

Normativity, Realism, and Emotional Experience

Norms are standards against which actions, dispositions of mind and character, states of affairs and so forth can be measured. They also govern our behaviour, make claims on us, bind us and provide reasons for action and thought that motivate us. J. L. Mackie argued that the intrinsic prescriptivity, or to-be-pursuedness, of moral norms would make them utterly unlike anything else that we know of. Therefore, we should favour an error theory of morality. Mackie thought that the to-be-pursuedness would have to be built into mind-independent moral reality. One alternative, however, is that the to-be-pursuedness is built into our faculty of moral sensibility. There is a large body of empirical evidence demonstrating that the emotions play a central role in making moral judgments. I shall argue that this helps to explain how normative judgments are reliably and non-accidentally related to motivation. I shall also argue that emotional experience has the right structure and properties to provide us with a defeasible warrant for normative knowledge. The role of the emotions in our moral psychology does not obviously support anti-realism. Rather, emotional experience can be intentional, evaluative, evaluable, and quasi-perceptual. This makes emotional experience a plausible candidate for constituting a non-queer faculty of moral sensibility.

1. Mackie's Argument from Queerness

Mackie summarises his argument from queerness as follows:

If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. (1977)

Mackie thinks that the queerness of objective values and the queerness of any putative faculty of moral intuition—the metaphysical and epistemological strands of the argument from queerness respectively—follow from the kinds of facts about norms mentioned above, especially their intrinsic prescriptivity. In Mackie's words, objective value would have to be 'such that knowledge of it provides the knower with both a direction and an overriding motive; something's being good both tells the person who knows this to pursue it and makes him pursue it' (1977). Such an account of objective value is dramatically exemplified by Plato's Form of the Good. According to Mackie,

it is implausible that there is anything in the world answering to this description. Therefore, our moral thought and talk is systematically false.

Although Mackie concentrates on morality, it is the *normativity* of moral values that is problematic, and so, if Mackie's argument works at all, then it would seem it should work against non-moral forms of normativity too. For example, the argument from queerness can be applied to epistemic, logical and semantic norms. Similar considerations occur in the 'Kripkenstein' debates over rule-following. There is a mysterious to-be-followedness about logical and semantic rules, which is hard to explain in terms of natural properties. If this is right, the argument from queerness is self-defeating as an *argument*, for it undermines the norms that give us reason to accept it. In fact, it undermines *any* argument that depends on logical inference. Thus, although much of my discussion focuses on moral norms, it is important to keep an eye on the bigger picture. Normative realism, not only moral realism, is at stake.

Returning to the details of Mackie's argument, we can identify two premises in the metaphysical strand. First, Mackie assumes that motivational internalism is true. Knowledge of the good, he tells us, would provide an 'overriding motive' such that the knower pursues it.¹ Second, he assumes that motivational internalism would have to be true in virtue of the intrinsically prescriptive nature of objective value. Although there are reasons to doubt motivational internalism, I will put these aside in the present article, and accept at least the weaker, relatively uncontroversial claim that there is a reliable and non-accidental connection between recognising a normative reason for action and being defeasibly motivated to act in accordance with it.

I want to focus on the second premise instead. In order for objective values to explain motivation, Mackie takes it that objective value would need to have 'to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it' (1977). It is this property of to-be-pursuedness which, he argues, makes objective values queer. The property of to-be-pursuedness is likely to seem especially queer ontological naturalists, i.e., advocates of the view that science is the

¹ Earlier, Mackie writes that 'just knowing them or "seeing" them will not merely tell men what to do but will ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations' (1977). This seems to be an implausibly strong version of internalism according to which the connection between grasping a norm and being motivated to act is non-defeasible.

final arbiter of ontology. For, it seems unlikely that to-be-pursuedness would feature alongside properties like spin, mass and charge in any hypothetically completed physics of the future. This apparent unlikelihood explains the force of the metaphysical strand of the argument from queerness. Moreover, the apparent queerness of the motivational force of norms is sufficient to cast doubt on moral realism and to motivate forms of anti-realism.

In fact, the metaphysical and epistemological strands of the argument are interdependent. The idea that to-be-pursuedness must be built into objective values underpins the epistemological strand of the argument. Mackie elaborates as follows:

When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premises or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sense perception or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any construction of these, will provide a satisfactory answer. (1977)

By ‘our ordinary accounts of sense perception’ it seems likely that Mackie means accounts in terms of the causal interaction between an organism and its environment. The various patterns of reasoning he mentions then operate upon the contents or products of sensory experience. The problem, then, is that the property of to-be-pursuedness does not seem to be the sort of property we can causally interact with (which helps to explain the thought that to-be-pursuedness is unlikely to appear in a final scientific ontology). We might say, in a Sellarsian idiom, that to-be-pursuedness is within the space of reasons, not a property causally impinging on that space. Given that to-be-pursuedness is not a property with which we can causally interact, it is hard to understand how we could perceive it.²

There is, however, a way to undercut this line of argument. According to Mackie, motivational internalism must be grounded in, and explained by, recognition of the property of to-be-pursuedness that is somehow built into mind-independent normative reality. An alternative is that the motivational force of normative facts depends on facts

² The argument has the same structure as the standard epistemological argument against Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics (see, e.g., Benacerraf (1973)). Mackie’s ‘error theory’ finds its mathematical parallel in Field’s fictionalism (see, e.g. Field (1988)).

about the perception, sensibility or awareness of moral agents. It might be, for example, that the faculty of moral sensibility is such that moral agents, and only moral agents, are reliably and non-accidentally motivated by normative facts when they perceive them (or, if internalism is correct, necessarily, but defeasibly, motivated).³ In this case, there would be no need to appeal to a further, external, mind-independent property of to-be-pursuedness. So, at a rough first pass, the normative facts would be in the world, but the to-be-pursuedness would be in the head insofar as an agent is disposed to be motivated by recognising those facts.

2. *Justificatory and Causal Explanations*

This sort of sentimentalist approach might not appear to be a live alternative for the moral realist who Mackie is criticising. A possible concern is that it seems to relocate an essential feature of normativity away from the objective world and into subjective experience. It might be objected that a moral realist is committed to the view that normative facts and, hence, to-be-pursuedness are mind-independent. Furthermore, if to-be-pursuedness is mind-independent then the facts that explain an agent's motivation must be mind-independent too. However, this line of criticism trades on an ambiguity concerning what it is to explain motivation. An explanation might focus either on what *causes* a moral agent to be motivated or what *justifies* that motivational state. Causes and justification can coincide, but they are logically distinct. Moral realists defend the claim that there are objective, mind-independent good-making or right-making properties, and that these properties are such that moral agents are normatively governed by them. However, the cause of a moral agent's motivation need not be a mind-independent property of to-be-pursuedness. The facts that causally explain their motivation could be facts about their faculty of moral sensibility.

Moral realism does demand, however, that mind-independent, normative facts can *justify* moral agents' states of motivation. Thus, in the justificatory sense, moral realists must explain the fact that a moral agent is appropriately motivated in terms of mind-

³ Döring (2007) has also argued that the emotions can explain the motivational force of moral judgments (see further section 8). Whereas Döring takes internalism to be an a priori constraint on practical judgment, I favour the view that non-trivial statements of internalism are false. Arguing the point here, however, would lead me too far astray.

independent good-makers and right-makers. In order to do this, however, there is no need to appeal to a further queer property in the world, such as a property of to-be-pursuedness. Indeed, such an appeal would be independently implausible. It is not as if the difference in motivational state between Smith, who sees some state of affairs as making moral demands on him, and Jones, who fails to see that the very same state of affairs makes moral demands on her, is to be explained by the fact that only Smith causally interacts with the property of to-be-pursuedness, which shines over a state of affairs like the star of Bethlehem. It seems far more plausible to suppose that the difference in motivational state is explained by differences in their respective moral sensibilities. To repeat, however, it does not follow that the facts that justify Smith are mind-dependent facts of the sort to trouble a moral realist.

To sum up this section of the discussion, in order to counter the force of Mackie's argument from queerness it would be sufficient to show that moral awareness is reliably and non-accidentally related to motivation. We could then make sense of the idea that moral agents' motivational states are justified by the mind-independent, normative facts, while what makes it the case that appropriately rational agents will be motivated are facts about their faculty of moral sensibility. On this view, there is no need to make an appeal to metaphysically queer properties stitched into the fabric of the world like Plato's Form of the Good.

3. Moral Judgment, Emotion, and Realism

Moral realism is the view that some propositions with moral content are both truth-apt and true. Moreover, these propositions are true in virtue of standing in the appropriate relationship to mind-independent reality, e.g., by describing or corresponding to it.⁴ It would be possible for these conditions to obtain and for all our moral judgments to be false. Perhaps we are systematically deceived or moral reality is too complex for us to understand or describe. However, most moral realists also take it that some of our moral thought and talk are in good order in the sense that some of our moral judgments are true. A faculty of moral sensibility consistent with this sort of moral realism would

⁴ Of course, some mind-independent facts depend on minds in the sense that they are about minds. It may also be that some mind-independent normative facts depend on minds in the sense that they concern the relations between minds and mind-independent states of affairs.

have to produce moral judgments with at least the following four features. The moral judgments would have to (i) be *about* moral reality, (ii) have normative content, (iii) have correctness conditions and (iv) owe their content in some measure to the moral reality that they are about. In the absence of (iv), it would be mere coincidence if any of our moral judgments turned out to be true and, so, we could not have moral knowledge. I shall argue that certain forms of emotional experience are suitable candidates for constituting a faculty of moral sensibility with these features. In particular, emotional experience can be intentional, evaluative, evaluable and quasi-perceptual. This should help to dispel the impression that our faculty of moral sensibility must be queer.

How, then, do we make moral judgments? This is an empirical question, albeit one that cannot be answered independently of philosophical questions about the content of morality. The scientific evidence clearly supports the view that the emotions play a central role. Our ability to reason morally and prudentially, according to social rules, norms and conventions, depends on the proper functioning of regions of the brain associated with the emotions, including the amygdala, anterior insula, anterior temporal lobes, and prefrontal cortex. The ventromedial regions of the prefrontal cortex (an evolutionarily modern part of the brain located behind the bridge of the nose) appears to be crucial for the ‘higher cognitive’ emotions that play an essential role in moral judgment.⁵ I shall return to the importance of the higher cognitive emotions in section 7. As these empirical findings have been discussed fairly extensively, I shall not provide a further survey here.⁶

The role of the emotions in moral judgment is often taken to support moral anti-realism. If moral sensibility depends on the emotions and the emotions are non-rational feelings, ill-suited to respond to normative facts, this would seem to support the view that moral judgments do not track moral facts and favour either non-cognitivism or an error theory of morality. Non-cognitivism would find support from the idea that moral judgments express mental states without cognitive content. Error theorists might argue that

⁵ For details of fMRI studies showing that the regions of the brain associated with the emotions are active during moral cognition see Moll et al. (2002), Moll et al. (2005), Joshua D. Greene et al. (2004) and Zahn et al. (2009).

⁶ See, for example, Damasio (1994); (1999), J. Greene, Haidt, J. (2002); Joshua D Greene (2009) Nichols (2004), Prinz (2007), Sneddon (2011) and Haidt (2012).

although moral judgments purport to express truths, they are in fact a product of the emotions, which systematically mislead us into thinking that there are mind-independent moral properties.⁷ For instance, Greene writes:

We believe in moral realism because moral experience has a perceptual phenomenology, and moral experience has a perceptual phenomenology because natural selection has outfitted us with mechanisms for making intuitive, emotion-based judgments, much as it has outfitted us with mechanisms for making intuitive, emotion-based judgments about who among us are the most suitable mates. Therefore, we can understand our inclination towards moral realism not as an insight into the nature of moral truth, but as a by-product of the efficient cognitive processes we use to make moral decisions. (2003)

In fact, if emotions have the right properties to function as a faculty of moral sensibility, then the fact that moral judgments routinely involve regions of the brain associated with emotional experience may *support* moral realism by offering the prospect of a non-mysterious moral epistemology. This is what I shall argue.

4. Emotion and Feelings

An influential approach in twentieth-century psychology was to identify emotions with feelings or unintelligent sensations, which psychologists, and later neuroscientists, could measure in the laboratory. Thus, the standard scientific view of the emotions concentrated on short-term physiological responses, in particular, disturbances to the neurological-hormonal-muscular core: facial expression, musculoskeletal responses, effects on the endocrine system and consequent variation in hormone levels, and activation of the autonomic nervous system.

Feeling theories of the emotions are especially associated with William James and Carl Lange. More recently, they have been defended by philosophers including Whiting (2011) and Kriegel (2011).⁸ James stated his feeling theory as follows:

⁷ For example, Joyce (2006).

⁸ Prinz (2005, 2007) also defends a qualified Jamesian view. My discussion assumes a standard reading of James based primarily on his paper “What is an emotion?”. However, Matthew Ratcliffe (2005)

The bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and ... our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion. (1884)

This reverses the pre-theoretical order of explanation defended by Darwin and others. We do not have butterflies in our stomach because we are nervous. We are nervous because we have butterflies in our stomach.

According to James' view, an emotion is the perception of a particular pattern of physiological arousal and, so, it can be type-identified by that pattern. While a feeling can be accompanied by a judgment or an 'emotional idea' (1884: 196), the two are distinct and it is the feeling that we properly refer to as an 'emotion'. Thus, he writes:

If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains (1884)

Again:

What kind of an emotion of fear would be left, if the feelings neither of quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present, it is quite impossible to think. (1884)

On James' view, then, a judgment without the appropriate somatic phenomenology is just a judgment, rather than an emotion. This has become known as the 'subtraction argument'. We are left with a mental state 'purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth' (1884). What is distinctive and constitutive of the emotions is the way they feel.

James seems right that occurrent emotions typically involve particular forms of somatic phenomenology. Moreover, it is significant that these bodily feelings are positively or negatively valenced (Charland 2005). Some emotions feel good and others feel bad. The distinction between feeling good and bad might be cashed out in terms of hedonic qualities, i.e. pleasure and pain, or in terms of approach and avoidance, or markers of

argues that when this paper is understood in the context of James' later work, an account emerges according to which the feelings that constitute emotions are part of the structure of intentionality. According to this reading, which I find persuasive, there are important similarities between James' account of the emotions and the kind of account I defend below.

reward and punishment (Prinz 2010). Whichever way, the valenced nature of the emotions means that they involve action tendencies or, as James put it, an ‘impulse to vigorous action’ (1884).⁹ We are motivated to increase the good feelings and decrease the bad feelings. Again, there are competing explanations of how the bodily feelings are related to the action tendency. The action tendency might be explained as the direct effect of the bodily feeling or *via* the production of a desire (say, that the painful feeling of anger stops). In either case, feelings are reliably and non-accidentally related to motivation, which is consistent with the idea that they could play a role in a faculty of moral sensibility that is reliably and non-accidentally related to motivation.

Beyond emphasising the connection between feeling and emotion, James wanted to show that a judgment without an accompanying awareness of physiological disturbance would not count as an emotion at all. Conceptually, however, bodily feelings seem to be detachable from emotional states. It is possible to imagine a different sort of creature, or perhaps a suitably modified or impaired human, who could be angry without the typical physiological manifestations or sensations.¹⁰ James himself recognises this point:

I do not say that it is a contradiction in the nature of things, or that pure spirits are necessarily condemned to cold intellectual lives; but I say that for *us*, emotion disassociated from all bodily feeling is inconceivable. (1884)

Although it is true that human emotions normally involve bodily feelings, there are also quite ordinary cases in which emotions remain with us long after the violent neurological-hormonal-muscular sensations and concomitant desire to act die down. Emotions can come in short fiery bursts, but they can also be long-lived and mostly unconscious, such as the enduring love of a mother for her child. Of course, some characteristic activity of the nervous system remains, but the same is true of all mental states. A mother does not only love her child when she is conscious of the

⁹ The relationship between emotions and action tendencies is clearest in the case of emotions about objects that are present. By contrast, the relationship seems less direct in the cases of certain past- or future-directed emotions such as regret or hope. In these cases, it may be better to say that the emotions are associated with dispositions to be motivated in suitable circumstances.

¹⁰ Perhaps the closest *actual* case is patients suffering from pure autonomic failure (PAF). In such cases, patients lose feedback from their sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. While emotional responses are impaired, they are not absent. See Critchley et al. (2001). For a survey of some other empirical challenges to James’ account see Hufendiek (2016).

accompanying feelings. For this reason, it is standard to draw a distinction between occurrent emotional episodes and emotional dispositions.

5. *Emotional Experience and Intentionality*

In recent decades, advocates of ‘cognitivist’ theories of the emotions have emphasised features of emotional experience that the Jamesian view neglects or downplays (e.g., Neu (2000), Nussbaum (2001), and Solomon (2007)). These include features that make emotional experience a plausible candidate for a non-queer faculty of moral sensibility. In particular, some emotional experiences are intentional, subject to rational evaluation, evaluative and quasi-perceptual. To illustrate these claims, consider an example described by Goldie:

Imagine you are in a zoo, looking at a gorilla grimly loping from left to right in its cage. You are thinking of the gorilla as dangerous, but you do not feel fear, as it seems to be safely behind bars. Then you see that the door to the cage has been left wide open. Just for a moment, though, you fail to put the two thoughts – the gorilla is dangerous, the cage is open – together. Then, suddenly, you do put them together: now your way of thinking of the gorilla as dangerous is new; now it is dangerous in an emotionally relevant way for you. The earlier thought, naturally expressed as ‘That gorilla is dangerous’, differs in content from the new thought, although this new thought, thought with emotional feeling, might also be naturally expressed in the same words. Now in feeling fear towards the gorilla you are emotionally engaged with the world, and, typically, you are poised for action in a new way – poised for action out of the emotion. (2000)

In this description, the emotion of fear is not experienced as a blind, undirected sensation. Rather, it is experienced as intentional in the sense that the fear is directed towards, or about, the gorilla. When someone is afraid, they are not afraid *of* changes in their hormonal state, increased heart rate and the like, but some state of affairs in the world.

In fact, the intentional nature of the emotions has been commonly remarked on. The idea can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*.¹¹ In the psychological literature, it has been emphasised by theorists in the appraisal and psychological constructionist traditions for over a century (Gendron and Barrett 2009). Among analytic

¹¹ See, for example, his discussion of anger (1379a–1379b). The idea is also important in Hellenistic philosophy and, especially, Stoicism. See Nussbaum (1994).

philosophers, Kenny (1963) is usually credited with having first paid attention to the intentional structure of the emotions. Kenny argued that emotions are defined by their formal objects and, therefore, necessarily intentional.¹² This is a logical-cum-semantic constraint. For instance, Kenny argued that an emotional attitude only counts as fear because it takes something dangerous or fearful as its formal object. Solomon also defends the claim that emotions are necessarily intentional: ‘no feeling and no physiological response even counts as emotional unless it has the property of intentionality’ (2007: 205). This may not be right about all emotions (see section 7). However, even if we reject the strong claim that emotions are *necessarily* intentional states, it seems hard to deny that emotions *can be* intentional states.

6. *Emotion, Phenomenology, and Transmutation*

Sometimes emotional experience is not only *about* the world, but also appears to have representational content. Phenomenologically, emotional experience can disclose the world to us in a new way. In particular, emotional experience can present states of affairs as normatively salient and, therefore, reasons for action. This claim has been defended by Sartre among others. In his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, he calls an emotion ‘a transformation of the world’ (1962) and ‘a sudden fall of consciousness into magic’ (1962). Expanding on the metaphor of magic he writes:

We have seen how, during an emotion, the consciousness abases itself and abruptly transmutes the determinist world in which we live, into a magical world. But, conversely, sometimes it is this world that reveals itself to consciousness as magical just where we expect it to be deterministic. It must not, indeed, be supposed that magic is an ephemeral quality that we impose upon the world according to our humour. There is an existential structure of the world which is magical. (1962)

Although the idea is not precise, Sartre’s idea of magic seems to refer to a sort of post-Weberian re-enchantment of the world that makes some courses of action appear possible, but forecloses others. He focuses on cases in which we project our emotions on to the world in order to excuse ourselves from acting and to reduce cognitive dissonance.¹³

¹² See further Teroni (2007).

¹³ See, for example, Sartre’s discussion of the girl who breaks down in emotion because she cannot face the prospect of caring for her sick father (1962).

As these are mere projections of magic, Sartre seems for the most part to endorse something like an error theory of the intentional content of emotions. So, it is unclear that he is entitled to say, as above, that the world reveals itself as magical or that it has a magical existential structure.¹⁴ Nonetheless, his discussion suggests an attractive account of the emotions as quasi-perceptual modes of representation with intentional content that are distinct from scientific (deterministic), third-personal representations and reveal the world as having particular ‘magical’ properties that are significant for action. Setting aside appeals to magic, Sartre’s account of the emotions seems right in several ways. As a number of philosophers have argued more recently, it is plausible that emotional experience provides a quasi-perceptual understanding of the world as being charged with normative force or significance. I shall return to this idea in section 8.

7. Basic and Higher Cognitive Emotions

There is a temptation to ask “what is an emotion?” and then go on to defend a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the extension of the concept. However, emotions vary considerably and, arguably, do not constitute a natural kind.¹⁵ In fact, despite defending a feeling theory of the emotions in his famous 1884 paper, William James writes elsewhere that there are numerous equally defensible systems of classification for the emotions:

If then we should seek to break the emotions, thus enumerated, into groups, according to their affinities, it is again plain that all sorts of groupings would be possible, according as we chose this character or that as a basis, and that all groupings would be equally real and true. The only question would be, does this grouping or that suit our purpose best? (1890/1907)

¹⁴ Weberman (1996) also presses this line of objection.

¹⁵ Griffiths (1997, 2004) argues that there is little explanatory power and no theoretical unity to the category of emotions, and that consequently, the term ‘emotion’ does not pick out a natural kind and should be eliminated from theoretical discourse. The sense that the emotions may form an artificial category is reinforced by the observation that many languages have no straightforwardly equivalent term. See further Dixon (2003). A further controversy concerns whether *particular* emotions, such as fear or anger, are natural kinds (see Barrett (2006a)).

Given the varieties of emotional experience, proposed conceptual analyses typically succumb to counterexamples or collapse into unfalsifiable definitions. I am not, therefore, attempting to provide a full analysis of emotional experience. Emotional experience can be intentional and represent the world as having normative significance. However, not all emotions are like this. So-called basic emotions seem to be a notable exception.¹⁶

Basic emotions include certain primitive forms of anger, fear, joy, sadness, surprise and disgust (Ekman and Friesen 1971; Ekman et al. 1987; Ekman 1999). They are pre-cognitive, more or less hard-wired responses to environmental stimuli, sometimes referred to as ‘affect programs’. In this sense, they are like the startle response. They appear to be pan-cultural and homologues are present in many non-human animals (Ekman and Friesen 1971; Ekman 1992). So, we can sometimes speak of a person being angry in much the same way that a cat is angry. Whereas a cat raises its hackles and flashes its tail, a person turns red and grimaces to bare his teeth. In both cases, they are signalling that they are prepared to fight, and the bodily manifestations of the emotion prime them to do so. Physiologically, basic emotions are correlated with subcortical brain activity, especially activity in the amygdala, part of the evolutionarily old, limbic system.¹⁷

By contrast, higher cognitive emotions arise from interaction between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortices.¹⁸ Examples include romantic love, moral indignation, nostalgia, regret, envy, pride and jealousy. The expression of these emotions, and the associated patterns of action, can be culturally influenced (Griffiths and Scarantino 2005; Deonna et al. 2015). They also frequently presuppose concepts of self and other. Significantly, the higher cognitive emotions enable us to evaluate

¹⁶ Moods seem to be another category of emotions that are neither intentional nor representational. Indeed, Griffiths (1997) argues against cognitive accounts of the emotions partly on the grounds that emotions such as depression, elation and anxiety do not have obvious intentional objects. J. Deonna and F. Teroni (2012) agree that moods are not intentional and, for this reason, argue that moods are not emotions.

¹⁷ For detail on the role of the amygdala on moral and social behaviour, see Adolphs (1999). See also Greene and Haidt (2002). There is, however, continuing debate about whether distinct emotions consistently correspond to activity in distinct brain regions. See Lindquist et al. (2012).

¹⁸ For details on the distinction and an explanation of the underlying physical mechanisms see Damasio (1994, 1999). In particular, the central cingulate region is thought to integrate basic emotions and cognition (Panksepp 2003)). Rather than ‘basic’ and ‘higher cognitive’, Damasio uses the terms ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ respectively.

both basic emotions and other higher cognitive emotions. So, someone can be proud of their courage or ashamed of their lack of empathy. They can also be frightened of their fear (or of their fearlessness). The fear that they are frightened of might be a basic emotion, whereas the fear they feel concerning their fear is a higher cognitive emotion with evaluative content.

It is plausible that some of the debates surrounding cognitivism arise from emphasising either the basic or higher cognitive emotions at the expense of the other. For instance, it is sometimes argued that cognitivism over-intellectualises the emotions, and cannot account for the emotional lives of children and non-human animals.¹⁹ In fact, some emotions are more intellectual than others. While there is a clear distinction between paradigmatic examples of basic and higher cognitive emotions, the cognitive content of the emotions lies on a continuum. Moreover, the distinction is not strict. As just mentioned, sometimes the same type of emotion, such as fear, can be found in basic and higher cognitive forms. Shame is another example (Clark 2010, 2012).

The basic emotions are an important part of our affective life. Indeed, it is probable that most human emotions recruit and depend on the feelings that constitute basic emotions. However, the sort of emotional experience I am interested in here involves the combination of feeling and representational content that is typical of the higher cognitive emotions. As Antonio Damasio writes:

It is the connection between an intricate cognitive content and a variation on a preorganized body-state profile that allows us to experience shades of remorse, embarrassment, *Schadenfreude*, vindication, and so on. (1994)

It is this combination or connection between feeling and content that makes the higher cognitive emotions candidates for constituting a faculty of moral sensibility. The combination might be explained in various ways. Perhaps, for instance, higher cognitive emotions are basic emotions caused by beliefs. Or perhaps higher cognitive emotions are basic emotions with cognitive content. Or, perhaps again, higher cognitive emotions are basic emotions calibrated with beliefs (see (Prinz 2007)). While

¹⁹ Hufendiek (2016) provides a useful overview of objections against cognitivism including this one.

adjudicating between these possibilities is an important task for a theory of the emotions, what matters for present purposes is the co-presence of feeling and content in the phenomenology of emotional experience.

8. *Emotion and Perception*

I suggested above that emotional experience can be quasi-perceptual. The idea that emotions are affective perceptions has been defended by a number of philosophers including de Sousa (1987), Tappolet (2000, 2012), Prinz (2004), Deonna (2006), Döring (2007) and Wringe (2015). One goal of perceptual accounts is to preserve the cognitivist insight that emotional experience can be intentional and representational, while avoiding the charge of over-intellectualism. Clearly, though, emotions are not ordinary forms of sense-perception. In fact, it usually seems better to think of them as *responses* to sense-perception (or other mental states such as remembering or imagining) that change the experiential character of what is perceived (or remembered or imagined). Nevertheless, the analogy is helpful to the extent that it emphasises that emotional experience can have representational content and provide a warrant for evaluative and normative judgments without being reducible to beliefs.

According to perceptual accounts, emotional experience is a form of *perceiving-as*. Alternatively, we might describe emotions as forms of *experiencing-as*, trying to capture the idea that feeling, thought, and readiness to act are integrated into an emotional episode, which, phenomenologically, discloses the world in a new way. In emotional experience, we experience a gorilla *as* dangerous, a person *as* lovable, or an action *as* morally contemptible. In one way, this is just as we experience an apparently elliptical piece of engraved copper as a round penny. However, emotional experience does not reveal an object in a new way in virtue of enabling us to perceive something beyond its sensible or perceptible properties; emotional experience should not be thought of as a queer form of sense-perception. In Goldie's example, the difference between the times before and after putting the two thoughts together—gorilla dangerous, cage open—is not that one has literally seen a new property of the gorilla, the queer property of to-be-fearedness. There is no skywriting in the new mental representation of the gorilla with the word 'dangerous' scrawled across the top. The gorilla's sensible

properties are the same. It is to be feared because of its common-or-garden, natural properties, such as its weight, its strength and its occasional propensity for aggression. Its property of to-be-fearedness is recognised through the combination of thought and affect that is present in emotional experience, in virtue of which it is perceived as dangerous.

Goldie also relates this new way of experiencing the world to the issue of motivation:

In feeling fear towards the gorilla you are emotionally engaged with the world, and, typically, you are poised for action in a new way – poised for action out of the emotion. (2000)

Like zoologists, we can coolly perceive the sensible properties in virtue of which a gorilla is to be feared. However, this cool perception does not determine that we will fear the gorilla or be motivated to act appropriately in response to the danger it poses. This is similar to the case of a sociopath who sees that someone is in pain, but fails to experience this a reason to alleviate that pain. Rather it is when we perceive the gorilla as dangerous *in emotional experience* that we are poised to act. In this sense Sartre is right to say that emotions transmute ‘the determinist world in which we live, into a magical world’ (1962). In feeling fear we are emotionally engaged with the world. Consequently, we recognise states of affairs as salient and as constituting normative reasons for *us*.

Whiting (2012) has challenged these kinds of phenomenological claims that are used to support perceptual accounts of the emotions. He argues that the phenomenal content of smugness, for example, is better understood as a compound of a particular sort of pleasurable feeling and a mental representation of a particular sort of achievement. We do not perceive the achievement in a new way, but associate it with the feeling. As it happens, this is not how I would describe my own experience of an emotion like smugness, which seems to me to be constituted by an embodied experiencing-as.²⁰ However, these sorts of phenomenological disputes are notoriously hard to resolve. Rather than argue about the nature of the compound, i.e., whether the feeling and the representation are dissociable components, the important point is that our emotional experience of, say, smugness, involves *both* feelings and mental representations, and

²⁰ Compare Nussbaum’s description of grief (1994).

that the complex experience involves representing an object as having properties that weren't previously experienced, such as, in the case of Goldie's gorilla, the property of to-be-fearedness. Goldie captures this combination with his description of emotions as 'feeling towards' or, equivalently, 'thinking of with feeling' (2000).²¹

9. Evaluating Emotional Experience

I have argued that emotional experience can have representational content. In particular, it can represent certain states of affairs as being normative reasons for action, attuning us to the world and focusing our attention on its salient features. To be fearful of a gorilla is, in part, to experience the gorilla as dangerous. In this sense, emotions can be more belief-like than desire-like. In terms of Anscombe's popular metaphor, emotional experience can have a mind-to-world direction of fit. There is something that it is for emotions to be appropriate or justified depending on how the world is. Emotional experience depicts the world in a certain way, and gets it right when the world is as depicted. It is therefore evaluable as well as evaluative (J. A. Deonna and F. Teroni 2012). To be fearful of an escaped gorilla may be appropriate. To be fearful of a gorilla inside a secure cage is very likely to be a mistake.²²

Emotional experience can get things right or wrong in another way. Whereas a belief gets things right when its propositional content is true, emotional experience can also be evaluated in terms of its phenomenal intensity. If we should be very afraid of the gorilla in an unlocked cage, we should be slightly nervous of a capuchin in the same situation. If emotional experience can serve as a vehicle for normative judgments, this may also help to explain why we experience value as a matter of degree. Sometimes our emotional experience has the appropriate direction, but not the appropriate intensity. Something has gone wrong if we experience intense moral indignation in

²¹ Similarly, J. Deonna and F. Teroni (2012) defend a view of the emotions as 'felt bodily attitudes' directed towards evaluative properties, which captures the idea that emotional experience is an embodied form of taking-to-be-the-case. Also along similar lines, Hufendiek defends an account of emotions as 'embodied, action-orientated representations' (2016). For Hufendiek, the embodied nature of an emotion is a constitutive part of its intentional structure. A further important question concerns the psychological processes that produce out unified emotional phenomenology. One possibility is that the different, representational and non-representational states, are unified in emotional experience by a process of categorisation or conceptualisation (Barrett 2006b; Barrett et al. 2009).

²² See Tappolet (2012) for more on emotional errors and illusions.

response to a minor, unintentional slight. The intensity of the emotion can be irrational in the sense of being out of proportion.

The recognition that an emotional response is out of proportion may in itself calm the response.²³ It should at least prompt us to recognise that the emotional response is inappropriate. Alternatively, it might lead to *post hoc* rationalisations or confabulations in order to avoid cognitive dissonance; for example, a search for reasons that justify the initial violence of the emotion. While this is irrational, the phenomenon is only intelligible given that emotional intensity is subject to rational evaluation.

Not only are occurrent emotions subject to rational evaluation, so are emotional dispositions. Whether we experience particular emotions can depend on our background beliefs and dispositions. As with our epistemic dispositions, we can cultivate our emotional dispositions directly or indirectly. We can realise that we are too quick to anger, and learn to count to ten or redirect our attention. We can make efforts to sympathetically imagine the situations of others. By listening to others, we can learn to respond appropriately to morally salient facts that we might not recognise otherwise. We are also inveterate story-tellers and we learn from each other's tales of everyday life and make-believe. Paying attention to subtle moral distinctions in plays, novels, films and other narrative arts also tends to refine our emotional dispositions.²⁴

On the other hand, we can deliberately cultivate emotional experience in ways that blind us to the normative significance of our environment, or aspects of it. For instance, Hochschild (1983) describes self-induced emotions in airline stewardesses who are expected to cultivate a general disposition of cheerfulness regardless of their situation. More immediately, we can also affect our emotional responses by controlling our bodies. For example, we might follow James' advice:

²³ Not always though. Sometimes emotions are 'cognitively impenetrable' in the sense that they persist despite an agent having beliefs that undermine their evidential basis. Some phobias, like the fear of flying, are like this.

²⁴ See Brady (2010) for other ways in which we pay 'virtuous attention to our emotional systems'.

Smooth the brow, brighten the eye, contract the dorsal rather than the ventral aspect of the frame, and speak in a major key, pass the genial compliment and you heart must be frigid indeed if it does not gradually thaw. (1884)²⁵

We can also ply ourselves with alcohol, or listen to stirring music, in order to intensify feelings of joyfulness, bravery or melancholy. Partly because emotional experience has a felt dimension, the cultivation of intense emotions can be pleasurable and even addictive (Fisher et al. 2016). The ability to cultivate emotional experience means that we can be held (partly) responsible for the emotions that we experience. It also means that we can *improve* ourselves qua emotional beings and, hence, qua moral beings if emotional experience is indeed integral to our moral nature.

10. Emotional experience and realism

My aim has been to describe aspects of our emotional experience in a way that makes it plausible that the emotions can function as a non-queer faculty of moral sensibility that reliably and non-accidentally motivates us to act when we recognise normative facts. Perhaps, however, this account will still seem like grist for the mill of the anti-realist. A particular concern is that even if the world is represented as having normative properties in emotional experience, the emotions are unreliable, even maximally unreliable, as cognitive capacities.

Indeed, there are good reasons to be cautious about the reliability of our emotions as cognitive capacities. As discussed, emotions function as action tendencies and as coping mechanisms. Their basic function seems to be related to successful action rather than true beliefs. Moreover, true beliefs are not always the best means to acting successfully. Sometimes heuristics and biases work better, especially in real time. Moreover, even if emotions are intentional, we can be wrong about the object of our emotions. As Freud observed, emotions can be displaced. We may misdirect our anger at Jones towards Smith. Similarly, emotions can spread out beyond their appropriate object. For example, disappointment about some particular failure or injustice can transmogrify into depression and poison our view of life. Alternatively, a joyful event

²⁵ See Laird and Lacasse (2014) for a review of the empirical evidence supporting James' common-sense advice.

can cause us to view the world through ‘rose-tinted spectacles’. Moreover, as I have mentioned, emotions can be manipulated in various ways.

An adequate reply would require an account of the psychological processes that give rise to emotional experience, an account of the normative properties that emotional experience purports to reveal, and a discussion of whether the former is fitted to reliably track the latter. As this is far more than I can accomplish here, I shall confine my response to four brief points. First, the phenomenon of unreliable emotions supports the claim that emotions do have an object, and that the relationship between an emotion and its object can be more or less appropriate. So, even if emotional experience sometimes misrepresents the world, this misrepresentation must be understood against the background expectation that emotional experience can get things right. Second, *all* modes of human cognition can fail to reliably track the facts, sometimes because of their susceptibility to deeply ingrained biases or for contingent, evolutionary reasons (Stich 1990; Kahneman 2011). If emotional experience has cognitive content, then differences in reliability are a matter of degree rather than kind. Third, if we accept that emotional experience represents the world as to-be-acted-upon, there is a (contingent) evolutionary reason to think that it will be generally reliable, namely that successful action typically depends on accurate representation. This consideration is especially persuasive when we consider emotional responses to threats and opportunities. Fourth, it seems that we can sometimes recognise when the normative facts are misrepresented in emotional experience. Sometimes, as I have discussed, this is a matter of bringing our emotions to bear on one another. This is no more worrying in principle than correcting perception with perception. However, it also suggests an independent standard of normative appraisal, which is grist for the realist’s mill.

11. Conclusion

One way to meet Mackie’s argument from queerness is to show that we have a non-queer, naturalistically respectable faculty of moral sensibility in virtue of which we are reliably and non-accidentally motivated by normative facts when we recognise them. I have argued that emotional experience can be intentional, evaluative, evaluable, and quasi-perceptual. These features make it a plausible candidate for this sort of faculty.

The account I have defended is also consistent with the view that emotional experience provides a (defeasible) warrant for normative judgments. Finally, it is consistent with a realist ontology according to which the normative facts constitute a mind-independent standard against which emotional content can be evaluated.

Is it in fact the case that emotional experience puts us into cognitive contact with normative reality? While the arguments of this paper provide some reasons for optimism, much work is yet to be done. We need adequate accounts of the normative phenomena and also the psychological processes that underlie the phenomenology of emotional experience. While plenty of work has been done in both areas, less has been done to see whether they fit together in ways that would support (or undermine) moral realism. Do the psychological processes provide us with a non-queer mode of access to normative reality? A satisfactory answer can only be based on interdisciplinary research. We cannot study the psychological processes from the armchair, and, without these data, we cannot say whether the processes that underlie our phenomenology are sensitive to normative facts. This means that we cannot do the metaethics solely from the armchair. On the other hand, we cannot say whether the psychological processes are sensitive to normative facts without an account of what those facts are or could be. To give such an account is to do moral philosophy. This means that we cannot do the metaethics solely from the laboratory either.

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