

The Emergence of Emotion: A Reconceptualization of Its Constructive Mechanisms

Jan M. Jakopič

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Abstract

Emotion science lacks stable, interoperable definitions for many of its central constructs (e.g., emotion, mood, affect, feeling, goals, desires, drives, etc.). This paper argues that emotion science is impeded by terminological proliferation, weak consensus on definitions, and level-of-analysis confusions that undermine construct validity and comparability across studies. To address this, it offers a programmatic conceptual framework intended as a multi-level taxonomy that can support clearer labeling and future integration with brain-based mapping, while avoiding one-to-one structure-process assumptions. The central proposal is the construct emotional intuition, defined as a unified, pre-reflective, non-propositional grasp of situational significance arising from the synthesis of value (“what matters”) and purpose (“what it is for”). The framework attempts to explain the mechanism that construct emotional intuition by distinguishing appraisal and motivation as coupled but separable processes, producing four content types: affect and belief (value outputs) and impulse and drive (purpose outputs). It further separates levels of system dynamics (basal, tonic, phasic) from formats of manifestation (dispositional, background, episodic). Emotions are categorized as phasic constructions within a generalized emotions system, arranged along a construction continuum with three classes: fundamental, basic, and judgmental. By contrast, mood and attitude are categorized as tonic constructions that function as priors/primers from past outcomes, shaping (and being shaped by) phasic emotional episodes within this scheme. Within this scheme, affects plus impulses yield moods, fundamental & basic emotions, whereas beliefs plus drives yield attitudes and judgmental emotions. Method: conceptual synthesis and iterative model-building

Keywords: emotion taxonomy; emotional intuition; appraisal and motivation; affect, belief, drive, and impulse; mood-emotion distinction

Introduction

Psychological constructs and measures often suffer from a “toothbrush problem”: researchers prefer bespoke instruments over shared, standardized ones, fueling measure proliferation and

undermining comparability (Mischel, 2008; but see Elson et al., 2023). In emotion research, this dynamic feeds jingle-jangle fallacies by reusing the same label for different constructs or introducing new labels for the same construct, and the nominal fallacy of inferring a measure's content from its name (Weidman, Steckler, & Tracy, 2017; Lilienfeld & Strother, 2020). When studies claim to examine the "same construct" but vary widely in operationalizations, tasks, samples, timing, and analyses, their estimates cease to be commensurate; aggregation then risks conflating method variance with the phenomenon itself—a problem meta-method work highlights and seeks to diagnose (Elson, 2019). The other problem is that shared, standardized instruments lack an underlying consensus amongst experts. A historical-epistemological perspective investigates this and finds that concepts stabilize only when experimental systems, preparations, and writing practices cohere; before that, they function as open-textured "epistemic things," inviting drift across laboratories (Rheinberger, 2010). Many foundational papers converge on the diagnosis: progress is impeded by a lack of consensual definitions and conceptual clarity, by misalignment between verbal constructs and statistical practice, and by conflation of levels (Scherer, 2005; Hastings et al., 2011; Flake & Fried, 2020; Yarkoni, 2022; Russell, 2003). Dimensional and categorical accounts often talk past one another precisely because they operate at different analytical levels (Russell, 2003, 2009), and findings frequently fail to generalize due to hidden boundary conditions and non-invariant measurement across groups and time (Yarkoni, 2022). Consequently, loose semantics undermine construct validity, stall cumulative synthesis, and weaken interpretability for clinical practice, cross-cultural research, and affective-computing systems (Hastings et al., 2011; Henrich et al., 2010).

People routinely use psychological concepts even when the boundaries and conditions of application of those concepts are only vaguely understood (Haslam, 2016; Weidman et al., 2017). To communicate with such users at all, we often have to step back and work at the level of their existing conceptual repertoire, rather than assuming shared, fully specified definitions. It is usually taken for granted that concepts aim to represent reality, but when they are used without sustained empirical validation or philosophical analysis, they tend either to become so rigid that they exclude relevant cases or so elastic that they lose explanatory power (Haslam, 2016; Smithson & Verkuilen, 2006). My aim in this paper is to offer a more finely graded set of distinctions among psychological concepts, many of which have drifted as their associated terms are used too freely in some contexts and too narrowly in others. Clarifying this conceptual landscape is crucial if psychological science is to name its findings in ways that either fit, or explicitly problematize, our background assumptions about psychological functions (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955; Elson et al., 2023).

Work in neuroimaging suggests that selective one-to-one mappings between mental processes and specific brain structures are, at present, impossible to establish (Poldrack, 2010). McCaffrey and Wright (2022) labels this the "problem of no one-to-one mappings" and stresses that many of the psychological categories used in imaging studies lack a principled underlying ontology. Poldrack therefore argues that progress requires explicitly developed ontologies or taxonomies of cognitive processes, accepting that existing classifications are inadequate. The framework I develop here can be read as answering this call: it proposes a more fine-grained, multi-level taxonomy of mental kinds that is not tied to single regions but

is designed to be compatible with, and guide, future brain-based mapping. The underlying mental functions overlap across different brain regions, rather than having sharp, isolated boundaries, and this is consistent with research showing that purportedly distinct processes—such as different emotions or affective episodes—are difficult to separate cleanly in experience, behavior, and neural implementation (Barrett, 2006; Lindquist et al., 2012; Scherer, 2022). Contemporary network neuroscience shows rapid progress but also openly acknowledges that our picture of how brain networks support cognition is still largely incomplete (Bassett & Sporns, 2017). The future might improve this as Huang and Shu (2025) present AI-based integration of multimodal neuroimaging for early detection and individualized treatment in neuropsychiatric disorders, and survey AI methods and data-fusion strategies designed for this purpose. A striking illustration comes from recent work in mouse neuroscience, where an AI-based transformer model trained on large-scale spatial transcriptomics data re-parcellated the brain into fine-grained regions, recovering known areas while also proposing hundreds of previously uncatalogued subregions (Lee et al., 2025). The fact that an artificial intelligence system can sharpen and revise our brain maps in this way highlights how overlapping and high-dimensional our target phenomena are, and how limited our unaided conceptual tools can be. Yet despite this growing body of data, we still lack both an overall scientific synthesis of these findings and a well-articulated theory of how the mind works.

At the same time, we still lack a widely accepted synthesis of these empirical findings or a shared mid-level theory of how the mind works. There are already several ambitious accounts of how the brain generates behavior and subjective experience, such as integrated information theory by Tononi (2004), the free-energy/predictive processing framework by Friston (2010), and global neuronal workspace models developed by Dehaene, Changeux, and Naccache (2011). Such theories are often built on heterogeneous and sometimes thin everyday notions of “affect,” “belief,” “motivation,” and related constructs. The role of this paper is to flesh out those background notions by proposing a set of concepts that can be revised or discarded insofar as they succeed or fail in organizing accumulating empirical evidence. Without such work, ill-posed or poorly differentiated concepts risk misleading empirical designs and distorting the interpretation of results (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). My method is more programmatic than exhaustive: it moves between a holistic picture of the mind and its parts, adjusting definitions so that the intersections and mixtures between processes can be described in a systematic way. Even if some readers find these proposals overly restrictive or overly expansive, they at least provide a concrete baseline for terminology and conceptualization that can support more precise empirical testing, richer clinical explanations in mental-health contexts, and a foundation in artificial intelligence.

My aim is not only to challenge our assumed understanding of emotions and consciousness, but also to present simple yet conceptually structured models that make key ideas intelligible in plain language and help experts converge on shared meanings for the terms they use. Because key terms are poorly defined and consensus is scarce, much of our presumed understanding of core constructs associated with different components of consciousness—from intuition and emotion to belief and affect—is likely misguided, or at best insufficiently precise to clearly differentiate them. A major issue lies in unexamined conceptual gaps. Experts sometimes forget that many central concepts, especially the non-empirical ones, are

generalizations; and as Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games suggests, their meaning rests on use rather than on any hidden essence (Wittgenstein, 2009, §§23, 43, 65-71). This can create an illusion of "good enough" understanding simply because a term is used correctly within a familiar context and gives a sense of contentment after an explanation. De Regt develops a contextual theory of scientific understanding on which achieving understanding of phenomena is a central epistemic aim of science, not just a psychological by-product of explanation (de Regt, 2017). On his view, such understanding requires intelligible theories-ones whose qualitative consequences scientists can grasp and use in constructing models-and intelligibility itself depends on the conceptual tools and skills available within a given historical and disciplinary context (de Regt, 2005, 2017). In light of this, my investigation of the emotion literature suggests that no coherent, shared conceptual framework currently exists. In response, I outline a more adaptable model, intended as a candidate framework that could integrate with AI systems and that offers conceptual distinctions which may be easier for future researchers to test.

Statistical and scientific models are approximations built for specific purposes: they ignore many variables, assume idealized forms (e.g., linearity, normal and independent errors), and compress complex mechanisms into relatively simple functions (Box, 1976; Box & Draper, 1987). Taken literally, this means that every model is "false" as a complete description of the world-*all models are wrong, but some are useful*-and insisting on a perfectly true model would amount to never using any model at all (Box, 1976). The framework I present here is the result of roughly 10 years of such iterative model-building: constructing an initial model, examining where it fails (conceptual misfit, empirical counterexamples, new data), and then revising or replacing it rather than treating any single formulation as final. This approach reflects the logic of idealization and approximation (deliberate distortion to make reality tractable), instrumentalism/pragmatism (evaluating theories by what they do-how they organize, predict, or guide action; Dewey, 1929), and fallibilism (all scientific claims remain open to revision; Popper, 1959).

Converging literatures indicate what a remedy must contain. Constructionist work shows that language scaffolds emotion concepts and shapes perception and experience-labels are not mere tags but part of the process (Lindquist et al., 2015). This is why it is vital to conceptually map the difference between more universal/basic emotions and those that are less universal but more constructed and culturally dependent. Core-affect theory distinguishes primitive feelings of valence and arousal from constructed emotion categories, cautioning against cross-level conflation (Russell, 2003, 2009). So far, such differentiation has been largely absent from the way emotion findings are accumulated. Data-driven mapping reveals dozens of categories arranged along continuous gradients, implying that useful taxonomies should encode both clusters and graded boundaries, aligning with prototype/hierarchical structure in lexical studies (Cowen & Keltner, 2017; Shaver et al., 1987). When boundaries between different classes of emotion lack categorical differentiation, the cultural use of specific terms can have the opposite of the intended effect: the terms ossify into rigid labels, treated as self-evident rather than examined philosophically.

As I argue here, progress in emotion science hinges on a common semantic foundation that fixes what, exactly, our labels denote and how categories are to be compared. Decades of work document that we share a word-*emotion*-but not a shared precise understanding. With downstream consequences for theory testing and evidence accumulation; a viable remedy is to adopt a design-feature working definitions and to specify the components of an “emotion episode” so claims become commensurable across labs and methods (Scherer, 2022). In the same spirit of semantic hygiene, survival-function accounts caution against reifying folk feeling words as scientific kinds; they recommend naming underlying functions and circuits and separating these from conscious experiences and concepts, thereby preventing level-of-analysis confusions in classification (LeDoux, 2012); but achieving this requires a prior philosophical analysis of the concepts that represent different emotional states and its components, so that empirical testing can be aligned with a coherent model and its results can be compared across studies. The appraisal tradition likewise shows why precision matters: distinguishing knowledge-level construals from proximal appraisals, and articulating core relational themes and their component questions, yields a useful vocabulary for similarities, contrasts, and lawful oppositions among categories (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Such conceptual sharpening not only advances scientific investigation but helps people more accurately perceive, label, and communicate subjective experience. Lindquist et al. (2015) argue that language is a fundamental element of emotion: it functions as the “glue” that binds bodily experiences and situational cues into emotion concepts and, in doing so, shapes perception. On this view, a shared, language-grounded semantic map is not merely cosmetic, it enables sharply framed contrasts and cumulative progress. They present converging evidence that a richer emotion vocabulary with mapped relations helps individuals differentiate look-alike states (e.g., “anxious” vs. “fearful”), better communicate needs and want, and choose effective responses, while giving scientists shared, testable categories that improve measurement and cumulative research. Converging evidence from neuroimaging meta-analysis likewise challenges one-label/one-location assumptions and favors organizing taxonomies around psychological operations and their combinations (Lindquist et al., 2012). Emotion science remains definitionally unsettled and empirically noncumulative; with a shared, language-grounded semantic map, we can pose sharply framed contrasts and link emotional experiences to clearly specified concepts that construct them-improving the cumulative progress. I suggest this paper be read primarily as a programmatic conceptual exploration rather than as a definitive taxonomy. Historical-epistemological work shows that early, open-textured constructs can be productive for discovery, provided we later stabilize them into shareable, operationally specified objects (Rheinberger, 2010).

In the next sections, I will attempt to resolve several problems psychology faces. The first is terminological. When discussing emotions, there is no single word that straightforwardly includes both emotions and moods. “Affect” sometimes serves this role, but it is often used in a narrower sense that omits belief-like and drive-like components. I therefore introduce the term emotional intuition. Although “intuition” is broad and can include emotions, instincts, and impressions; emotional intuition is meant to name the unified phenomenon in which the components of emotion (affect, impulse, belief, drive) and its tonic counterpart, mood, are integrated within a single framework.

What is Emotional Intuition

I use emotional intuition to name the overlap among emotion, mood, affect, and feeling: a non-conceptual, pre-reflective, phenomenally felt grasp that can occur without propositional thought yet yields an immediate “insight” into what a situation pertains. It is the non-propositional thoughtless content that combines the symbolic with the felt. In emotional intuition, content can remain preconscious while competing for prominence; the occurrent emotion manifests the winning contents synthesis (a presentation). Historically, the phrase emotional intuition is grounded in value phenomenology: for Scheler (1916), values are immediately given in affect (*fühlen*/feeling in his terminology). Later scholars summarize that stance as “emotional intuition”: e.g., Velázquez (2023) explicitly explains that *Scheler understands emotional intuition as equal to the eidetic intuition described by Husserl’s Phenomenology*; Hackett (2013) likewise glosses Scheler’s view as the immediate givenness of value through the term emotional intuition. In contemporary Aristotelian moral psychology, emotional intuition is framed not as an arational hunch but as “reason-infused and reason-responsive” cognition that can guide action while remaining answerable to reasons (Kristjánsson, 2021/2022). Building on this lineage, I specify the term emotional intuition as the most advanced form of intuition that is constructed through the combination of different values and purposes, and when the felt and symbolic merge in emotion.

Emotional intuition is the experienced significance that arises from the co-emergence of value (“what matters”) and purpose (“what it is for”). It has clear aboutness whose content is constructed by coordinated processes under goal directives, which govern the synthesis, weighting value by the relevancy hierarchy of the appraisal process and weighting purpose by the priority hierarchy of the motivation process. This directive-guided synthesis of contents yields a unified significance of the situation, experienced as emotional intuition.

This idea that emotions function as value and purpose “perceptions” is not new but hasn’t been explained in this way. This framing can be situated within existing work that treats emotions as action-guiding states (purposes) and also explains how their evaluative content is constructed (values). Classic motivational accounts treat emotions as modes of action readiness with control precedence, prioritizing relational ends and preparing execution while leaving room for regulation to shape overt behavior (Frijda, 1986, 2007). Damasio’s neurocognitive work casts emotions as somatic markers that map patterned body states to concerns in the world and thereby bias action selection toward adaptive coping—not as mere “feelings” but as perception-like guides for choice (Damasio, 1994, 1999). Appraisal theories specify how the value side of this picture is constructed: Lazarus’s primary/secondary appraisals and core relational themes, and Scherer’s stimulus evaluation checks (relevance, implications/goal-conduciveness, coping/control, normative significance) jointly differentiate emotions from other components during an episode (Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Lazarus, 1990; Scherer, 2001, 2009; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). On the purpose side, contemporary motivational syntheses emphasize that emotions selectively potentiate coherent sets of behavioral options, giving immediate directionality to what to do next (Scarantino, 2024, chs. on the motivational tradition).

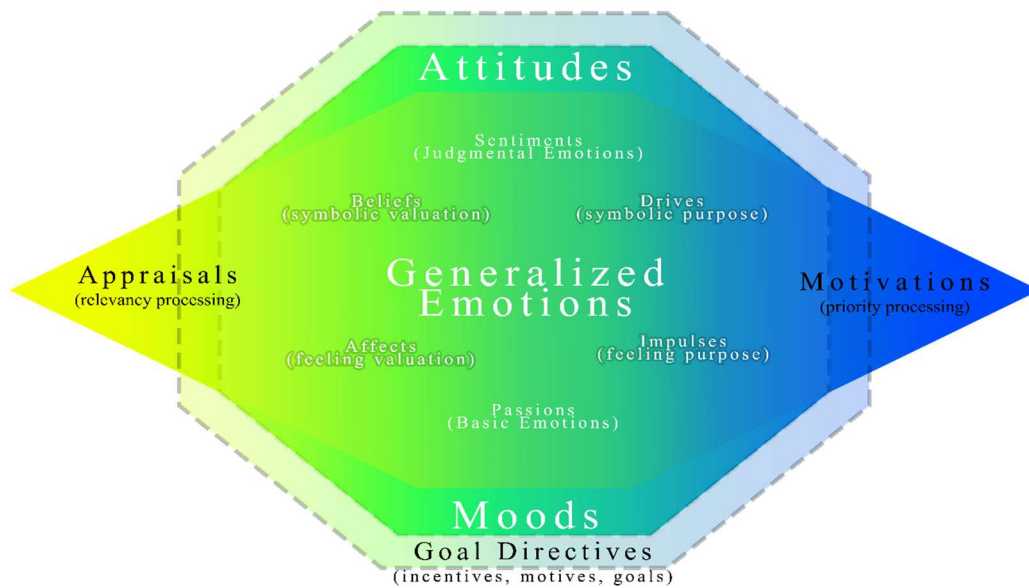


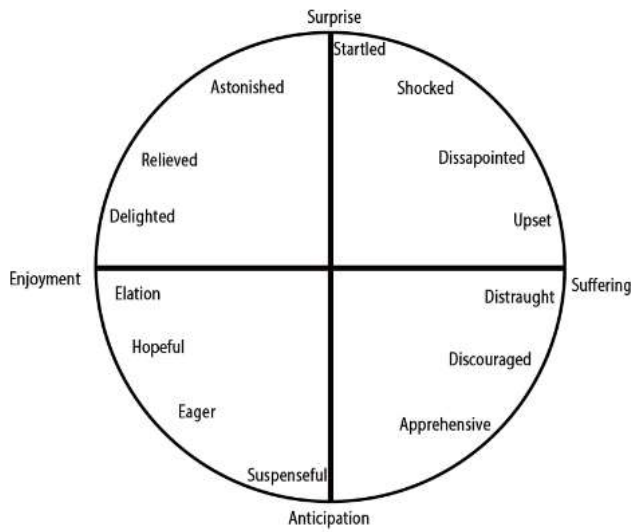
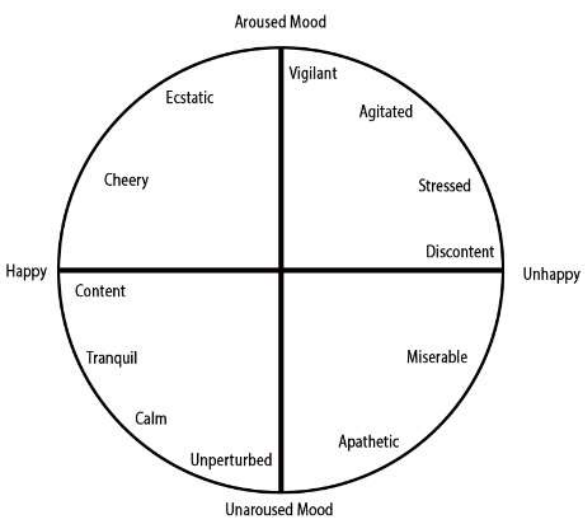
Figure 1. shows: Architecture of emotional intuition. Appraisal processes (left) construct value content (relevancy), and motivational processes (right) construct purpose content (priority). Goal directives regulate selection, sequencing, and inhibition during construction (schemas of significance). Moods & Attitudes are tonic representational states of past outcomes that serve as priors/biases for new processes. Within the phasic Generalized Emotions system, affects (felt valuation) and impulses (felt purpose) combine into passions (basic emotions), while beliefs (symbolic valuation) and drives/desires (symbolic purpose) combine into sentiments (judgmental emotions).

The Intentionality Behind Emotional Intuition

The contents of the mind have either mind-to-world or world-to-mind direction of fit (Searle, 1983; see also Moors, 2022). Values, such as beliefs and affects, have a mind-to-world direction of fit, meaning that it is fitting if the content of the representation is accurate in relation to the world. On the other hand, purposes, such as impulse and drive, have a world-to-mind direction of fit, meaning that it is fitting if the world conforms to the content of the representation. Once a person has a representation of value and purpose (i.e., emotional emotion) the contents of this representation should give veridical insight into what the world is about. In the case of emotional intuition, it's the affects and beliefs, as well as what possible directions of behavior the world offers-in this case impulses and will. Emotions are attempts to accurately describe the individual's situation within the environment by presenting them with "what it's about" and "what to do about it." Thus, appraisals are mind-to-world while motivations are world-to-mind process types. Emotions thereby have a dual intentionality: they purport to disclose value in the world and simultaneously prescribe purposeful action. Their guidance can be insightful but is defeasible-emotions may misrepresent or mislead in particular cases.

I term feelings as clusters of representational categories, as is already used in most languages. Feelings are the synthesized contents constructed from "simple" processes - that are

generalized to include sensations (meaning), affects (value), and impulses (purpose). They concern what is felt, a mode of the automatic givenness of an intrinsic nature. If these feelings lack symbolic connection, they are less constructed and may, for some, not even be conceived as emotions proper - I term these fundamental emotions (see picture 2) and fundamental moods (see picture 3). In such cases, intuition leads to a reflexive reaction where such primitive “emotion” is understood through one’s felt behavioral consequences. Whereas the symbolic is a mode of “phantasy” with deeper, “reconstructed” representations, which includes imagination (meaning), beliefs (value), and drives (purpose). They concern what can be created for the mind, enabled by quality of memory, and “in theory” separable from a species intrinsic nature. The symbolic can be considered as a recreation of past experiences. While Symbols are a mode of phantasy with deeper, “reconstructed” representations-including imagination, beliefs, and drives (drives are termed as desires in philosophical literature). They concern what can be created for the mind, separable from the givenness of nature: a recreation of experience.

 <p>A circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis is labeled 'Surprise' at the top and 'Anticipation' at the bottom. The horizontal axis is labeled 'Enjoyment' on the left and 'Suffering' on the right. The quadrants contain the following emotions: Top-Left (Astonished, Relieved, Delighted), Top-Right (Startled, Shocked, Dissapointed, Upset), Bottom-Left (Elation, Hopeful, Eager), and Bottom-Right (Distraught, Discouraged, Apprehensive).</p>	 <p>A circular diagram divided into four quadrants by a vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis is labeled 'Aroused Mood' at the top and 'Unaroused Mood' at the bottom. The horizontal axis is labeled 'Happy' on the left and 'Unhappy' on the right. The quadrants contain the following moods: Top-Left (Ecstatic, Cheery, Content), Top-Right (Vigilant, Agitated, Stressed, Discontent), Bottom-Left (Tranquil, Calm, Unperturbed), and Bottom-Right (Miserable, Apathetic).</p>
Picture 2. Fundamental Emotions Circumplex	Picture 3. Fundamental Moods Circumplex

Treating motivations, appraisals, and their resultant contents as functionally distinct yet coupled helps explain familiar dissociations between concepts. Agents can appraise the same situation differently but respond similarly, and vice versa. Introducing affect, impulse, beliefs, and drives as distinct from one another allows us to better identify the kinds of contents that construct emotions and to make more precise inferences about why this occurs (with practical medical applications). I do not claim that these types of representations can be cleanly separated empirically, though I provide evidence for that; I claim that the separation helps conceptually explain the specific type of emotion one is experiencing. At present, we rely on context and then generalize back to folk-psychological terms in the hope of a sufficient shared understanding. Using this terminology, we can say: I feel a bit of pain from working out (sensation), but it is not unpleasant (affect); it tells me I did well (belief), orients me to

work out more often (drive), and I feel the need to stretch (impulse); and even though it is painful to stretch (sensation), it has a pleasant quality (affect). Or consider an itch: when I have an itching sensation, I feel a strong need to scratch (impulse), and if I try not to, it becomes increasingly unpleasant (affect), which makes me frustrated (basic emotion). But when I scratch, even though it is painful (sensation), it feels good to do (affect) and gives me brief relief (fundamental emotion); afterward, I get scratch-induced pain (impression = sensation + affect), which I do not like but at least the urge to scratch the itch (instinct) is gone.

Many studies already support these distinctions. Associative learning shows that an odor's pleasantness can be shifted while its intensity and familiarity: The sensation remains relatively stable; in other words, appraisal-level associations can modify affect without altering sensation (Herz et al., 2004). Reappraisal/labeling paradigms likewise change felt valence while the sensory input is held constant (Gross, 1998; Ochsner et al., 2002), and startle-potentiation provides a readout of negative affect independent of overt action (Lang et al., 1990). By contrast, classic "liking vs. wanting" and Pavlovian-to-Instrumental Transfer findings show that cues and state manipulations can increase urges and work output (impulse/readiness) without necessarily increasing hedonic liking-evidence that motivation configures impulse rather than affect per se (Berridge & Robinson, 2003; Cartoni et al., 2016; Salamone & Correa, 2012; Trifilieff et al., 2013; Soares-Cunha et al., 2016, 2018, 2022). Together these literatures fairly support my idea and point to three distinct results from different processes-sensation (meaning content), affect (value content), and impulse (purpose content). Their activity patterns typically co-occur and interlock, which makes them hard to tease apart phenomenally; yet because they are separable-but-coupled, rearranging them can produce different experiences with the same inputs (e.g., same sensation with different affects; same affect with different impulses).

Pharmacological work complements this picture: administered β -adrenergic blockade (beta-blockers) weakens a memory's affective tag without altering its beliefs and propositional content (Kindt et al., 2009). Converging neuropsychology shows a double dissociation between implicit affective learning and declarative belief: patients can retain conditioned autonomic responses without knowing the facts, or know the facts without the affective response (Bechara et al., 1995). Face syndromes trace the same split between belief-like recognition and affective familiarity: in prosopagnosia, overt recognition fails while covert autonomic responses persist (Bauer, 1984); in Capgras, overt recognition is intact but autonomic "familiarity" is blunted (Ellis et al., 1997).

To build up a case for distinguishing the purpose constructing processes: researchers also investigated a separate split distinguishing what I term drives from impulses. The Reflective-Impulsive Model formally separates what they termed reflective goals/desires (drives in my model) from cue-triggered impulses (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Outcome devaluation / slips-of-action tasks show that, after a reward is devalued, people can still execute cue-bound responses-impulse without current desire-with strong evidence in both lab and clinical samples (de Wit et al., 2012; Gillan et al., 2011). Pavlovian-to-Instrumental Transfer in humans shows value-matched cues invigorate action even when outcome value is held constant (Talmi et al., 2008; Cartoni et al., 2016). Implementation intentions distinguish goal

intentions (“I want X”) from cue-linked if-then plans that automate initiation, decoupling action from momentary desire strength (Gollwitzer, 1999). Experience-sampling confirms everyday desires often go un-enacted, and some actions occur with weak desire (Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012). In addiction theory, automatized action schemata can drive use even when conscious desire is minimal (Tiffany, 1990).

Appraisals and Motivations as Interacting Processes Modulated by Goal-Directives

Across fine-grained experiments that distinguish neuronal kinds and their connections, the evidence converges on a functional split between appraisal and motivation: some populations carry comparative value signals that abstract away from immediate motor contingencies—paradigmatic “appraisal” roles—while other identified populations and opponent microcircuits causally set action readiness by mode selection, vigor, and persistence; given those appraisals (Padoa-Schioppa & Assad, 2006; Beyeler et al., 2016, 2018; Namburi et al., 2015; Fadok et al., 2017; Haubensak et al., 2010). Distinct cell classes can rapidly energize pursuit or impose constraint in opponent fashion, and arousal-linked mechanisms can selectively boost engagement under salient goals (Aponte et al., 2011; Mahler et al., 2014). Signals that down-weight approach in light of negative expectation and that bias choice toward safer options after unfavorable outcomes illustrate that “value” and “purpose” are coupled but non-identical roles: one organizes what the situation is about, the other configures what the agent is ready to do (Matsumoto & Hikosaka, 2007; Zalocusky et al., 2016).

A group of neurons long viewed as a brake actually gates motivation: nudged at anticipation it boosts willingness to work; nudged after the outcome it winds effort down (Soares-Cunha et al., 2016). So the old “go vs. no-go” picture is too crude: the two systems cooperate, with one modulating when and how much to act rather than simply opposing action (Xu et al., 2024). In my terms, it doesn’t change the appraisal (what is the value of a situation); it configures motivation (what you’re ready to do given that value). Soares-Cunha (2018) follow-up shows how that control is implemented: the effect runs through a dedicated control line to a downstream policy integrator. Turn it on at the cue and animals work harder; turn it on at the reward and they wind down; Flip the manipulation and behavior flips (Soares-Cunha et al., 2022). That means this path controls motivation (purpose construction), not how much the reward is valued. We know this because the manipulations change how hard animals will work for the same reward, while not increasing how much they like or consume that reward when cost is low. Complementary manipulations that strengthen a receptor class in the same circuit increase effort by weakening the canonical inhibitory output to its downstream target—again pointing to a change in work allocation rather than in how much the outcome is valued (Gallo et al., 2018). Critically, independent evidence shows that boosting this system elevates effort while leaving low-cost consumption and basic preference unchanged, reinforcing that these signals tune motivation rather than hedonic appraisal (Trifilieff et al., 2013).

Processes do not manifest content for the mind, or produce behavior, as an end-goal product that is finished; it is a constant flux of information interpretation that inevitably constructs content for the mind which translates to an activity in some form or another, be it conscious or not. As James puts it, experience unfolds as the felt now whose content is in ‘constant flux,’ even as the felt now ‘stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall’-a framing that treats mental content as continuously constructed rather than finished (James, 1890/1918, vol. 1, p. 631). And ideas are not inert: ‘every representation of a movement awakens in some degree the actual movement which is its object’ (James, 1890/1918, vol. 2, p. 526). On this view, perception and action are two faces of the same ongoing construction. As the mind actively interprets the stream of input within the brief “now,” it simultaneously configures potential processes and bodily readiness, biasing the focus of attention, so that by the time any measurable response appears, its enabling influences are already interwoven. In practice, there is no clean handoff from intuition to thought, but a single constructive loop whose outputs are mixtures presented as a unified consciousness stream. Or as Pessoa (2008) put it: Such “cognitive” and “emotional” signals rarely dissociate during processing, so the response to an item’s significance reflects their simultaneous action and the origin of the modulation is lost and cannot be uniquely assigned.

Appraisal theorists hold that appraisals may be “immediate and indeliberate” and that later appraisals in the process can be “more like evaluative judgments” that are deliberate and self-conscious (Helm, 2024). This fits the model as the immediate appraisal turns to affect, while the latter appraisals turn to beliefs, and to propositions when explicit thoughts run the show. In Scherer’s Component Process Model (CPM), appraisal is a component that springs changes in the other components; appraisal outputs elicit an action-tendency in the motivational component, which then guide changes in the remaining components (Scherer, 2001, 2009; see Scarantino, 2024, for summary). In contemporary appraisal accounts, the field converges on a set of molecular dimensions-novelty, intrinsic valence, certainty/predictability, goal conduciveness, agency, perceived control, and compatibility with personal or social standards-that jointly differentiate emotion episodes (Ellsworth, 2024). In Scherer’s CPM, these dimensions are organized into four appraisal objectives-relevance, implications (goal-conduciveness and related checks), coping potential (control/certainty), and normative significance-decomposed into 16 stimulus evaluation checks (SECs) that can be profiled for specific emotions (e.g., fear = high novelty, low intrinsic pleasantness, urgency, low control) (Scherer, 2009). By contrast, Smith and Lazarus hold that molecular appraisals coalesce into higher-level “molar” appraisals or core-relational themes (e.g., danger for fear, demeaning offense for anger, loss for sadness) before driving the other components (Smith & Lazarus, 1990; Lazarus, 1991). Such molar appraisals are the focus in my model online, as they explain how similar molar appraisal types participate with motivational processes and construct emotions. Complementing this, Lazarus also distinguishes primary appraisal (evaluating what is at stake) from secondary appraisal (evaluating coping potential), a distinction widely captured today by dimensions such as control/coping potential alongside goal-relevance and goal-conduciveness (Lazarus, 1966; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; overview in Ellsworth, 2024). While I do not concern myself directly with this differentiation, it is clear that it is present in a slightly different form; as the

model explains how and why different molar appraisal and motivational contents compete and through goal directives achieve goals that benefit the individuals - and their attempts at regulating their unpleasant emotions.

I treat goal directives as control schemas that surround the generative streams of appraisal and motivation processes. These schemas are content-triggered-specific appraised or motivated contents *awaken* matching control patterns-and their activation threshold/gain is graded by an importance hierarchy (prominent motives, goals, incentives). Functionally, goal directives weight selection, sequencing, and inhibition during construction, arbitrate conflicts between tonic priors (moods/attitudes) and phasic contents (current passions/sentiments), and permit directive preemption when certain content is high on importance hierarchy. This somewhat fits with Pessoa's (2008) ideas where goal-directed attention and task context influence the neural fate of affectively significant items, increasing the affective significance of a stimulus has effects similar to increased attention. Thus, thoughts can selectively boost relevance/priority through sentiments via goal directive, supporting or suppressing passion-level automatic intuitive processes. This translates into reappraisals when the main appraisal leads to an incompatible content to ones goal directives; this in turn activates processes that discontinue or contradict the ones going against the current goal directive. In short, goal-directives are wide-ranging types of schemas that have influence over how processes construct representational content.

Goal-directives function as schemas that guide action. When the contents of emotional intuition are represented, they operate as active schemas; when the contents are not yet represented, they remain as potential schemas encoded in dispositions, so that prior learning can still bias future behavior.

This framing aligns with regulation-first models in which modulation at multiple loci (situation selection/modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, response shaping) determines the final profile of an emotion episode (Gross, 1998; Etkin, Büchel, & Gross, 2015). It also fits computational mood accounts that cast mood as a summary of recent outcomes that biases subsequent perception and learning-i.e., a tonic prior that tunes control (Eldar & Niv, 2015/2016). Finally, evidence for cognition-emotion integration via dynamic network coalitions and hub-mediated flow regulation explains how attitudes and reasoning retune goal-directive policies over time (Pessoa, 2008; 2013). In short, goal directives are content-triggered, priority-weighted, and history-tuned policies that orchestrate value-purpose synthesis into an action-guiding episode.

Emotional Intuition: Levels and Formats

I often wondered how moods and emotions can both phenomenally be in an occurrent episodic or background state. And since the same underlying affective condition can function as a free-floating mood, as part of an emotional episode, or as a background bodily feeling that is not thematically attended (Russell, 2003; Colombetti, 2011; Damasio, 1999/2010), it is important to conceptually understand where and why they differ, so that researchers do not mistake one for the other, e.g. anger for irritability (Toohey & DiGiuseppe, 2017; Saatchi et al., 2023) or fear for anxiety (Davis et al., 2010; Sylvers, Lilienfeld, & LaPrairie, 2011). I

suggest restricting moods to the tonic level of activity and emotions to the phasic level (cf. Davidson, 2000, 2002, 2003) - irrespective of whether they are phenomenally in the foreground or background. Existing accounts already imply that what we call “mood” can be an occurrent, consciously experienced state (Parkinson et al., 1996; Siemer, 2005, 2009; Price, 2006), and that emotional processes can organize perception and action even when their feeling component is recessive or absent from focal awareness (Colombetti, 2011; Lambie & Marcel, 2002; Tsuchiya & Adolphs, 2007). On my proposal, these results are captured by treating mood-typical processes as tonic and emotion-typical processes as phasic, while allowing both to appear either as background or as episodic formats. The move from background to episodic (or vice versa) does not by itself change a mood into an emotion or an emotion into a mood; what distinguishes them is the underlying level, not merely whether they occupy the experiential foreground. However, this is not to deny that emotional episodes influence how moods develop, or that moods shape and set the ground for emotional episodes.

It often seems that to have an emotion is simply to experience an emotion; some authors explicitly argue that emotions are by definition conscious because they essentially involve subjective experience, and recommend reserving “unconscious” talk for emotional processes rather than emotions themselves (Searle’s connection principle that all intentional states are necessarily potentially conscious pushes in this direction; Sander, 2021; Searle, 1992). For a long time I was fully in this camp. I now think a more graded picture is needed: having an emotional episode normally does involve some awareness of the emotion, but this awareness can slip from in-focus consciousness into more preconscious or background forms. In global neuronal workspace accounts, information can be strongly represented in specialized systems yet fail to reach conscious access because attention is elsewhere (Dehaene & Naccache, 2001; Dehaene et al., 2006); only when it is “selected” or gains sufficient “strength” does it ignite a widespread workspace and become reportable. Models of consciousness distinguish between nonconscious processing, phenomenology, and explicit awareness, and allow for robust emotional processing without reportable feeling (Lambie & Marcel, 2002; Smith & Lane, 2016; Tsuchiya & Adolphs, 2007). Developmental work on levels of emotional awareness makes this explicit by treating emotional awareness as a graded cognitive skill, ranging from bodily sensations through action tendencies to differentiated blends of emotion, and by positing that components of emotional responses can exist at lower, implicit levels without ever being organized into higher-level, conceptually articulated descriptions (Lane & Schwartz, 1987; Lane et al., 1990; Lane & Smith, 2021). On such accounts, the processes that constitute an emotion can be represented while remaining outside focal awareness; they only become occurrent when they are integrated into higher-order representations or selected by attention. The fact that one can be more or less aware of an emotion therefore need not be reduced to the ability to explicitly avow “I feel X”; it reflects how far the underlying contents constructing emotion have progressed from subliminal or parametric formats into representational, fully reportable content presented in awareness.

I hold that mental activity is state-dependent: even in quiet moments the brain remains active, and what enters the foreground of awareness depends on the system’s current configuration. In my emotion model, I distinguish levels of system dynamics-basal, tonic, and phasic-from

formats of manifestation-dispositional, background, and episodic. I use dispositions for basal, trait-like biases; moods and attitudes for tonic configurations; and passions and sentiments for phasic transients. Crucially, these dynamics can shift format: tonic configurations can become episodic when foregrounded, and phasic bursts can settle into the background as lingering aftereffects. The layers are coupled, building on one another to shape phenomenal experience.

A lot of neurological studies show evidence that such differentiation is valid. Empirically, the “quiet” brain shows organized ongoing activity rather than idling (Raichle et al., 2001) supporting that the mental processing on the basal to tonic level can be considered as active even when one lacks awareness of them. Task engagement typically adds modest deviations on top of that ongoing activity, not wholesale surges; a selective reconfiguration (brief, focused coordination) atop an already-active system (Raichle & Mintun, 2006). One research program distinguishes a background mode that relaxes task engagement from a selective mode that sharpens currently relevant content, providing a concrete route by which a background orientation can prime what comes to the fore (Aston-Jones & Cohen, 2005). It seems that at the phasic level, contents reach awareness when they are broadcast widely enough to coordinate many capacities at once (Dehaene & Changeux, 2011).

Several existing frameworks already distinguish levels of processing in ways that parallel my basal-tonic-phasic scheme. Theorists of consciousness, for example, propose taxonomies that separate subliminal, preconscious, and conscious processing rather than relying on a single conscious/unconscious cut (Dehaene et al., 2006; Kouider & Dehaene, 2007). On the global neuronal workspace view, conscious perception is systematically associated with surges of parieto-frontal activity that amplify and broadcast a subset of representations into reportable awareness, whereas subliminal and preconscious processes remain limited in strength or access (Dehaene et al., 2006). Philosophers in the Rylean tradition similarly contrast dispositional mental properties-being “bound or liable” to enter certain states under appropriate conditions-with occurrent states or changes themselves (Ryle, 1949).

Phenomenological work on existential and background feelings describes bodily rooted background feelings that are not directed toward specific objects but instead “colour and structure one’s experience as a whole,” in contrast to more object-focused emotions (Fuchs, 2009; Ratcliffe, 2008). Within emotion theory, Lambie and Marcel (2002) explicitly treat separately the content of emotion experience, the underlying nonconscious correspondences, and the processes that produce emotion experience, using this tripartite structure to explain the heterogeneity of emotional experience. In affect-structure research, hierarchical models of mood identify broad trait-level dimensions of Positive and Negative Affect that reliably emerge above more specific mood descriptors in factor analyses, indicating a multi-level organization of affective phenomena (Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Taken together, these lines of work support distinguishing dispositional, background, and episodic formats of emotion-related content and relating them to differences in accessibility (subconscious, preconscious, and attended), even though the specific basal-tonic-phasic terminology is my own synthesis. It is important, however, to distinguish the format contrast-dispositional, background, episodic-from the level contrast-basal, tonic, phasic-because the two cut across one another rather than coinciding. A single tonal property such as anxiety (moods are treated as tonic dimension) can be formatted as an episodic flare-up, as a background anxious orientation, or

as a dispositional (trait-like) tendency, so that “anxiety” does not belong to only one tier but can occupy different combinations of level/activity.

Several existing frameworks support carving mental life along more than one dimension, in ways that partially parallel (but do not collapse into) my basal-tonic-phasic scheme. In consciousness research, taxonomies distinguish degrees of accessibility-subliminal, preconscious, and conscious-rather than relying on a single conscious/unconscious divide (Dehaene et al., 2006; Kouider & Dehaene, 2007). On the global neuronal workspace view, conscious perception is associated with transient surges of parieto-frontal activity that amplify and broadcast a subset of representations into reportable awareness, whereas subliminal and preconscious processes remain limited in strength or access (Dehaene et al., 2006). In philosophy, the Rylean contrast between dispositional properties (being “bound or liable” to enter certain states under appropriate conditions) and occurrent states highlights a different axis: whether a property is a standing tendency or a current episode (Ryle, 1949). Phenomenological work on existential and background feelings describes bodily rooted background feelings that are not directed toward specific objects but instead color and structure one’s experience as a whole (Fuchs, 2009). Relatedly, Ratcliffe (2008) argues that “existential feelings” form a typically unthematized backdrop against which intentional states and possibilities show up. Within emotion theory, Lambie and Marcel (2002) explicitly separate the content of emotion experience from underlying nonconscious correspondences and from the processes that generate experience, using this distinction to explain heterogeneity in what emotions feel like. In affect-structure research, hierarchical models identify broad trait-level dimensions of Positive and Negative Affect that reliably emerge above more specific mood descriptors, indicating a multi-level organization of affective phenomena (Watson & Tellegen, 1985).

Taken together, these lines of work indirectly support the need to distinguish formats of emotion-related content-dispositional, background, and episodic-and relating them to differences in accessibility (subliminal, preconscious, attended). My basal-tonic-phasic terms, however, target a different contrast: levels of system dynamics (basal constraints, tonic configurations, phasic transients). The format contrast (dispositional/background/episodic) and the level contrast (basal/tonic/phasic) cut across one another rather than coinciding. A single tonal property such as anxiety can be formatted as an episodic flare-up, as a background anxious orientation, or as a dispositional tendency; and any of these can be more or less accessible to awareness depending on current conditions.

Belief & Affect as Value Content Produced by Appraisals

On the standard view, a belief is a standing (dispositional) state rather than an occurrent episode: to believe that p is to be disposed to treat p as true-guiding inference, memory, and action-even when you’re not currently rehearsing or explicitly representing it; occurrent judgments or reports just token that standing disposition in an episode (Ryle, 1949; Audi, 1994; Schwitzgebel, 2019). I regard the classical dispositional-occurrent account as inadequate. I will argue a different point, that belief is not a single standing state: like other mental contents, the processes constructing it can operate at basal, tonic, and phasic levels.

Moreover, a belief is truth graded evident by our phenomenal inspection; it presents as a spectrum of truth-evaluations (credences) rather than a binary truth declaration.

In judgmentalist accounts, emotion is fundamentally a matter of belief, specifically an evaluative judgment about how things stand with one's concerns (Nussbaum, 2001). While I support that belief is fundamental to emotions in humans, it is just one of the content types that construct it. My focus in understanding emotions is on declarative beliefs (often termed judgments), which I will argue, are symbolic values, a specific type of truth evaluated content produced for the mind, a consequence of an advanced appraisal process. Belief need not be confined to a purely propositional format that is either believed to be true or not. The classical gloss treats belief as a propositional mental construct closely tied to judgment where you either believe a particular thing or don't (Harris, Ronfard, & Bartz, 2007), yet in practice belief exhibits graded conviction. Degrees of belief (credences) capture this without forcing an all-or-nothing treatment (Ramsey, 1926/1931). When categorical belief is required for assertion or commitment, it can be modeled as a thresholded view grounded in those degrees, more specifically, high and stably maintained credence (Leitgeb, 2014).

Masked-priming work shows lexical/semantic activation that shapes later judgment without reportable awareness-evidence for subpersonal belief-sub-serving content rather than occurrent belief proper (Marcel, 1983; Holender, 1986; Kouider & Dupoux, 2004; Ortells et al., 2006). Such experiments show that belief enactments start at the sub-conscious basal level that at later time reveals its activity by influencing later representations (reference bias in my model). In my framework, background (basal/tonic) processes don't just store beliefs; they facilitate priming through attitudes. On this account, attitudes are object-evaluation associations in memory whose accessibility (a strength facet) determines the likelihood and speed of their automatic activation upon encountering the object (Fazio, 2007). The resulting activation serves as a facilitative set for the episode of endorsement; depending on motivation and opportunity, expression proceeds along more spontaneous or more deliberative routes (Fazio, 1990; Fazio & Olson, 2014). In such cases, tonically, belief functions as an attitude structuring inference and conversational common ground. Philosophers typically treat this as the standing (non-occurrent) side of the occurrent-standing distinction (Schwitzgebel, 2006; Stalnaker, 2002); it is "there" as parametric content of our cognitive stance even when not occurrently entertained. Phasically, belief is usually an occurrent episodic act assembled in context, which explains its possible divergence from one's standing/background states (attitudes). Here both in-between believing (Schwitzgebel, 2001) and fragmentation accounts explain why what guides interpretation and evaluation can depend on which belief-fragment is activated in a given context, rather than on a single unified web (Bendaña & Mandelbaum, 2021; Porot & Mandelbaum, 2021). In-between believing occurs when a person has no single stable belief because their reports, reasoning, and behavior shift across contexts. In my model, this happens because the underlying belief-content exists as multiple basal "shards," only some of which become salient at a given time. A tonic stance functions as a selection filter over these shards, and a phasic episode constructs a momentary taking-as-true/false from whichever shards are currently available. Basal activity provides a standing repertoire of learned priors-memories, associations, values, and habitual interpretations-rather than a single fixed belief. A tonic stance then functions as a weighting or selection mechanism over this

The diagram illustrates the relationship between different types of priors in a Bayesian framework, showing how they interact and influence each other. It is structured into two main loops, one for phasic episodes and one for basal dispositions, connected by a central reference bias.

- Top Loop (Phasic Episode):** This loop represents the process of learning from a specific event. It starts with **Assimilation-Priming**, which leads to **Imprint Bias**. This bias then influences the **Reference Bias**, which in turn affects the **Facilitation-Priming** process.
- Bottom Loop (Basal Dispositions):** This loop represents the process of learning from the environment over time. It starts with **Recalibration Priors**, which leads to **Homeostasis**. This process then influences the **Selection Priors**, which in turn affects the **Reference Bias**.
- Central Reference Bias:** A vertical arrow labeled **Reference Bias** connects the two loops, indicating that the bias from the phasic episode influences the basal dispositions and vice versa.
- Facilitation-Priming:** This process is shown on the left side of the diagram, leading to the **Tonic Background**, which is the overall state of the system.
- Tonic Background:** This is the overall state of the system, which is influenced by the **Facilitation-Priming** process and the **Reference Bias**.
- Homeostasis:** This process is shown on the right side of the diagram, leading to the **Recalibration Priors**, which are used to update the system's state.
- Selection Priors:** These are the priors that are used to select the most relevant information from the environment, based on the current state of the system.

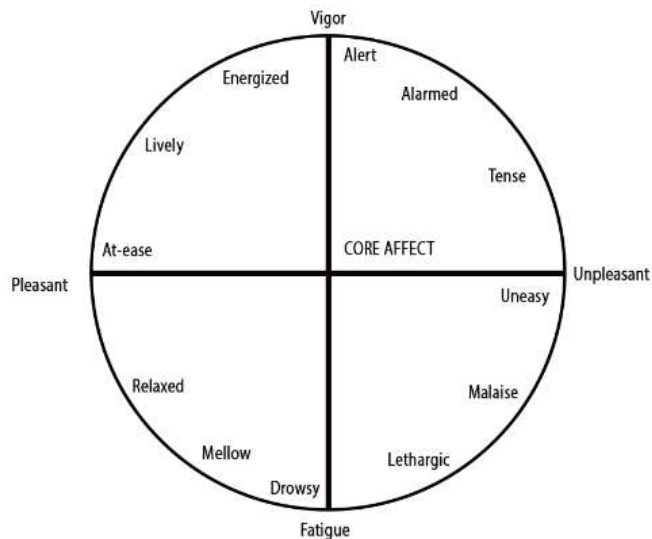
Picture 4. Taken from Jan M. Jakopič Models for Consciousness - not yet published.

Belief and affect are, in my framework, two value-containing output types of the appraisal process. Belief is appraisal rendered in symbolic content scaled by credence/conviction—whereas affect is appraisal rendered in a felt content scaled by valence/arousal. If belief is not a single standing state but a construction that can operate across basal, tonic, and phasic system dynamics, then the same should hold for affect: the difference is not whether appraisal is present, but whether its value is delivered as a taking-as-true/false (belief) or a felt

evaluation (affect), each admitting degrees rather than binaries. Also, they overlap and mutually constrain one another in emotional construction, which makes any clean physiological separation difficult.

On comparator accounts, emotion mechanisms monitor the belief–desire system and produce nonconceptual outputs that signal detected fulfillments and frustrations of desires, as well as confirmations and disconfirmations of beliefs (Reisenzein, 2009). Converging evidence from people with markedly reduced physiological feedback (e.g., paraplegia; the use of beta-blocking agents) suggests that bodily feedback is most likely not necessary for emotional experience (Reisenzein & Stephan, 2014). Affective states also bias appraisal, selective exposure, and encoding toward congenial or goal-relevant information even when objective perceptual evidence is fully available (Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Hart et al., 2009). Overall, this supports the view that belief and affect interact dynamically.

Dimensional accounts typically define core affect as a primitive, nonreflective feeling characterized by the bipolar dimensions of valence and arousal, and they explicitly allow that such affective states need not amount to a full emotion episode (Russell & Barrett, 1999; Russell, 2009). At the same time, survey work notes that the field’s key terms—especially “valence” and “arousal”—have been used with different and insufficiently distinguished meanings, yielding incompatible models and calling for greater conceptual clarity (Colombetti & Kuppens, 2024). Appraisal/process theories typically treat the feeling component as a monitoring/integrative summary of the synchronized subsystems and articulate molecular appraisal dimensions (e.g., novelty, goal-conduciveness, control, normative significance) that differentiate episodes (Scarantino, 2024, summarizing Scherer’s CPM; Ellsworth, 2024). By contrast, in the basic-emotion tradition, “primary affects” are closely tied to program-driven response suites, with classic statements casting the affective system as the primary motivational system (Tomkins, 1962). Maintaining a conceptual separation between appraisal and motivation yields clear explanatory leverage for affect-impulse dissociations: in the Component Process Model, appraisal is a distinct component whose outputs trigger an action-tendency in the motivational component, but motivation then drives other components—so evaluation and action-readiness are linked yet separable stages (Scherer, 2001, 2009; summary in Scarantino, 2024). Because appraisal unfolds over molecular dimensions (e.g., goal-conduciveness, agency, control, norm compatibility) and can range from automatic (affect) to deliberate (belief) processing, changes in evaluation need not translate linearly into a fixed impulse (Ellsworth, 2024). Many combinations of appraisals can change components without producing a fully synchronized emotion, underscoring why evaluation may shift physiology or attention yet not yield the expected impulse (Scarantino, 2024, on Scherer’s SECs).



Picture 4 shows a circumplex of the core affect.

Several influential theories already suggest that affective phenomena are stratified rather than unitary, distinguishing an ongoing background field, occurrent episodes, and deeper nonconscious determinants. Core affect theorists describe a continuously present, low-dimensional affective state that can function as diffuse mood, as part of focal emotional episodes, or as a merely peripheral feeling depending on how attention is allocated (Russell, 2003, 2009; Russell & Barrett, 1999). Phenomenological and enactive accounts likewise distinguish foreground emotions from “background bodily feelings” that quietly structure one’s experience of self and world without being thematically attended (Colombetti, 2011, 2014). Complementary models of emotion experience analyze how shifts in attention and level of awareness differentiate highly focal emotional episodes from less articulated affective context, and how these conscious forms relate to underlying nonconscious processes (Lambie & Marcel, 2002).

In parallel with the belief case, existing findings support treating affect as spanning levels: basal (pre-constructed/dispositional valence), tonic (a standing background that parameterizes inference, i.e., mood), and phasic (occurrent, representational endorsements, i.e., emotions). At the basal tier, unseen valence shifts liking and behavior without report: backward-masked affect changes evaluations (Murphy & Zajonc, 1993), and subliminal smiles increase pouring/consumption and willingness-to-pay without self-reported feeling change (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Affective conditioning produces persistent, object-specific dispositional changes (Hofmann et al., 2010). Dispositional scaffolds forecast phasic episodes, as higher neuroticism predicts greater moment-to-moment negative-affect responses to daily stressors (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995), and dispositions contribute to tonic set-points, as multilevel diary models isolate substantial person-mean affect (Merz & Roesch, 2011). Personality dispositions then align with these baselines: the “neuroticism cascade” shows that higher neuroticism increases stressor exposure, reactivity, and mood spillover, cumulatively depressing the standing background level-linking basal traits to tonic set-points (Suls & Martin, 2005). Twin daily-diary work adds that a person’s intraindividual mean affect is partly heritable, confirming dispositional roots of tonic mood (Zheng, Plomin, & von

Stumm, 2016). Longitudinal well-being research converges: dynamic equilibrium models argue moods tend to return to trait-shaped set points after life events, again tying tonic background to basal personality (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Headey, 2006). Dispositions regulate not only the mean of the Background but its persistence: affect shows inertia, and higher inertia is associated with psychological maladjustment, indicating a slower return to baseline and greater carryover of affect over time (Kuppens, Allen, & Sheeber, 2010). Given that neuroticism is linked to greater stressor reactivity and mood spillover, it is a plausible dispositional route by which tonic affect becomes more persistent (Suls & Martin, 2005). As a background parameter, tonic mood biases appraisal routes and weights and lowers defensive thresholds, thereby facilitating congruent phasic responses (Forgas, 1995; Schwarz & Clore, 2003; Bublatzky, Alpers, & Pittig, 2017). Phasic emotions reorganize judgment with object-bound content (anger vs. fear produce opposite risk appraisals; Lerner & Keltner, 2001) and carry over to subsequent, nominally unrelated judgments (beliefs) by assimilating into the background (Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, & Kassam, 2015). Over longer horizons, episodes imprint on basal structure (see image 1): extinction/relapse phenomena (renewal, reinstatement, spontaneous recovery, rapid reacquisition) indicate enduring, context-modulated traces rather than transient moods (Bouton, 2004; Vervliet, Baeyens, Van den Bergh, & Hermans, 2013). Finally, acquired interpretation biases function as basal-like priors that push ambiguous inputs toward threat or safety and alter immediate emotional reactions (Mathews & Mackintosh, 2000). Multilevel diary models separate person-level from moment-to-moment variance and show a sizable, stable between-person (tonic) component of affect-i.e., individual baselines exist over and above daily swings (Merz & Roesch, 2011).

Affects are typically regarded as fundamental to emotion, are felt values, a specific type of content produced for the mind, a consequence of the appraisal process. Impulses, often ignored in emotional literature or mistaken for instincts, are the felt purpose, a specific type of content produced for the mind, a consequence of the motivation process. Together they produce fundamental emotions which lack the constructionist aspects (experiences are presumed to be irrelevant to a stage - see picture xx); as well as passions which are basic emotions for which I presume have a fairly constructive structure (are adaptive) but is still ingrained for complex organisms who need clear and specific insight for their survival, often best observed in conspecific social interactions.

Impulse & Drive as Purposeful Instructions Produced by Motivations

Similarly to how belief and affect can be treated as outputs of appraisal-i.e., information processing that yields value-relevant content for the mind-I suggest treating impulse and drive as outputs of motivational processing that yield purpose-priority instructions for the mind. The processes are tightly interwoven, but as I argued above, studies indicate they can dissociate and form different pairings; for that reason, it is clearer to distinguish them rather than collapsing them under the broad umbrella of “affect.”

A current problem in psychological research on motivation is that terms like drive, instinct, impulse, motive, goal, and desire are often used interchangeably. Many authors follow everyday usage, where these words overlap and blur into one another. My aim here is to closely examine terms such as drive, instinct, and impulse, and to clarify what common language captures accurately and where it misleads.

In this paper I use drive in the common, desire-like sense, but I restrict it to a symbolic form of motivation: a purpose representation that is tethered to belief. By contrast, impulse refers to the action-readiness component bound to affect: a felt instruction that is separable by the type of activity (reactive vs proactive) and urgency (low vs high) (see image Y). Both drives and impulses seem to overlap in motivational processes and produce purpose; they co-occur in experience but can vary independently, which is why treating both as “affect” obscures their distinct roles.



Picture 5. Shows Impulse variations

Research has well established the fight-flight-freeze response as a defensive reaction to a situation. But other inclinations or instructions haven't been studied as thoroughly, such as restorative rest, digest, mate; investigative scan, probe, plan; and appetitive seek, pursue, seize. These other patterns are often discussed only in narrower subfields (e.g., autonomic regulation and recovery, sexual motivation, curiosity and exploration, reward pursuit), and they are rarely treated as comparably “canonical” response repertoires with a shared vocabulary and a unified experimental tradition. As a result, their components are typically measured in fragmented ways; sometimes as physiological states, sometimes as motivational traits, sometimes as decision-making strategies, rather than as coherent, repeatable action-guiding modes. In my terms, they still look like recurring, purposive instructions: restoration biases the organism toward replenishment and bonding; investigation biases it toward information-gathering and model-building; and appetite biases it toward acquisition and consummation.

A persistent problem in psychology is that instinct and emotion are frequently treated as if they were the same kind of thing, largely because they co-occur and converge on the same outward signature: rapid action readiness. Threat elicits freezing, fleeing, or fighting, and this behavioral cascade is then named with the same term used for the felt and evaluative episode (e.g., “fear”), so the label ends up ambiguously referring to a phylogenetic action pattern, a physiological mobilization profile, a conscious feeling, or a neural mechanism. This conflation creates a category error that weakens both theory and measurement: it encourages researchers to operationalize emotion as a reflexive output (or to infer feeling directly from behavior), obscures dissociations where patterned responding occurs without the corresponding experience (and vice versa). For conceptual clarity, instincts are better treated as sensation-impulse linked action patterns, whereas emotions are affect-impulse linked action readiness and can be further shaped by higher-order, belief-drives pairing.

James treats emotion as a tendency-to-feel and instinct as a tendency-to-act toward an eliciting object; because the same object can arouse both-and feelings have bodily expression-the line between them is often practical rather than philosophical (James, 1890/1918). By contrast, I maintain a conceptual separation: the confusion between the two arises from their common denominator -impulse. On this view, an impulse is an action tendency as enacted feeling based motivational process; emotions carry such impulses (hence their readiness for action) and instincts specify learned or phylogenetic action patterns in relation to sensation (as in the classical stimulus - response reactivity), not affect. They thus share some of the various contents that builds specific behaviors but plays different representational roles: emotion organizes affects and impulses (akin to Affect Program Theory); instinct (and reflexes) organized impulses and sensation (akin to classical conditioning). An instinct does not need affect, the impulse it forms is tied directly to its sensations - it is why instincts are enough for primitive organisms’ success in their natural habitat. In experience, instincts and emotions (as well as impression) unify into a single episode, yet analytically they remain distinct components of one type of intentionality.

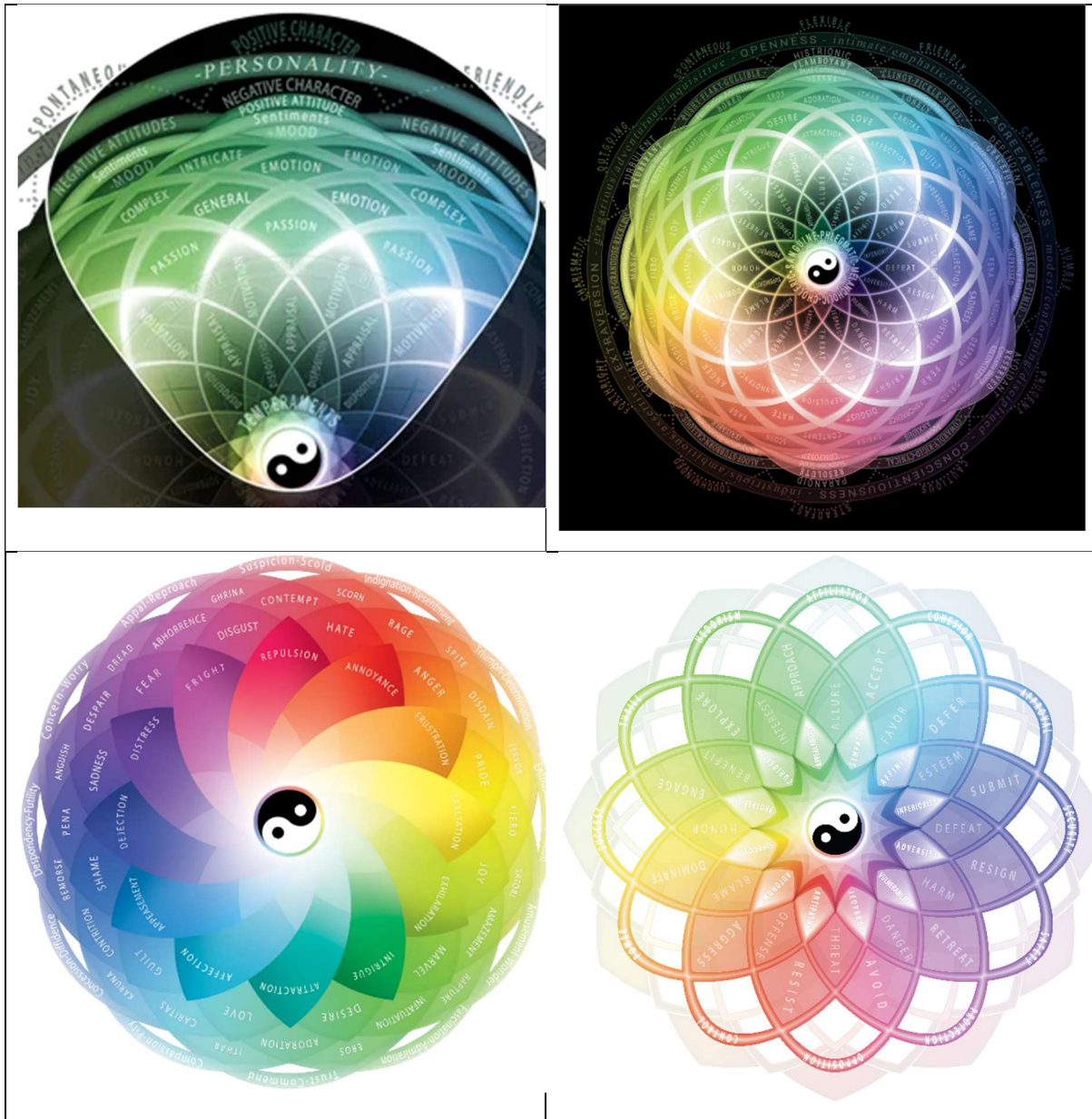
Drives (described as desires in philosophy of emotion) are symbolic purpose, a specific type of content produced for the mind, a consequence of the appraisal process. Together with beliefs they produce sentiments which are synonymous with judgmental emotions for which I presume have a constructive structure that is dependent on the social/linguistic understanding and the reasoning ability of the organism. Schroeder’s discussion of desire is useful for my use of drive because he shows why the everyday “want/urge/goal” family is both familiar and theoretically messy: many different conative states (wanting, craving, preferring, having a goal, having a purpose) get grouped under “pro-attitudes,” and it’s genuinely disputed whether they are all the same kind of state or importantly different kinds (Schroeder, 2015). At the same time, he stresses a practical starting point: desires typically come with a cluster of effects-moving us toward action, producing urges, and tilting affect toward a proper emotion. Yet the real explanatory question is which parts of this cluster are constitutive of desire and which are merely common downstream consequences (Schroeder, 2006). He then maps three major “naturalistic” proposals for what desire most fundamentally is: an action-based state, a pleasure-based state, or a reward-learning state (Schroeder, 2006). This framing supports my decision to treat drive as a purpose-bearing, belief-sensitive motivational state: if

desire's central explanatory role is to organize action, then what an agent believes about means and feasibility will naturally shape how a drive gets expressed and how strongly it competes for control of behavior (Schroeder, 2015).

Model in Practice: A Framework for Emotion & Personality

This is a quick generalization of what's in the model available online: integrative label-and-correlation illustrative model in which all elements follow two organizing principles across the framework that is internally consistent which has been made possible by improving and reframing included concepts. The model's fundamental logic behind how concepts relate consists of opposition, where each construct has a defined counter-construct with predictable inverse relations; and composition, where constructs combine into higher-order patterns and families of concepts.

The core elements of emotional intuition are dispositions, propensities or predispositions, that function as priors biasing appraisal and motivational computations; while repeated appraisal patterns and motivational policies update dispositions, gradually consolidating recurrent patterns into traits. Such processes interact with goal directives as existing contents (motives, incentives, and active goals) to gate the selection, intensity, and provide regulation of emotion episodes. These dynamical systems produce affects, impulses, beliefs, and drives that emerge in: 1. phasic emotions which are arranged along a construction continuum with three classes-fundamental (discussed in this paper, not online), basic, and judgmental-which, through composition, yield generalized emotion categories that contain various mixtures of these classes. 2. Tonic moods and attitudes, interrelated with these classes, prime emotions and get primed by them. Dispositions are generalized into 12 interrelated words but are also simplified into trait clusters through temperament as well as character and by my estimate correlate with the Five-Factor Model (FFM); this situates emotional tendencies within established personality structure. The model (available at emotionalintuition.com) provides explicit definitions for each construct, a correlation map among components, and logical spatial relations, enabling clear hypotheses about co-activation, covariance, state transitions, and trait-state alignment. By supplying a wide vocabulary within a structured correlation framework, the online model aims to unify labeling practices, clarify disagreements as testable contrasts, and support cumulative theory building across emotion and personality science. It also invites constructive discussion and a reimagining of testing across different areas of emotion science and personality. In addition, my attempt was to find the best general terms for a concept that would fit well with other concepts and that would not be too specific and be wide enough in its conception so that other similar concepts can be put under it without extensive overlap, e.g. offense as appraisal can include "molecular" appraisals such as insult, misdeed, transgression, crime, misconduct, etc; and then these can relate more to "molar" appraisals such as blame or threat - depending on the situation and the person doing the appraising. Because the concepts are very complicated, I made different graphical representations for ease of learning, all having the same underlying logic:



More illustrative models can be found on <https://emotionalintuition.com/>

Discussion on Emotional Intuition:

I find it important to explain that my concepts may differ from that of the reader, so I offer some quick explanations for how I understand some parts of the mind:

1. Emotional intuition is a type of knowledge, an insight into the world where language is not needed. Restricting knowledge to propositional understanding is a mistake; having knowledge does not mean a thing is true or not, it means that the information-data-information is properly decoded-encoded-decoded that in a veridical way serves to produce meaning/value/purpose. Most of our knowledge about the world comes from our intuition - this is self-evident: we learn/know what tastes good or bad, what feels smooth or soft, what gravity is in practice, etc.

1. Emotions are always, but they can be more or less, conscious; they are combinations of

intentional states, types of perception that represent the most prominent types of content that fall under emotional intuition.

2. The content that constructs emotion is considered preconscious if it is in competition for prominence with other content; if it is part of what constructed the emotion, it is manifested as conscious through that emotion; but can be pushed into subconsciousness.

3. The awareness of content is dependent on:

- Capability: The processes ability to construct/present/fit content for the mind
- Strength: the power to process the information that construct the content
- Competition: the already represented content in the mind may prevent the awareness of the new content (limitation of focus/ principle of unified consciousness)
- Regulation: The prevention of disruption of processes (tuning out / stopping processes)

4. Processes do not manifest content for the mind or produce behavior as a product that is finished; it is a constant flux of information interpretation that inevitably constructs content for the mind which translates to behavior in some form or another, be it conscious or not.

5. There are two types of conscious representations: tonic (moods, attitudes, habits, etc) and phasic (emotions, ideas, impressions, etc). It seems that they can be separated by awareness of: intuition and thought. The attention of intuition seems to have more ability to focus on different content at the same time, e.g. one may feel pain, taste, feels stressed, urge to pee, etc, without one easily overwriting the other; However, thoughts seem to somewhat lack this width; if one focuses on a thought, other thoughts seem to go out of attendance (stay preconscious), which is not the case for intuition as feeling is primary to consciousness on which everything else builds on.

6. Feelings are a cluster of categories of (re)presentations that include sensations, affects, and impulses - they are about what is felt, a type of givenness of intrinsic nature. Affects are things that are often seen as fundamental to emotions, they are felt values, and a consequence of the appraisal process.

7. Symbols are a type of phantasy that have deeper “reconstructed” (re)presentations that include imagination, beliefs, and drives - they are about what can be created for the mind separable from the givenness of nature, a type of recreation of experience.

8. Dispositions are propensities and predispositions for triggering reactions that start processes. They are trait generalizations, describing the likelihood of activating tendencies, more precisely, the likelihood of the processes that construct emotional intuition (in papers case).

9. Attitudes are similar to moods, or better, they are paired with them: they are the state of mind when intuition pairs with thoughts. Attitudes and moods influence each other and likely serve a closely related underlying function. A mood always has the feeling dimension; while attitude always has symbolic dimension - so they interact most of the time.

Discussion on AI

Emotion AI (affective computing) is a necessary next frontier for intelligent systems: without the capacity to represent, evaluate, and construct specific emotions, AI cannot approach

human-like understanding, agency, or anything plausibly called consciousness, which requires integrating the dynamics behind emotion into a coherent control architecture. Building on Picard's framing of affect inference as a state-space problem-latent states inferred from multimodal signals, with explicit co-activations and state transitions, in either discrete classes or low-dimensional embeddings ("eigenmoods")-we gain the possible computational scaffolding for such integration (Picard, 1995). My contribution supplies the missing semantic backbone: a componential taxonomy with oppositions and rules of composition that lets the factors that construct emotion-dispositions, appraisals, motivations, and goal directives-compete, merge, and compare before an emotion is finalized. This yields mechanistic, testable dynamics (e.g., lawful inverses, permitted blends, winner-consolidation vs. mixed states) that map directly onto the topology of the latent space and the observation model, advancing affective-computing systems toward interpretable, self-consistent affective cognition.

Conclusion

Without shared, well-specified semantics, emotion science cannot cumulate. Clear definitions, level separation with explicit bridging rules, contrast-set testing, and ontology alignment make hypotheses auditable, comparisons commensurable, and theory tests sharper-benefiting psychology, philosophy of mind, and downstream applications. This theory aims to provide mental health practitioners, researchers, and related fields with usable models and clear explanations, so the overall picture becomes clearer.

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