This means that emotions bypass the central processing system in producing action. One might be drawn to this position insofar as one is a proponent of the Massive Modularity Hypothesis (See e.g. Carruthers, 2006; Cosmides & Tooby, 1994; Sperber, 2001). I cannot engage extensively with the arguments for Massive Modularity here, however, even if one thinks there may be good reason to reject Massive Modularity (see e.g. (Fodor, 2000)), one may think that there are pathways from perception to action that bypass the belief-desire system. On this modest view, certain forms of high level cognition may engage the belief-desire system, but when it comes to situations that require ‘quick and dirty’ responses action is generated directly.

While I believe the data that Moors cites pointing out the sensitivity of emotional action to beliefs and desires puts some pressure on this position, it might be helpful to spell out the relationship between my framework and the notion of modularity. Emotions themselves are modular processes. The process from perception of a certain stimuli, to its appraisal and then its modulatory effects occurs in a manner that is largely insensitive of our present beliefs and desires. Thus, even if we believe that we are perfectly safe on a plane, we may still feel fear and its corresponding action tendencies. What I deny, however, is that the *action selection process* is modular. Instead, the action selection process takes place in the domain general belief-desire system that consists of our beliefs and desires. Emotions play a role merely in modulating our beliefs and desires within that system. The framework I offer here parallels a point that Currie and Sterelny (2000) make in the context of social cognition. There they argue that even if we grant that there are domain specific modules dedicated to social domains (e.g. a cheater-detection module), we need not accept that the process of belief-fixation itself is modular. Instead, the modules of social cognition play the role of providing input into a domain general system which fixes belief in the context of an inferential network of the agent’s other beliefs. Similarly, even if emotions display some form of modularity, this does not imply that the action selection process is itself modular. Instead emotion provides input in the form of its modulatory effects into the domain general belief-desire system which selects an action in the context of an inferential network of the agent’s other beliefs and desires.

Furthermore, the reason why we need a domain general system mediating between emotion and action is that the agent can perform only a limited number of actions. Certain actions rule out certain other ones, and we need some system to sort these out. There therefore needs to be some domain general system that processes input from the domain specific modules recommending action. (See Bermúdez, 2005) A more forceful way to make this point is to consider the fact that various emotions may be in play at the same time which generate different kinds of action tendencies. Consider the situation where a big burly man has just stolen your money. At once you feel angry at the thief as well as afraid of what more he could do to you. The two emotions may generate different action tendencies in you: your anger leads you to desire to punch the thief, while your fear may lead you to move away from him. The problem is not merely that of deciding which action to perform first but that satisfying these two desires may conflict in a way that you would not realise unless you had some way of representing the content of those desires. In this case, you may need to recognise that to punch the thief would increase the threat you face from him. Of course, reasoning may fail to produce the optimal outcome, but some adjudication is required to determine which action the agent is to perform. The domain general belief-desire system appears to be ideal as the site for such reasoning, and this explains why emotions would modulate desires instead of directly producing action.

**5.2 Objection 2: Action Tendencies are not Desires**

In a recent paper, Wiegman (2020) has challenged the idea that emotional actions involve desires.[[15]](#footnote-15) He does so by pointing out that we need a robust notion of when we can attribute a desire to a putative agent. We may say that a thermostat has the ‘desire’ to heat up the room, but it appears implausible that the thermostat performs any action. Insofar as the notion of desire is supposed to explain action, we thus need a more robust conception of desire that rules out such cases. According to him, a desire must be a unified representational state that represents a certain way the world must be as its satisfaction condition, with that representation serving as the selection criteria for the agent to perform actions. In other words, action explained by desire must satisfy the following two constraints:

***Behaviour selection constraint***: if a sequence of behaviour is explained by a putative desire of φ-ing, then the agent’s selection/execution of the behaviour depends on the agent having information that the behaviour will bring the world closer to a state that realizes φ-ing.

***Satisfaction constraint***: if a sequence of behaviour is explained by a putative desire of φ-ing, then *ceteris paribus* the behaviour should cease once the agent registers that φ-ing has been realized. (Ibid.)

Wiegman concedes that considering action tendencies as desires does indeed satisfy the behaviour selection constraint. As I’ve mentioned, the actions performed when one is in the grip of behaviour is sensitive to the agent’s beliefs about what would satisfy his desires. He believes, however, that emotional actions fail to meet the satisfaction constraint.

To see why, recall that the motivational aspect of the emotion is elicited by an appraisal regarding the agent’s concerns. Thus, for example, Jane is angry because she perceives that Joan has spread malicious rumours about her at the office. This generates the action tendencies that are associated with Jane’s anger which persist as long as Jane remains angry. However, some of Jane’s action tendencies may be ineffective at dealing with the situation that elicited the anger response. This occurs during displaced aggression, when Jane attempts to symbolically express her anger by tearing at Joan’s photo. The situation that would satisfy her anger, perhaps an apology from Joan, cannot be attained by her present action tendencies. The state that motivates her thus fails to meet the satisfaction constraint; the satisfaction condition of the action tendency (to receive an apology from Joan) is not represented in that action tendency (to tear at Joan’s photo). Her action tendencies will thus continue even after she has completed the action. The state therefore cannot be called a desire.

I accept that the satisfaction constraint is a reasonable requirement to have on a conception of desire, but I believe that Wiegman makes a mistake here for two reasons: (1) he fails to consider that a desire may have the content which is a state of continuous activity and (2) because he confuses the satisfaction conditions of the emotion with the satisfaction conditions of the desires that the emotion generates.

As stated, the satisfaction constraint is fairly puzzling. Often, we think of desires as representing states the world ought to be in, thus motivating action to generate that change. The desire motivates action so long as the world is perceived to be different from the way the desire represents how the world ought to be. In Wiegman’s formulation of the satisfaction constraint, however, the content of the desire is an action “φ-ing”. This is ambiguous between a desire that (1) the agent be such that he *has performed* the action φ and (2) the agent be in a state where he is φ-*ing*. It is only on the first reading that the agent would cease to act once he has registered that he has performed the relevant action. On the second reading, which interestingly is suggested by Wiegman’s use of the continuously tensed “φ-ing”, the agent should persist in performing the relevant action. For example, if Jane desired that she be destroy*ing* objects symbolically associated with Joan, she would persist in searching for more such objects even after she had torn Joan’s eyes off the photo. It is only if Jane’s desire is that she have successfully destroyed an object that she would cease after completing the act. It is therefore unclear that persistence of action decisively demonstrates that action tendencies fail to meet the satisfaction constraint.

Furthermore, Wiegman also confuses the satisfaction condition of the emotion and of the satisfaction condition of desire that the emotion generates. Let’s assume, along with Wiegman, that the anger is only satisfied by restitution and some form of apology from the offending party (Funk, McGeer, and Gollwitzer 2014). One of the desires that the emotion generates may have a satisfaction constraint that can be decisively accomplished, say Jane has a desire that Joan be humiliated before her colleagues which she somehow accomplishes. In this situation, we may plausibly conceive that although Jane has accomplished her desire she remains angry with Joan, not having received what would satisfy her anger: an apology. Jane may no longer perform any actions that lead her to further humiliate Joan, given that the desire is satisfied, but she still displays resentment toward Joan. The desire, therefore, has genuine satisfaction conditions which are not identified with the satisfaction conditions of the emotion. This is natural: we’ve all been in situations where our fear or anger lead us to perform actions which ultimately do not placate the emotion, and we are simply left in the grip of emotion unsure of what to do. The effects of the emotion on our behavioural dispositions are still seen, but our action tendencies are muted.

Wiegman makes one final point to argue against the idea that emotional actions are properly explained by desires. According to him, “a goal of executing the action tendency is not always sufficient to explain the agent’s *over-arching* pattern of behavior” (emphasis mine). To make this point, Wiegman compares the action tendencies of an emotion to the footsteps one takes when one decides to walk along a path toward some destination. We more plausibly describe ourselves as having a goal to move toward some destination instead of having a goal to place our foot at each specific point in the journey. Wiegman thus claims that “expectations that guide the execution of an emotional action tendency … resemble the expectations that guide each footstep (or that move one toward each waypoint) more than they resemble the expectations that guide the walker toward her superordinate goal in walking.” In other words, the action tendencies of an emotion are just sub-goals through which the emotion achieves its relational aim, just as the placing of each foot is a sub-goal of the genuine goal of walking to a destination. We offer a better explanation of the agent’s action by citing the over-arching goal as opposed to the sub-goals which can hardly count as desires at all.

There is something right about this suggestion. I agree that consideration of how emotion motivates action should make us recognise that explanation of action can be enriched. On my framework as well, we notice that there are many threads going into explanation of action apart from the selection of a mere belief-desire pair. The relational aim of the emotion as well as the developmental history of the agent all feature as part of the explanation of why a specific action is chosen. Indeed, we may consider that some of these aspects may feature as crucial parts of understanding the agent’s agency and are not merely background causal conditions for the crucial belief-desire pair. However, the framework also demonstrates that, in the end, reference to some belief-desire pair forms an ineliminable part of the explanation of action. And this is so for the reason, once again, that an emotion may generate an associated desire that runs contrary to the relational aim in some situation. If we explain action only with respect to the overall relational aim of the emotion, we are unable to explain the self-defeating actions that are often the product of emotional motivation. The Humean analysis thus remains a crucial part of the story.

**§6 Conclusion**

This paper has argued that we should understand emotions as modulators of desire. This allows us to show that emotional action can be explained via the standard Humean account of citing a belief-desire pair while allowing us to explain the various features of emotional motivation. For a while, theorists have assumed that we need to move past Humeanism in explaining emotional action. By adopting the framework I have proposed, however, I believe we can enrich our understanding of both action and emotion.[[16]](#footnote-16)

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1. For a defence of the idea that we should take beliefs and desires to be functional concepts see (Goldman 2017; Jackson and Pettit 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One might wonder if these commitments about the belief-desire system and central processing are really what all Humeans are committed to. Thus, for example, one may take Davidson to really be concerned about our practices of giving *explanations* of action rather than making any point about our mental architecture. I take it, however, that for at least most of the emotion theorists who claim that the Humean picture is mistaken, they are really targeting the claim that the belief-desire system constitutes a genuine part of our mental architecture that explains and causes all action. Insofar as one is worried merely about our practice of providing *explanations*, however, I grant later that appealing to a belief-desire pair is necessary though insufficient to make some emotional actions intelligible. Thanks to various members of the ANU Philosophy of Mind Work-in-progress group, especially Daniel Stoljar, Bronwyn Finnigan and Garrett Cullity, for helping me to see this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arguably, Hursthouse is primarily concerned again with our practices of explanation rather than any claim about our mental architecture. However, her line of thought can and has been (e.g. in Döring 2003) taken to challenge the claim that the belief-desire system alone causally generates action and this is the claim that I want to defend. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One who is committed to the standard Fodorean view might point out here that being the system domain general does not imply that relevant beliefs and desires will always get to combine, merely that they have the potential to do so. However, systematic failures of combination in cases of emotional action, even when the relevant belief and desire is made salient, does raise the question of whether the belief-desire system is being engaged and these cases do call from some explanation. I show how one can provide this explanation later (§4.2.4). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Scarantino uses the term ‘relational goal’ to play a different role in his account. In his account the relational goal is goal that is adopted by the agent in the grip of an emotion. What I want, however, is a term that captures the *function* of the emotion in the organism irrespective of which particular goal the emotion leads the agent to adopt. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In calling these changes behavioural dispositions, I don’t mean anything more than that the body is disposed to generate these various bodily changes when the agent in the grip of an emotion. I don’t mean to suggest, for example, that the phenomenology of these bodily changes is a kind of dispositional phenomenology. These changes, and the feeling of these changes, are presumably occurrent. I’d like to thank an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The role I have sketched for emotion here is therefore similar to the notion that emotions are irruptive motivational states (Griffiths 1997). They disrupt our previous pattern of reasoning and action by modulating desires in the belief-desire system. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I’d like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. That this is the right way to think about automaticity is of course controversial, but I address some worries about this in section 5.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hunger is complicated; there are appear to be in fact three distinct pathways through which our appetite is modulated, triggered by a variety of such events as the level of satiety and perception of food intake. See (Sternson and Eiselt 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Another worry one may have here is whether the kind of process I invoke here is a process that is incompatible with another standard commitment of the Humean theory of motivation: that reason is not a process that can control the passions. The strongest way of formulating this claim, I take it, is Neil Sinhababhu’s formulation: “Desire that M is created as the conclusion of reasoning if and only if the reasoning combines desire that E with belief that M would raise E’s probability. It is eliminated as the conclusion of reasoning if and only if the reasoning eliminates such a combination.” (2017: 2) The formulation is supposed to be a restriction on the ways in which *reasoning* is supposed to generate desire. Reasoning, as I have sketched in the introduction, should be understood in terms of interaction among beliefs and desires in the domain general central-processing system. The basic idea then is that central processing only generates new desires as a result of means-end reasoning. The modulatory process that I am proposing, however, does not occur within the central processing system and so does not fall afoul of this standard Humean commitment. I’d like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Nussbaum reviews the literature on this in (Nussbaum 2001: Chapter 4) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I’d like to thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. I think this also suggests a weakness in Deonna and Teroni’s (2012; 2015) claim that emotions are felt bodily attitudes towards some object. According to them, the phenomenology of emotional experience is best captured in terms of our body being felt to be globally poised to take a certain attitude towards some object. Thus, for example, “In fear, one feels one’s own body poised to defuse something; in anger, one feels its preparedness to deal with it in an actively hostile way” (2015: 303) As I note, however, while the relational aim of an emotion does individuate it, that relational aim is not necessarily chief among the desires that the emotion modulates and these desires can vary depending on the developmental history of the agent. The global felt motivational profile can thus vary for the same emotion. For example, we can imagine an agent who, perhaps because of an abusive childhood, has desires to avoid some person whenever that person angers her. Her bodily felt attitude would not, then, be one that is best described as being “prepared to deal with [the offender] in an actively hostile way”. It may take years of therapy perhaps to even recognise that it was anger all along that she felt towards the various abusive figures in her life. The variability of the modulated desires, then, puts pressure on a view that individuates emotions according to particular felt motivational patterns. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Wiegman conducts most of the discussion in terms of ‘goals’ rather than ‘desires’, but he makes it clear that his account of goals aims to capture the relevant mental state that Smith talks about in his defence of Humeanism i.e. desires. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This paper has benefitted from two anonymous referees of *Philosophical Studies* whose comments greatly improved this paper. I am grateful to Bronwyn Finnigan, Neil Sinhababu, the members of the ANU MSPT Reading Group, the ANU Philosophy of Mind Work-in-progress group and ‘Colin’s Crowd’ for valuable discussion. Finally, I’d like to especially thank Colin Klein, Philip Pettit, Victoria McGeer and Michael Nielson for reading and providing invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)