CrossMark

Emotion as Position-Taking

Jean Moritz Mueller[1]

Abstract It is a popular thought that emotions play an important epistemic role. Thus, a considerable number of philosophers find it compelling to suppose that emotions apprehend the value of objects and events in our surroundings. I refer to this view as the Epistemic View of emotion. In this paper, my concern is with a rivaling picture of emotion, which has so far received much less attention. On this account, emotions do not constitute a form of epistemic access to specific axiological aspects of their objects. Instead it proposes that they are ways of taking a stand or position on the world. I refer to this as the Position-Taking View of emotion. Whilst some authors seem sympathetic to this view, this it has so far not been systematically motivated and elaborated. In this paper, I fill this gap and propose a more adequate account of our emotional engagement with the world than the predominant epistemic paradigm. I start by highlighting the specific way in which emotions are directed at something, which I contrast with the intentionality of perception and other forms of apprehension. I then go on to offer a specific account of the valence of emotion and show how this account and the directedness of emotions makes them intelligible as a way of taking a position on something.

✉ Jean Moritz Mueller
jean.moritz.mueller@gmail.com

1 Institut für Philosophie, Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Am Hof 1, 53113 Bonn, Germany

🙋 Springer

1 Introduction

Much current work on the emotions conceives of them as epistemically significant. As many philosophers suppose, emotions apprehend the values and disvalues of objects and events in our surroundings.[1] Roughly, the idea is that, in favourable circumstances, emotions like joy and disappointment disclose a certain object or event as having positive or negative value, respectively. I call this view the Epistemic View of emotion.

In this paper, my concern is with a rivaling picture of emotion, which has received much less attention. On this account, emotions are ways of *taking a position* on the world: in being joyful or disappointed about something we do not apprehend its value but rather adopt a positive or negative stand towards it in light of its value. This view – which I call the Position-Taking View of emotion – goes back to an early strand of phenomenology. It is mostly associated with Husserl's student von Hildebrand.[2] The view occasionally also surfaces in the contemporary philosophical literature on emotion.[3] However, while some authors seem sympathetic to the idea, it has so far not been adequately motivated and elaborated.[4] In this paper, I wish to do so and offer a more satisfactory account of our emotional engagement with the world than the predominant epistemic paradigm.

I first explicate the sense in which emotions are directed at something (section 2). A corollary of this will be that the Epistemic View misrepresents our emotional involvement with the world and that this involvement is more aptly conceived as a position-taking. I substantiate this claim by offering a specific account of the valence of emotions (section 3).

The view I develop in this paper is concerned with emotions qua occurrence or episode. This general take is shared by the Epistemic View which construes them as epistemic episodes. Notwithstanding this common ground, the view I will propose radically differs from the latter with respect to the kind of episode as which it conceives emotions.

2 Emotional Directedness

To motivate the Position-Taking View I will begin with a common observation: emotions are intentional in that they have a *target*[5] or *particular object*. Thus, if Sam is indignant, there will be something about which he is indignant; if Maria is afraid, there will be something that she fears etc. When philosophers introduce the notion of a

---

[1] Cf. e.g. Tappolet (2000), Roberts (2003, 2013), Deonna (2006), Teroni (2007), Slaby (2008), Deonna and Teroni (2012, 2014, 2015).

[2] Cf. von Hildebrand (1969a, 1969b, 1953). The view figures in early phenomenology more widely, though.

[3] Cf. esp. Mulligan (2007, 2010a, 2010b). Mulligan uses 'reaction' and 'position-taking' interchangeably.

[4] Recently, Zamuner (2015) has elaborated a cognate view on which emotions are psychological reactions. Although drawing on a similar intuition, the position I elaborate differs from his in several respects. Cf. n. 17, n. 18 and n. 26. Within the recent literature, Deonna and Teroni's (2012, 2014, 2015) 'attitudinal view' can seem very close to an elaboration of this idea, too, though see section 3.2.

[5] This usage of the term goes back to Wittgenstein (1953, § 476). I say more about targets below.

particular object, they usually add that emotions also have *formal objects*. In contrast to particular objects, formal objects are shared by all instances of the respective emotion type. Thus, while occurrences of indignation (fear) may be about different things, they are all concerned with offence (danger). More specifically, the formal object of an emotion is a particular (dis)value property which provides its standard of adequacy: indignation about (fear of) x is fitting if and only if x is offensive (dangerous).[6] Some theorists suppose that there is more to the connection between emotions and formal objects.[7] According to the Epistemic View, emotions moreover apprehend and thus provide awareness of instances of their formal object.

In the course of the paper, I will show that the Epistemic View misrepresents the link between emotions and their formal object. However, my primary focus for now will be on their particular objects. To make plausible the notion of an emotional position-taking, I shall contrast the intentionality of emotions with the intentionality of a different type of experience to which proponents of the Epistemic View often assimilate them. As they frequently suppose, emotion can be modeled on perception.[8] While this view may seem intuitive in that both emotions and perceptions appear to be passive mental occurrences, I will show that it conceals an important difference in respect of their intentionality.

2.1 Directedness and Perceptual Intentionality

Imagine perceiving a landscape.[9] There are various objects in front of you: houses, trees, a mountain in the background. Giving a naïve description of your visual experience, we might say that these objects are *presented* to you. The same goes for their properties: the redness of the roofs, the dark green of the trees, the shape of the mountain are all in a straightforward sense presented to you.[10] Now imagine that, as you perceive the landscape, you also feel an emotion. Contemplating the scene in detail, intense joy wells up in you. In saying that your joy wells up *in* you, we imply that it contrasts in respect of its experienced location with the perceived external scene. At the same time, it has a specific connection with that scene: it is *directed toward* it. You feel glad *about* the scene.

---

[6] This view is incompatible with strong subjectivist views of value, such as value projectivism. However, it is not committed to a strong form of realism. In section 3.1, I offer a view of the formal objects of emotions as relational properties that have subjective concerns as one of their relata.

[7] In section 2.2, I indicate a further role of formal objects.

[8] For the view that emotions are perceptions of value, cf. e.g. Meinong (1972), Tappolet (2000), Deonna (2006). On another account, emotions are analogous to perceptions in certain respects. Cf. e.g. Helm (2001, 2002), Cuneo (2006), Döring (2007). Versions of the latter do not always understand emotions as apprehending value and thus as versions of the Epistemic View as here introduced. Sometimes, the focus is primarily on a putative analogy in respect of the justification of judgment, which is spelled out without assimilating emotion to perception in respect of apprehending aspects of the world (but e.g. in terms of both serving as evidence for certain states of affairs, as Cuneo 2006 has it). On some views (Roberts 2003, 2013; Döring 2004), emotion is a form of 'perceiving-as'. Here, the intentionality of emotion is assimilated to that of perception in that both are understood as presentations or impressions of certain features.

[9] The example is taken from von Hildebrand (1969a, 10f.). Cf. also Reinach (1989, 295).

[10] On the presentational phenomenology of perception, cf. also Husserl (2001), Chudnoff (2012).

If this account is descriptively accurate, there is a salient phenomenological difference between emotion and perception. As a first pass, one might say that there is a different *direction* to the intentionality of each type of experience. Thus, von Hildebrand proposes that in perception, "the intention goes, so to speak, from the object to the subject: the object reveals itself to our mind, it speaks and we listen."[11] Put less figuratively, we might say that in perception your role is that of a recipient who registers what is presented. By contrast, it seems that the intentionality of your joy towards the scene has the opposite direction. Here, the 'intention' goes from the subject to the object: the joy inside you is directed towards the external scene; it is you who 'speaks'.[12] Another way of putting this contrasting point is in terms of your emotion having a *target*. This notion represents emotions as being *aimed at* something. One might think that von Hildebrand's speech act-metaphor is somewhat more evocative, though, in that it invites a slightly richer characterization of emotional directedness. It invites thinking of emotion as a position adopted towards an object: in having a positive feeling aimed at the landscape you are not simply registering the scene, but *take a favorable stand* towards it.

Since the contrast I am highlighting may be unfamiliar, it calls for further elucidation. Also, one might doubt that it generalizes to all emotions. For example, in the case of an immediate reaction of fear to a sudden danger this contrast is not as easily set up. Here, it is less plausible to say that the emotion 'wells up in you' and contrasts in respect of its felt location with the external situation. Can we still characterize immediate emotional reactions as aimed at something or as position-takings? To show that we can and further elucidate what I have in mind, I will offer some remarks on the locutions we deploy to ascribe objects to emotions and perceptions. Once we have a clearer understanding of directedness, I will then substantiate the richer characterization of emotions as position-takings.

While 'directed toward' is often used technically to characterize all intentional phenomena, there is a more restrictive, ordinary use that captures what is specific to emotional as opposed to perceptual intentionality. On this use, the term is a near synonym of 'aimed at' and applies only to some intentional phenomena.[13] More specifically, we can speak of joy, fear, indignation, jealousy, contempt and admiration as directed toward (aimed at) something. In contrast, perceptions do not admit of this characterization. Thus, on this use of 'directed toward' the following sentence seems anomalous:

> Maria's fear was directed toward the motorbike; and so were the visual perceptions she enjoyed as the bike approached

---

[11] Von Hildebrand (1953, 178). Von Hildebrand is here concerned with a broader class of phenomena he calls 'cognitive acts', of which perception is a paradigm case.

[12] Ibid., 178. Von Hildebrand's claim concerns all so-called 'responses'. I say more about the responsive character of emotion below. On the contrast with perception that I am here elaborating, cf. also Salice's (2015) exposition of von Hildebrand's views on intentionality.

[13] I do not offer 'addressed at' as a possible synonym to avoid confusing the directedness of emotion with a specific communicative role that is sometimes accorded to them. It is often supposed that emotions are adaptive in that they are communicated to others via their characteristic (e.g. facial) expressions. However, to specify the target of an emotion is not to specify whom it is communicated to. Maria's anger may be directed towards Sam in a situation where it cannot be communicated to Sam (e.g. because Sam is absent).

Compare, moreover, the prepositions we use in attributing objects to emotions and perceptions, respectively.[14] In the former case, we use prepositions such as 'about', 'at' and 'over':

>   Sam is glad about the scene in front of his eyes

>   Maria is angry at Sam

>   George is enthusiastic over his victory

These prepositions convey a direction towards an object. In this respect, they differ from the preposition 'of', as used to attribute objects to perception:

>   Maria has a vivid perception of the landscape

>   Sam enjoys a visual experience of the mountains

Rather than conveying a direction towards an object, 'of' here specifies what is registered. To be precise, 'of' can also be used to attribute emotional objects:

>   Maria is afraid of the motorbike

>   John is contemptuous of Peter

However, here the preposition conveys something different. Note that we can paraphrase these ascriptions by saying that the respective emotion is directed towards (aimed at) something. When 'of' attributes objects of perception, no such paraphrase is possible.

The same goes for ascriptions of objects to the two phenomena by means of 'that'-clauses. Consider:

>   Peter is glad that he got sight of the scene

>   George is sad that the show has closed

These sentences contrast in the same way with sentences such as

>   Maria perceives that there is a mountain.

While the former can be paraphrased in terms of the emotion being directed at a certain state of affairs, the latter admits of no corresponding paraphrase.

These linguistic considerations illustrate the contrast I have in mind. Moreover, they suggest that it is not restricted only to specific emotional responses: we speak of emotions as being directed towards (aimed at) something regardless of whether they

---

[14] On this point, cf. also von Hildebrand (1969a, 10, n. 1).

arise slowly or as an immediate reaction.[15] To offer some additional elucidation of the directedness of emotions, I would like to supplement these considerations with some remarks on their relation to reasons. This will also show more clearly how the view I am elaborating is opposed to the Epistemic View.

2.2 Directedness and Responsiveness

When we feel an emotion towards something, its target will provide a reason for which we have the emotion. That is, we feel it *in light of* some aspect of its target. We can also put this by saying that an emotion is a *response* to its target. In this context, the term 'response' is not used simply to indicate a causal connection between the emotion and its object but to attribute a motivating reason for the former. To see that the directedness of an emotion implies that it is a response, we need to look more closely at ordinary emotion ascriptions. Consider the following sentences[16]:

> *Peter is glad about the scene, though not because the scene appears to have any positive import to him whatsoever

> *Maria is afraid of the motorbike, though she is not afraid because the motorbike appears even remotely dangerous to her

> *George is sad that the show has closed, though he is not sad because its closure appears to him as a loss of any sort

These sentences seem semantically anomalous. They indicate that the attribution of a target to an emotion entails that this object constitutes a motivating reason for it. More precisely, this motivating reason is a specific evaluative respect in which its target presents itself. As these examples suggest, to conceive of an emotion as directed is to recognize it a response to an appearance of its formal object.[17]

---

[15] I would maintain, though, that there is an inner phenomenology also to immediate emotional responses. Although at the time, our attention is fully directed outwards, we can later turn our attention inwards and appreciate our inner arousal at that time. Considerations along these lines hint a further difference between emotion and perception in respect of *transparency*. On this point, cf. also von Hildebrand (1969a, 9ff.), Deonna and Teroni (2012, 69). There is more to be said about this apparent difference and how it relates to the contrast in respect of their intentionality. I here set it aside and focus on explicating the notion of directedness insofar as this is necessary to make plausible and substantiate the Position Taking-View.

[16] I here adopt the most natural way of specifying motivating reasons, i.e. by means of 'because'-clauses. The 'because'-clauses in the sentences to follow can be paraphrased by corresponding clauses preceded by 'in light of'.

[17] In this connection cf. also de Sousa (2011, 72) and Mulligan (2010b, 485). Dietz (2017) argues that the propositional content of factive emotions (ascribed by means of '*S* Vs that *p*') is a motivating reason for them. I would maintain it is ultimately the evaluative light in which the state of affairs specified by their propositional content is construed which constitutes a motivating reason (cf. the third example). Moreover, the basic point is not restricted to factive emotions. For a clear case in hand, consider this variant of the second example: 'Maria is afraid that the motorbike will hit her, but not because this prospect appears in any way threatening to her'. This sentence, too, is anomalous. Cf. also Müller (*forthcoming*).

   Zamuner (2015, 35f.) argues on empirical grounds that emotions are not necessarily reactions to evaluations. However, as he himself notes (ibid., 36, n. 28), these empirical considerations only tell against the claim that emotions are reactions to conceptual evaluations. Note that the above examples are deliberately framed in terms of 'appearance' rather than 'belief'. There is no supposition that the respective evaluative construal is conceptual. I respond to a further concern with this picture, raised by Teroni (2007) and Deonna and Teroni (2012, ch. 8), in Müller (*forthcoming*).

This take on the directedness of emotion adds further support to the claim that emotions and perceptions differ in respect of intentionality. Note that perceptions are not responses: as a request for a reason-giving rather than mere causal explanation, the question 'why do you perceive x?' makes no sense.[18] Accordingly, emotions and perceptions seem to relate to their objects in different ways.

To adequately situate these considerations it is worth noting also that they are incompatible not only with views that take emotion to be a form of perception, but with any version of the Epistemic View.[19] As a request for motivating reasons, the question 'why do you apprehend x?' is meaningless, too. The same goes for cognate verbs such as 'grasp', 'register', 'discover', 'detect','(come to) be aware of'.[20] What is more, they tell against the Epistemic View also insofar as they indicate that appearances of formal objects serve as motivating reasons for emotions.[21] This is in part because, in favourable circumstances, the evaluative construal to which an emotion is responsive already does the epistemic work which the Epistemic View accords to emotion. More specifically, under certain conditions the value appearance to which an emotion is responsive constitutes actual awareness of value. Since this appearance also brings about the emotion, it temporally precedes it. Thus, in such cases, the respective value is apprehended prior to the emotion. But this means that the emotion itself does not apprehend this value: one cannot apprehend what one has already apprehended. Of course, not all emotions are based on actual awareness of value. Thus, there are cases where the evaluative appearance is non-veridical. However, in this case, there is no value to be apprehended by the emotion in the first place.[22]

If these remarks are correct, it follows that the directedness of emotion falsifies the Epistemic View. If emotional directedness is a matter of responsiveness to apparent value, emotions do not apprehend value.

Having shed additional light on the directedness of emotion, I shall now explicate the richer characterization of emotional intentionality as position-taking in order to develop a genuine alternative to the Epistemic View. While the directedness of emotion is crucial to this proposal, there is more to the idea of a position-taking. More specifically, one may wonder about the precise sense in which one can be said to take a particular *position* towards something in having an emotion. While

---

[18] In this connection cf. also Mulligan (2010b, 485), Brady (2011), Deonna and Teroni (2012, ch. 6), Dietz (2017) and Müller (*forthcoming*). Note that this dissimilarity does not necessarily undermine the idea that both perception and emotion are passive. Thinking of emotions as directed is compatible with them being passive in the sense of being beyond our voluntary control. Yet emotional passivity is different from perceptual passivity in that it is not a matter of (quasi-)perceptually registering aspects of the world.

The responsive character of emotion also distinguishes them from reflex-like behaviours and reactive sensations. This seems to me not to be fully appreciated by Zamuner (2015) in developing the view that emotions are psychological reactions. Although some of what he says implies that he sees emotions as having motivating reasons, he does not draw a clear distinction between responses and mere bodily reactions.

[19] Cf. also my Müller (*forthcoming*). I read Deonna and Teroni (2012, 2014, 2015) as defending the Epistemic View without assimilating emotion to perception. Cf. section 3.2.

[20] Cf. also Mulligan (2010b, 485) on knowledge.

[21] On this concern cf. also Mulligan (2004, 2010a), Teroni (2007), and Müller (*forthcoming*).

[22] I here set aside a further, unusual case where the evaluative appearance is accidentally veridical. As I argue in Müller (*forthcoming*), in this case the emotion does not apprehend value either.

von Hildebrand's speech act metaphor renders this characterization somewhat intuitive, it must be shown to be apt as a substantive, rather than mere metaphorical, account.[23]

3 Emotional Valence and Position-Taking

We find a hint at how to substantiate the Position-Taking View in a brief remark by Mulligan (2010a, 234):

> It is hard to deny that emotions are reactions, viz. have the character of responses. [...] Indeed, the fact that so many emotions are positive or negative and thus have a "valence" just means that these emotions are reactions, position-takings for or against something.[24]

According to Mulligan, the character of emotions as position-takings is an immediate consequence of their valence: emotions are position-takings for or against something *insofar as they are positive or negative*. This claim allows for multiple readings. Rather than assessing various different conceptions of emotional valence,[25] I shall here opt for the one that I take to best elucidate what seems pre-theoretically correct about the view I am looking to explicate. I will thus understand valence in hedonic terms and propose that emotions are position-takings insofar as they feel good or bad.[26] This reading makes sense in light of the example I have given at the outset of section 2. What makes it intuitive to think of the joy you feel towards the scene as the taking of a favorable position towards that scene seems closely related to how you feel in experiencing that joy: you feel good. The same goes for negative emotions. In

---

[23] There are multiple ways to spell out this view. Judgmentalist accounts of emotions (e.g. Nussbaum 2001) might likewise be thought to recognize emotions as position-takings. In the phenomenological literature, judgment and belief count as intellectual position-takings. The account I offer in what follows differs from judgmentalist views in that it recognizes emotions as position-takings in their own right rather than assimilating them to intellectual phenomena. In this respect, my account is similar to Zamuner's (2015) view of emotions as psychological reactions as well as to Deonna & Teroni's account of them as evaluative attitudes (2012, ch. 7; 2014, 2015).

[24] My translation (JMM).

[25] Cf. Colombetti (2005) for a critical survey.

[26] I here deviate from Mulligan, who conceives of (un)pleasantness as a value property rather than as a way of feeling. Cf. Mulligan and Scherer (2012, 350). For discussion cf. also Mulligan (2010b, 492ff.). Greenspan (1980) speaks of a specific class of emotions as pro or con attitudes which involve the taking of a position on their object inasmuch as they are (dis)pleasures. However, she seems to think of the respective (dis)pleasures as attitudes which are not feelings. Gaus (1990, 68f.) proposes that the felt aspect of an emotion is a (dis)liking, where the relevant sense of '(dis)liking' is supposed to be akin to 'having a (dis)favourable attitude towards'. While Gaus does not endorse the view that emotional feelings are (dis)pleasures, he yet does not seem entirely unsympathetic to it either.

The idea that emotions have polarity is central also to Zamuner's (2015) view of them as psychological reactions. He likewise takes his lead from Mulligan, though his notion of a reaction is broader than Mulligan's and covers also simple bodily reactions rather than only responses. Cf. n. 18. Zamuner explicates the polarity of emotion in terms of a distinction between emotions involving approach and emotions involving avoidance. His explication deviates from the standard notion of valence and carries no commitment to the distinction between positive or negative emotions. This conception is less closely related to the phenomenological origins of the view than the one I develop in what follows.

indignation, one adopts a negative stance towards a certain event or state of affairs; its character as a negative stance is intuitively related to the specific discomfort we feel in indignation. The proposal makes sense also of ambivalent emotions. In feeling nostalgic one takes a positive position towards one's past, albeit one that is positive in a qualified sense: while nostalgia is pleasant, it also involves an element of pain.

While these examples favor substantiating the Position-Taking View on the basis of a hedonic account of emotional valence, there are well-known objections to this account which might suggest that this approach is unfaithful to the variety and complexity of our emotional lives. Thus, it can seem that some emotions do not have a hedonic feel. The most commonly proposed counter-example is surprise. Another candidate is beatitude, which is not supposed to have any valence on its traditional Christian understanding. Moreover, the view might seem to fail to recognize emotional valence as variable across different occurrences of the same emotion type. As I have illustrated the view, valence is understood as fixed for each type of emotion. Yet things may seem more complicated. Consider erotic love. While this emotion is generally pleasant, unrequited erotic love is painful. Note, moreover, that in these cases the character of erotic love as a position-taking seems independent of its hedonic dimension: even when painful, erotic love is still intuitively a positive stance.

Although I will here not be able to offer a full defense of a hedonic account of emotional valence, I shall offer some remarks to disperse these two concerns.[27] A straightforward reply to the first one is to deny that apparent counter-examples are genuine emotions. Although this move may seem desperate, it is in fact not uncommon and has intuitive support in case of the first of the above given examples. It seems that someone who was merely surprised, but never emotionally (dis)pleased, by significant events in her life would lead a psychological life hardly worth being called emotional.[28] Moreover, surprise differs from paradigm emotions in that it is not based on any concern.[29] Unlike in the case of joy, indignation or nostalgia, nothing is *at stake* in surprise: one may be surprised by events that are entirely irrelevant to one's desires, needs or attachments. I take these considerations to provide good reasons to doubt that surprise is an emotion and dismiss this putative counterexample. I do not think that all proposed counter-examples can be handled in this way, though. Thus, I would not deny that beatitude is an emotion. Yet I would maintain that it is a form of comfort. Beatitude is, after all, a form of relief, that is, relief from the burden of mundane concerns. Relatedly, beatitude is also based on a concern: a concern for one to be free of mundane concerns, which is satisfied by one's present condition.[30]

---

[27] Arguably, one may wonder whether any view that accords valence to emotions can accommodate the large variety of phenomena that are treated as emotions in ordinary discourse and philosophical psychology. I take it to be important that the view I offer is able to accommodate for what are uncontroversial cases of paradigm emotions.

Admittedly, in order to fully demonstrate this I would need to address more putative counter-examples than I do in this paper and some further apparent concerns with the view. Cf. e.g. Deonna and Teroni (2012, 15). As far as I can see, their worries are largely the result of assimilating emotional (dis)pleasure to simple bodily (dis)pleasure. Cf. also Roberts (2003, 155f.) and Schroeder (2007, 265f.) on this understanding.

[28] Cf. Schroeder (2007, 259).

[29] Cf. Roberts (2003, 298).

[30] Cf. Roberts (2003, 279) on relief.

The apparent variability of hedonic valence across occurrences of a particular emotion type similarly rests on a mistaken view of the phenomena. There is no doubt a sense in which unrequited erotic love is unpleasant. However, acknowledging this does not require attributing a different hedonic dimension to the emotion in these cases but recognizing a distinct occurrence of disappointment or frustration. This distinct emotion is unpleasant in that it involves the frustration of particular erotic interests, including, perhaps, a more general interest to have a partner.[31] These interests also inform the valence of erotic love: erotic love is pleasant inasmuch as its object is construed so as to positively resonate with these interests. Although the pleasantness of erotic love recedes into the background when it is unrequited, there is more to the overall experience than pain: it is usually a bittersweet affair. Accordingly, there is also no reason to suppose that, in such cases, the hedonic dimension of erotic love and its positive character as a position-taking diverge.[32]

While the hedonic character of emotion helps pin down what seems intuitive about the Position-Taking View, this approach still falls short of a substantive account which allows us to appreciate the proposal as more than metaphorical. If emotions possess both hedonic valence and directedness, this makes it compelling to suppose that they are in some sense positively or negatively aimed at specific aspects of our circumstances. However, in which sense precisely is this a matter of taking a stand?

To answer this question, it is necessary to give a more substantive account of the hedonic character of emotion itself. Suitably explicated, their hedonic tone shows emotions to be position-takings inasmuch as it makes them intelligible as forms of *approval* or *disapproval*. Intuitively, in (dis)approving of something one takes a positive (negative) position toward it. More precisely, to (dis)approve of something is to find it (dis)agreeable, i.e. concordant (discordant) with oneself or one's evaluative outlook. In the remainder, I show that the hedonic dimension of emotion is a form of concordance (discordance) with oneself.

3.1 The Personal Dimension of Hedonic Valence

There is an intimate connection between the hedonic tone of emotions and our concerns. For example, the pleasantness of one's joy after having completed a good day's work seems intimately linked to one's desire to meet one's goals for the day: we feel good insofar as this desire is palpably satisfied. So is the discomfort involved in one's disappointment that one has not met them: we feel uncomfortable inasmuch as this desire is frustrated. Likewise, as noted in the last subsection, the pleasantness of erotic love seems to be tied to the fate of certain concerns, i.e. certain erotic interests.

---

[31] I elaborate on this view of emotional (dis)pleasure in section 3.1.

[32] One might also think of erotic love as a relatively stable attachment that is constituted by certain erotic interests. Cf. Roberts (2003, 291). On such a view, the positive resonance of something with these interests is distinct from the attachment so that the valence of erotic love cannot be conceived as I propose. However, as Roberts suggests, insofar as genuine erotic love is an attachment, it is not an emotion. The pleasurable aspect of unrequited love is here to be conceived, like the painful one, as an aspect of a distinct emotional occurrence.

Such considerations motivate an account of emotional valence defended by Roberts (2003, 157). According to Roberts, emotional (dis)pleasure consists in the "perceived satisfaction or frustration of a concern by a situation".[33] While I take this to be roughly correct, there are two respects in which this view requires qualification. I address these in turn.

First, it is important to clarify the idea of the satisfaction or frustration of a concern. In giving an account of emotional (dis)pleasure, the satisfaction or frustration of concerns must be sharply distinguished from the (dis)value to which the emotion is responsive. This is important since it seems plausible to think of this (dis)value as constituted (at least in part) by the positive or negative significance or relevance which something has relative to particular concerns. And it can seem that the positive or negative relevance of something for a concern coincides with its satisfaction or frustration, respectively.[34]

To illustrate and motivate this view of the formal objects of emotions, consider danger, the formal object of fear. Intuitively, what we are responsive to in fearing something is always apparent danger to something *qua* object of our concern. When I am afraid that the impending storm might damage the photographs that I forgot on the porch before leaving, my fear is motivated by the storm's potential to damage *something about which I care*. The badness of the danger seems to consist in its negative relevance to a particular attachment. Similarly, when I am glad to have completed my goals for the day, I am responsive to the relevance of their completion for my corresponding desire. Their completion is good insofar as it accords with this desire.[35]

Importantly, to think of something as positively or negatively relevant to a concern is not to think of it as positively or negatively resonating with (satisfying or frustrating) that concern. The former is to recognize it as objectively (in)congruent with this concern. In contrast, in the latter case we refer to an actual psychological occurrence in which this concern is favorably or adversely impinged upon in a specific way. This distinction is worth stressing since satisfaction and frustration are often equated with the objective (in)congruence of things with concerns. At least in the case of desires, it is usually supposed that they are satisfied when they bring about changes which make the world congruent with (render true) their intentional content. My account of satisfaction and frustration crucially differs from a mere semantic understanding of these notions in

---

[33] The same idea is found in Schroeder (2007). Cf. Wollheim (1999) for another cognate view. Both focus on the satisfaction or frustration specifically of desires. I here understand concerns to include also interests, aversions, needs, preferences, attachments and valuings. Deonna and Teroni (2012, 33ff.) raise several objections to views that identify emotions with representations of the satisfaction (frustration) of desires. Though I here lack the space to adequately address these, it seems to me that they are less threatening to a view on which hedonic tone consists in the felt satisfaction (frustration) of concerns more generally, as elaborated below. At least this view is not committed to an objectionable meta-representational analysis of emotion. Cf. n. 40. Given a suitably broad notion of concern, it neither seems to me to distort the variety and richness of emotional experience.

[34] Roberts (2003) does not always seem to me to be sufficiently clear about the difference between the two.

[35] This understanding of the axiological character of formal objects echoes appraisal theories of emotion. Cf. Reisenzein's (2009) explication of the appraisal-theoretic notion of relevance detection. Von Hildebrand (1969a, 37ff; 1953, ch. 18) maintains that we are often emotionally responsive to values that are independent of our concerns. Though this raises a substantive issue, I will here have to postpone detailed treatment of it. While I agree that e.g. in admiration it does not seem to us that we are responsive to significance that is relative to our interests, I would maintain that we are nonetheless ultimately responsive to excellence *qua exemplification of what we value*. Cf. also Roberts (2003, 264f.) on the concern for excellence involved in admiration.

conceiving of satisfaction and frustration as actual psychological occurrences.[36] On this account, the objective (in)congruence of something with a concern is neither necessary nor sufficient for its satisfaction (frustration). It is not necessary since the satisfaction (frustration) of concerns may be a response to mere apparent (in)congruence with them: in the relevant, psychological sense the satisfaction of my concern to meet my goals for the day requires only that the world *seems* congruent with it. Concern (in)congruence is not sufficient for concern satisfaction (frustration) either since the fact of something's being (in)congruent with a concern does not entail that one registers the (in)congruence and responds accordingly.

A second qualification concerns the term 'perceived' in this context. The claim that emotional (dis)pleasure consists in the perceived satisfaction (frustration) of concerns invites misconceptions. In particular, it can seem to come dangerously close to an epistemic conception of emotion: Does it not amount to the claim that emotions perceive or register the satisfaction or frustration of concerns? We can disperse this worry if we instead characterize hedonic tone as the *felt* satisfaction (frustration) of a concern and understand 'feel the satisfaction (frustration) of a concern' adverbially, that is, as ascribing a *way of feeling* rather than awareness of concern satisfaction (frustration). We thereby take account of the fact that emotional (dis)pleasure is canonically ascribed by the adverbial construction 'feel good (bad)'. On the proposed analysis, ascriptions of emotional (dis)pleasure by the transitive construction 'feel the satisfaction (frustration) of a concern' ascribe what is also ascribed by 'feel good (bad)'. In this context, 'good' ('bad') refers to concern satisfaction (frustration) *qua way of feeling*.[37]

We can motivate this analysis by noting that adverbial analyses of transitive 'feel' constructions make good sense in an intimately related context. Consider ascriptions of the specific emotions that go by the names 'satisfaction' and 'frustration'. To say of someone that she feels satisfaction (frustration) is tantamount to saying that she feels satisfied (frustrated). We thereby ascribe a certain *way of feeling* rather than awareness of an emotion.[38] This way of feeling can be characterized as positive (negative): it is a case of feeling good (bad). Thus, this ascription seems to be analyzable in adverbial terms, where the ascribed way of feeling is picked out also by 'feel good (bad)'. I propose to similarly analyze 'feel the satisfaction (frustration) of a concern'. While it seems that one cannot simply analyze this locution as being synonymous with 'feel frustrated (satisfied)' at pains of assimilating all emotional (dis)pleasure to the emotions of satisfaction and frustration, I suggest a related analysis on which it picks out a corresponding, qualified way of feeling: feeling satisfied or frustrated *as the subject of specific concerns*. Thus, taking account of the fact that we canonically ascribe emotional (dis)pleasure by means of 'feel good (bad)', I understand talk of feeling the satisfaction (frustration) of a particular concern as talk of feeling satisfied (frustrated) as a subject of that concern. Correspondingly, I take 'good' ('bad') in this

---

[36] In this respect, this account is similar to Wollheim's (1999, 8ff.) psychologised account of desire satisfaction (frustration). While in agreement with the core of Wollheim's view, there are some respects in which my account is different. I here lack the space to discuss these, but hope to do so in the context of a more thorough discussion of Wollheim's overall theory of emotion in future work.

[37] I am inclined to think that the satisfaction (frustration) of a concern is intrinsically felt, that is, a way of feeling. However, there is no need to insist on this as long as emotional hedonic tone is identified explicitly with the felt satisfaction (frustration) of a concern.

[38] I here depart from the analysis of emotional feeling Roberts gives in (2003, ch. 4.3).

connection to refer to ways one feels (frustrated/satisfied) qua subject of certain concerns. It seems that, despite initial appearances, this analysis accommodates also the valence of the emotions satisfaction and frustration. Although the way we ordinarily ascribe these emotions seems to imply that it is the person as such rather than particular concerns of hers that is satisfied (frustrated), we can account for the relevant intuitive distinction by supposing that the concerns in these cases have a special standing. When I report not simply joy but satisfaction after having completed a good day's work, the comfort of my emotion is still tied to the fate of my desire to meet my goals for the day. In this case, however, the desire has a particular standing in being central to my evaluative perspective or at least presently takes a prominent place within my personal investments. It is for this reason that we here commonly speak of satisfaction *simpliciter*.[39] Crucially, this adverbial analysis of 'feel the satisfaction (frustration) of a concern' makes room for a view of hedonic tones which avoids conceiving of them as forms of awareness of concern satisfaction (frustration).[40]

In light of this account of emotional (dis)pleasure, it is now but a small step towards completing my exposition of the Position-Taking View. In the final subsection, I explain how this account makes sense of emotions as forms of (dis)approval.

3.2 Hedonic Valence as a Position towards the World

The proposed view of hedonic tone is not simply an account of the (un)pleasant character of emotion. It makes emotions intelligible as ways of finding the world (dis)agreeable. To see this, it is crucial to recognize the satisfaction (frustration) of concerns as a way in which the world is concordant (discordant) with onself or one's evaluative outlook. The relevant notion of concordance (discordance) is a specifically experiential notion. It is paradigmatically expressed in ordinary discourse in first person reports of the following form:

X (the scene/the weather/her new haircut…) (dis)agrees with me

Such statements usually report that something is concordant (discordant) with oneself in a particular sense: it is (not) to one's taste or liking. At the same time, they are reports of (dis)pleasure: what (dis)agrees with one *ipso facto* (dis)pleases one. This notion of concordance (discordance) with oneself makes emotions intelligible as forms of (dis)approval once we appreciate that it covers a rather broad range of (dis)pleasures. Thus, while concordance (discordance) with one's taste or liking can be understood in a somewhat restrictive sense, as referring to a specific set of (broadly) aesthetic cares,

---

[39] As Roberts (2003, 216f.) argues, frustration involves seeing a desire as opposed by a significant obstacle. I take it that this is what the emotion is typically responsive to, though unlike Roberts I do not understand this construal to be constitutive of the emotion and moreover doubt that the relevant concern has to be a desire. I take the emotion to be identical with the felt frustration of the relevant concern in the sense explicated above. On this picture, we can still recognize feeling frustration as different from the displeasure characteristic of other negative emotions if we take it that the relevant concern enjoys a certain prominence within one's wider set of cares and that this affects how it feels for it to be frustrated.

[40] It also avoids conceiving emotions as meta-representations of concerns and thus one of Deonna and Teroni's (2012, 35) worries with the identification of emotions with representations of desire satisfaction (frustration).

there is also a corresponding notion which refers to our personal investments more generally. The pleasantness of one's joy after having completed a good day's work is a case of the world being in agreement with oneself as someone desiring to meet their goals for the day; the bother of indignation is a case of disagreement with oneself as someone with certain normative concerns or values. The proposed account of hedonic tone invokes a broader notion of (dis)agreement with one's concerns on these lines. Emotional (dis)pleasure is concordance (discordance) with one's concerns in the form of their satisfaction (frustration): one feels satisfied ('agreed with') or frustrated ('disagreed with') as a subject of specific concerns.

On the basis of this notion of (dis)agreement it should now be easy to make sense of emotions as forms of (dis)approval. To do so, we only have to relate this notion to their directedness. If we recognize the (dis)comfort of emotion as directed (dis)agreement, emotions thereby become intelligible as *ways of finding something (dis)agreeable*. That is, for one to feel good or bad towards something in having an emotion is for one to find it concordant or discordant with oneself as a subject with specific cares. In line with my remarks on the responsive character of emotion, we can add that this (dis)agreement is a response to a particular (dis)value. More specifically, given the above understanding of formal objects, emotions can be conceived as ways of finding something (dis)agreeable relative to particular concerns, which are responses to its apparent relevance with respect to those concerns.

There is considerable room to expand this view and contrast it with cognate proposals. While I lack the space to situate it in detail within the current theoretical landscape, I would yet like to briefly compare it with Deonna and Teroni's (2012, ch. 7; 2014; 2015) recent account of emotions as evaluative attitudes.[41] This account, which likewise opposes a perceptual view of emotion, is based on a specific analogy between emotions and other phenomena with formal objects. More specifically, in the case of phenomena with formal objects, it is generally their intentional mode, rather than intentional content, which is responsible for the fact that their conditions of adequacy involve the corresponding formal object. As they propose, it is because S adopts the intentional mode of fear towards x that her mental state is fitting if and only if x is dangerous. Fear is the mode of *taking-as-dangerous* an intentional content.

I have assessed this proposal and developed my own version of the view that emotions are evaluative modes elsewhere.[42] In contrasting Deonna & Teroni's account with my account in this paper, I should stress that their core notion of an attitude is the technical notion of intentional mode rather than that of position-taking.[43] This notion applies to all intentional phenomena. To be fair, Deonna & Teroni's view does have some echoes with the Position-Taking View. For example, in explicating their view they also sometimes speak of

---

[41] Zamuner's (2015) view would make for a further interesting comparison. In light of the centrality of the polarity of emotion to his view, it is a closer cognate of the Position-Taking view than Deonna and Teroni's proposal. Given the attention their attitudinal view has recently attracted, I devote the rest of this section to the latter, though. For some (dis)similarities with Zamuner's view cf. n. 17, n. 18, n. 23 and n. 26.

[42] Cf. Müller (*forthcoming*).

[43] Cf. Searle (1983) for an exposition of this notion.

emotions as stances or postures we adopt towards the world (e.g. 2012, 79, 81; 2015, 302).[44] Relatedly, they similarly contrast the phenomenology of perception with the phenomenology of emotion and account for the difference by characterizing emotions as attitudes (2015, 306). Yet they do not do enough to highlight what is specific to emotions as attitudes in this further, non-technical sense and how this distinguishes them from every form of apprehension. [45] Relatedly, while they note that emotions, but not perceptions, admit of justifying reasons, they do not recognize them as responses to value and hold on to the Epistemic View.[46] In this respect, their position conflicts with the Position-Taking View.

My central concern here has been to put the specific sense in which emotions are directed at center stage and to show how their intentionality and their valence jointly give substance to a view that sharply contrasts with the Epistemic View in every possible form. One can read my considerations on hedonic tone as offering a substantive characterization of the intentional modes of emotions; however, this account conceives of their modes as fundamentally different from the intentional mode of any form of apprehension.

4 Conclusion

I motivated and developed an alternative to the popular view that emotions apprehend value. According to this alternative, emotions are ways of taking a position in response to value. As I argued, emotions are position-takings insofar as their hedonic feel constitutes a specific form of (dis)approval. Indeed, in recognizing emotions as stances that are informed by our complex background of cares and concerns, this picture recognizes them as one of the most subtle and sophisticated forms of position-taking we are capable of.

References

Brady, M. (2011). Emotions, perceptions, and reasons. In C. Bagnoli (Ed.), *Morality & the emotions*. New York: OUP.
Chudnoff, E. (2012). Presentational phenomenology. In S. Miguens & G. Preyer (Eds.), *Consciousness & subjectivity* (pp. 51–72). Ontos: Frankfurt am Main.
Colombetti, G. (2005). Appraising valence. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 12*, 103–126.

---

[44] They also relate their proposal to de Sousa (1987, 156f.) who takes emotions to belong to a wider class of attitudes. Cf. Deonna & Teroni (2015, 294, n. 1). De Sousa likewise invokes a notion of an attitude that bears some resemblance to that of a position-taking.

[45] It is also not clear that the valence of emotions is important to their understanding of them as stances. That said, their proposed explication of the attitudinal character of emotion in terms of felt action tendencies is intended to be sensitive to their valence. Cf. (2012, 88). Importantly, in rejecting a hedonic account of valence in favour of a specific pluralistic view, Deonna & Teroni do not understand emotions (dis)approvals along the lines I have proposed. There is more to say about their appeal to felt action tendencies by way of a more thorough comparison of their account with the Position-Taking View. However, I will have to here leave this for another paper.

[46] Cf. esp. (2014, 16) on the intuition that emotions apprehend value. As I read their (2012, ch. 7), they still suppose that the felt aspect of an emotion 'makes manifest' evaluative aspects of the situation. Admittedly, this reading may be controversial in the case of their (2015), though in this article they also do not explicitly distance themselves from this view. My own version of the view that emotions are evaluative modes (Müller *forthcoming*) is explicitly opposed to the Epistemic View.

Cuneo, T. (2006). Signs of value: ried on the evidential role of feelings in moral judgment. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy, 41*(1), 69–91.

de Sousa, R. (1987). *The rationality of emotion*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

de Sousa, R. (2011). *Emotional truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Deonna, J. (2006). Emotion, perception and perspective. *Dialectica, 60*(1), 29–46.

Deonna, J., & Teroni, F. (2012). *The emotions: a philosophical introduction*. London/New York: Routledge.

Deonna, J., & Teroni, F. (2014). In what sense are emotions evaluations? In S. Roeser & C. Todd (Eds.), *Emotion and value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Deonna, J. & Teroni, F. (2015). Emotions as attitudes. Dialectica 69(3), 293-311.

Dietz, C. (2017). "Reasons and Factive emotions". *Philosophical Studies*, online first (accessible at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11098-017-0929-y).

Döring, S. (2004). Gründe und Gefühle: Zur Lösung "des" Problems der Moral. Habilitationsschrift Universität Duisburg-Essen.

Döring, S. (2007). Seeing what to do: affective perception and rational motivation. *Dialectica, 61*(3), 363–394.

Gaus, G. F. (1990). *Value and justification: the foundations of liberal theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Greenspan, P. (1980). A case of mixed feelings: ambivalence and the logic of emotion. In A. O. Rorty (Ed.), *Explaining emotions* (pp. 223–250). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Helm, B. (2001). *Emotional reason: deliberation, motivation and the nature of value*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Helm, B. (2002). Felt evaluations: a theory of pleasure and pain. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 39*, 13–30.

Husserl, E. (2001). *Logical investigations, Vol. 2* (New ed.). London: Routledge.

Meinong, A. (1972). *On emotional presentation*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. (Orig.: Meinong, A. (1917). "Über emotionale Präsentation". *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien: Philosophisch-historische Klasse* Vol. 183, Article 2, Vienna.)

Mulligan, K. (2004). Husserl on the „Logics" of Valuing, Values and Norms. In B. Centi & G. Gigliotti (Eds.), *Fenomenologia della Ragion Pratica: L'Etica di Edmund Husserl* (pp. 177–225). Naples: Bibliopolis.

Mulligan, K. (2007). Intentionality, knowledge and formal objects. *Disputatio, 23*(2), 205–228.

Mulligan, K. (2010a). Husserls Herz. In M. Frank & N. Weidtmann (Eds.), *Husserl und die Philosophie des Geistes*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Mulligan, K. (2010b). Emotions and values. In P. Goldie (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of philosophy of emotion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mulligan, K., & Scherer, K. (2012). Toward a working definition of emotion. *Emotion Review, 4*(4), 345–357.

Nussbaum, M. (2001). *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reinach, A. (1989). *Sämtliche Werke* (Vol. 1). Munich: Philosophia.

Reisenzein, R. (2009). Relevance detection. In D. Sander & K. Scherer (Eds.), *Oxford companion to the affective sciences* (pp. 339-340). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roberts, R. (2003). *Emotions: an essay in aid of moral psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roberts, R. (2013). *Emotions in the moral life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Salice, A. (2015). "The phenomenology of the Göttingen and Munich circles". In E. Zalta (ed.) *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (URL=http://plato.stanford.Edu/entries/phenomenology-mg/).

Searle, J. (1983). *Intentionality: an essay in the philosophy of mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schroeder, T. (2007). An unexpected pleasure. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 32*, 255–272.

Slaby, J. (2008). Affective intentionality and the feeling body. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, 7*, 429–444.

Tappolet, C. (2000). *Émotions et valeurs*. Paris: Presses Universitaires France.

Teroni, F. (2007). Emotions and formal objects. *Dialectica, 61*(3), 395–415.

von Hildebrand, D. (1953). *Christian ethics*. New York: McKay.

von Hildebrand, D. (1969a). *Die Idee der sittlichen Handlung*. Special Edition. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. (Originally published in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Vol. 3, 126–251, 1916.)

von Hildebrand, D. (1969b). *Sittlichkeit und ethische Werterkenntnis*. Special Edition. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. (Originally published in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Vol. 5, 463–602, 1922.)

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wollheim, R. (1999). *On the emotions*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Zamuner, E. (2015). Emotions as psychological reactions. *Mind & Language, 30*(1), 22–43.