Of all the phenomena we experience in our inner lives, there is perhaps none more salient than emotion. The sensations that fear, joy, or sadness send rippling through our bodies seem to consume us in a way that thoughts, perceptions, or pains do not. Emotions colour our minds and bodies so immediately and completely that they feel automatic; triggered without any inner discourse or appeal to reason. This feeling was echoed most famously by William James, who described emotions as just that – feelings. To James, trembling is not just a symptom or component of fear – trembling *is* fear. As he says, emotions are "nothing but [sensorial brain] processes variously combined." (James, 1884, p. 188) Without a bodily response, there is no emotion.

While this view is persuasive on its face (and for a good while, it was), it misses the mark on several key characteristics of emotion. The one I will focus on here is *the role of cognition*. If we follow James' garden path, the causal chain of emotion goes something like this: we perceive some fact of the world, undergo some bodily changes in response, and then have some thought about the whole ordeal. If James is right in placing thought *after* bodily response, then the elicited emotion appears to be purely mechanical. We experience something, and by instinct, our bodies are cued to respond in some particular way. While this jives quite nicely with the picture of emotion as a dominating force that haphazardly flings us to and fro, we are hard-pressed to explain cases in which we seem to feel an emotion, *yet fail to act on it*.

To take an example, when we feel anger, we are typically compelled in the moment to correct the wrong that has been done to us. But sometimes, we are not – sometimes, we may recognize that lashing back may not be particularly productive, or that our aggressor's actions may have stemmed from a misunderstanding. In the face of an emotion, we certainly feel that we

have a *choice* to act on it, or not. That is to say, emotions possess a certain *motivational power* that we can either be swept up by, or choose to override.

In saying all this, I mean to highlight the space that seems to exist in the emotional process between perceiving a situation and feeling a bodily response. If, as James suggests, an emotion is identical to a bodily response, then we are predisposed to act in similar ways each time a specific emotion is triggered. A case of anger in which we decide to keep our composure ceases to be a case of anger at all. A defender of James may argue that we have focused on the wrong kind of bodily response here – granted, *actions* may differ with different instances of the same emotion, but the *internal, biological processes* remain the same. A case of composed anger will result in the same muscular tension and heightened body temperature as a case of flying rage. But again, there seems to be a gap between perception and bodily processes – if the 'anger processes' are predisposed to occur with certain perceptual cues, then we must innately possess cues for the 'composed' case, the 'rage' case, and all other possible anger-triggering perceptions. This would be a staggeringly large collection.

To my eye, emotions cannot *just* be bodily feelings brought on by perceptual cues. There must be some sort of *determiner* for those feelings, some sort of middleman that receives a perception and decides which set of feelings to switch on. This determiner, I feel, takes the form of cognition – specifically the form of *beliefs*. In my experience, there is no easier way to induce an emotion than by recalling a situation strongly tied to a belief. This happens all the time – for instance, the reason we wholeheartedly cringe when we remember an embarrassing moment is because we believe that we have compromised our social standing in some way. Similarly, the reason we start fuming again after remembering a frustrating argument is because we believe that we were right and the other was wrong. You may notice that in both these examples, the belief

being enforced was about *us*. That is to say, both were beliefs about objects or concepts *of importance to us* (i.e., our social status, our values).

My view is best championed by Martha Nussbaum, who describes emotion as "forms of evaluative judgment that ascribe great importance to things and persons outside one's control." (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 311) To Nussbaum, emotions are beliefs (p. 316) that possess three characteristics: they must be *intentional* (p. 315), *eudaimonistic* (p. 318), and *accepted* (p. 321).

By *intentional*, Nussbaum does not mean to imply that emotions have to be purposeful. Rather, she is getting at the philosophic use of the term – if emotions are intentional, they "are about something; they have an object." (p. 315) This intentionality or 'aboutness' of emotion certainly seems true – sadness is *about* loss, anger is *about* being wronged, and so on. Make no mistake, intentionality on Nussbaum's account is not just a constitutive component of emotion, but part of its very identity: "take [the emotion's object] away and [fear, for example] becomes a mere trembling or heart-leaping." (p. 315)

But why should an emotion's intentionality figure so strongly in its identity? Nussbaum argues that this is because an emotion's 'aboutness' is more than just a gesture towards an object, but rather involves the emoter's *subjective interpretation* of the object; it "embodies a way of seeing." (p. 315) When we think about an embarrassing moment, we feel shame because we see the object of our emotion – our social standing – as being *endangered* by our actions. However, if we were to interpret our actions in a more positive light (i.e., as demonstrating our zest and devil-may-care attitude), we would likely feel pride, or happiness instead. And this is *exactly* what Nussbaum is getting at – our way of viewing the intentional objects of our emotions is what defines them. "What distinguishes fear from hope, fear from grief, love from hate—is not so

much the identity of the object, which might not change, but the way the object is perceived." (p. 316)

This point of intentionality is particularly important because it specifically addresses what James' account of emotion lacks. By construing emotion as bodily feelings alone, we are left without any good way to: *a)* justify them, or *b)* distinguish them. But, by giving emotion an intentional object, we are able to: *a)* explain how an emotion has come to pass by appealing to our interpretation of its object, and *b)* distinguish between emotions by comparing their interpretations.

Nussbaum's emotions are also *eudaimonistic*. As I have already remarked, emotions seem to be beliefs about objects that are *important to us*. Nussbaum addresses this observation by using a term from Greek Stoic philosophy – eudaimonia, the condition of one's own flourishing. (p. 318) She suggests that the object of an emotion is important to us, because of "some role it plays in [our lives]." (p. 318) Revisiting the embarrassing memory, we recall that our shame lies in the belief that our social standing (i.e., the intentional object) has been damaged (i.e., our perception of the object). The object of our shame – our social standing – is intrinsically important, because it signals to others how we should be treated. Our belief is eudaimonistic then, because "[it has] to do with damage to me and to my own, to my plans and goals, to what is most urgent in my conception of what it is for me to live well." (p. 319) Our belief holds weight because *if we take it to be true*, it would mean a knock against our self-flourishing.

This brings us to the final characteristic of emotion. So far, we have suggested that an emotion is a belief (or set of beliefs) that is intentional and eudaimonistic. The last piece of the puzzle lies in the acceptance of this belief, or as Nussbaum puts it, "an assent to [its] appearance." (p. 321) Again, Nussbaum defers to a Stoic concept here, that of *judgment*. For

Nussbaum and the Stoics, making a judgment is a two-step process: the first involves recognizing the current state of affairs; "that such and such is the case." (p. 322) The second step involves either an acceptance of the appearance, a denial of the appearance (i.e., an acceptance of the contradictory), or a refusal to "[commit oneself] to it one way or another." (p. 322) In the first two cases, the acceptance or denial of the appearance *is* one's judgment of it. In the third case, no judgment is made.

It seems to me that Nussbaum's conception of *judgment* is synonymous with *belief*. If a judgment is an acceptance of a certain state of affairs, then it sounds rather like a belief – an acceptance that a statement is true. I will note that Nussbaum uses the term judgment, specifically the Stoic definition, to emphasize that these are judgments concerned with "vulnerable externalities," or "events beyond one's control." (pp. 324-5) This feels redundant, however, as a lack of control seems to follow from the concept of eudaimonia – for things that are tied to our own flourishing would cease to be of importance to us if we knew that we could reliably control them. For clarity then, I will continue to use the term *belief* in place of *judgment*.

To recap, emotions on this view are sets of beliefs about how some object or event will impact one's own life and well-being, for good or for ill. Again, this theory is intuitively appealing to me because it acknowledges the role of cognition in emotion, thereby addressing many of the issues present in feeling-forward theories like James' (i.e., a lack of intentionality, a lack of justification, difficulties with discrimination).

Some may argue, however, that we have now swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction and kicked bodily sensations too hard to the curb. They may ask us to explain situations where we *really do* seem to respond automatically, without any recourse to thought (e.g., like being startled by a snake-like twig while walking through the woods at night). A common

element of challenges like these is the presence of an *unreliable* perception. To respond to this problem, I will co-opt Annette Baier's notion of *chalance*.

If non-chalance can be described as a "temporary lightness of being, chalance or seriousness may be granted to be a temporary state of being bowed down with some weighty matter." (Baier, 2004, p. 342) To Baier, chalance is an emotion we experience before learning something of "great importance" to us. (p. 349) Specifically, this matter of great importance must be ambiguous; that is, we do not know if the outcome will be good or bad – only that it is important. While Baier uses bodily feelings and expressions to gauge chalance, I will adapt it to a belief – namely, the belief that our lives are about to change in some *unpredictable, wholesale way*. I posit that in instances of knee-jerk emotional reaction, we were *already* feeling chalance. That is, we were already feeling doubtful, or cautious of the situation because we were uncertain of its consequences. If we are thrown into a terror because of a misshapen twig, it is because we were already feeling uneasy about walking through the woods at night. These are, in effect, not scenarios in which we were caught off guard by our perceptions, but rather scenarios in which we were thinking about them *all along*.

At the top of this paper, I criticized James' view for being unable to account for cases in which we feel an emotion and choose not to act on it. It just so happens that cases like these also serve as a point of criticism against Nussbaum's evaluative theory. The argument goes something like this: if emotions are accepted beliefs about one's own flourishing, couldn't one just accept these beliefs and choose not to act as a result of that acceptance? This, to me, seems like a strength of the theory, precisely because it is able to address these 'behaviourally inert' cases of emotion. I will rebut further, however, and say that acceptance, used in this sense of *surrendering*, is not the same kind of acceptance that she and the Stoics had in mind. To them, to

accept an appearance is to *entertain* it – to "take it into [oneself] as the way things are." (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 322) To Nussbaum, when one *accepts* that a loved one has passed, they are seeing the situation in one of many ways, e.g., that their loved one is not coming back, that they are not just sleeping, and so on. This does not mean that they have *surrendered to the reality of the situation*, only that they have committed to *seeing things a certain way*.

As a final remark, I will add that the most compelling aspect of Nussbaum's view to me, above all else, is its basis in *self-preservation*. Our tendency to pursue what is best for the survival of not only our bodies, but also our *self-concepts*, is at a basic level implicit in all our thoughts and behaviours, and its central role in Nussbaum's theory is both intriguing and correct, I think. The best strategy in the game of survival is to thrive, and doing so requires one to avoid certain things and pursue others. It may be the case that emotions alert us to these things. If this is true, then just as it was in James' view, the story behind emotion is an evolutionary one. In this way, Nussbaum's theory can be thought of as an extension of James'. And that makes me feel happy.

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Albert Cao (301254951)

Simon Fraser University

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Kathleen Akins

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