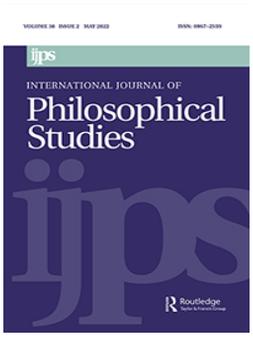

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Could There Be Expressive Reasons? A Sketch of A Theory

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ABSTRACT

In pursuit of a theory of expressive reasons, I focus on the practical rationality of actions such as welcoming, thanking, congratulating, saluting – I label them 'expressive actions.' How should we understand the kinds of practical reasons that count in favour of expressive actions? This question is related to the question of how to understand non-instrumental fittingness-type reasons for emotion. Expressive actions often are and should be *expressions of emotion*. It seems to be an important feature of such actions that the reasons that count in favour of the action are entangled with reasons of fittingness that count in favour of the relevantly connected emotion. But how should we understand this entanglement? I argue that the relevant category of reasons cannot be captured on approaches standard in normative theory. I develop a theory of sui generis expressive reasons. I argue that we have reason to perform actions that mark certain situations that contain some significant value or disvalue, independently of any reason to alter those situations. This is the role of expressive actions. Sui generis reasons for expressive actions are entangled with reasons for relevantly connected emotions because (some) emotions have the same role of marking extraordinary situations.

KEYWORDS Emotion; expression; expressive action; reasons; practical rationality; ethical theory

1. Introduction

There may be many sorts of normative practical reasons: that is, different sorts of consideration that speak in favour of some action or action-like response. For instance, prudential reasons speak in favour of actions in virtue of bearing some significant instrumental relation to the agent's own welfare. Are there distinctively *expressive* reasons? And if there are, are these reasons simply an extension of some already well-recognised type of normative practical reason, or do they form a distinct, sui generis class?

Some have suggested that there is a distinctive, sui generis class of expressive reason. According to Allen Wood:

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> 'Expressive reasons for doing things may have been largely overlooked in moral theory, but they are not unfamiliar in everyday life. People shake hands, congratulate or condole with others, and say "Please," "Thank you," and "You're welcome," in order to manifest respect, gratitude, benevolence, or esteem for them . . . this is also the sort of reason why people salute the flag or bow their heads in the presence of religious objects.' (Wood 1999, 141-2)

Wood raises this issue in the context of discussing Kant's Formula of Humanity ('So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' [Kant 2011, 87]). He defends the further claim that the structure of dignity alluded to by Kant – and in particular the normative connection between rational nature and actions of respect, which the concept of dignity is meant to elucidate – is best understood as a claim about expressive reasons.[1] However, while Wood's claims about the Formula of Humanity are suggestive, they are not explained in any detail. In this paper I aim to defend these remarks by developing a theory of sui generis expressive reasons. I should note, however, that my aim will not be to explain the structure of Kantian dignity. I will rather be concentrating on actions such as Wood's examples of welcoming, thanking, congratulating, saluting and so on, and the question of how they, and relevantly connected emotions, can be guided by a distinctive type of normative practical reason. Whether the account developed here could apply to the structure of dignity, or to rational action more generally, is something I leave for further inquiry.

The interesting feature of Wood's examples is that they look to have a symbolic or expressive role, and I will therefore label them 'expressive actions.' We often take ourselves to have good reason to perform expressive actions. Social life would look very different if we did not. Performing such actions – e.g. welcoming people, thanking them – is an important micro-technique of social inclusion. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that at least a partial explanation of the ubiquity of such actions is that we do indeed (at least sometimes) have good, even decisive, reasons to perform them. The question I will be asking is how to make sense of this: how should we understand the kinds of practical reasons that count in favour of expressive actions? The method of the paper is inference to the best explanation. I will argue that there are sui generis expressive reasons for both actions and emotions on the basis that this is the best explanation of the fact that there are sometimes good and even decisive reasons for expressive actions. The following is a sketch, but I hope an illuminating one.

In Section 2 I motivate the thought that, if there are reasons for expressive actions, they are sui generis and not captured by some already widely

[1]The thought being that rational nature requires certain actions of respect, and that the explanation for this is that those actions are expressive of appropriate attitudes of respect.

recognised category of practical reason. In Sections 3 and 4, I look at accounts provided by Elizabeth Anderson, Allen Wood and John Skorupski that are related to my task here, and I argue that they are inadequate. In Section 5, I outline my alternative theory. In Section 6, I explain how my theory could make sense of the entanglement of expressive action with emotion. Section 7 concludes.

2. The Irreducibility of Expressive Reasons

Philosophical debate standardly recognises a number of different types of candidate practical reasons. The following list could be based on a survey of recent normative theory:

- prudential reasons that stem from one's own well-being;
- instrumental reasons to satisfy actual desires;
- instrumental reasons to satisfy ideal or informed desires;
- humanitarian reasons stemming from others' need;
- consequentialist reasons to promote impartial good;
- deontic reasons that stem from moral obligations correlating with rights;
- deontic reasons that stem from moral obligations not correlating with rights;
- reasons to possess and manifest virtue;
- reasons to possess and manifest particular virtues;
- reasons that attach to particular roles or relationships;
- reasons that arise from prior voluntary undertakings.

This is not to say that all philosophers endorse all of these types of practical reasons. Debate rages as to which of these types are valid and irreducible to the others. However, it is unnecessary to look at such debate in detail to motivate the thought that this standard typology does not account for reasons for expressive actions. While reasons of many of these types *may* speak in favour of an expressive action, they do not figure in the *core explanation* of why such actions are appropriate. For instance, my mother may need me to participate in her mourning for my grandfather, and I may thereby comply with humanitarian reasons if I do so; but in the standard case I have other, less indirect, reasons to mourn for my father that provide the core explanation of my reason to do so (Bennett 2016). I may advance my self-interest by apologising; but, in a case of serious wrongdoing, my apology will be undermined if that is the main reason I have for apologising. In many cases, I can have reason to celebrate or commiserate with someone without their having any right that I do so, or without there being any moral obligation. And reasons for expressive action can be valid for a person

without their having undertaken anything to incur them. Furthermore, the appropriateness of expressive actions seems independent of the maximisation of impartial good: these actions seem to be fitting to situations that have particular features, and their appropriateness thus independent of the vagaries of overall good. Meanwhile, without some more specific explanation of the appropriateness of expressive actions, standards of virtue are too vague to account for the reason to perform an expressive action. This gives us some motivation to think that expressive action cannot easily be accommodated on standard approaches to practical reason.

It might be said that expressive actions could be accommodated on a two-level normative theory. On such a view, fundamental justificatory considerations are usually available to us only at the 'critical' or 'reflective' level, whereas the considerations by which we tend to be guided, and which we cite in everyday thought, discussion and action, are – even in the best case – only indirectly related to those fundamentals. While this suggestion is not without problems, the idea of such an indirect, two-level theory is capacious enough that I will not attempt to rule it out here. To this extent, the account given can be read as 'hermeneutic' in trying to capture and reconstruct the reasons by which we are to be guided in everyday action; it does not preclude the possibility of a further level of ultimate justification.[2]

I have given some examples of cases in which it seems unintuitive that we could capture reasons for expressive actions in terms of standard approaches to practical rationality. But there is a more general, theoretical reason to suspect that such approaches will be inadequate. This is the connection between, on the one hand, expressive actions and the practical reasons that count in their favour, and, on the other hand, emotion. While the precise nature of the link with emotion is part of our inquiry, it is a distinctive feature of actions in this class that they can also be thought of as *expressions* of an emotional or affective state: expressions of gratitude, pleasure or regret, remorse, joy or sympathy, for instance. To say that they are expressions of emotion can mean a number of things, but I will take it at the moment to involve the idea that reference to the emotion enters in some significant way to an explanation of the nature or meaning or significance of the action. In particular, the claim that I am interested in is that, if these are actions that are to be understood as expressions of emotions, they are actions in which the explanation of the appropriateness of the action is in some way entangled with the question of the appropriateness of the correlated emotional or affective state. To put it in more technical terms, it is non-instrumental reasons of fittingness that are entangled with the relevant reasons for action.

[2]Another category that I do not attempt to rule out is global Humeanism, which suggests that all normative practical reasons are reasons to further existing motivations. I take this view only to be worth considering as a meta-normative thesis, and not as an account of first-order normative reasons. Thus I set it aside here.

For instance, if I have a reason of fittingness to feel guilt, I also have a related reason of fittingness to apologise; if I have a reason of fittingness to grieve, I also have reason to mourn. There appear to be some practical reasons that are entwined with reasons for emotion. However, I take it that explaining the appropriateness of actions in such a way that they are entangled with the appropriateness of emotion is not something considered by the standard normative approaches listed above.

It is true that Aristotelian approaches give a role to emotion. However, as I mentioned above, it would be hard to derive a reason from such an approach for something as specific as an expressive action. Furthermore, the Aristotelian position does not offer a detailed explanation of how particular practical reasons are entangled with the texture and variety of particular emotions. While the considerations of this section do not conclusively demonstrate that no standard approach to normative theory can give us the explanation we need, I hope to have said enough to motivate an inquiry into an alternative. As we gain a better understanding of the entanglement between expressive action and emotion, we will see that it calls for an explanation not offered by the standard approaches.

3. Two Incomplete Attempts to Explain Expressive Reasons

Elizabeth Anderson is one prominent theorist who has drawn on the idea of the 'expressive' in the service of normative conclusions: for instance, in seeking to give a distinctive 'expressive' articulation of claims about the ethical limitations of capitalist markets. While this topic may seem remote from the expressive actions that we have made our concern, it will be instructive to look briefly at Anderson's account. Her case is underpinned by what she calls an 'expressive theory of rational action' (Anderson 1995; see also Anderson and Pildes 2000). This theory 'defines rational action as action that adequately expresses our rational attitudes toward people and other intrinsically valuable things' (Anderson 1995, 17). The idea, in brief, is that rational action is not merely purposive, at least not in the sense of aiming to bring about defined effects or consequences. Even when it does aim at such defined effects, it always does so in a way that also involves expressing appropriate attitudes to the particular nature of relevant intrinsic values (Anderson 1995, 22). Anderson calls this a 'dual ended' account. The implications of a value for action, are given, Anderson thinks, by 'expressive norms.' Expressive norms are constitutive of valuing: 'a fully rational action expresses a way of valuing something in being governed by norms constitutive of that mode of valuation' (Anderson 1995, 18).

Anderson's position has been subject to criticism, notably by Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski (Brennan and Jaworski 2015). These critics ask whether there is any substance to the 'expressive' objections to markets

pressed by Anderson that does not in fact derive its force from other, already recognised normative considerations. They deny that there is a distinctive class of expressive reasons that are not reducible to the badness of e.g. encouraging undesirable attitudes, or altering valuable social meanings, or to wrongs of exploitation, or rights violation, etc. They seek to push Anderson into a dilemma. Either the objections she is trying to make collapse into an appeal to other, well-recognised kinds of wrongs; or else the claim that they are genuine 'expressive' wrongs is unconvincing.

Anderson might attempt to answer this criticism by spelling out what makes expressive reasons distinctive. However, it is not clear that Anderson has really done this. Although she claims that valuing is related to emotion (Anderson 1995, 2) this is not yet sufficient to show that there are sui generis expressive normative practical reasons. And while Anderson tells us that 'expressive norms' are intentional, backward-looking, distributive and non-instrumental (Anderson 1995, 33); and that they are tied to social norms (Anderson 1995, 18) these features are shared by many norms, not just supposedly expressive ones. What we need is a better understanding of what it means to 'express' attitudes to values, and what the point is of doing so; and a better grip on the 'expressive norms' that would count in favour of one response rather than another in a given situation in which a particular value is instantiated.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Allen Wood also claims that there are expressive reasons. He focuses more on actions like welcoming, thanking, congratulating, etc. But like Anderson, he has a larger theme in view.

> Yet if we think only of examples in which expressive reasons are seen in abstraction from more familiar kinds of reasons, expressive reasons may seem suited only to matters of etiquette or ritual, and they may therefore appear an unlikely ground for a comprehensive rational morality. But that impression is misleading, since every action that is done for a reason (as distinct from being merely a response to an impulse) is based on regarding something as objectively valuable. When it is done for that kind of reason, the performance of the action is fundamentally an expression of esteem for that value, and this expressive reason for performing the action is therefore the ground of any other reason we may have for performing it (such as a reason framed in deontological or consequentialist terms). (Wood 1999, 142)

In this passage, Wood provides a similar view to that of Anderson, that rational action always expresses attitudes to objective values. Like Anderson, Wood seems to be committed to the idea of there being some 'expressive norms' that explain why some action is fitting to the particular 'shape' of a given value; but in a brief set of remarks he does not develop the details of such an account.

Wood and Anderson both have a larger goal in mind, and defend the idea that rational action is not to be understood simply as purposive, but rather as

'expressing esteem' for the particular shape of the values at play in the situation to which the action responds. But their suggestive accounts are incomplete as they stand. They do not provide a developed or persuasive account of the 'expressive norms' that generate a reason for a distinctive response in the face of some value. As a result they are vulnerable to the charge that supposed examples of expressive action are either supported by other already-recognised sorts of reasons or else unsupported by reason. Furthermore, neither provides an explanation of the entanglement between expressive action and emotion. Nevertheless, we have previously motivated the thought that at least some expressive actions are supported by practical reasons and that these reasons are distinct from the alternatives considered by Brennan and Jaworski. Is there more that can be said about the content of expressive norms?

4. Skorupski on the Bridge Principle

An alternative approach to understanding expressive reasons starts from the Bridge Principle argued for by John Skorupski (Skorupski 2010). Skorupski introduces this principle as part of a defence of a sentimentalist account of value. He explains his version of sentimentalism through three claims (Skorupski 2010, 264–5):

(I) There are irreducible reasons for emotion (evaluative reasons)
(II) Value is analyzable in terms of evaluative reasons
(III) Many practical reasons are grounded in evaluative reasons

Because a defence of expressive reasons does not require an overall sentimentalist position, I set premiss (II) aside. I will also accept as plausible premiss (I). For instance – to give Skorupski's examples – when you win the match despite all the pressure, you have reason to be proud; when someone who is supposed to be doing a job for you fails to turn up (yet again) you have reason to feel annoyed; when someone helps you out of a difficulty you have reason to be grateful; when you make an understandable mistake in reading the map you have no reason to be ashamed (Skorupski 2010, 265). Evaluative reasons are non-instrumental, pro tanto reasons for emotion: the agent's situation, as they are warranted in understanding it, makes it inherently 'fitting' to experience the relevant emotion.

My interest is in the reasons mentioned in (III). I will call these evaluative-practical reasons (EPRs). If the actions that we are interested in are expressions of emotion, and if we are looking for an account of practical reasons for such actions that does not reduce to the reasons in the list given earlier, a good starting point might be with irreducible reasons of fittingness for the emotional states themselves. We might hope that an account of these

distinctive reasons for action could then piggy-back on an account of the reasons for emotion. The fact that the reasons for emotion are themselves distinctive reasons of fittingness would then ground the distinctiveness of expressive reasons.

How does Skorupski think that practical reasons can be grounded in evaluative reasons? If (III) is true then there must be some principle that provides the grounding. This, according to Skorupski, is the Bridge Principle (Skorupski 2010, 267):

- 'Whatever facts give x reason to feel Ø give x reason to do the Ø-prompted action, in virtue of being a reason to feel Ø'

As he illustrates the Bridge Principle (Skorupski 2010, 266):

- When someone does me a good turn, I have reason to act from gratitude by thanking or rewarding them, or returning the favour
- When someone does me an undeserved harm, I have reason to act out of resentment, in recrimination or demands for apology, etc.
- If there is reason to fear something then there is reason to avoid it
- If there is reason to be bored by something then there is reason not to attend to it

At least two considerations count in favour of something like the Bridge Principle. First, when we have reason to perform an expressive action, it seems to have something to do with the way the action 'fits' the situation; and, furthermore, it has something to do with there being reason to feel a corresponding emotion. Indeed, usually we do not need to offer a separate justification in order to explain why, in a situation in which we have reason to feel a certain emotion, we performed the corresponding action. For instance, I do not need to cite a further reason to explain why I apologised if I have already explained that I have reason to feel guilty. Second, it would require significant further explanation if there were irreducible reasons for emotion but not thereby corresponding reasons for action associated with that emotion, given the tight connection between action and emotion (Bennett 2012). On many accounts of emotion, emotion is partly constituted by tendencies towards action; but even if one does not take that view, specifying the action associated with an emotion is often the way to capture the specific profile of a given emotion (we will explore this theme further below). If our situation gives us some good reason to experience the emotion, then it would require special explanation if it we did *not* thereby have some reason to act than if we did.

The Bridge Principle might thus seem to be a good way to account for expressive reasons. Nevertheless, there are serious problems with Skorupski's

account. The Bridge Principle rests on a large generalisation. It is something of a hostage to fortune to claim that there is no case in which there is reason for emotion but not thereby an EPR. Can we be sure *already* – without thinking through all possible cases of appropriate emotion – that there are no counter-examples? Maybe when we have reason to fear an approaching tiger we have reason to run; but this reason is more plausibly prudential than it is an EPR. Furthermore, if the Bridge Principle is valid, it should be possible to explain in virtue of what it holds. Skorupski claims that the Principle is a priori, but even if that is correct, it should be possible to say something about what makes it true. However, Skorupski does not give any such explanation. And that leads to some difficult questions. For instance, for any emotion, Ø, could the action it prompts have been different? Skorupski has to answer no, since a positive answer would introduce unacceptable arbitrariness into EPRs. But why is the answer no? We would have to explain, for any emotion, Ø, why the Ø-prompted emotion is the action it *should* prompt. But again, no such explanation is forthcoming. Skorupski's strategy seems to be to posit the Bridge Principle in order to explain how EPRs are possible. While this strategy may be appropriate to Skorupski's defence of sentimentalism, it does not answer the questions we have raised here.

Skorupski's Bridge Principle attempts to generate practical reasons from the appropriateness of the emotions, on the basis of an a priori link between the emotion and the action. But the problem is that the nature of the link between emotion and action has to itself be a normative one if warrant is to be transmitted from the former to the latter. A better statement of the idea behind the Bridge Principle would be that there is reason for action only if the action is an *appropriate* expression of an appropriate emotion. However, this would require an account of the relation between emotion and expressive action that Skorupski does not provide.

5. A Theory of Expressive Reasons

The accounts considered thus far may be inadequate in themselves, but they give us some idea of how to proceed. On the one hand, we have the important idea that expressive reasons have something to do with responding to value, and specifically with responding *adequately* to the *particular nature* of some value. On the other hand, we have the idea that they are related to reasons for *emotion*. Now although these two ideas may seem very different, they are not necessarily incompatible. After all, the notion that emotion is underpinned by some sort of appraisal or evaluation is a familiar one, at least on broadly cognitive theories of emotion. This might suggest that at least some emotions can be understood as part of an adequate response to the shape of particular values. Furthermore, the idea that emotion involves some tendency towards relevantly connected action – and that

the distinctive feel of an emotion is to be understood as the body gearing itself towards such action – is also a familiar one in the literature on emotion (James 1884; Frijda 1986; Scarantino 2014). Thus a fruitful line of investigation looks like the following: 1) provide a better account of the idea that expressive actions are the adequate response to particular values; 2) investigate whether this account of expressive action reveals a distinctive class of expressive reasons; and then 3) see whether that account of expressive action and expressive reason provides a plausible explanation of the entanglement of reasons for expressive action and reasons for emotion.

Let us begin with Anderson and Wood's thought that expressive reasons concern responses to values. This way of putting matters does not yet help us to focus on distinctively expressive reasons. As I mentioned, expressive reasons are different from reasons to maximise impartial good. Expressive reasons rather concern the tie between a particular type of situation and a particular type of action: as Skorupski says, this seems to be something like a tie of fittingness. Nevertheless, maximising impartial good is clearly a response to value. Indeed, it may be an appropriate response. The Anderson/Wood formulation does not help us to focus on expressive reasons because it does not yet capture how expressive reasons are distinct from reasons to maximise impartial good. Another deficiency lies in the Anderson/Wood formulation's talk of 'value.' Some of the actions we are concerned with respond to good, valuable aspects of situations; but some of them respond to disvalue – such as guilt, mourning, commiseration. If it is accurate to say that expressive reasons concern responses to 'value' then this term has to be construed broadly, to include detriments to value as well as successes.

What is the difference between actions that are expressive and actions that maximise impartial good? In comparison to maximising impartial good, expressive actions can appear unproductive. While good consequences may come from performing actions like thanking, welcoming, leave-taking, grieving, and so on, their appropriateness seems independent of any such eventuality. Where, then, can their significance lie?[3] I suggest that the role of these actions is to *mark* situations rather than to alter them for the better: to *recognise* or *acknowledge* value and disvalue, rather than to promote value. According to Philip Pettit, the basic consequentialist insight is that, in response to any value, the appropriate response is always to promote that value (Pettit 1991). If there are expressive reasons, however, that is incorrect.[4] Sometimes it is important *also* to alter a situation for the better; sometimes it is impossible to do so; but, if there are expressive reasons, it can

[3]In what follows, I build on a theory of expressive action that has been set out in (Bennett 2016, 2021a, 2021b).

[4]Recall, however, that I remain agnostic about indirect consequentialism.

be important to mark it nevertheless. Thus I propose that we have distinctive expressive reasons to perform expressive actions only if we have reason to mark certain situations. The initial claim to which a defence of expressive reasons is committed is:

(i) MARKING: We have reason to perform actions that mark certain situations that contain some significant value or disvalue, independently of any reason to alter those situations.

Is claim (i) true? The idea is that pivotal, out-of-the-ordinary situations such as those involving new arrivals, leavings, achievements, disasters, wrongdoings, acts of generosity, etc. are such as to call for a distinctive acknowledgement. When I mourn, or apologise, or thank, or welcome, what I am doing first and foremost is to mark the situation as extraordinary in a particular way. Perhaps the fact that such situations call for such acknowledgement is even essential to our best understanding of the significant events.

We can distinguish two interpretations of MARKING: a communicative and a non-communicative one. The communicative interpretation says that we have reason to mark something only if we have reason to communicate such marking to a particular audience. The non-communicative interpretation says that we have reason to mark something independently of the effect on an audience. The communicative interpretation takes it that we can have reasons for expressive actions only if we have reason to alter the situation in a certain way by performing that action, viz., by communicating something through that action and thus having some desirable effect on an audience. The non-communicative interpretation, by contrast, holds that we can have reason to mark situations even if no such advantageous change is brought about. Thus the non-communicative interpretation holds expressive reasons to be sui generis, and distinct from actions that promote value.

Critics of sui generis expressive reasons such as Brennan and Jaworski assume the communicative interpretation. Perhaps they assume that the non-communicative interpretation is a non-starter.[5] However the non-communicative interpretation is highly plausible. We can have reason to thank someone, or apologise to them, privately, without addressing anything to them. We can have reason to manifest our joy or our grief independently of the effects of doing so. Such displays of emotion are not simply arational interruptions in a life of promoting value. We have reason to mark extraordinary situations because we have reason to lift those situations out of the ever-ongoing one-thing-after-another of life and create a space in which to dwell on them. We have reason to give certain situations and events a special

[5]They may also be following (Anderson 1995, 18): 'To have an evaluative attitude toward something is in part to govern one's deliberations and actions by social norms that communicate distinctive meanings to others.'

place in our life. These situations can be various, and may involve such things as e.g. a special role that, in a particular situation, another person has played in one's life; a special achievement of one's own; an especially good or bad thing one has done; the presence of a specially important person or object; a new arrival, or a departure, of someone or something significant; etc. The nature of human life and consciousness is such that these events would simply be swallowed up by the next thing we have to deal with, unless we had some way of creating space in which to dwell on them and do something to fix them, anchor them in our existence and our memory.

If we have reason to mark such extraordinary situations, are there better or worse ways in which to do so? The view that there are expressive reasons requires a commitment to a further claim to this effect:

ii. EXPRESSIVE ADEQUACY: There are criteria of adequacy for marking such situations.

(ii) is essential to the view that there are determinate expressive reasons. For if we agreed with (i), and yet it was arbitrary how such situations were to be marked, then we would not have expressive reason for any particular action. Thus if (i) did not imply (ii), we would only have expressive reasons in a very weak sense. However, (ii) should also be accepted. If it is accepted that we have reason to mark a situation, and the rationale for this given above is also accepted, then it is highly plausible that our marking can hit the target or misfire. If the role of expressive action is to lift situations out of the mundane and allow us to dwell on them then any particular action may be more or less appropriate to that function. Perhaps there is no single right way to do it, but responses can be more or less adequate. That also seems intuitive. I cannot normally thank someone, or express my gratitude to them, by depositing a large mound of faeces outside their front door. The problem is not just that this will communicate the wrong message; it also fails to be non-communicatively fitting to the situation. (Only if my doing so meets some further description – normally that the action is helpful to the person being thanked in some way – can it credibly be claimed to be adequate to the task of thanking.) Similarly, I cannot normally express my joy by moping. The action I choose to mark what is extraordinary in these situations has to meet certain criteria of adequacy.

If (ii) is correct, we should be able to say something about what these criteria are. If there are expressive reasons, and if these are reasons with which we are familiar in practical life, and by which we are sometimes guided, then it should be possible for us to say something about what it would be for an expressive action to misfire or to hit the target. The rationale that I have given for MARKING might lead us to think that the way in which expressive actions misfire or succeed is by succeeding or failing to create the psychological space through which one can dwell on a situation sufficiently to lift it out of the run of mundane events. This would be to collapse the

significance of expressive actions to the significance of a particular way of altering the situation, namely altering one's own psychology in relation to that situation. The ground of expressive reasons, and thus the explanation of their force, would be agent-focused. Alternatively, it might be thought that the only way in which expressive actions misfire or succeed is in terms of conventionally-established meanings that would be communicated to a relevant audience. On Scanlon's line of thought, for instance, if the conventions so dictate, it would be perfectly possible to 'say it with flowers' if one wanted to express condemnation, rather than with something like punishment (Scanlon 1988, 214).[6] Because the content of the conventions is intrinsically arbitrary, it simply depends on the way in which an audience will receive it. On this alternative interpretation, the ground and force of expressive reasons would be audience-focused.

However, both the agent- and audience-focused interpretations fail on two counts. They fail to accommodate the idea that the importance of MARKING lies in something other than altering the situation for the better. And they find the ultimate source of the reason for MARKING in the effect on the agent themselves or an audience, thus distorting the natural thought that the point of expressive actions lies in honouring the value or disvalue to be found *in the situation*. The agent-focused interpretation thus makes expressive actions look like a self-centred indulgence. The audience-focused interpretation makes expressive actions look like a fancy piece of communication. The insight behind MARKING, by contrast, is that some situations simply call to be acknowledged for what they are. Our relation to these situations – that is, our *rational* relation – can simply be to bear witness rather than to seek to make things better. The commitment to expressive reasons as a sui generis category of practical reasons thus involves the thought that the reason to bear witness to a situation by dwelling on it does not need to be grounded in the importance of bringing about a psychological change in oneself or in an audience.

A more plausible interpretation of EXPRESSIVE ADEQUACY would rather be *situation-focused* and would claim that criteria of adequacy relate to the attempt to *represent* or *reflect* or *capture* the salient features of the situation. If the point is not always to change the situation, but to recognise or acknowledge it, then the norms that govern the adequacy of our attempts to do so will concern how well we capture or reflect the nature of that situation in our actions. It might seem strange to think that actions are a representational medium. However, the idea that actions can be symbolic is a familiar one (though not always well understood). If actions are symbolic then they are capable of pointing to something beyond themselves; and

[6]Though Scanlon does qualify this with 'or perhaps more appropriately, with weeds,' which might be a recognition of the point made in the text.

presumably they can point to that thing adequately or inadequately, depending on whether their symbolism is adequate or inadequate.

This thought requires some unpacking. If actions are symbols, they must be capable of referring. Actions are capable of marking situations adequately because they are capable of referring to those situations, or referring to what is salient (or 'mark-worthy') in those situations. Symbolic action therefore gives the agent an opportunity to put into the symbols of their action what it is that they find mark-worthy in the situation. Their attempt is adequate to the extent that they are correct in what they understand to be mark-worthy and to the extent to which they succeed in finding symbolic actions that correspond to their understanding. However, if symbolic actions refer, they do not do so in the same way that 'dog' or 'chien' or 'Hund' refer (Bennett 2016). These terms refer to dogs according to a conventionally-adopted schema of reference that matches terms to objects, but where the terms are essentially arbitrary and the nature of the connection between symbol and referent purely based on usage. By contrast, when action is expressive, its symbolism involves a more intimate correspondence of the referring features of the action with the salient features of the situation that call to be marked. The salient features have to be *embodied* in the action, as if these mark-worthy features are taken up in the action and made part of it. The symbolism of the action has to resonate with the nature of the situation, such that one can perceive the nature of the situation in the action. Thus it is more as *iconic* than as denotative that those actions that seek to mark a situation refer. The third and final claim to which a defence of sui generis expressive reasons needs to be committed is thus as follows:

iii. SYMBOLISM: The criteria of adequacy for marking stem from the need to capture the salient features of the situation in corresponding symbolic features of the action.

For instance, we can see embracing someone in welcome or leave-taking as symbolic of the perception that the person arriving or leaving is someone one wants to have close. The deferential posture of the apologiser can be seen as symbolic of the perception that their wrongdoing puts their position in the relationship in doubt. Deferential bowing or kneeling can be seen as symbolic of the relation of inferior to superior. Raising a fist is symbolic of defiance and determined resistance. A similar analysis might be illuminating in relation to Colin Kaepernick's taking the knee (perhaps combined with deferential respect of victims or precursors in the struggle).[7] I am not committed to the adequacy of any of these symbols. Some expressive actions become formalised and merely ritualistic, and their symbolism a dead metaphor. Some of the common expressive actions we deploy may turn out to have a symbolism that we should find repugnant. But this would not

[7]For more detailed analyses of particular cases, see (Bennett 2016, 2021a).

undermine the idea that expressive actions answer to a genuine human need. My account explains the point of such actions, and the form of practical rationality involved in them.

We have now developed the basis of a theory of expressive reasons that goes further than the remarks of Anderson and Wood. According to this theory, we have reason to mark certain situations with actions the symbolism of which is adequate to the salient features of those situations – that is, to that which calls on us to lift these situations out of the mundane and to dwell on them as in some way extraordinary. I have argued that we can understand acts of thanking, welcoming, leave-taking, mourning, protesting and apologising, etc., as being fitting and appropriate insofar as these situations genuinely call to be marked and insofar as the symbolism of the actions is adequate. While critics such as Brennan and Jaworksi argue that there are no sui generis expressive reasons, their arguments assume that the expressive is merely a conventional form of communication.

The argument of this paper is compatible with understanding these claims about expressive reasons, (i)-(iii), as objective, universal and culture-independent. While I am not committed to regarding them in this way, there is nothing in the argument of this paper to rule out such an understanding. If (i)-(iii) are persuasive then we would have established that there is reason to mark certain situations symbolically. In principle these reasons might apply to all agents. What the argument would show is that expressive actions have a function, and this function does not depend on any particular cultural meanings. Nevertheless, when we look at the symbolism of particular actions, this might well depend on cultural meanings. This is because of the fine-grained and holistic nature of symbolism. For instance, think about the different symbolism of touching someone on different parts of their upper body – on the top of their head, on their cheek, on their shoulder, on their elbow. To some extent there might be a universal human meaning to these gestures. But it also seems clear that any such common significance can be elaborated by different cultural understandings of social distance and of the body, and of the face in particular. Thus even if there is a culture-independent reason to mark a situation with adequate symbols, the question of which symbols are adequate might be culture-dependent.

6. Expressive Reasons and Emotion

The theory developed here does not assume sentimentalism, either at the level of first-order normative ethics, or at the meta-ethical level. It does not assume that expressive reasons arise only because we are subject to certain emotions. This is the significance of beginning with Anderson and Wood's view that expressive action is action that is oriented in a certain way to value. Whether in the final analysis the best understanding of expressive reasons is

a sentimentalist one is a further question. Neither is it assumed – or argued – that only creatures with emotions could have expressive reasons. It might be that accepting the existence of expressive reasons makes those accounts of morality, like Kant's, that claim to apply to all possible rational creatures, less plausible. But while the argument here is compatible with that conclusion, it does not require it.

However, I would now like to look at whether this account of expressive reasons can give us an explanation of the kernel of truth in Skorupski's Bridge Principle. To recall, this is the idea that reasons for emotion are entangled with reasons for action expressive of that emotion. We can formulate Skorupski's Bridge Principle as follows:

(a) If one has reason to experience emotion E, one thereby has pro tanto reason to do V, where V is the expression of E

One question we raised about this version of the Principle concerns its generality: can we be sure in advance that the Bridge Principle holds for all E and all V? Another question we raised was about the lack of explanation of what makes the Principle true. And we raised a question about what the link between E and V is meant to be. Skorupski uses the term 'emotion-prompted' for V. However, this is insufficiently precise. Transmission of warrant from emotion to action cannot take place unless V is somehow appropriate to E, or to the circumstances that warrant E. But Skorupski does not explain what makes V appropriate in that way.

Nevertheless, we also saw that something in the vicinity of the Bridge Principle may be correct. Could the account of expressive reasons given above show that a related principle can capture what is correct about the Bridge Principle? While a full defence of such a claim would require me to defend a theory of the nature of the emotion – which I am not in a position to do in this paper – the following sketch provides some explanation of how we can accommodate what seems correct in the Bridge Principle. Start with the following principle:

(b) If one has expressive reason to perform action V in situation S then one has the same reason to experience emotion E in S

The foregoing account of expressive reasons can provide an explanation of this claim if we adopt a certain view of the nature and psychological role of (some) emotions. On this view of the emotions, expressive actions are essential to the identity of (some) emotions. This claim need not hold of all emotions; indeed, I think it implausible that it holds of all emotion. Nevertheless, a significant class of emotions may be illuminated by considering them in this light. This understanding of the emotions falling into this class can be argued for in two claims.

The first claim is that the relevant emotions are a complex of sensation, bodily changes, perception, evaluation, patterns of thinking and inference, and tendencies towards action or motivation, which are unified by an

attitude towards a certain action or posture or gesture as called for by the situation.[8] This view of emotion helps to explain the link between appraisal and action in emotion. But it also promises a more powerful explanation of the appraisal involved in emotion. For instance, the emotion of guilt is based on an understanding of oneself as having violated some binding ethical standard. However, one can have such an understanding and perception of oneself without experiencing guilt. Thus an analysis of guilt that confined itself to this account of the evaluation involved is insufficient. My suggestion is that, in order to capture the specific nature of guilt as an emotion, we need to add reference to an experience of one's situation as calling for a certain action or posture or gesture. The particular discomfort or pain of guilt – the sensations and bodily changes involved – is better explained as the discomfort of understanding oneself as fragmented by one's wrongdoing – of blaming oneself for one's deeds – in a way that only atonement can put right (see e.g. Bennett 2002). Similarly, we might attempt to analyse compassion as based on a perception of another as suffering misfortune or need. However, one can have this perception and yet not experience the emotion of compassion. A better analysis of compassion would explain it as the experience of one's situation as calling for a particular action or posture or gesture: specifically, that one display sympathy, and give help and care to the person in need. The particular feeling of compassion arises from the motivation towards looking after the person, and can be especially painful when there is nothing to be done and only sympathy remains.

As I say, this view of emotion as unified by an attitude to an action as called for may not hold of all emotions. However, I believe that it is plausible and illuminating in relation to at least some, perhaps many, emotions. This view of these emotions stands in opposition to views that have sought to identify emotions with a particular mental state or activity, such as judgment (Nussbaum 2004) or perception (de Sousa 1980; Tappolet 2016). One criticism that can be made of the perceptual view is that it is over-intellectualistic and leaves out the role of sensation and distinctive motivations. Another criticism is that the perceptual account of emotion lacks explanatory power unless supplemented by the view I am proposing. The perceptual account does not give a sufficiently fine-grained explanation of the nature of the perception that is characteristic of a particular emotion unless this perception is explained as involving an attitude towards an action as called for. While the perceptual view sees emotions as centrally involving the perception of certain features as salient, a deeper explanation requires us to say, for any given emotion, in what way those features have to be salient for that given emotion. The same event – say, a person leaving – can be the basis of very different emotions, such as sorrow or joy. On the view of emotion I am

[8]For some helpfully related recent papers, see (Mueller 2018); and (Naar 2020).

suggesting, the way in which these features are salient for different emotions is captured by saying that these different emotions involve attitudes towards different actions as called for: for sorrow, the event is one to be deplored, grieved at, whereas for joy it is to be celebrated. The specific identity of the emotion is captured by the action or posture or gesture that the agent takes to be called for in the situation, and to which the emotion motivates.

Similar criticisms can be made of analyses of emotion in terms of belief-desire pairs (e.g. Marks 1982). Even if we accept that emotion always involves a belief-desire pair, it seems perfectly possible to have the pair in question and yet not to experience the emotion. My suggestion is that what has to be added is an attitude towards a certain action as called for in the situation. Furthermore, the explanatory power of belief-desire analyses is limited. The key question left unaddressed by the belief-desire view is why, given that an agent has a certain belief, they therefore come to have the paired desire when experiencing a given emotion. Simply analysing the emotion into the belief-desire pair doesn't by itself illuminate the perspective of the emotion, on the basis of which, given that one believes one is in a certain situation, one thereby takes oneself to have reason to act in a certain way. The idea that emotion involves an attitude towards an action as called for in the situation explains this. While the above remarks certainly do not constitute a full defence of this account of emotion as unified by an attitude to action as called for, they are sufficient, I hope, to show some of its advantages. If this account is plausible, we can start to see that an attitude to *expressive* action as being called for might be essential to the identity of some emotions.

We can now move on to the second claim to be made in favour of the view that expressive action is essential to the identity of some emotions. This second claim is that an important psychological role of emotion – what justifies at least some episodes of some emotions – is the same as that which we have attributed to expressive action. In other words, the psychological role of (some) emotions is that of marking certain events as significant, thereby lifting them out of the mundane run of events and dwelling on them, creating a special place for those events in the agent's psychological economy. Emotions are, in Martha Nussbaum's apt phrase, 'upheavals of thought' (Nussbaum 2001). Not just of thought, but of sensation and of the body in general. When appropriate, emotions involve a finely attuned responsiveness to the valence of the situation. But what is the point of such psychological upheaval? Philosophers have been impressed by the way in which emotions can be attuned to prudential ends, and can have a strategic benefit in preparing the agent quickly, perhaps without the need for conscious reflection, for action that will, more often than not, be beneficial to her. However, while this prudential analysis may fit the case of, say, fear, it does not obviously fit the case of gratitude or joy or guilt or shame. To the extent that there are actions, or postures, or gestures to which these emotions

tend, it is less easy to argue that they have prudential value. The theory of expressive reasons developed here provides a plausible alternative. The role of these emotions is rather to recognise and acknowledge the salient features of the situation, even when there is no reason to seek to alter that situation. The rationality of these emotions lies rather in the fact that they are partly constitutive of treating these situations with the seriousness (or indeed, the levity) that they call for. When combined with the claim above that emotions are psychological complexes unified by an attitude to a certain action as called for in the situation, we can now see the plausibility of the idea that some emotions are unified by an attitude to *expressive* action as called for in the situation.

The account of emotion sketched here raises some questions. The emotions that it imagines are not psychologically 'basic' emotions. Rather they are in some sense socially constructed. But how does the process of construction take place? I have not given such an account here.[9] If these emotions are socially constructed, does this assume that there is a basis of non-constructed emotional psychology that provides the building blocks for the types of emotions that I have in mind? That seems plausible, but how the building blocks are built upon is again something that I have not explained. What the account sketched here hints at is the possibility of a cultural elaboration of the emotions that becomes to some extent autonomous of the basis of these emotions as brute psychological givens. The emotions sketched here have become responsive to expressive reasons, and are thus capable of being elaborated through social learning in a way that is not arbitrary from the point of view of reason. Of course, I do not explain how it is possible for our emotional lives to become to this extent autonomous of our brutely given psychology: rather such a possibility is assumed in my sketch. Nevertheless, such a rationalism about the emotions is, I believe, implicit in a mature understanding of the role of the emotions in human life.

With the plausibility of this account of the emotions sketched (and acknowledging the limitations of this sketch), we have made significant headway in explaining why something like Skorupski's Bridge Principle – and in particular claim (b) above – is likewise plausible. That is, we have provided the basis of an explanation for the fact that, when one has expressive reason to act in a certain way, one thereby has non-instrumental fittingness-type reason to experience some relevantly connected emotion. Reasons for expressive actions are linked to reasons of fittingness for emotion because a situation that calls to be marked by some expressive action will usually also call to be marked within the agent's psychological economy. 'Dwelling on' the situation requires the agent's attention to be appropriately focused on the salient features of the situation while the agent engages in the

[9]For an example of the kind of account that might be adapted to serve this purpose, see (Kelly 2011).

expressive action. The explanation for (b) is that a situation that calls to be marked by an expressive action also calls to be marked by emotion, given that (some) emotions are partly constituted by an attitude to an action as called for in a situation, and that the psychological role of (some) emotions is to mark such situations. On the same basis, a further variation on the Bridge Principle is also plausible:

c. If one has pro tanto reason to V, and one thereby has reason to experience E (as in b above), one has reason to V as an expression of E, and thus to manifest E in V–ing.

For instance, if there is reason to apologise for a non-trivial wrong that one has done someone then there is also reason to feel bad about what one has done, and to express one's feeling bad in the apology. If one were to apologise in such a case without the emotion, or in such a way as to manifest indifference, there is an important sense in which one will not really have apologised, or certainly not apologised properly; the apology will not do the normative work of repairing relations that it is there to do (Bennett 2022). Hence we can say in such a case that one will not really have complied with the reason to apologise. The same will go for celebrating or thanking or welcoming or protesting. These actions are all cases of *emotion work*. That is, they are cases in which the reason for which the action is called is also a reason for which one should experience and manifest relevant emotions. Without the emotion and its manifestation in the action, one would not have complied with the reason to V.

7. Conclusion

We now have a better understanding of the nature of sui generis expressive reasons than the accounts put forward by Anderson, Wood and Skorupski. While all three authors attempt to make claims about rational action in general, my focus has been on a particular class of *expressive* actions such as thanking, welcoming, apologising, protesting and mourning. How far this class can be extended I have not attempted to consider here: it has been sufficient to attempt to establish my theses as pertaining to certain paradigm cases.

Anderson and Wood have the insight that expressive reasons have something to do with appropriate response to the shape of a particular value. Yet they do not explain the specific kind of response that expressive reasons speak in favour of; and they do not explain what is distinctive about the way in which expressive reasons speak in favour of such a response. Their accounts are therefore vulnerable to the objection that expressive reasons are either not sui generis – that they reduce to other types of practical reason – or that they lack force. By contrast, I have explained why expressive reasons have force and are sui generis. Such reasons speak in favour of a response that marks the

situation in a symbolically adequate way, that the agent should thereby dwell on the situation as one that is to be lifted out of the mundane.

Skorupski has the insight that the reasons that count in favour of expressive actions are entangled with the reasons that count in favour of relevantly connected emotions. This seems plausible in part because expressive actions such as thanking, welcoming, apologising, mourning and protesting can all be performed as expressions of emotion, and it is standardly the case that it is appropriate that they be so performed. However, Skorupski does not explain the nature of this entanglement, and his arguments for the Bridge Principle are insufficient. I have suggested that reasons for expressive action are entangled with reasons for (some) emotions because (some) emotions are partly constituted by an attitude to expressive action as called for by the situation. I have argued that this view of such emotions is plausible and can be considered an improvement on some alternative views of emotion.

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