

Emotions as Attitudes

Julien A. DEONNA and Fabrice TERONI

Department of Philosophy, University of Geneva

ABSTRACT

In this article, we develop a fresh understanding of the sense in which emotions are evaluations. We argue that we should not follow mainstream accounts in locating the emotion-value connection at the level of content and that we should instead locate it at the level of attitudes or modes. We begin by explaining the contrast between content and attitude, a contrast in the light of which we review the leading contemporary accounts of the emotions. We next offer reasons to think that these accounts face substantial problems since they locate the link emotions bear to values at the level of content. This provides the incentive to pursue an alternative approach according to which emotions qualify as evaluations because they are specific types of attitudes, an approach we substantiate by appealing to felt bodily stances. We conclude by considering two reasons why this approach may be resisted; they respectively pertain to the alleged impossibility of drawing the attitude-content contrast in the case of the emotions and to the suspicion that so doing raises qualia related worries.

In view of the well-known problems associated with mainstream accounts that understand the evaluative nature of emotions in terms of their having an evaluative *content*, we have incentive to explore an alternative approach. The aim of this paper is to recommend and defend our attitudinal theory of the emotions (Deonna and Teroni 2012), whose central claim is that the different types of emotions are distinct evaluative *attitudes*. The discussion starts with some stage-setting regarding the contrast between content and attitude (or mode) and a presentation of the leading contemporary accounts of the emotions (section 1). Next, we explain why the evaluative nature of emotions is best elucidated in terms of their being specific types of attitudes (section 2) and lay out a way of developing such an approach in terms of felt action readiness (section 3). The remainder of the paper explores two lines of thought that may explain why accounts in terms of attitudes have been neglected in recent debates. According to the first, emotions do not lend themselves to a distinction

between content and attitude (section 4). According to the second, accounting for the evaluative nature of emotions in terms of their content is the only way to avoid raising the spectre of qualia (section 5). We offer reasons to reject these lines of thought and thus hope to show that the attitudinal theory is a viable contender.

1. Emotion, attitude and content: stage-setting

Reference books in the philosophy of mind ordinarily start by introducing the pivotal distinction between content and psychological attitude or mode.¹ We should accordingly distinguish between (i) what the mind is concerned with, and (ii) the way in which the mind is concerned with it. One may for instance *believe* that one's wife is in bed, *see* or *suppose* that this is the case, or *desire* that it be the case – these are different attitudes directed towards the same content. One may also believe that one's wife is in bed, that one's wife is at work, that one's husband is on the sofa, or that he is on holiday – these are different contents of the same attitude: believing. The same reference books typically mention emotions as telling illustrations of the content-attitude distinction (e.g. Crane 2001; Searle 1983). One can fear, hope or be angry that one's husband is in bed, for instance. It is indeed natural to think that the different

¹ Henceforth, we shall use 'attitude' where others use 'mode'. The choice is governed by the idea that thinking of the different emotions as different attitudes is, as we shall argue, just right (see de Sousa 1987, 156). Being typically used within the expression 'propositional attitude', however, it has the drawback of encouraging the claim, which we shall reject, that emotions are attitudes exclusively directed at propositions. This drawback is largely compensated, we believe, by the benefits of avoiding any confusion that might arise between the idea of 'mode' and that of 'modes of presentation'. The latter, which has to do with distinctions amongst contents, will play no role in what is to come as what we shall say is compatible with any view one might have on how fine-grained emotional content is.

types of emotions constitute distinct attitudes on a par with those of believing, desiring and so forth. Yet, strangely enough, if the books in question explore the nature of emotions any further, they invariably do so in a way that fails to do justice to that natural thought. In this, they stand in basic agreement with many if not all mainstream philosophical accounts of the emotions. Perhaps with the worry of not ending up with too many psychological attitudes, these approaches have attempted to understand all emotions in terms of a single attitude or a combination of attitudes that have nothing particularly emotional about them.

Consider first the idea that all types of emotions are combinations of two attitudes: *desiring* and *believing* (e.g. Gordon 1987; Green 1992; Searle 1983). On this account, believing that *o* is approaching and desiring to avoid or flee from *o* is a case of fear. And, since all emotions are understood in terms of these two same attitudes, it is in virtue of their having specific contents that beliefs and desires end up constituting an episode of fear rather than, say, one of anger or no emotion at all.

The very same observation carries over to two further accounts that are ontologically even more parsimonious. According to the *evaluative judgement theory*, emoting is nothing but judging (e.g. Nussbaum 2003; Solomon 1976). According to the *perceptual theory*, it is nothing but perceiving (e.g. Deonna and Teroni 2008; Johnston 2001; Tappolet 2000). On both accounts, the difference between types of emotions lies in the nature of what is judged or perceived, and it is the *evaluative aspect of these attitudes' content* that is key to elucidating these differences. Judging that one is degraded or perceiving one's own degradation is being ashamed, judging that a remark is offensive or perceiving its offensiveness is being angry. That is, types of

emotions differ from one another in virtue of the specific evaluative property they present or represent.

We shall not rehearse here the many well-known problems associated with these three accounts², but shall focus on selected issues that will provide a helpful background for the exposition of our alternative approach. Two fundamental worries have had a significant impact in driving people away from the belief and desire account. The first worry is that the account ends up denying the existence of emotions as states with their own psychological profiles. While such a reductionist strategy may have some initial appeal, it is significantly diminished by the account's failure to demarcate those combinations of beliefs and desires that constitute emotions from those that do not.³ Second, the account fails to acknowledge that emotions are *evaluations* that may be more or less fitting to their objects. This latter aspect of the emotions has been recurrently emphasized since ancient theorizing about them and a satisfactory account should elucidate it. Attempting to do so has of course been the driving force behind the evaluative judgement and perceptual theories. Since they conceive of emotions as cognitions of values, the relation between emotions and evaluative properties is accounted for in representational terms.

Yet, most philosophers agree today that understanding the emotions as deployments of evaluative concepts in judgements is mistaken and the dissenting voices against the perceptual theory are also gaining in strength (Brady 2011; Deonna and Teroni 2012,

² While the evaluative judgement theory is aptly criticized in Deigh (1994), the limits of perceptual theories are exposed in Brady (2013). We offer our own detailed criticisms of both in Deonna and Teroni (2012), respectively in chap. 5 and 6.

³ This line of thought is substantiated in Deonna and Teroni (2012, chap. 3).

chap.6; Dokic and Lemaire 2013; Salmela 2011). The former is cognitively much too demanding to accommodate the emotions of young children and nonhuman animals. As for the latter, it is led to posit a primitive and mysterious form of non-conceptual acquaintance with evaluative properties.⁴ Aside from these problems and the ingenious responses they have received in the guise of quasi-judgementalist (Roberts 2001; Solomon 2003) or quasi-perceptualist approaches (Döring 2007; Goldie 2000; Zagzebski 2003), something like the first worry levelled against the belief and desire account may resurface. For observe that both types of approaches conceive of the emotions in terms of *one single attitude that is not distinctively emotional*. This has two surprising consequences worth emphasizing.

The first is that it seems to imply that there is no psychological difference in being emotionally, as opposed to being judgementally or perceptually, directed towards something. The difference is exclusively located at the level of content – evaluative as opposed to non-evaluative content – of the same (non-emotional) attitude. The second consequence is that all these approaches encourage the idea that there is no difference amongst the emotional attitudes involved in, say, being angry, amused by, sad about or proud of something. The variety of emotion types is explained by the specific evaluative contents of what is, again, the same psychological attitude.

2. The idea of emotions as attitudes

We propose to explore an approach to the emotions which does not have to face such consequences. As advertised, the idea to be pursued consists in viewing the different

⁴ For a critical discussion of these two theories that centres on the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content, see Deonna and Teroni (2014).

types of emotions as different types of attitudes.⁵ Here are three reasons that one can advance in favour of such an attitudinal theory.

First, regarding the different types of emotions as different attitudes and not as one and the same attitude – for example the attitude of judging or that of perceiving – towards different contents is the default position, a position that then falls victim to philosophers’ proclivities towards ontological parsimony. Isn’t it natural to understand the contrast between, say, fear, anger and joy as one between different ways the mind is concerned with objects and events? Shouldn’t this contrast be located at the same level as that between desiring, believing and conjecturing and be clearly distinguished from the contrast between believing a given proposition and believing another? Observe that the suggestion is not that there is *one* psychological attitude common to the various emotion types and that would be distinct from other attitudes. We are not pursuing the idea that having an emotion is adopting the attitude of *emoting* towards a given content. This would take us back to the original theoretical quandary, since it would require that we distinguish the different types of emotions from one another at the level of their evaluative contents. In addition, it is hard to see what this emoting attitude – to be shared by horror, amusement, pride etc. – amounts to in psychological terms. For this reason and others that will emerge shortly, the suggestion is rather that there are as many emotional attitudes as there are types of

⁵ Ben Ze’ev has also recommended that we should think of the emotions as modes or attitudes (e.g. Ben-Ze’ev 2000, 2010). His way of thinking about attitudes differs significantly from ours, however, since the criteria he uses to individuate them have nothing to do with these attitudes’ *formal objects* (see below). For the distinction between attitude and content as it will be understood in the present article, see Crane (2007) and Recanati (2007).

emotions.⁶ And, if types of emotions are distinct from one another because they relate to different evaluative properties – this much is common ground between a variety of approaches – we have incentive to think of this relation as tracing back to the fact that they involve different attitudes.

Second, and as made clear from the outset, locating the relation between emotions and evaluative properties at the level of the attitude as opposed to that of the content allows one to reap the benefit the distinction is supposed to provide in the first place, namely that different attitudes can have exactly the same content. If Sharon's aloofness makes Jennifer angry and amuses Franz, it is quite reasonable to say that they relate in different ways to one and the same thing. Observe that individuating contents more finely, as Döring and Lutz (2014) propose, does nothing to undermine the point we are making here. Although they are right to suggest that different people may apprehend the same event or object differently (two different 'modes of presentation'), which results in their undergoing different emotions towards it, this certainly need not be the case. Consider the following example, which is illustrative of a very common situation. Maurice is not amused anymore by Barbara's excellent joke for he heard it a hundred times. This is because his attitude towards the joke has changed, not because of a change in the content of the joke. We expect Maurice to insist that the joke is very funny while stressing the fact that at that point he heard it too many times (Herzberg 2013, 81). We have no apparent reason to think that these

⁶ One less profligate attitudinal approach to the emotion would have it that there are only two determinate and distinct emotional attitudes: being pleased or displeased by something. We are not very hopeful that this strategy will allow for an attractive individuation of the different types of emotions, but it is certainly an option.

everyday situations imply a difference in *what* the subject's mind is concerned with as opposed to the *way* his mind is concerned with it. This is something approaches positing one single attitude – be it judging, perceiving or variants thereof – are bound to deny. According to them, to be amused consists in representing an event's comical character, being angry at it consists in representing its offensiveness, and so on.

We shall have the opportunity below (see section 4) to turn our attention to some reasons why one might end up thinking that the relation between emotions and evaluative properties cannot be captured by an account that sets attitude apart from content. For now, we shall simply explain why issues regarding the *individuation* of types of emotions should not encourage the thought that emotions of different types cannot share their contents. Consider the following piece of reasoning. Observing that a theory should have the resources to individuate types of emotions and that types of emotions relate to distinct evaluative properties, one may be led to conclude that one should account for this relation in representational terms. Of course, the reasoning is too quick since it overlooks the potential role of attitudes. What is more, the issue of emotion type individuation is actually more trouble for an account in terms of content than is often realized. The fact that an evaluative property features in the content of a mental state is hardly sufficient to make it an emotion, let alone an emotion of a specific type. For instance, one may amongst other things wonder, imagine, be surprised, disappointed, or indeed afraid that something is dangerous, and the same observation seems to hold for any evaluative content.⁷ If we have in any case to advert

⁷ Except, that is, if one appeals to a range of properties that are exclusive to the different types of emotions, a view favoured by Mendelovici (2013). Yet it should strike one as very surprising that emotions are about properties that cannot be represented by other mental states. The analogy with

at some point to attitudes to individuate the types of emotions, then we have all the more reason to try to preserve the idea that emotions of different types can have the same content.

The third and final reason for approaching the link between emotions and evaluative properties through attitudes is that this allows for a convincing partition of the respective contributions of attitude and content to the correctness conditions of emotions.⁸ To drive the point home, consider the following questions. Why does the truth of the proposition that it will rain tomorrow enter into the correctness conditions of the belief that it will? Why does its being desirable enter into the correctness conditions of a desire to that effect? It is very tempting to give the following straightforward answer: this is because the proposition is the object of a belief in the one case and of a desire in the other, and *not because the properties at issue are part of the content of these mental states*. After all, few philosophers go along with Davidson in insisting that believing requires representing a proposition *as true*,

colour perception Mendelovici offers in support of this view is inconclusive since, as we will argue below, perceptual phenomenology is very dissimilar from emotional phenomenology.

⁸ Reference to the evaluative correctness conditions of emotions is not premised on any substantial account of evaluative properties. It only presupposes that some emotions are correct, others incorrect as a function of whether a given evaluative property is exemplified or not – and we seem to admit this much when we assess episodes of anger or fear as incorrect because there is no offense or danger. This picture is irreconcilable with a crude form of subjectivism about evaluative properties according to which e.g. *o* is dangerous if and only if someone is afraid of *o*, but is compatible with sophisticated response-dependence approaches, as well as with buck-passing and realist accounts.

or that desiring requires representing a proposition *as a goal* or *as desirable*. Parallel claims for other types of mental states should be met with the same scepticism.⁹

It appears then reasonable to think that the correctness conditions under discussion result from the joint contributions of two factors: a content, which is identical in both cases, and distinct psychological attitudes whose presence explains why the mental state is correct as a function of whether the proposition is, respectively, true or desirable. What is represented and the attitude towards it each make their respective contributions. Observe in addition that truth and desirability are part of the correctness conditions of the relevant *types* of mental states, and not only of some of their instances: truth features in the correctness conditions of any belief, as desirability features in the correctness conditions of any desire. The relation is then the same as that between a type of emotions and a given evaluative property – e.g., between fear and danger or between anger and offensiveness – which is why some philosophers describe evaluative properties as the formal objects of emotions (Kenny 1963; Teroni 2007). This encourages the thought that a distinction between the respective contributions of content and attitude to the correctness conditions akin to the one sketched above for belief and desire also holds true for the emotions. To the question: “Why is fear or anger correct if the object or situation to which these emotions are directed is dangerous or offensive?”, the straightforward answer is “Because one has the attitude of fear or anger towards it” and not “Because it is represented as being dangerous or offensive”.

⁹ The examples provided should make it clear that we have in mind what it is customary to single out as epistemic (as opposed to prudential, moral or aesthetic) correctness, i.e. what D’Arms and Jacobson (2000) refer to as ‘fittingness’ in the case of emotions.

The foregoing observations offer some reasons for thinking that an attitudinal theory of the emotions is worth pursuing. Still, they are unquestionably pitched at a level of abstraction that makes it quite difficult to get one's mind around them. Going any further therefore requires answers to substantial questions regarding the nature of emotional attitudes. To that end, surveying some important distinctions amongst attitudes will prove fruitful.

3. The nature of emotional attitudes

A first distinction is that between *propositional* and *non-propositional* attitudes.¹⁰ There is a growing dissatisfaction with the idea that all attitudes are propositional (e.g. Crane 2001; Merricks 2009; Montague 2007). Perceiving is often taken to be a primary example of a non-propositional attitude: one sees the rotting meat, whether or not one believes that the meat is rotting. Bringing the distinction to bear on our discussion, it appears that emotions come in both propositional and non-propositional varieties. One may regret that the meat is rotten or be disgusted by the rotten meat. A more general survey suggests that while some types of emotions always have propositional (regret) or non-propositional (disgust) contents, most (fear, anger etc.) can have both sorts of contents.

This should not come as a surprise, since emotions have a content because other psychological states provide them with one. Furthermore, it takes little reflection to realize that these psychological states themselves come in a variety of attitudes –

¹⁰ By “propositional”, in the present context, we do not mean only that a criterion of correctness applies to the content, but also that the content is composed of concepts which the subject must deploy in order for her to be in the relevant state.

believing, imagining, remembering, perceiving and so on – that constitute as many potential *bases* of the emotions. One may fear an elephant one sees approaching (perception), fear that an elephant is about to arrive (testimony), or fear a monstrous flying elephant one is prompted to visualise (imagination). The fact that emotions get their content from the psychological states on which they are based has an obvious implication regarding the nature of that content: emotions have the propositional or non-propositional content of their bases.

This turns out to provide an additional argument in favour of an approach in terms of attitudes. As emphasized, the judgement and perceptual theories conceive of the emotions as involving a single attitude. In so doing, they are led to substantially restrict the types of contents emotions can have – according to a judgement theory, all emotions have a propositional content and according to a perceptual theory, they may all have a non-propositional content. These are consequences of the fact that these theories locate the relation between emotions and evaluative properties at the level of content – it is because emotions are held to represent these properties in the way judgement or perception represents that emotional contents turn out to be so restricted. By contrast, if we reject a content-based account of the relation between emotions and evaluative properties, we can leave the question regarding the propositional or non-propositional nature of emotional content completely open, and this is just how it should be.

A second distinction amongst attitudes is that between *dispositional* and *occurrent* attitudes. Belief may serve as an illustration of both types of attitudes. The belief that there is rotten meat in the fridge may be understood as a dispositional attitude. Accordingly, for a subject to have this belief is for him to be disposed, say, to assert the

proposition when it is called for, to defend it against those who put it into question, to use it in inferences and to guide behaviour, and so on. By contrast, someone who is actually considering the implications of the fact that there is rotten meat in his fridge may be described as having an occurrent belief about this proposition.¹¹ Does the same occurrence-disposition distinction apply to the emotions? There are undeniably many types of emotional dispositions (Deonna and Teroni 2009). When we talk here of emotional attitudes, however, we are referring to emotional episodes.¹² We are referring, say, to John's occurrent disgust at the meat in his fridge, which may or may not be the manifestation of a disposition to be disgusted by meat or rotten aliments.

Finally, amongst attitudes, and perhaps most obviously amongst occurrent attitudes, we can distinguish those that have a *phenomenology* from those that have none. It is not uncommon for philosophers to claim that, while there is a "way it is like" to be imagining or remembering, no such feature exists in believing or conjecturing. Whatever one's final verdict regarding the phenomenology (or lack thereof) of these different attitudes, it can hardly be doubted that emotions have an especially salient phenomenology. The next question regards how best to characterise it.

As we have just observed, the approach under discussion accommodates nicely the idea that emotions get their contents from a variety of psychological states serving as their bases, and this will obviously have repercussions on the overall phenomenology of emotional episodes. Being afraid of an object one sees differs phenomenologically

¹¹ Those who do not like the idea of 'occurrent beliefs' (see e.g. Armstrong 1968, chap. 10; Crane 2001, chap. 4) may substitute the expression with 'judgement' or 'covert judgement'.

¹² In conceiving of emotions as *episodes* rather than as more or less long-lived *dispositions*, we distance ourselves from the accounts favoured by Goldie (2000) and Wollheim (1999).

from being afraid of an object one has heard about or is imagining. This being said, recall that our central contention is that it is in virtue of being distinct attitudes that emotions of different types have different evaluative correctness conditions. Does this constrain in any way the sort of description one may offer of what it is like to feel an emotion? On the face of it, the answer must be negative. In fact, even those who are generally suspicious of making phenomenology play any role in thinking about the mind could find the model attractive as long as emotional attitudes are elucidated in, say, functional rather than phenomenological terms. But if one goes along with the majority of philosophers working on the emotions and is convinced, as we are, that an adequate theory must capture the idea that emotions are first person experiences that relate to evaluative properties, the framework on offer can still accommodate a broad variety of views regarding the nature of emotional phenomenology.

It is fair to say that emotional phenomenology is very controversial territory. Some stick to an account that appeals to the traditional idea of positive and negative *hedonic* tones (Goldstein 2003) or distinctive 'raw feels' (Whiting 2011). Others, in Jamesian spirit, endorse a purely *somatic* conception of emotional phenomenology as patterns of bodily feelings (Damasio 2000; Prinz 2004). Still others insist that this phenomenology is so to say directed towards the world outside the subject's body and may claim that emotions involve a *cognitive* phenomenology – which happens to be one tempting interpretation of Goldie's notorious 'feelings towards' (Goldie 2000, chap.3; see also Kriegel 2012). Of course, all sorts of combinations of the above are possible.

Although nothing in what follows depends on the particular attitudinal theory we favour, presenting it will help illustrate some of the issues we shall be discussing. The

best way to proceed is to explain where we stand with respect to the different accounts of emotional phenomenology that we have just mentioned. As against the appeal to hedonic tones, we think that emotional phenomenology is too rich and complex to be captured in terms of degrees of (un-)pleasantness. This is common ground with an account in terms of distinctive raw feels. The latter, however, manifests a lack of sensitivity to the kind of *evaluative aboutness* characteristic of emotional phenomenology, an issue we shall address in section 4. As regards the enduring Jamesian vs. 'feelings towards' understandings of emotional phenomenology, the position we favour consists in taking the middle path.

On the one hand, we agree with Jamesian approaches that bodily phenomenology is central. Appealing to other types of phenomenology, a strategy epitomized by Goldie's feelings towards, is supported neither by first-person introspection nor by more controlled investigations. Episodes of fear, sadness, anger, shame, joy and so on are characterised by a salient and distinctive bodily phenomenology, and one is for that reason hard-pressed to come up with a convincing account making reference to an alternative phenomenology. On the other hand, if there is, as we suggested, a kind of aboutness to the way it feels to have an emotion, then we should try to reconcile this fact with an emphasis on the way the body feels. It is often claimed that adopting a Jamesian approach leads to the conclusion that emotions are intentionally directed to specific happenings within the body, which is hard to accept given that it does not seem to us, when we are in the grip of an emotion, that we represent such happenings. However, as we shall now see, nothing forces this awkward conclusion on the Jamesian.

It is indeed possible to steer the aforementioned middle-path. The point of departure is the idea that what it is like to undergo the bodily changes that occur in emotions is best glossed by saying that the subject feels herself taking a certain stance, posture or indeed attitude towards something outside her body. To put it differently, the idea is that, when undergoing an emotion, the body is felt globally or holistically as taking a certain attitude towards this or that object or event. The underlying suggestion is not that emotions are attitudes directed towards the felt body, but rather that they are felt attitudes that are, typically at least, directed towards something else. In appealing to more global and outward-looking forms of bodily consciousness that possess their own sort of aboutness, this way of understanding the phenomenology involved in emotions goes against an 'atomistic' conception of bodily experience.

One attractive way to pursue this line of thought consists in appealing to an aspect of the emotions recurrently emphasized in contemporary approaches: action readiness (e.g. Frijda 1986, 2007; Scarantino 2014a). Making reference to the subject's experiencing a given readiness to act indeed allows for a fine-grained understanding of the claim that emotions possess evaluative correctness conditions because they are felt bodily attitudes (Deonna and Teroni 2012, chap. 7). At the heart of the account under discussion, then, is the idea that emotions are evaluative attitudes because they are bodily experiences of being disposed or tending to act in a differentiated way vis-à-vis a given object or event. The relevant notion of felt bodily attitude should be broad enough to encompass the felt readiness to move away, towards or against a given object, to contemplate it, to submit to it, to be attracted by it, to disengage from it or even to suspend any kind of interaction with it. In fear, one feels one's own body poised to defuse something; in anger, one feels its preparedness to deal with it in an

actively hostile way; in shame, one feels one's readiness to escape from the look of those who make one feel ashamed; and in sadness, one feels one's body go weak as it is deprived of any interaction with the absent object whose qualities we are actively attending to. A sort of pull from the object made manifest in the way it grabs and controls one's attention is also at the forefront of that more aloof emotion, admiration.¹³

These illustrations, which underscore the agentic dimension of emotional phenomenology, allow us to appreciate the sense in which emotions are evaluative attitudes. To make the same point differently, they help us understand how reference to distinct felt bodily profiles explains why different types of emotions have distinctive evaluative correctness conditions. Fear of a dog is an experience of the dog as dangerous insofar as it is an experience of one's body being prepared to forestall its impact (flight, preventive attack, immobility, etc.), an attitude it is correct to have if, and only if, the dog is dangerous. In the same way, anger at a person is an experience of offensiveness insofar as it consists in an experience of one's body being prepared to retaliate, an attitude that is correct if, and only if, the person is offensive. And shame is an experience of oneself as degraded insofar as one feels one's body readiness to disappear under the ground or shrink out of sight from those who defame us. These are some examples of the approach to emotional attitudes we favour and whose

¹³ A reader sympathetic to our account will notice in these illustrations an attractive way of extending the notion of a felt bodily stance to cover mental activities that are pre-eminently attentive.

fecundity depends on the availability of convincing descriptions of a significant number of emotion types in terms of felt bodily attitudes.¹⁴

In the foregoing, we have advocated a specific attitudinal theory that explains the evaluative nature of emotions by reference to the distinctive felt attitudes they feature, and that understands these attitudes in terms of felt action readiness. An attitudinal theory, whether or not in the specific guise we recommend, holds promise, then, but it also faces serious challenges. The remainder of the paper examines two prominent ones.¹⁵ The next section explores the idea that emotions do not lend themselves to a distinction between attitude and content. The final section considers whether attitudinal theories are committed to positing qualia and, if so, whether this is detrimental to them.

4. The blending problem

We advertised the basic agreement in which the attitudinal theory stands with the intuitive distinction between attitude and content as one of its main selling points. The theory allows saying that one can be amused by what another is fearful of, or that one may be afraid of a state of affairs that another simply judges to obtain. The distinction may fail to apply to the emotions, however. According to an influential line of thought, the nature of emotional phenomenology does not make room for the attitude-content

¹⁴ This is of course an open empirical issue, but see e.g. Scherer (2009) and Scarantino (2014b) for some reasons for optimism.

¹⁵ Several other challenges, some tied to our specific Jamesian version of the approach, others to the general strategy, are examined and hopefully defused in Deonna and Teroni (2012: chap. 7).

distinction.¹⁶ Goldie gives us a taste of what is at stake in an oft-quoted passage in which he asks us to contemplate what happens with him before and after he fell on ice:

Then I only thought of the ice as dangerous; now I feel fear towards the ice. Of course it is true that I now do still think of the ice as in some way dangerous, but my way of thinking of it as dangerous is now distinct. Now I think of its dangerousness as emotionally relevant in a special way. Coming to think of it in this new way is not to be understood as consisting of thinking of it in the old way, plus some added-on phenomenal ingredient – feeling, perhaps; rather, the whole way of experiencing (...) the world is new (...). The difference between thinking of X as Y without feeling and thinking of X as Y with feeling will not just comprise a different attitude towards the *same* content – a thinking which earlier was without feeling and now is with feeling. The difference also lies *in* the content, although it might be that this difference cannot be captured in words. (2000, 59-60)

The passage is of particular interest because it weaves together a variety of considerations that may support the conclusion that emotional phenomenology does not leave room for an attitude-content distinction.

One first consideration is that, once one has been afraid of the ice, one can think about it in new, affective ways. This may well be the case, but it does not militate against distinguishing the contribution of the attitude (being afraid) from that of the content (one's way of thinking of ice and its dangerousness). For the relevant phenomenon lends itself easily – and in fact illuminatingly – to a treatment in terms of the attitude-

¹⁶ While several arguments have been offered for this conclusion, we shall concentrate on those appealing to emotional phenomenology, which appear to us to be the most threatening. For an argument to the same effect that starts with linguistic considerations, see Gunther (2003) and, for a convincing response, Herzberg (2012).

content distinction. On this reading, Goldie insists on two things. First, that *two attitudes* – judging and fearing – differ phenomenologically and, second, that undergoing an emotion towards a given object has all sorts of consequences on how one may think of it. That is, having an emotional attitude has consequences for *the contents* one may think (judge, suppose, remember, etc.). Nothing here should lead us to deny that the attitude-content distinction applies to the emotions.

One may insist, however, that this does not get at the heart of the issues raised by Goldie's objections to what he describes as 'add-on' approaches. Is he not contending that applying the attitude-content distinction to the emotions would betray their distinctive phenomenology? This is a second consideration, which can be developed by insisting that an approach in terms of attitude and content forces upon us a distinction that is incompatible with the emotions' *phenomenological unity*. Emotional experiences, it is claimed, are so unified that it is hopeless to try to prise apart the contribution of the attitude – the way it feels like to be sad, afraid or angry – and that of the content.¹⁷ We agree to the following extent: there is a unity to the phenomenology of fearing an elephant or of being angry at one's husband, which makes it difficult for one in the grip of these emotions to describe them in any other way than as an episode of fear directed towards an elephant or one of anger directed towards one's husband.

Now, we might betray this unity if we thought of the episode of fear as involving the feeling of cold sweat running down one's spine together with the visual

¹⁷ Roberts concurs: "experientially, a construal is not an interpretation laid over a neutrally perceived object, but a characterization of the object, a way the *object* presents itself." (2001, 80) Similar considerations can be found in Gunther (2004).

representation of an elephant. Still, whatever one's verdict about this and similar examples, why think that all ways of drawing the attitude-content distinction would betray the emotions' phenomenological unity? More specifically, is there any reason to think that our approach in terms of felt bodily attitudes would do so? If conceiving of the emotions as felt attitudes plus contents forces upon us the conclusion that they resemble a mixture in which the elements fail to interpenetrate (rather like water and oil) and not a homogenous blend (as in a successful mayonnaise), we fail to see why. So, while emphasizing phenomenological unity may be a useful reminder of the fact that attitudes and contents are abstractions in the sense that the fundamental psychological entities are homogenous blends, this does not militate against the idea that the phenomenology of these entities is a function of two independent variables, attitude and content.

Again, this reply to the problem of phenomenological unity may be too quick. Goldie's worry that we should not consider the affective aspect of emotions as being *added on* to a 'neutral' content is perhaps better interpreted as bearing on the *aboutness* characteristic of emotional feelings. The third consideration that may go against the attitude-content distinction thus appeals to the fact that what it is like to be afraid of an elephant or angry at one's husband consists in experiencing an elephant or a person in evaluative terms. The idea that this sort of experiential evaluative aboutness must be understood in terms of representational content is one of the fundamental motivations for a perceptual theory (De Sousa 1987; Döring 2007; Roberts 2001). Emotions, it is claimed, are characterized by a perception-like phenomenology of value – in fear, we are presented with danger; in anger, with an offense, etc. – because

they represent these evaluative properties, i.e. because these properties feature in their contents (Gunther 2004, 49).

We have here the beginning of an argument for blocking our claim that emotions *cannot* be individuated by an exclusive appeal to their evaluative contents and that appeal to attitudes is required (see section 2). Suppose that there are different ways of indirectly representing that something is red but only one way of *experiencing* its redness, namely by seeing it. Likewise, suppose that there are different indirect ways of representing that something is dangerous but only one way of *experiencing* its dangerousness, namely by fearing it. If this is the case, then describing a visual experience or an emotion as the experience of a given colour or evaluative property may fully individuate it. No emotional attitudes are required, we just have to appeal to experiences of the relevant evaluative properties.

If such a perceptual approach is driving Goldie's thoughts in the above passage, he relies on a questionable assumption, since we still have to be persuaded that assimilating emotional phenomenology to perceptual phenomenology is to remain faithful to the facts. Does the former resemble the latter in calling for a treatment that appeals to contents exclusively? The perceptual theory encourages the idea that the phenomenology of fear is that of danger making itself manifest to one in the same way as redness or hardness make themselves manifest in vision or in touch. The attitudinal theory encourages an alternative description, according to which the phenomenology of an emotion is that of a given attitude: what it is like to feel fear is best described in terms of a felt attitude towards something. Or, in the language of the specific version we favour, feeling afraid is best captured in terms of feeling oneself taking a bodily stance, posture or attitude towards something. There is no perception-like

phenomenology of danger, but a felt attitude that is correct if and only if something is dangerous. This alternative description is, we submit, not only convincing on phenomenological grounds, it also removes the air of mystery surrounding the idea of a perceptual relation to evaluative properties.

Emotional phenomenology is characterized by a kind of aboutness, but it displays important dissimilarities with perceptual phenomenology that must be taken seriously. Approaching the distinctive feel of emotions in terms of felt bodily attitudes is an attractive way to do so. All in all, attention to the nature of emotional experience should not encourage the idea that the phenomenology of emotional attitudes is in tension with their aboutness. What remains to be seen, though, is whether there are reasons to resist the account of emotional phenomenology put forward in the foregoing. One may indeed feel uncomfortable with the way it tries to circumvent the influential dichotomy between content and qualia.

5. Facing qualia

We have argued that attention to emotional phenomenology supports the idea that to undergo an emotion is to feel oneself taking a specific attitude towards something. We shall now consider a worry regarding accounts in terms of attitudes that does not, or at least not directly, concern emotional phenomenology. The worry takes as point of departure an influential approach to the mind according to which phenomenology is either a matter of representational content or of non-representational qualia.¹⁸ Approaching phenomenology in the light of this ‘either content or qualia’ dichotomy,

¹⁸ For a helpful treatment of the different ways in which the term ‘qualia’ has been understood, see Crane (2000). For the ‘qualia or content’ dichotomy, see e.g. Ross (2001) and Tye (2013).

one may be led to the conclusion that attitudinal accounts are bound to conceive of the phenomenological contribution of the attitude, which has been consistently distinguished from that of the content, on the model of a quale. This final section is concerned with this worry.

Let us start with the following observation: the worry appears to presuppose that the phenomenology distinctive of attitudes cannot, unlike that of their contents, but consist in some sort of raw feel. This comes down to claiming that the observations about emotional phenomenology with which we concluded the last section cannot be correct because they fail to echo the content or qualia dichotomy. Trying in this way to make phenomenology fit an influential yet far from uncontroversial theoretical framework may arouse some discomfort, but we will not pursue this line of thought. We wish instead to focus on the fact that talk of qualia in relation to the phenomenological contribution of attitudes lends itself to two distinct readings which will help clarify the account we favour.

According to the first reading, a quale is a phenomenological property of a mental state that does not contribute *to what the mental state represents*. If reference to qualia is read in this way, then the phenomenology of emotional attitudes is that of qualia. But it should be clear that this conclusion carries no implication at all regarding the nature of the attendant phenomenology. It is for instance compatible with the idea, upon which we insisted above, that there is a sort of aboutness to the way it feels to have an emotional attitude.

According to the second reading, a quale is a phenomenological property of a mental state that does not contribute at all *to its intentionality*. If reference to qualia is read in this way, then talk of qualia is hard to reconcile with talk of aboutness. Yet, we have

emphasized that descriptions such as “It seems that one is taking an attitude towards something” is congenial to the way it feels to undergo emotions. If so, then one cannot maintain that the phenomenology at issue does not contribute to intentionality – the phenomenology of emotional attitudes is not one of qualia so restrictively conceived. For recall that the attitudinal component of psychological states has a major impact on their intentionality. Attitudes are responsible for the fact that distinct formal objects feature in the correctness conditions of these states – truth for belief, desirability for desire, different evaluative properties for different types of emotions, and so on. We have stressed that this is not a matter of what these states represent, i.e. of their content. This is why we insist that what it feels like to have an emotion is not entirely a matter of representing something. As emphasized against the perceptual theory, it is also a matter of feeling oneself taking a given attitude *directed towards* what is represented. It is e.g. because the attitude of fearing has a distinctive phenomenology, one which is characterized by a certain aboutness, that fearing something is correct if and only if it is dangerous.

Let us finally come back to the ‘content or qualia’ dichotomy with which we opened this section. We understand emotional phenomenology in a way that is irreconcilable with an influential conception of the mind that we can, following Crane’s helpful terminology (2007), label ‘pure intentionalism’. According to this conception, the phenomenology of psychological states is exclusively a matter of what they represent. We have contended that endorsing pure intentionalism about the emotions would betray the way they feel, since this would leave no room for the attendant attitudinal phenomenology. To make essentially the same point, emotions fail to exhibit, *pace* Mendelovici (2013) and Tye (2008), the sort of transparency characteristic of (at

least some) perceptual states that has encouraged many to endorse pure intentionalism about them (Harman 1990; Martin 2002). Emotional phenomenology is not exclusively that of something making itself manifest. As opposed to what happens in perception, the exercise of attending to one's emotional experience as opposed to what it is about does not culminate in the contemplation of the very same properties in both instances. This is clear when we appreciate how switching one's attention from what an emotional experience is about to the experience itself dissolves its intentional structure.¹⁹

This lack of transparency suggests that we should reject pure intentionalism about the emotions and embrace a view more faithful to their phenomenology. This is Crane's 'impure intentionalism': the claim that the way it feels to have a mental state is the joint upshot of an attitude and a content.

Conclusion

Emotions are evaluations, we have argued, because they feature distinct attitudes and not because they represent evaluative properties. On the backdrop of mainstream

¹⁹ Frijda expresses this very nicely in the following passage: "Intentional nature and meaning [of emotion experience] depend on the current mode of attention. They are most distinct in synthetic mode and immersion and they can be destroyed with increasing degree of analyticity and detachment. In self-focus, analytic attention reduces felt bodily engagement to just that. Felt impulse to shrink back from a threat is transformed into felt muscle tension, just as the feeling of pointing can be transformed into feeling one's finger stretched. One comes to feel dizzy, one's heart racing, instead of feeling anxious or upset. [...] *Analytic isolation of information sources robs an experience of its emotional character.*" (2005, 482)

contemporary theories of the emotions, we have explained how we can develop such an approach in conceiving of the emotions as felt attitudes or, within the specific account we recommend, as distinct ways of feeling oneself taking a bodily attitude towards something. We have then examined whether the nature of emotional phenomenology as well as more general theoretical issues should lead us to abandon it, a conclusion we offered reasons to resist.*

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