

# What “Values” Are Emotions About?

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**Abstract** This paper’s starting point is the popular thesis that emotions are constituted by experiences of value. This thesis raises what I call the *value question*: what exactly are these values that emotions are supposedly about. ‘Value’ here is understood broadly to include not only properties such as being good, bad, fearsome, dangerous, etc. but also being right, wrong, a reason, etc. In my view, the value question hasn’t received the concentrated attention that it deserves (though there are some notable exceptions), perhaps because it isn’t immediately clear how to adjudicate competing answers. I argue, however, that Ronald de Sousa has developed two important ideas which can help us to make progress. These two ideas are as follows: (i) emotions help to solve the “frame problem” by controlling what strikes us as salient in deliberation, and (ii) emotions are Janus-faced, looking outward toward the world and inward toward the self. Careful consideration of the value question in light of these two proposals favours the view that emotions are about the following value: the emoter’s *reasons* to do things.

## 0. Introduction

Emotional experiences are intertwined with value. A hiker’s fear of a charging bear, for example, seems to involve an awareness of some negative value. By contrast, a person’s enthusiasm about riding a roller coaster seems to involve an impression of some positive value. Such observations gesture toward a general thought, one which is at the heart of much recent theorizing about emotional experiences (or for short, emotions). Put loosely, the idea is that emotions are essentially, or by their very nature, bound up with experiences of value. Call this the *value-experience thesis*. Since the value-experience thesis is very loose, it gives rise to a series of questions about how to precisify it. Recent emotion theory is full of theories attempting to answer these questions. But not all of these questions have received the same measure of focused attention, and this paper is about one that has not, in my view, gotten the attention it deserves. In particular, I will be considering the following: if emotions are essentially bound up with experiences of value, what are these “values”? I call this the *value question*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philosophers often assume (even if simply for convenience) answers to this question, in the service of addressing other questions generated by the value-experience thesis (e.g., about what type of mental state the relevant evaluative experience is that emotions are essentially bound up with). This isn’t always the case, however. For more focused discussions to the value question, see Roberts (2003, chapter 3); Nussbaum (2004); Prinz (2007); Rossi and Tappolet (2015); Teroni (2016); Tappolet (2016). Additionally, one way to frame Dokic and Lemaire’s criticism of perceptual theories of emotion is that they cannot offer a plausible answer to the value question (2013, 232-239).

In addressing this question, it helps to make some assumptions about how to answer adjacent questions, ones likewise prompted by the value-experience thesis. First, the thesis invites us to ask, *in what sense are emotions “bound up with” experiences of value?* On one view, they are responses to antecedent experiences of value (e.g., Müller 2017). But on a nowadays more typical view, emotions are identical to, or at least partly constituted by, certain experiences of value (e.g., Tappolet 2016). This paper will be written as if emotions were themselves experiences of value, but none of the arguments that I give depend on it. Another question is, *what kind of mental state are these evaluative experiences?* Some have argued that these experiences can be assimilated to a more familiar type of mental state such as judgment or perceptual experience (Nussbaum 2004; Tappolet 2016). Others have argued that emotions are a distinctive type of attitude. This latter view splinters into those who think that the evaluative experiences represent value and those who think it doesn't (Deonna and Teroni 2012; Mitchell 2019). I'll be assuming that emotions do represent value. Again, however, this is an assumption of convenience. Theorists who maintain that emotions are evaluative experiences, but don't represent value, are free to translate my arguments accordingly. Given these two assumptions, then – that emotions are evaluative experiences and that they represent value – we can frame the value question more simply as the following: *what values are emotions about?*

Some questions occasioned by the value-experience thesis have received more sustained and systematic attention than others. In particular, the question of what the relevant evaluative experiences are has received by far the most. Perhaps this focus is warranted. But one preliminary point to recognize is that it can be risky to investigate this question without serious parallel consideration of the value question. Here's an illustration. As we've seen, one popular view takes the relevant experiences to be perceptual, or at least perceptual-like (de Sousa 2011; Tappolet 2016; Milona 2016; inter alia). This view seems to require that emotional experiences make evaluative properties manifest in the way that perceptual experiences make manifest the properties that they are about. A number of theorists have expressed skepticism about such phenomenological claims (Deonna and Teroni 2012; Mitchell 2019). This debate is difficult to adjudicate, however, independently of the value question, since the right answer to the value question tells us what properties we should be looking for in thinking about whether emotions make manifest some

value.<sup>2</sup> And if we have in mind an incorrect answer to the value question, then of course perceptualism's phenomenological commitments will seem misguided.<sup>3</sup>

Additional reasons to care about the value question come into focus when we broaden our perspective beyond just emotion theory.<sup>4</sup> For example, the question matters a great deal from the perspective of moral epistemology. To see why, consider that many theorists take emotions to play a central role in grounding evaluative knowledge (e.g., Elgin 2007; Tappolet 2016; Milona 2016). But how useful emotions are in this regard depends partly on how reliable they are; and different answers to the value question can lead to diverging views about their reliability. It also matters for knowing what evaluative beliefs emotions may most directly support. And for those who think that emotions provide a source for evaluative concepts, much as perceptual experiences seem to provide a source for certain empirical concepts (e.g., the concept of red), the value question plausibly bears on questions about our most primitive evaluative concepts.<sup>5</sup>

One difficulty with the value question, however, is that it isn't immediately clear how to get leverage on competing answers. For example, how can we tell whether fear is about fearsomeness, reasons to avoid a threat, or something else?<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I argue that Ronald de Sousa has developed two important ideas which, if accepted, can help us to make progress.<sup>7</sup> This includes the following: (i) emotions help to solve the "frame problem" by controlling what strikes us as salient in deliberation, and (ii) emotions are Janus-faced, looking outward toward the world and

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, I don't mean to suggest that no one who presses this objection has in mind an answer to the value question that then informs their formulation of the objection (e.g., Deonna and Teroni 2012). Furthermore, one might offer different formulations of the phenomenological objection for different possible answers to the value question (e.g., Dokic and Lemaire 2013). Alternatively, one may insist that it is simply apparent, when we reflect on emotional experience, that there is no value being made manifest in a perceptual-like way. This seems to be Demian Whiting's view, who explicitly sets aside the value question in giving an argument of this sort (2012, 93 n2). But my view is that operating at such a level of abstraction is a highly risky way of doing phenomenology, especially in light of the fact that many perceptualists make opposing phenomenological claims (see Milona (forthcoming) for discussion).

<sup>3</sup> My own view is that the answer to the value question defended here ultimately mutes the force of this line of objection to perceptualism. Indeed, my view is that it actually leads to an attractive phenomenological argument in perceptualism's favour. However, since this paper isn't about perceptualism, I leave an exploration of this to another occasion.

<sup>4</sup> A similar difficulty arises in the context of debates about "guise of the normative" views of desire. According to a traditional view, desires involve representations of the good. But an important competitor takes desires to represent reasons for action. For attempts to make headway in determining which of these views is more plausible, see Gregory (2013) and Milona and Schroeder (2019).

<sup>5</sup> In this way, the value question may have relevance to ongoing metaethical debates (see Schroeder 2021) about whether reasons, value, fittingness, or something else are the most basic in the evaluative realm.

<sup>6</sup> As this question indicates, my use of 'value' is inclusive of the normative (e.g., reasons).

<sup>7</sup> I do not insist, however, that de Sousa himself endorses (or would endorse) the view that I ultimately propose.

inward toward the self.<sup>8</sup> Careful consideration of the value question in light of these two proposals favours the view that emotions are about the following value: the emoter's *reasons* to do things.

## 1. The Question

This opening section clarifies the value question and how I plan to address it. I also briefly contrast my approach with some existing alternatives.

### 1.1 The options

To begin, this paper understands 'value' in a very broad sense. So, for example, the evaluative includes not only properties such as being good, bad, fearsome, dangerous, etc. but also being right, wrong, a reason, etc. That is, values are anything that fall on the "ought" side of the traditional "is/ought" divide. Of course, there are questions about whether certain properties (or concepts) such as being dangerous are really evaluative or merely such as to ground values. But I follow the custom in emotion theory which almost always takes for granted that such thick "values" are really evaluative (cf. Tappolet 2016, 50-52).

Given this broad approach to 'value', there are a variety of potential answers to the value question. It won't, of course, be possible to explore each. Instead, I distinguish broad families of views, with an eye toward the arguments to come. I then argue that one of these families squares better than the others with certain attractive assumptions about emotion. If I'm right about all of this, we'll have made substantial progress on the value question.

To begin, then, one broad approach to the value question says that emotions are about values that concern how the emoter is to respond. I'll call any such view an *emoter-response* view. One important emoter-response view is *emoter-response sentimentalism* (or for short, *ER-sentimentalism*). On this approach, fear is about the fearsome, admiration is about the admirable, etc. To say that something is fearsome, for example, isn't to say that it causes fear but rather that it is *fitting* or *appropriate* to fear. And according to ER-sentimentalism, fear isn't merely about the fearsome but what is fearsome to the agent who is afraid. This may explain why it isn't fitting for the well-trained lifeguard to be afraid of jumping in the deep end of the pool, even if doing so would be fearsome to others, for fear wouldn't be fitting *for the lifeguard*. To generalize, this view

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<sup>8</sup> de Sousa discusses these two ideas at various points. But on the frame problem, see especially de Sousa (1987, chapter 7); and on the Janus-faced character of emotions, see especially de Sousa (2002).

says that whenever one experiences an emotion the evaluative representation consists (at least) in a representation of that type of emotion as fitting for them (i.e., the emoter) to experience.

A second possible answer stays within the sphere of emoter-response views but isn't sentimentalist. Instead, it takes emotions to be about the emoter's reasons for action. I call this *emoter-response action* (or for short, *ER-action*).<sup>9</sup> For example, on this view, a hiker's fear of a bear might involve a representation of the possibility that the bear maims or kills them as a reason for them to avoid the bear. Similarly, a driver's anger at someone for cutting them off in traffic might involve a representation of the other driver's disregard as a reason to retaliate against them. Note that, according to ER-action, the term 'action' is understood broadly to include not only paradigmatic actions but also activities such as focusing on, ruminating about, etc. Furthermore, ER-action lends itself to a view according to which different emotions are distinguished by virtue of targeting different subsets of reasons for action. The defender of ER-action might say, for example, that fear is oriented to reasons for action having to do with *threats*, anger to reasons for action having to do with *offenses*, and so on for other emotions. But the idea isn't that threats, offenses, etc. are (necessarily) part of the content of the corresponding emotions; the idea is rather that such concepts can be used to categorize the set of emotional representations of reasons that we call fear, anger, etc.

Moving forward, a third approach to the value question takes emotions to represent a value that isn't always tied to the emoting agent in question. I call this approach *impartialism*. Impartialism comes in numerous varieties. For example, an impartialist might agree with ER-sentimentalists that emotions represent sentimentalist values while relaxing the "emoter-response" dimension. Or, alternatively, they may adopt a view that takes emotions to represent reasons for action but not necessarily those of the emoting agent. To contrast with the above, we can label these views *impartialist sentimentalism* and *impartialist action*. But just as emoter-response views aren't exhausted by ER-sentimentalism or ER-action (see n9 above), neither are impartialist views exhausted by impartialist sentimentalism or impartialist action. For example, an impartialist may think that a person's anger or indignation represents *injustice* but whereby representing injustice isn't simply a matter of representing fitting indignation or reasons (for action). A person who holds such a view about injustice may think that something similar goes for other emotions. That is, they

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<sup>9</sup> A related view takes emotions to represent what we *ought* to do, or perhaps what we prima facie ought to do. I won't try to adjudicate here whether this is superior to the reasons answer.

may think that *all* emotions represent some value such that representing that value isn't simply a matter of representing a fitting emotion or reasons (for action). Or they may think that impartialist sentimentalism or impartialist action explain some emotions. These questions won't concern me here, however, for the argument I offer against impartialism targets the thesis of impartialism as such.

As I've indicated, in describing these three views – ER-sentimentalism, ER-action, and impartialism – I hardly mean to suggest that I've given an exhaustive taxonomy of possible answers to the value question. For example, Martha Nussbaum takes emotions to be about the emoter's well-being, or flourishing, which she interprets in the broad Aristotelian sense of *eudaimonia* (Nussbaum 2004). Readers drawn to this view are invited to consider how the arguments to come bear on it. I suspect it possesses some of the advantages of ER-action, which is the view I'll be defending; but it also seems to have some deficiencies that ER-action does not. For example, my compassion toward a stranger doesn't seem to be telling me anything about *my* flourishing, at least not in all such cases (Tappolet and Rossi 2015). But it may be telling me about my reasons to help. So insofar as we're attracted to a view on which emotions are somehow centered on the emoter, ER-action has advantages with respect to certain emotions. Furthermore, ER-action has, in my view, received less attention than it deserves. One way to see this is to notice that ER-action combines well with the thought that motivations are central to emotions (e.g., Deonna and Teroni 2012; Scarantino 2014). This is because one way of unpacking ER-action is in terms of agents seeing themselves as having reasons to do what the emotion they are experiencing paradigmatically motivates them to do (more on this in section 3).

### *1.2 Background and clarifications*

At this point, I need to address several complications with respect to how I'll be approaching the value question. To begin, if we approach the value question in an "unrestricted" way, then there is a sense in which the emoter-response views are non-starters and impartialism is almost certainly the right approach. For example, one might observe that we sometimes imagine being someone else, and then have an emotion on that basis. This seems to be what happens with certain sophisticated forms of empathizing, for instance (cf. Goldie 2011). So even if emotions always have the reflexive character exemplified by emoter-response views, there may nevertheless be cases in which empathetic imagining means that the evaluative representation isn't, strictly

speaking, about the emoter but rather whoever the emoter is imagining themselves to be. But this strikes me as telling us more about the flexibility of human thought and imagination rather than the nature of emotions themselves (see Teroni 2016, 443). Going forward, then, I will set aside cases in which the emoter imagines themselves to be someone else.

I also want to acknowledge that, even restricted in this way, some readers may be skeptical that there is going to be any interesting, systematic answer to the value question. On this way of thinking, some loosely formed version of impartialism, rather than a more restrained impartialist sentimentalism or impartialist action, is going to be correct. If this were so, then it might be best to simply investigate particular emotions on their own terms. Roberts (2003) offers what might seem to be a paradigmatic illustration of this approach. For while he offers general answers to other questions raised by the value-experience thesis, namely the questions of how emotions relate to value experiences and what those value experiences are, he doesn't offer any general theory of the values emotions are about and instead explores emotions one-by-one. I am optimistic, however, that we can say something systematic about the values emotions are about. In fact, I'll suggest that given some plausible assumptions about the nature of emotion, we should favour the ER-action answer.

One may also worry about whether the different answers I've sketched are exclusive of one another. Here I don't mean – what I've just tabled in the preceding paragraph – that different answers may be partially correct insofar as they correctly characterize certain emotions and not others. Rather, the thought is that, even when it comes to a given type of emotion, multiple answers may be correct. For example, according to Tappolet (2016), the formal object of fear is the fearsome. In this way, she holds that some sentimentalist answer to the value question is correct about fear. But she also holds that “if it is true that an experience of fear informs us of the fearsomeness of something, it will also be true that this experience of fear informs us about our practical reasons” (2016, 52; see also 163-167). The explanation for this depends on how exactly we conceptualize practical reasons, or reasons for action. On a standard approach, which I've been assuming thus far, reasons are just non-evaluative facts, and these facts are reasons insofar as they are considerations counting in favour of certain actions (see Scanlon 1998). For example, the fact that the bear is charging the hiker is a reason for the hiker to take evasive action. Now consider that this fact also makes it fitting for the hiker to fear the bear. More generally, considerations that

make something fearsome also seem to be reasons for action. So it may seem that if fear is about what is fearsome, then it will also be about reasons for action (Tappolet 2016, 167).

But I do not think we should read Tappolet as suggesting a picture on which ER-sentimentalism would entail ER-action, as I am understanding these views. Consider an analogy. Suppose that I visually experience an object in the distance as a tree. As it turns out, the object is a tree. In fact, it's a dogwood. So I've experienced a dogwood. But just because I've experienced a dogwood, it doesn't follow that I've experienced anything as a dogwood. By the same token, if fear involves an experience as of something as fearsome, it may also thereby be an experience of what is a reason for action. But whether it is an experience of reasons for action *as reasons for action* – whether the emoter represents something as a reason for action – is a separate matter. For example, the fact that the bear is charging the hiker gives the hiker, on the one hand, a reason to take evasive action and, on the other, makes fear fitting. But the hiker's fear may not be about ways of acting at all, in which case it can't represent that fact as a reason for action; or the hiker's fear may not be about fear at all, in which case it can't represent that fact as making fear fitting. So while one could represent what they are about in terms of both sentimentalist values and reasons for action, this doesn't follow immediately from assumptions about the metaphysical relationship between reasons and sentimental values (or corresponding relationships between the relevant concepts).

Finally, I'll note that there is one way of attempting to settle the value question that I won't be exploring in this paper. In particular, some theorists seem to think that any sentimentalist answer is a non-starter on phenomenological grounds. For example, in the course of arguing against perceptualism, Dokic and Lemaire say:

It is hard to believe that our emotions reflexively present themselves as being appropriate. Rather, our common experience seems to be that the content of an emotion does not refer to the emotion itself, let alone its appropriateness. Once again, if we follow the analogy with color, the appropriateness of seeing something as red is not part of the perceptual experience of red objects. Similarly, it is no part of the content of an emotion that this same emotion is appropriate. (235)

I share Dokic and Lemaire's intuition; it doesn't seem as if emotions are about their own appropriateness. But questions about the phenomenology of emotions are notoriously vexed, and



not all theorists will agree that sentimental answers are non-starters on phenomenological grounds. Furthermore, Dokic and Lemaire are considering the sentimental answer in the context of perceptualism. But one may think that emotions are about value in a way that is unlike the phenomenologically transparent way in which perceptual experiences are about their content (cf. Mitchell 2019). On this approach, straightforward appeals to phenomenology may reasonably be thought to have limited force.

In what follows, I draw on two key ideas from the work of Ronald de Sousa to argue that ER-action is an especially attractive answer to the value question.

## **2. Emotions, Values, and Framing**

The first idea from de Sousa that I'll be drawing on is the following: emotions are crucial for solving the *frame problem*, or at least a certain version of that problem. My argument is that considering the value question in light of de Sousa's proposal creates a problem for sentimental answers to the value question, including both ER-sentimentalism and impartialist sentimentalism. Other views, by contrast, better synergize with de Sousa's insights.

As far as I am aware, Ronald de Sousa was the first philosopher to argue that emotions can help to solve the *frame problem* (de Sousa 1987, 190-198). Although this problem was originally cast as a problem in artificial intelligence (Pylyshyn 1987), de Sousa is concerned with a version of the problem as it arises for any account of rational decision making. Here is how he puts it:

An especially virulent problem is the "philosophers' frame problem": we need to know when not to retrieve some irrelevant information from the vast store of which we are possessed. But how do we know it is irrelevant unless we have already retrieved it? (1987, 172).

So the frame problem, as I will understand it, is about determining what information to consider, given the near endless array of information we might consider. For example, suppose that a person is deciding whether to take off from work next month for a family vacation. The relevant considerations are near endless. Each option raises a constellation of possible outcomes which in turn have their own constellation of further possible outcomes (and so on); and yet somehow, we are able to arrive at verdicts about what is relevant and, ultimately, decide to stop deliberating and

act. We can further illuminate the difficulty here by considering beings for which the problem *doesn't* arise (1987, 195). God, for example, doesn't face this frame problem insofar as God is at once aware of every truth and needn't reason to any conclusions at all. It also doesn't arise for mechanistic beings like ants, for an ant is programmed only to respond to certain information. But human beings are importantly unlike either God or insects; humans must *reason* about what to do in the face of endless considerations that they may bring to bear.

So how do emotions help us to confront this problem? de Sousa proposes the following:

I proffer a very general biological hypothesis: Emotions spare us the paralysis potentially induced by this predicament by controlling the salience of features of perception and reasoning. (1987, 172)

The idea, then, is that emotions help us to decide what to do by making certain things *salient*; and by manipulating salience, emotions lead us to take certain things, and not others, as relevant to a given decision (ibid, 202). For de Sousa, this isn't an incidental feature of emotions; it is part of their nature that they help us to confront this problem (i.e., it is part of their biological function that they do this). He then adds that a key part of the explanation for why emotions are able to play this role is that, similar to perceptual experiences, emotions are sensitive only to certain information. Or as he puts it, “[Emotions] temporarily mimic the informational encapsulation of perception and so circumscribe our practical and cognitive options” (ibid, 172) For present purposes, however, I take no stand on whether emotions' being informationally encapsulated is crucial for how they are able to help with the frame problem (see Majeed 2019 for discussion). My focus here is more narrowly on the role emotions play in controlling salience and how reflection on this helps us to gain leverage on the value question.

Whether something is salient or not is a feature of experience. So if emotions help to solve the frame problem by making certain things salient, then such “salience-strikings” should somehow occur alongside, or as a part of, emotional experience. A question thus arises: *from a first-personal, phenomenological perspective, what are these salience-strikings?* For someone who accepts the thesis that emotions are evaluative experiences, the answer is almost irresistible: emotions make things salient insofar as they represent them in an evaluative light. To build on the example from above, suppose that the person deliberating about whether to take time off for a family vacation

fears their boss's reaction, if they do decide to go on the vacation. (Perhaps it helps to suppose that they work in private industry in the United States.) According to the present proposal, then, this fear of their boss's reaction influences their attention – what seems salient to them – in the sense that it represents some value(s). Furthermore, according to de Sousa, the role that emotions play in making certain considerations salient not only helps with the frame problem but also in explaining akrasia (1987, 199-201). Taking salience-strikings to be evaluative experiences helps us to make sense of how this works. When one acts akratically, one acts irrationally; they aren't simply pushed mechanically by non-rational forces. By understanding emotional salience-strikings in terms of a kind of evaluative experience, we can more easily see why an agent moved by such influences over their attention counts as rationally criticizable. They are being guided by a different sort of evaluative thought that runs contrary to their considered judgment.

But even if we're assuming the value-experience thesis, should we really understand the phenomenology of salience strikings in terms of the relevant evaluative experiences? There is another attractive hypothesis about the phenomenology of salience-strikings, namely that emotions make things salient by virtue of being *affective*. Put roughly, the idea is that emotions have a positive/negative affective dimension that seems to incline the agent toward or away from certain objects, thoughts, etc. But in my view, this hypothesis isn't naturally construed as in competition with the hypothesis in terms of evaluative experiences. This is because the evaluative experiential dimension of an emotion is plausibly identified with the affective dimension, or at least a part of it. Just as other types of experiences are in a certain mode – whether visual, auditory, cognitive, or whatever – emotional experiences seem to exist in an affective mode (e.g., Tappolet and Rossi 2019, 553; cf. Milona forthcoming). Furthermore, if we understand the relevant salience strikings as affective, a question arises about how these affective experiences rationalize, in the sense of *make intelligible*, the patterns of reasoning and, ultimately, decisions that they do. Theorizing such affect to be the modality of a certain kind of evaluative experience helps us to do this. Going forward, then, I take on board the following thesis: emotions help to solve the frame problem by virtue of making certain things salient, i.e., by virtue of representing certain considerations in an evaluative light.

We can see now how this foray into the frame problem can help with the value question. It does so by offering a constraint: *the value that emotions are about should lead to a plausible story about how agents overcome the frame problem*. Some views offer an attractive solution. Recall

that according to ER-action, emotions are about the emoter's reasons for action. And if emotions focus our attention in the sense that they lead us to represent certain reasons for action, then they are making us aware of precisely that which is most directly relevant to deciding what to do. Return to the case of the person deciding whether to take time off from work for a family vacation. Suppose that the person is experiencing both fear of their boss's reaction and enthusiasm about concentrated family time. According to a natural development of ER-action, such enthusiasm may involve a representation of concentrated time with family as a reason to take the trip while the fear may highlight one's boss's annoyance as a reason not to do so. Some impartialist views are also consistent with emotions helping to resolve the frame problem. For example, impartialist action relaxes the requirement that an emoter's reasons are always about their reasons for action, but it doesn't deny that emotions sometimes are. A defender of impartialist action can thus say all that defenders of ER-action say when it comes to the frame problem.

Turn now to sentimentalist answers to the value question, including both ER-sentimentalism and impartialist sentimentalism. In contrast with the above, these answers do not synergize well with the proposal that emotions are key to solving the frame problem. Sticking with the case of the person considering whether to take time off from work for a family vacation, consider their fear of how their boss will react. According to the sentimentalist answer to the value question, such fear is about certain considerations in virtue of which fear is fitting. So the person may represent the boss's potential annoyance, and the possible material consequences of such annoyance (e.g., that they are passed over for promotion), as making fear fitting. The trouble is that the deliberator's question here is not about the fittingness of fear. It is about whether to take time off for a family vacation.

It may be true that the considerations that make fear fitting are in this case also reasons against taking time off for vacation and thus, in this way, relevant to the key practical question. In general, it's at least often the case that considerations in virtue of which fear is fitting are also reasons for action (Tappolet 2016, 164-167). But even when there is such alignment, these are two different normative relations. That is, standing in *fit-making* relation to an *emotion* is distinct from standing in a *reason-giving* (favouring) relation to an *action*, even if the fit-making/reason-giving fact is the same in each instance. The trouble for the sentimentalist answer, then, is that it takes emotions to be an experience of a normative relation that isn't itself directly relevant to solving the frame problem. One potential response on behalf of ER-sentimentalism and impartialist sentimentalism,

suggested by the foregoing, appeals to principles linking sentimental values to reasons for action. For example, suppose an agent knows a principle of the following sort: if something is fearsome, then whatever makes it fearsome is also a reason to avoid the object of one's fear. According to this line of response, such an agent may *then* put their fear to use in solving the frame problem. But this reply doesn't so much help ER-sentimentalism or impartialist sentimentalism as highlight its awkward fit with de Sousa's insight. One difficulty (and we'll see another below) is that it has the result that emotions only come to have a function of controlling saliences in a way that helps with the frame problem once we gain an understanding of the relevant linking principles. But if emotions have a biological function of helping to solve the frame problem, as de Sousa suggests, then we would expect emotions to already be about the value that helps with that problem.

Sentimentalist answers face a second problem. To begin, recall that ER-sentimentalism and impartialist sentimentalism take the content of the evaluative experience constitutive of each type of emotion to be about a distinct sentimental value corresponding to the type of emotion in question. That is, fear is about fitting fear, excitement about fitting excitement, anger about fitting anger, and so on. Now consider that when agents are deliberating about what to do, it will often be the case that multiple emotions are involved. For example, the person deciding whether to take time off from work for a family vacation experiences at least two relevant emotions: fear and enthusiasm. But how should they weigh *fitting fear* against *fitting enthusiasm* in making their decision? It isn't clear that we can draw on any systematic principles. Depending on the details of the situation, what is fitting to be enthusiastic about may take precedence or vice-versa. So on a sentimentalist approach, we need additional reasoning to explain the importance of different sentimental values bearing on the question of what to do; but the potential considerations that we might bring to bear here are near endless, leaving us with what appears to be a variant of the original frame problem (i.e., that of determining how such-and-such competing sentimental values bear on the question of what to do). Given sentimentalism, then, it isn't clear that emotions help us to move past the difficulty posed by the frame problem.<sup>10</sup> Notice, moreover, that ER-action avoids a parallel problem, since according to it, distinct emotions are nevertheless about a straightforwardly commensurable value, namely the emoter's reasons for action; and the

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<sup>10</sup> The problem sentimentalist answers face may arise in parallel fashion for some other approaches. For example, an impartialist answer according to which emotions represent *good/bad for* someone (or something) may ultimately face a similar problem (cf. Stroud 2013, 463; Hurka 2021, 819-821); but I haven't space to explore this matter here.

weightiest reason(s) favoring a given action offers a straightforward answer to the question of what to do.

We can better see the depth of the problem here by revisiting the sentimentalist's reply to the first objection. Recall that, according to that reply, emotions help to solve the frame problem insofar as agents know principles connecting sentimental values and reasons. A second difficulty for this strategy emerges because solving the frame problem requires not simply a recognition that there are reasons but also something about the *weight*, or importance, of those reasons.<sup>11</sup> For example, suppose a person invited to give a wedding toast finds themselves both anxious and hopeful. They're anxious about public speaking but hopeful their words will be meaningful. Even if we grant that human agents facing these kinds of choices know (even if only implicitly) principles linking the relevant values to reasons for action, the defender of a sentimentalist answer to the value question needs more than this, to capture de Sousa's insight: The principles also need to say something about how to derive weights of reasons from those sentimental values, for otherwise it would be mysterious (from the perspective of rational intelligibility) why agents would be guided by certain of their emotions and not others. Furthermore, the challenge is to say what these principles are such that it is empirically plausible that agents rely on them to help with the frame problem. I am not optimistic about the prospects for meeting the challenge.

In sum, sentimentalist answers to the value question, including ER-sentimentalism and impartialist sentimentalism, create a substantial gap between the values emotions are about and the values most relevant to solving the frame problem. Furthermore, any attempt to bridge this gap would require a measure of reasoning that would seem to restate a version of the frame problem rather than solve it.

### **3. Janus-faced Emotions**

Many philosophers have held that emotions must somehow be understood in terms of the self. For example, as noted above, Nussbaum takes emotions to be judgments that concern the emoter's well-being or flourishing (Nussbaum 2004; see also Prinz 2007).<sup>12</sup> In this section, I introduce the

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<sup>11</sup> The line of thought here doesn't have to be put in terms of reasons. One might prefer to talk about the degrees of goodness or badness of different courses of action. As far as I can tell, all the same concerns for sentimentalist answers would arise if we put things in these terms.

<sup>12</sup> See Tappolet and Rossi (forthcoming) for an in-depth discussion of myriad ways in which emotions and the self may relate.

idea that emotions have to do with the self through de Sousa's provocative metaphor according to which emotions are "Janus-faced." But despite the prima facie plausibility of this proposal, it runs into an important difficulty if taken, as it seems to me de Sousa intends, to apply to *all* emotions. As we'll see, the emotions that create trouble are the ones that seem to motivate impartialism as an answer to the value question. There is thus a tension between de Sousa's attractive idea that emotions are Janus-faced and impartialism. I argue, however, that ER-action offers a plausible way of defending de Sousa's proposal in the face of apparent counterexamples. Combined with the arguments in the previous section against ER-sentimentalism, this concludes my case in favour of ER-action.<sup>13</sup>

To begin, there are a number of ways in which emotions might be thought to relate to the self. In one sense, of course, it is trivial that they do, for if I am undergoing an emotion, it is *my* emotion. But this is a sense in which all mental states relate to the self. Furthermore, some emotions take the self as their object. For example, if I am feeling guilty that *P*, then the particular object of my guilt – *P* – needs to be something I see myself as having done, if the emotion is to be intelligible as guilt. Other emotions such as shame and pride seem to have a similar structure. But clearly not all emotions work in this way (see Teroni 2016, 436-439). The particular object of, say, my fear, might have nothing to do with me. I might be afraid that a car whose driver has lost control will strike a pedestrian, even if I am myself observing from the third story of a building. A third possibility is that emotions relate to the self in the sense that the value emotions are about has something to do with the self. This is the hypothesis that I explore going forward.<sup>14</sup>

de Sousa's idea that emotions are Janus-faced offers an attractive way of theorizing this possibility. The basic idea is that emotions point in two directions: outward toward the world and inward toward the self. But what exactly are these inward and outward facing dimensions? At first glance, they might seem capturable in terms of the following pair of traditional ideas: the outward facing dimension, one might suppose, is the particular object of an emotion (e.g., a charging bear) while the inward facing dimension is an experience of changes in one's body (e.g., a racing heart). But this approach leaves values entirely out of the picture, and isn't what de Sousa has in mind.

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<sup>13</sup> Other answers to the value question may share enough in common with the structure of ER-action such that my arguments here don't adjudicate between ER-action and those alternatives. Readers are encouraged to consider how the arguments here bear on their favoured theory, if it isn't among the ones discussed.

<sup>14</sup> Here I set aside questions of about whether the self must be understood in terms of emotions (see Tappolet and Rossi forthcoming)

For de Sousa, the Janus-faced character of emotions has to do with the way in which the value a given emotion is about bridges the world and the emoter (2002, 258-260 ff). He illustrates this idea with the oft-discussed Huck Finn example. In this case, Huck's emotions lead him to rescue his friend Jim from slavery, despite Huck's beliefs that it is wrong for him to do so. Huck's various emotions toward Jim, which may include compassion for Jim and fear for Jim's safety, aren't just about values that can be understood in isolation from Huck. Here is how de Sousa puts it:

The sense of emotional truth I have sought to articulate is one which posits a correspondence between the emotion, characterized by a specific formal object, and some property of the human inhabited world. But the values apprehended by emotions depend in part on who we are. They are no less objective for that; but what reflects my own individual nature—what makes for my emotional authenticity—therefore comes to seem, after all, potentially relevant to the objective world of value. (2002, 260)

It seems to me that de Sousa has captured something important about emotions, value, and the self. We can see this by considering the possible emotions of people who aren't Jim's friends, if they happen to become aware of Jim's situation. While it would be appropriate for them to be emotionally sensitive to Jim's plight – also feeling compassion for him and fear on his behalf – they shouldn't, it seems, experience compassion and fear in the same manner and degree as Huck. To them, Jim is one among many similarly positioned people suffering the extreme injustice of slavery. Huck's detailed history with Jim thus makes a difference to how Huck does (and should) feel.<sup>15</sup> Put in de Sousa's terms, there is an *evaluative truth* that Huck's emotions are discerning that we cannot see if we abstract from Huck's individuality. The trick is to find a value that would bridge Huck and Jim such that Huck's emotions are an experience of *that* value.

Part of the difficulty here is illustrated by the very contrast I've used to motivate de Sousa's proposal. For even if we can find plausible candidates for the values Huck's emotions are about, we also have the strangers' emotions to consider. And it may seem as if their emotions are about values that have nothing to do with themselves; and if this is correct, then some version of

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<sup>15</sup> According to my understanding of de Sousa, the concept of authenticity plays a role in explaining why this is the case. But since my arguments don't require any such specific commitments about the way in which the self makes certain emotions appropriate, I won't explore these matters here.



impartialism (e.g., impartialist action) would seem to be the best answer to the value question. For example, their fear and compassion seem to be wholly focused on Jim, not themselves, and this might be precisely what is different about their emotions in contrast with Huck's. Or, to take a different case, suppose a person in China is watching deadly fires sweep across California. They experience compassion on behalf of the people who may lose their lives or homes. But assuming that they have no connection to those people or to California, it is difficult to see their compassion as having anything to do with themselves (i.e., those who are experiencing compassion). The objection here is just a generalization of the one that plagues the view that emotions are about the well-being of the emoter (section 1; see also Teroni 2016). For it may seem that the counterexamples to that view show not only that emotions are sometimes not about the well-being of the emoter but aren't about the emoter *at all*; they seem wholly oriented, at least as far as evaluative experiences go, to external objects.

It turns out that ER-action offers a plausible way of retaining de Sousa's idea that emotions are Janus-faced in terms of the values that they are about. According to ER-action, emotions are about the emoter's reasons for action. The emoter is thus hypothesized to be featured in the evaluative content of the emotion since the relevant content always includes <for me>. So if Huck is (say) hoping for Jim's escape, then he thereby represents reasons for him (i.e., Huck) to do what will bring about Jim's escape. Or if he is afraid Jim will be caught and returned to slavery, he thereby experiences reasons for him (i.e., Huck) to do what will avoid this possibility. ER-action likewise helps a defender of de Sousa's proposal to avoid counterexamples faced by the view that emotions are about the emoter's flourishing. Return to the case of a person who isn't friends with Jim but who nevertheless experiences fear on his behalf. To be sure, their fear isn't plausibly construed as about their (the emoter's) well-being or flourishing. However, the idea that it is about their reasons to help Jim to avoid capture seems quite plausible. ER-action thus allows us to preserve an idea that has proven attractive to de Sousa as well as many other philosophers of the emotions, namely that emotional representations of value bear a systematic relation to the self.

Other cases might be thought more difficult for ER-action to handle, however. For example, what of the person in China who experiences compassion while watching a disaster unfold in California? In thinking about such examples, we should take care not to get distracted by the fact that such a person might not be motivated to do anything to help those in need. This is because one can represent reasons for action but not be motivated by those reasons. Thus the compassion

of the person watching the disaster unfold live can experience reasons to help without being at all motivated to help. In this way, ER-action should be distinguished from views that analyze emotions in terms of actual motivations (e.g., Deonna and Teroni 2012; Scarantino 2014). This difference is difficult to overstate. For example, Brian Ballard argues that it isn't at all clear what motivation is associated with regret, since it's the inability to do anything that seems especially distinctive of regret (2021, 854). But this isn't obviously a problem for ER-action, for regret may be about a present powerlessness to act on one's prior reasons.<sup>16</sup>

But this response to the person watching the disaster unfold raises another potential worry for ER-action. This is because it might be thought to generate the result that such emotions are irrational or inappropriate when intuitively they aren't. According to this challenge, the worry is that the defender of ER-action is committed to the following: (a) the person's compassion, which we can assume is quite intense, involves a representation of them as having weighty reasons to help; (b) they have no such weighty reasons; (c) If they have no such reasons, their emotion is thereby irrational or inappropriate. But, the objection goes, the compassion is unimpeachable and thus ER-action leads to implausible results in such cases. But this objection strikes me as relying on a highly contentious assumption that an emotion can't be appropriate if the emoter knows that the relevant value isn't present. Notice, however, that there are some cases in which one can know that a mental state is inaccurate and yet the mental state is appropriate. For example, one who responds to a straight stick in water by perceptually experiencing it as bent has a perceptual experience that is appropriate yet incorrect; this is true even if the perceiver knows that their experience is inaccurate. It is appropriate in the sense that it is precisely how a human's perceptual faculties ought to function. Similarly, one may intensely fear walking across a glass skywalk directly above a precipitous drop, even though one knows it to be completely safe.<sup>17</sup> As I have argued in detail elsewhere, this seems to be how one should react, if their tendencies toward fear are well-functioning, especially if one is encountering such an opportunity for the first time.<sup>18</sup> Turn now back to the person fearing the disaster that they're watching unfold on television. The defender

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<sup>16</sup> Readers may also wonder about aesthetic emotions such as admiration. For example, does a person admiring a beautiful painting represent reasons to act? My own view is that the answer is plausibly *yes*, though I won't be able to defend such a proposal in full. A key point to notice, though, is that the ER-action theorist understands 'act' broadly to include not only doing things in the world but also mental actions such as imagining, focusing, etc. So whereas fear, on this proposal, is naturally understood as about reasons to avoid an apparent threat, admiration may be about reasons to contemplate the object of one's admiration in different ways.

<sup>17</sup> I've adapted this example from Gendler's (2008) discussion of "aliefs."

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of this line of thought, see Milona (manuscript).

of ER-action can reasonably say that the person does *appropriately* experience reasons to help, even if they don't have such reasons. This is plausibly explained, at least in part, by the fact that our emotions evolved in contexts whereby if one were "seeing" such things, they would be taking place nearby such that one might be able to help; and one cannot easily uproot their tendency to experience compassion in such cases without risking cultivating a more general callousness. So even though one can't help, it would signal vice if one were emotionally unaffected by watching such events unfold on television. In general, just as it is plausible that well-functioning perceptual dispositions will sometimes mislead, so too is it plausible that sometimes well-functioning (virtuous) emotional dispositions will.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper's starting point was the thesis that emotions are essentially bound up with experiences of value. I focused specifically on the question of what value these value experiences are about. The central argument is that two important ideas from the work of Ronald de Sousa, namely that emotions help to solve the frame problem and that emotions are Janus-faced, can help us to make progress in answering this question. These two ideas are difficult to square with certain popular answers to the value question. However, they synergize well with the view that emotions are about the emoter's reasons for action.

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