

MODELLING EMOTION ON PERSPECTIVAL PERCEPTION

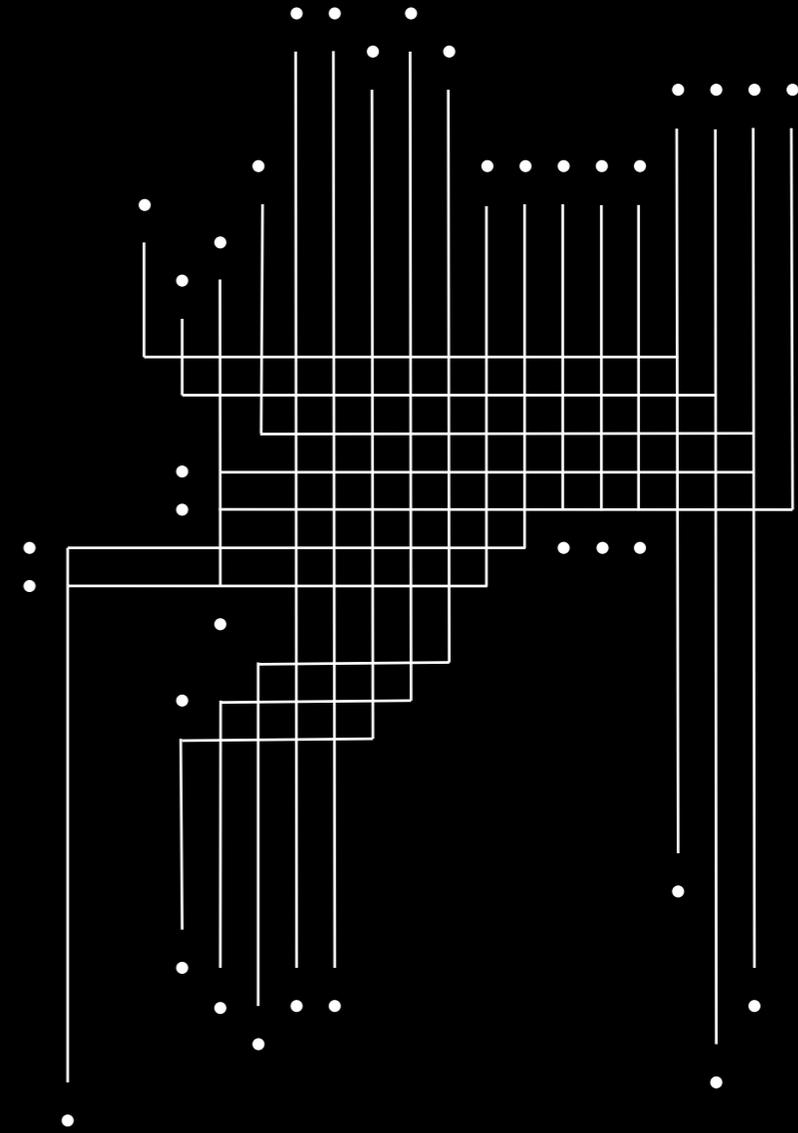
Unlike our perceptual experiences, our emotional experiences are dependent on our needs, desires, moods, interests, etc., which often give rise to inconsistent emotional responses. This puts into question whether our emotional experiences can be said to pick up information from the environment that purportedly prompts them. Julien A. Deonna argues that we can conceive of *evaluative features* as aspects of a subject's environment that *calls for* certain kinds of behaviour, and that one's emotional experiences are defeasible in light of one's *frame of reference*, cataloguing different calls to act with their correlative emotional experiences. I will question the plausibility of this theory by pointing to the dynamic nature of dispositions and the formative influence (and ubiquity) of what Deonna terms *contextual intruding factors*. I will argue that the dispositions of the responding subject often bear on the *fittingness* of their responses, rendering the idea of a frame of reference for emotions implausible and indicating that the tracking-relation that exists between a subject's perceptual system and her environment (in perspectival perception) is not analogous to the relation between her emotions and her environment.

By Mathias Helseth

Response-dependent accounts of value hold that values depend in some way on our emotional responses to the objects we ascribe value to. These accounts thereby accord with the intuitive idea that, as Daniel Jacobsen and Justin D'Arms put it, "values depend in some way on the existence of beings to whom things matter" (2000:723). Moreover, proponents of response-dependent accounts of value seem to converge on the claim that to judge something as valuable is to think it *fitting* to have a particular emotional response to it (2000:729). This, in turn, raises questions concerning the nature of value, and the relation between the environment and our emotional responses to this environment. Is there a tracking-relation between one's responses and the external properties that prompt them (in the evaluative domain), and, if so, what is the nature of these properties?

Many philosophers have modelled evaluative properties on colour properties (e.g., McDowell:1985; Gert:2010). Such accounts, however, seem unable to explain the relevance of the individual nature of the par-

ticular responding subject – that, say, a bag of peanuts is harmful to someone with a peanut allergy, but nutritious and delicious to someone else. That is, accounts that analogise evaluative properties with colour properties seem unable to account for the undeniable influence of the individual properties of the particular responding subject in evaluation. This suggests that evaluative features of a given subject's environment should be understood *relationally*, that, say, what is harmful to a given subject is determined by her relevant individual properties (e.g., her peanut-allergy), the relevant properties of the external feature(s) she responds to (e.g., peanut proteins), and their relation. Moreover, our emotions are informed by our changing moods, desires, beliefs, etc., which questions the utility of understanding emotions as tracking stable features of our environment, analogous to how perception tracks the relatively stable quality of colour. If values depend in some way on the responding subject's inconsistent emotional responses to purported evaluative features of her environment and her individual properties, then how do we determine the fittingness of a gi-



ven emotional experience and its corresponding evaluative judgement?

Julien A. Deonna attempts to make sense of the seemingly relational nature of value by modelling emotion on *perspectival perception* (2006:32). On his account, we pick up information about the environment through our emotions in a manner analogous to how perspectival perception picks up defeasible information (e.g., affordances) about the environment's relation to ourselves. If I perceive a branch as graspable, this represents a reason to think that the branch is in fact graspable at the time of my having that perception. Similarly, if I have an emotional response of fear to a set of circumstances, I will have a reason to believe that the circumstances I am confronted with constitute a threat to me. Deonna thus conceives of *evaluative features* as *calls to act*, generally either in the form of attraction or resistance (2006:34). This promises to make sense of the idea that values originate in the relation between the subject and the circumstances that prompt her response.

I will, however, draw attention to an aspect of our emotional interaction with the environment which it seems Deonna has, to a certain extent, overlooked. Namely, that our dispositions bear on the fittingness of our responses – say, whether I have long-standing trauma associated with a given aspect of my environment will bear on an assessment of the fittingness of my response to that aspect of my environment. Further, I will illuminate some concerns pertaining to the idea of normal interaction between a subject's emotional system and her environment. These considerations, in conjunction with my contention that the responding subject's disposition may bear on the fittingness of her response, renders the idea of a frame of reference for the emotions implausible. And, in turn, they indicate that the tracking-relation that exists between a subject's perceptual system (in perspectival perception) is disanalogous to the relation between a subject's emotional experiences and the environment that prompts these experiences. This nevertheless does not make Deonna's idea that our emotional experiences signify what merits a given agent's attraction or resistance implausible. However, in the absence of a frame of reference for the emotions, a response-dependent account of value constructed from such an idea will run the risk of becoming too subjective, since the defeasibility of our emotional experiences is called into question.

1. PERSPECTIVAL PERCEPTION AND EMOTION

Deonna attempts to model emotion on perception as a means of elucidating emotion through this slightly more familiar phenomenon (2006:29). In particular, he argues that emotions track for the subject *relational evaluative features* of her environment, in the same manner as perspectival perception (which I will elucidate below) tracks for the subject essentially relational facts about her environment (e.g., a branch as graspable, a ditch as jumpable, etc.). This means that Deonna does not endorse a realist conception of value, because values, on his account, exist in virtue of the subject's relation to the circumstances that purportedly cause her response.

This project thus promises to make sense of the idea that values are not “out there in the world” independently of human sentiment, but rather that they originate in the particular subject's relation to her environment. On this account, experiencing aspects of one's environment as valuable is tantamount to experiencing the circumstances as *calling* for certain kinds of behaviour. Having such an emotional experience is a defeasible reason for making a corresponding evaluative judgement. Next, I will outline Deonna's account of emotion modelled on perception.

1.1. Perspectival Facts

Deonna distinguishes between two aspects of perception: a factual dimension and a perspectival dimension (2006:32–34). The *factual dimension* of perception tracks for the subject facts about the world that exist independently of the subject's relation to her environment (e.g., that a tree is a tree, a square is a square, etc.). This is contrasted with the *perspectival dimension* of perception, which tracks essentially relational facts that spring from the subject's relation to her environment.

The most important perspectival facts to keep in mind will be *affordances*: those features of one's environment that are perceived as affording possibilities of action and reaction (e.g., a branch is not only perceived as a branch but as graspable or out of reach). This is because it appears Deonna conceives of evaluative facts on the model of affordances: as *calls to act*. Akin to the way affordances present themselves as possibilities of action and reaction that can be utilised or not, emotional experiences present circumstances as calling for certain actions. These calls may, in turn, be dismissed in view of the defeasible nature of the emotional experience. I may experience an aspect of

my environment as dangerous, and therefore be called to avoid this aspect. Yet, this experience may be false, in the sense that I may come to understand that my emotional experience of the circumstances does not align with the facts of the matter (i.e., that I was wrong in thinking that this feature of my environment presented a danger to me, under the present circumstances). Similarly, a branch may be perceived as graspable, but when I attempt to grasp it I may realise that it is not. Both in the case of affordances and in the case of calls to act (e.g., fear in response to a roaming lion), the experiences' conditions of correctness depend on relevant facts about the particular subject in conjunction with the actual circumstances.

The perspectival facts tracked by the agent's perceptual system are subcategorised, by Deonna, into species-relative facts and individual-relative facts (2006, 33–34). The perspectival species-relative facts tracked by the human perceptual system are facts about one's environment that present themselves to the subject in a manner particular to the human perceptual system (e.g., secondary qualities, like colour). The perspectival individual-relative facts tracked by one's perceptual system are such properties as affordances, facts that hold in virtue of the subject's situation in time and space and other relevant individual properties of her (e.g., her height, strength, etc.). Say the branch in front of me is perceived as graspable because of my situation relative to the branch, the length of my arm, and my height, and these conditions will not be satisfied for every member of my species.

These categories of perspectival perception (i.e., species-relative and individual-relative facts) make up the *frame of reference* that, according to Deonna, makes sense of perspectival facts. A green jumper can be categorised as green in virtue of the perceptual system shared by most members of the human species; the fact that a branch is graspable rests on the fact that I am situated at a certain distance from the branch, that I have a certain height, and that my arm has a certain length, in conjunction with the fact that I am equipped with a human perceptual system. So, the frame of reference registers the way in which the information derived from our environment through our perceptual system can be expressed: either as information that rests on the fact that the subject is equipped with a human perceptual system, or as information that rests on the preceding fact in conjunction with the relevant individual properties of the subject.

Again, as in the case of factual perception, appearances of species-relative and individual-relative perspectival facts are defeasible – a branch may present itself to me (through

my perceptual system) as graspable, yet when I attempt to grasp it I fail to do so. Consequently, this information will be revised to accommodate the individual-relative perspectival fact that the branch is not graspable. While the defeasibility of information derived from one's perceptual system is irrefutable, this fact does not present a serious objection to the claim that the human perceptual system generally tracks for the subject how the world is, and how the world is *to the perceiving agent* – that we can, in general, rely on information derived from our perceptual system. The fact that our perceptual system provides us with defeasible general knowledge of the world does not show that perception is a significantly unreliable source of information about the world. Indeed, most of our knowledge about the world is in principle defeasible and its derivation often hinges on our perceptual capacity.

1.2. Emotional Input as Tracking Perspectival Facts

Based on the preceding account of perception, Deonna proposes that we model emotions (at least some emotions) on perspectival perception (2006:34–35). This means that emotions, on this model, track for the subject facts constituted by the subject's *relation* to the object she responds to. In the case of tracking, say, the dangerousness of an object, this *evaluative feature* will be a *relational* fact that hinges on the fact that I am a human being, together with individual properties that are true of me and my situation relative to the dangerous object. For instance, if I perceive a lion in close proximity to me and the lion is acting erratically, I will ‘sense’ the danger the lion poses to me through my emotional response of fear and consequently be *called* to avoid this potential threat to myself. The information derived through my emotional system in such a case will be defeasible in the same manner as in the case of perspectival perception: The fact that the lion constitutes a threat to me rests on the fact that, in virtue of being a human being, I am vulnerable to a potential attack from the lion (in view of my inferior physical strength, my “tender flesh”, etc.). It may also rest on certain individual properties that are only true of me, such as that I have a very limited knowledge of the behaviour of lions (I will therefore be more vulnerable to the dangerous features of the lion than, say, a professional lion tamer) (2006:36). If, to the contrary, I am situated safely behind a tall fence, effectively protecting me against any potential attack, then we can say that the fear I experience in response to my perceiving the lion should be revised to accommodate the fact that the lion does not pose a threat to me (2006:36). The relational fact that constitutes the lion's dangerousness to me in the former case is not

true in the latter case; my fear in the latter case does not track any potentially dangerous aspect of my environment (in relation to myself), so that the information it provides is false relative to the facts of the matter. That the information derived from our emotions is defeasible shows that one's emotional response and one's evaluative judgement can be disjunctive – as in the case of being fearful of a lion behind a tall fence, or, in the case of perception, perceiving an ungraspable branch as graspable.

It should be stressed that 'evaluative features' do not denote evaluative features of the object that prompts the subject's response, in the sense that they belong to the objects themselves. That is, Deonna does not hold that the factual dimension of perception has its counterpart in emotion, but instead models emotion on the perspectival dimension of perception. Evaluative information therefore rests upon the frame of reference for emotions (which I will explain below), in a manner akin to the way perspectival facts rest on the frame of reference constituted by the human perceptual system and the relevant individual properties of the subject. From this it should be clear that, on Deonna's account, emotions do not track for us *how the world is* as in the case of factual perception, but rather *how the world is from the perspective of the subject*, as in the case of perspectival perception. He therefore provides a relational account of evaluative information, on which the information presented by the emotional system would not exist in the absence of the subject's relation to her environment. The relational facts derived from this system also, in many cases, rest on the fact that she is a particular individual of the human species, with particular individual properties and a particular situation in time and space.

Deonna suggests the following understanding of evaluative information: "an emotional experience of object *o* is a case of representing object *o* as calling for a certain behavior [sic]" (2006:34). As perspectival perception tracks for the subject essentially relational facts about her environment, emotions track for the subject evaluative information in the form of relational facts about the subject's environment relative to her, presented to her as calls for certain actions. In the lion case, absent a tall fence, the subject will be called to mitigate the threat that is presented to her through her emotional response to the lion's presence, and this mitigation will, presumably, in most cases take the form of avoidance. Certain emotional responses to objects in the subject's environment will constitute calls to act, in general terms, either in the form of attraction or resistance. The case of emotionally responding with fear to an erratic lion in close proximity to oneself will fall under

the domain of resistance, while the emotional response of, say, pride in response to a child's achievement will fall under the domain of attraction (e.g., one may be moved to congratulate the child).

It is important to keep in mind that the calls to act presented by the subject's emotional experience to the circumstances are, on Deonna's account, conceived as grounds for an evaluative judgement of the circumstances (2006:44–45). That is, the circumstances that call the subject to act in certain ways are the (apparent) cause of her emotional experience, and a defeasible reason to think that the representation of the circumstances delivered by her emotional experience is correct. Experiencing an object as dangerous relative to oneself is a defeasible reason to think that this object is in fact dangerous to oneself under the present circumstances; akin to how perceiving a branch as graspable is a defeasible reason to think that the branch is graspable.

1.3. A Frame of Reference for Emotions

Deonna makes clear, however, that the viability of the preceding idea is dependent on the viability of a frame of reference for emotions (2006:35–38). To conceive of an *emotional system* analogous to the perceptual system, we will have to show that human emotional dispositions – both those that spring from our species-specific human nature and those that spring from our individual human nature – can exhibit a sufficient degree of stability. Human emotional dispositions have to exhibit a degree of stability that is comparable to the stability exhibited by the deliverances of perspectival species-relative and individual-relative facts through perspectival perception. In the following I will outline Deonna's account of a frame of reference for emotions.

We can often make accurate predictions as to what a given individual will feel in a given situation, and, consequently, predictions as to how they will behave. These predictions seem to be possible in virtue of a frame of reference for emotions. Such a frame of reference would be made up, as in the case of perspectival perception, both of the fact that we (or most humans) are equipped with the same emotional system in virtue of being human beings, and facts that are true only of the particular affected subject. There are therefore two types of emotional dispositions at play in these predictions: (i) emotional dispositions that we can ascribe to most people, in the absence of contextual intruding factors; and (ii) individual emotional dispositions – that is, emotional dispositions that can only be ascribed to an individual member of the human species.

The latter category can, according to Deonna, be sub-categorised into emotional dispositions that arise from an individual's long-standing evaluative tendencies, and emotional dispositions that arise from an individual's character-traits. Long-standing evaluative tendencies will include such dispositions as reliably feeling contempt in response to people exhibiting (perceived) stupidity or clumsiness. The having of such a long-standing evaluative tendency, however, may not be endorsed by the agent in the form of a corresponding evaluative belief. That is, the agent may espouse a contradictory evaluative belief, such as the belief that clumsiness and stupidity do not merit disdain because these traits are outside of the control of the person exhibiting them. The difference between the two types of individual emotional dispositions is, on Deonna's account, merely that character traits can be exhibited in a wide variety of circumstances, while long-standing evaluative tendencies are exhibited in a more or less clearly circumscribed set of circumstances.

The contextual intruding factors that may hinder an individual's normal interaction with their environment will include such things as intoxication, lack of sleep, social ingratiating, and so on. For instance, Finn is generally calm and magnanimous, but when he drinks he tends to act aggressively and without concern for other people's well-being. Further, an individual's particular history will often influence her emotional responses to specific circumstances. For example, someone who has grown up in Australia may respond more calmly to the threat of a poisonous spider than someone who has never been exposed to this threat. These considerations show that generalisations about human and individual emotional dispositions will, in many cases, have to be supplemented by a detailed description of the circumstances and of the affected agent in order to account for the interpersonal and intrapersonal variation in people's emotional responses to the same object. Deonna's claim here seems to be that, absent such contextual intruding factors, humans are equipped with relatively stable emotional dispositions. Furthermore, these stable dispositions either spring from the fact that they are human beings, or from this fact in conjunction with the fact that they are particular individual human beings.

It is here, again, important to keep in mind that Deonna models the emotional system on the perspectival dimension of the perceptual system. Both systems track perspectival facts: facts that exist in virtue of the subject's relation to her environment. The above deliberations indicate that we may think of emotions as constituting a system. A frame of reference for emotions would cata-

logue different types of calls for action – and the evaluative presentation of the circumstances that go with these calls – with their correlative emotional experience. For example, fear will be catalogued with danger (2006:37). The emotional experience of fear prompts a fight or flight response, which gives rise to the evaluative judgement that the circumstances the subject is confronted with poses a danger to her – her emotional response of fear is a defeasible reason to think that the circumstances are potentially dangerous to her. Deonna seems therefore to assume that we can catalogue certain aspects of the environment with their uniquely fitting responses (in line with our "true" dispositions, absent any contextual intruding factors).

The emotional system, as conceived by Deonna, thus tracks facts that are analogous to perspectival species-relative facts, and perspectival individual-relative facts. For instance, the fact that a lion behaving erratically in my proximity poses a threat to me at the time of my having the response of fear (i.e., a perspectival species-relative fact), or the fact that I will be in grave danger if I got lost in a storm on a mountain, something that may not be true for someone with greater knowledge of how to survive in such situations (i.e., a perspectival individual-relative fact).

The conditions of correctness for the emotions are thus individually determined, as in the case of perspectival perception. Emotional experiences that are misaligned with the particular individual's catalogue of emotional experiences and their correlative evaluative presentations (i.e., their frame of reference for emotions) must, on Deonna's account, be attributable to contextual intruding factors that hinder the normal reactions of the individual. These contextual intruding factors are analogous to defeaters in perception, such that an awareness of contextual intruding factors (e.g., fatigue, social ingratiating, long-standing trauma, etc.) will correct the information received by the emotional system. Deonna's conception of a frame of reference for emotions therefore presupposes that there exists a normal interaction between one's emotional dispositions and one's environment and that this interaction can be seen as analogous to the normal interaction (absent perceptual defeaters) between the perspectival dimension of the perceptual system and the environment that causes these kinds of perceptions.

Nevertheless, in view of the ever-evolving nature of human emotional dispositions and the prevalence of contextual intruding factors that appear in many varieties and in a vast array of circumstances, it is unclear what this normality would consist in. I am therefore reluctant to endorse the idea that such a normal interaction between one's

individual emotional dispositions and their correlative evaluative presentation exists. I will return to this below.

1.4. Defects of the Emotional System

Deonna points to a set of emotional mistakes that are not attributable to contextual intruding factors: emotional mistakes that occur as a result of a defective emotional system (2006:38–40). He illustrates this phenomenon by way of the example of a man who responds with fear whenever he is in a room with a female person. In this case, one can argue that the man in question suffers from a defect in his emotional system, and that this kind of reliable misrepresentation by the subject's emotional system has its counterpart in perception. Deonna analogises this kind of defect with our perceptual system's systematic misrepresentation of the lengths of the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion, where two lines of equal lengths are systematically misrepresented as having different lengths. In both cases, it is probable that the agent is aware of the defects, and that he can correct the information provided by his emotional response, or his perception, so that his beliefs become aligned with the facts, i.e., that women are not dangerous in virtue of being female, and that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are actually of equal length (2006:39). Again, such mistakes are, according to Deonna, not attributable to contextual intruding factors because they originate in defects in the relevant emotional system. The human perceptual system reliably misrepresents the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion, and this misrepresentation occurs independently of any perceptual defeaters. Similarly, the man who suffers from gynophobia will reliably misrepresent women as dangerous on account of the nature of his emotional system, not as a result of long-standing trauma, lack of sleep, or the like.

The analogy, however, between pathological fear and the systematic misrepresentation of the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion cannot in fact illustrate this point. This is because the Müller-Lyer illusion pertains to the *factual* dimension of perception, while, as we have seen, Deonna attempts to model emotion on its perspectival dimension. The fact that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are of equal length does not depend on any individual properties of the responding subject. In contrast, the fact that the branch is graspable depends on where I am situated relative to the branch, the length of my arm, etc. To analogise our experiences of these lines with our experiences of 'evaluative features' therefore appears to yield a realist understanding of value, contrary to Deonna's attempt to construct a relational account. We

can nevertheless compare the case of pathological fear with a case of reliably misrepresenting a perspectival fact like an affordance as a result of a defect in the perceptual system: If I have a condition called micropsia, which makes objects appear smaller than they are, I may reliably perceive graspable branches as ungraspable. This potential defect in a subject's perceptual system is therefore analogous to the example of the man who suffers from gynophobia, and pertains to the perspectival dimension of perception.

Nevertheless, as I will argue below, this represents a misguided attempt at introducing objectivity to an inherently subjective account of value. If values are conceived of as regions that merit the attraction or resistance of a given subject, we cannot exclude certain experiences by claiming that they originate in defective emotional systems. This is because what merits my attraction or resistance will, in many cases, be partly determined by my (sometimes irrational) dispositions.

2. STABILITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

In this section I will argue against the notion that we can uncover our stable dispositions by becoming aware of the influence of contextual intruding factors. This is due to the ubiquity of such factors, and the fact that such factors contribute to the generation of our dispositions. I will, in addition, argue against Deonna's contention that we can identify defective emotional systems by appeal to their irrationality. This is, as will become apparent, because our dispositions often bear on assessments of what merits our attraction or resistance. Irrational dispositions often give rise to vulnerabilities, and such dispositions can therefore not be disregarded as defective. This, in turn, questions the utility of modelling emotion on perspectival perception. Further, Deonna's account contains the implicit assumption that particular aspects of a subject's environment are associated with uniquely fitting responses. I will reject this assumption on the basis of the preceding considerations.

2.1. The Stability of Dispositions

Deonna contends that we can make sense of the idea of stable dispositions – absent any contextual intruding factor(s) (and equipped with a working emotional system), our emotional dispositions exhibit a high degree of stability. Moreover, he holds that the viability of modelling emotion on perception is contingent upon the stability of our emotional dispositions, because the viability of the idea of a frame of reference for the emotions is contingent upon intrapersonal instability in emotional responses being attributable to the presence of contextual intruding

factor(s) (2006:38).

Nevertheless, contextual intruding factors may shape a subject's dispositions, which brings into question what they are intruding on. Furthermore, since contextual intruding factors may shape our dispositions, it will be very difficult to distinguish our stable dispositions from the factors that intrude on these dispositions. We can use amusement to illustrate this point: I may laugh at my boss' jokes as a result of an interest in ingratiating myself with her, but, over time, I may find myself reliably being genuinely amused by her jokes. However, let us say that time goes by again, and I find myself, in some instances, becoming aware of the fact that my disposition has changed in accordance with my wish to ingratiate myself with my boss – I become aware of the influence this previously contextual intruding factor has had on my disposition. Consequently, in those instances in which I become aware of this fact, I feel no genuine amusement in response to my boss' jokes. However, it here seems open to question whether it is the social ingratiation or my awareness of this contextual intruding factor that intrudes on my stable disposition. That is, it is not entirely clear whether my present disposition to respond with genuine amusement to my boss' jokes or my previous disposition to the contrary reflects a stable disposition.

Our dispositions are dynamic; they change over time and internalise contextual intruding factors along the way. Emotional contagion and social ingratiation may shape my sense of humour, long-standing trauma may influence what aspects of my environment elicit fear, my mood may influence what I deem befitting of anger, and so on. The fact that these contextual intruding factors help shape our dispositions, and the fact that our dispositions are generally subject to constant changes that are prompted by a myriad of factors, render the notion that we can make sense of the idea of a normal interaction between the environment and one's emotions dubious. My point is that the formative influence of contextual intruding factors on the generation of our dispositions makes it very difficult to find the stability needed to support Deonna's idea of a frame of reference for emotions. Moreover, if we cannot make sense of the idea of normal interaction between a particular subject's emotional system and her environment, it seems incorrect to assume that we can correlate certain aspects of her environment with particular emotional responses. In light of the ubiquity of contextual intruding factors and

their formative influence on our dispositions, I contend that Deonna's attempt to find stability in our dispositions by disregarding these factors is ill-founded, and that the stability of our dispositions cannot serve as the basis for a frame of reference for emotions.

2.2. A Subject's Dispositions Bear on What Merits Her Attraction or Resistance

Deonna's claim that we can determine whether a person's emotional system is defective or not rests on a mistaken understanding of the relational nature of values espoused by his account, namely, as what merits attraction or resistance from the perspective of a given subject. This is because, as Deonna contends, what merits a subject's attraction or resistance will be partly determined by facts

pertaining to the particular affected subject. We can exemplify this by reference to harmfulness: the death of a subject's child will be more harmful to her than the death of another person's child; peanuts will be harmful to a subject with a peanut-allergy, but not to others; the noise from fireworks may be harmful to a person suffering from PTSD, while innocuous to another person; losing a leg will be more harmful to a football player than to an accountant, and so on. That is, my preferences, desires, etc., as well as my personal relationships, allergies, phobias, mental illnesses, and many other factors pertaining to my dispositions bear on what aspects of my environment merit my resistance, as well as to what degree they merit it. This is because such factors seem to give rise to individual vulnerabilities. If this is true, then the dispositions of a subject will often bear on the fittingness of their responses.

Let us imagine John who is arachnophobic (he has a pathological fear of spiders). John has done everything in his power to remedy his irrational fear, but is incapable of doing so. Let us say his flatmate Ashley is aware of this. Despite having this knowledge, however, she throws an innocuous spider in his face for her own amusement. In this case, I contend that Ashley is not justified in doing so merely by the fact that, in view of the circumstances, the spider does not pose a threat to John. Ashley's contention that John's statistically oversensitive response was unjustified, in light of the fact that the circumstances presented no real danger to him, does not have a significant bearing on the fittingness of his response. That is, illuminating the irrationality of his fear will not justify Ashley's action, nor will it delegitimise John's response. Rather, his statistically

abnormal (overly sensitive) disposition is partly justified by appeal to his arachnophobia. Furthermore, let us say that these circumstances have debilitating effects for John: The experience causes him to miss a day of work, and he becomes increasingly paranoid at the prospect of any further “spider-attacks.” In short, it exacerbates his debilitating fear of spiders to the extent that it affects his life in a significantly negative respect. Ashley’s action is thus harmful to John because of the negative effects of the extreme fear he experiences in response to the innocuous spider being thrown in his face.

My point is that we cannot disregard certain emotional experiences on the basis that they are not tracking the right aspects of a subject’s environment. This is because certain aspects of a subject’s environment merit attraction or resistance, and to what degree these aspects merit a subject’s attraction or resistance is partly determined by the dispositions of the affected subject. While John wishes he could rid himself of his pathological, and thereby irrational, fear, he is incapable of doing so. He recognises that his disposition towards spiders is erroneous in the sense that it does not indicate what is physically dangerous to him, but spiders may nevertheless merit his resistance in view of the debilitating effects of his experiences in response to spiders in his proximity. John’s disposition to extreme fear in response to spiders therefore constitutes a vulnerability, and this kind of consideration will be particularly relevant in the social sphere upon deciding what we can and cannot do to one another.

I therefore contend that such factors as a subject’s pathological fear or long-standing trauma, and the dispositions they generate, bear on the fittingness of the subject’s responses, which is in contrast to Deonna’s claim that they should be regarded as contextual intruding factors (2006:40). This further indicates that we cannot reach a stable and “true” disposition by eradicating contextual intruding factors, because some of the factors that obscure a disposition on Deonna’s account are relevant to a subject’s assessment of what merits her attraction or resistance.

Besides, this is akin to how violent horror movies do not merit fear because they do not pose any threat to the viewer, but they may merit the resistance of, say, a child (or another impressionable person). Regardless of the lack of an actual threat, the child’s emotional experience of such movies may have a debilitating effect on their development. Moreover, an adult responding with fear to a horror movie would also be fitting, although it does not pose any threat to her – even adults are disposed to respond with fear to movies of this kind. This kind of film plays on our

disposition to respond with fear to certain aspects of our environment, aspects that would be dangerous if they were not fictional. In most cases the fictional nature of these films will influence one’s response, unless one is subject to a specific vulnerability to what is depicted in the film (e.g., if one is suffering from PTSD). So, again, whether a horror movie merits one’s resistance is partly determined by the effect of the fear it predictably prompts in one, and the extent to which it merits one’s resistance will also be determined by one’s disposition – if such a film will cause significant distress, loss of sleep, etc., then I contend that it does merit one’s resistance.

It appears that considerations as to the rationality of a subject’s response are not enough to determine its fittingness. This is because one’s irrational dispositions will, in some cases, have a bearing on the fittingness of one’s requisite responses, in view of the vulnerabilities they may give rise to. This is an aspect of our emotional interaction with the environment that goes into assessments of the fittingness of emotional responses which I contend Deonna has overlooked.

That said, we should obviously attempt to remedy pathological and debilitating fears because we all presumably have an interest in limiting our experiences of fear to those instances in which such fear indicates potential physical danger in our environment. In the absence of an effective cure, however, such irrational dispositions cannot be disregarded as defective. These experiences have debilitating effects, and the subjects of these experiences are justified in avoiding them. As a branch’s graspability may be influenced by physical disabilities (e.g., paralysis, arthritis, parkinson’s disease, etc.), what is harmful to someone (i.e., merits their resistance) may be influenced by factors pertaining to the subject’s disposition, such as psychological disabilities (e.g., pathological fears, PTSD, clinical depression, etc.).

So, what merits my resistance is not only determined by my human nature and facts about my particular physical constitution (as with perspectival species- and individual-relative facts in perception), but also by my dispositions to respond. My dispositions are influenced by my preferences, desires, etc., as well as many other factors, such as facts about my personal relationships, long-standing trauma, and so on. Consequently, it seems we have located a disanalogy between perspectival perception and emotion. The conditions of correctness in the case of perspectival perception are determined by my situation in time and space and facts about my physical constitution (such as my height, my strength, etc.). While what is harmful to a

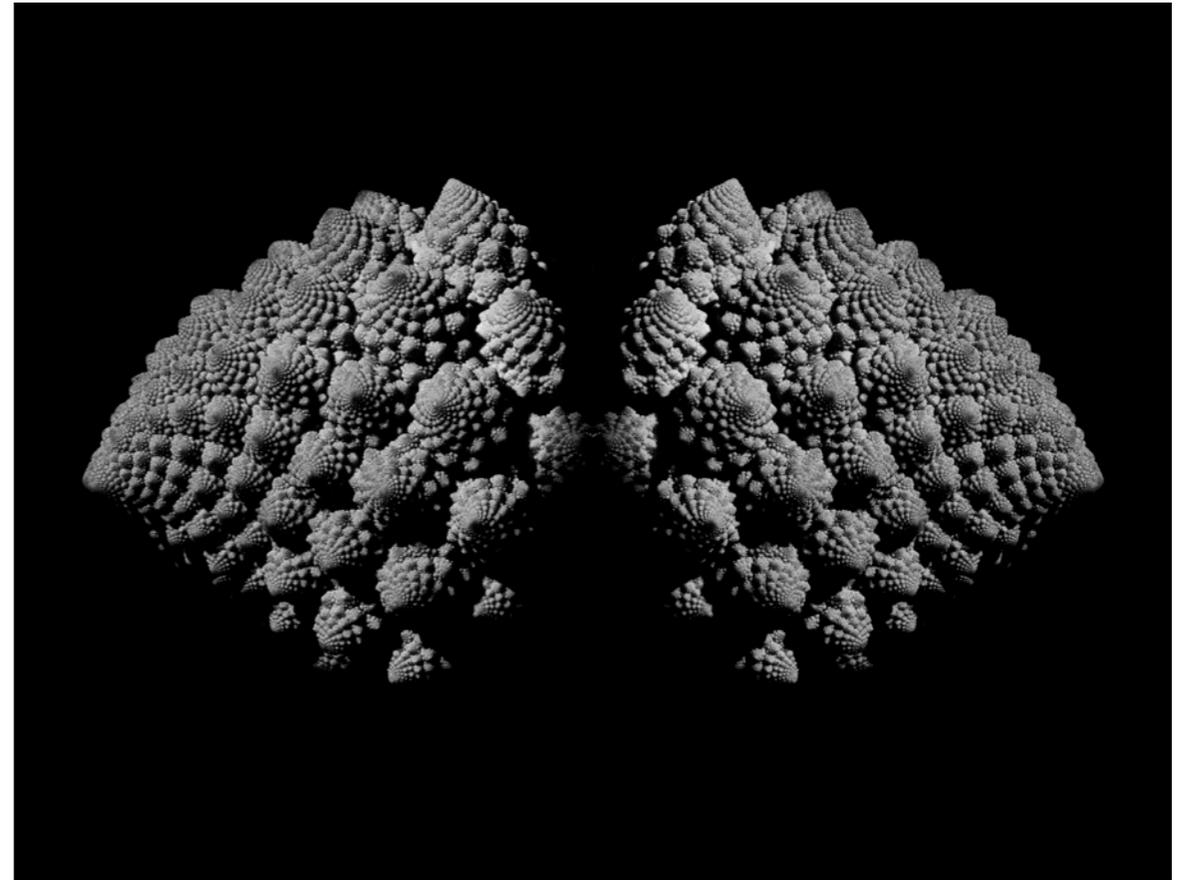


Illustration: Snorre Nygren

subject is partly determined by the same factors, it is also partly determined by the subject’s dispositions and their consequent vulnerabilities. These deliberations therefore question the utility of perspectival perception serving as a model for our emotional interactions with the environment (in the evaluative domain), since perspectival facts are not influenced by a subject’s emotional dispositions (or at least not to a significant degree).

One may nonetheless contend that the correctness of our experiences of affordances depend on such things as one’s view of one’s abilities, and one’s emotional responses to the possibilities of action and reaction the environment presents. For instance, it may be suggested that my perceiving a gap between two rooftops as too wide to jump across – as a result of underestimating my physical capabilities – will impede the possibility of my jumping across it. Such a depreciation of my capabilities may impede my capacity to jump across the gap. Similarly, it is open to question whether my fear of heights may somehow hinder the possibility afforded by such a gap in conjunction with relevant facts about me.

However, it seems Deonna would contend that such

experiences are mistaken. This is because he holds that perceptions of affordances are defeasible in light of relevant facts about the perceiver and the circumstances. The perceiver’s fear of heights or her depreciation of her physical capabilities therefore seem to amount to defeaters: They obscure her access to relevant facts about her and the gap. By depreciating her physical capabilities, or as a result of her fear of heights, she may refrain from acting on the possibility afforded by the gap between the two rooftops in conjunction with her capabilities. This, however, does not appear to remove that possibility. In such cases, she would choose not to act on the possibility afforded to her, but it is nevertheless a possibility she can choose to utilise. If jumping across such a gap is necessary for her survival, her fear of heights or her depreciation of her physical capabilities will presumably be overridden in favour of utilising this possibility.

2.3. The Uniqueness Assumption

Deonna does not adhere to the assumption that sentimental values are associated with uniquely fitting responses regardless of who figures as the affected subject. He nonet-

heless appears to hold that certain aspects of a particular subject's environment are correlated with uniquely fitting responses, although such responses will be uniquely fitting with regard to the subject's frame of reference for *her* emotions. This is evident from his idea of a frame of reference for the emotions as "a table correlating different types of evaluative properties (or calls for actions) with their corresponding emotional experiences" (2006:37).

I reject this assumption on the basis of two considerations: (i) it appears that we cannot make sense of the idea of normal interaction between a subject's emotional system and her environment; and (ii) it appears that a subject's emotional dispositions bear on the fittingness of their emotional responses, which, in turn, lends credence to the first consideration. Deonna's idea of a frame of reference for emotions "presupposes that there is such a thing as normal interaction between one's emotional dispositions and the environment, i.e., a tracking relation which parallels the one existing in perception" (2006:38). I have indicated that such a normal interaction does not exist, and this speaks against the idea of a frame of reference for emotions, and thereby against the notion that we can associate certain aspects of the environment with uniquely fitting responses.

Let us say, however, that we can somehow make sense of the idea that we are "disposed to react to token stimuli of the same type with the same type of emotional experience," absent any contextual intruding factor(s) (2006:37). Even so, the second consideration indicates that we cannot exclude certain experiences because they originate in purportedly defective emotional systems. That is, if irrational dispositions, such as John's pathological fear of spiders, influence the fittingness of their response (to some degree) then we cannot say that the emotional systems of those who are subject to such dispositions are defective. If we have no avenue of classifying certain emotional systems as defective, then Deonna would have to contend that statistically disproportionate fear is correlated with spiders in John's frame of reference for his emotions.

Now, let us imagine that, to John's surprise, a pill is invented which effectively remedies his pathological fear of spiders. Would this mean that, in the absence of pathological fear, John's response to spiders is no longer fitting? This is obviously counter-intuitive (and counter-productive) because such a change in his emotional disposition would most likely improve his life, and it would make his disposition more attuned to what is physically dangerous to him.

My contention is therefore, again, that Deonna has fai-

led to appreciate the dynamic nature of our dispositions, and that our emotional dispositions partly determine what merits our resistance or attraction. These considerations render the uniqueness assumption ill-founded, even if it only pertains to the subject's individually, uniquely fitting responses. If my dispositions bear on what merits my resistance or attraction, and my dispositions are subject to change, then correlating different emotional experiences with different aspects of my environment seems futile (other than as a temporary heuristic tool, perhaps).

2.3. Conclusion

I have argued that we cannot make sense of the idea of normal interaction between one's emotional system and the environment in light of the dynamic nature of our dispositions, and because factors that amount to contextual intruding factors on Deonna's account (such as long-standing trauma) shape our dispositions to a significant degree. Furthermore, Deonna fails to take into account that our emotional dispositions, even if they are caused by purported contextual intruding factors, partly determine what merits our attraction or resistance. Consequently, it seems we cannot exclude certain emotional systems as defective.

These considerations make the idea of a frame of reference for the emotions implausible. Since the viability of Deonna's account is dependent on the plausibility of such a frame of reference, it seems we should not model emotion on perspectival perception. The implausibility of the idea of a frame of reference for the emotions, in turn, suggests that we cannot correlate aspects of our environment with uniquely fitting responses because the fittingness of our responses may change along with our dispositions. This, moreover, points to a disanalogy between perspectival perception and emotion: Perspectival perceptions are not influenced, to a significant degree, by the subject's emotional dispositions. I therefore contend that there is no tracking-relation, analogous to the one that is evident in perspectival perception, between a subject's emotional experiences and her environment.

Although Deonna's account appears to overlook the role of our dispositions in assessing the fittingness of our emotional responses, his understanding of evaluative features as calls to act seems to have merit. This is because it can explain the fittingness of our responses in light of the *function* of the human emotional system as notifying us of regions of attraction and resistance in our environment relative to our individual nature. Nonetheless, in light of my contention that our dispositions influence what merits our

attraction or resistance, the resulting account will run the risk of becoming too subjective – the defeasibility of our emotional experiences is called into question. That is, it seems we will be left without any means by which we can deem a particular emotional response unfitting because we have no means by which we can distinguish between those dispositions that bear on the fittingness of a response and those that do not. After all, a spoiled adult's disposition to statistical oversensitivity in response to criticism is, at least intuitively, not on par with an arachnophobic person's disposition to being statistically oversensitive to spiders. It therefore appears that a resulting problem consists in identifying standards that may determine the weight of a disposition in disputes over the fittingness of emotional experiences.

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