

Emotional Knowing: the Role of Embodied Feelings in Affective Cognition

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Abstract The emotions play a crucial role in our apprehension of meaning, value, or significance — and their felt quality is intimately related to the sort of awareness they provide. This is exemplified most clearly by cases in which dispassionate cognition is *cognitively* insufficient, because we need to be emotionally agitated in order to grasp that something is true. In this type of affective experience, it is through a *feeling* of being moved that we recognize or apprehend that something is the case. And that is why our emotions are epistemically indispensable: namely, because they give us access to significant truths. In this essay, I explain how the phenomenally felt character of an emotion is intimately linked with its intentionality. Intellectual activity divorced from affective feeling is profoundly lacking — not only in its qualitative feel, but also in its epistemic import, or its ability to inform us about matters of significance. A better appreciation of how the living body is involved in affective experience should help us to understand the distinctive kind of embodied cognition that emotional responses involve. It also ought to resolve confusions about phobic responses and other “recalcitrant” emotions, which are not divorced from cognition as many have claimed.

Keywords Emotion · Cognition · Fear · Recalcitrant · William James · Embodiment · Feeling · Recalcitrant emotions · Cognitive theories of emotion · Phenomenology · Moral psychology · Embodied feelings · Philosophical psychology

Human emotions play a crucial role in our apprehension of meaning, value, or significance — and their felt quality is intimately related to the sort of awareness they provide. This is exemplified most clearly by cases in which dispassionate cognition is *cognitively* insufficient, because we need to be emotionally agitated in order to grasp that something is true. In this type of affective experience, it is through a *feeling* of being moved that we recognize or apprehend that something is the case. And that is why our emotions are epistemically

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indispensable: namely, because they give us access to significant truths. Scheler rightly points out that the intentional “function of feeling” would be lost if, rather than being oriented toward what our affective feelings are *about*, we paid attention only to “the sensation of heart palpitation,” and other conspicuous bodily changes, for their own sake.¹ However, it does not follow that somatic agitation is extraneous to the intentionality of emotions. The feeling of being in a certain affective state tends to include a sense of the visceral changes which are part of that emotional response. One need not insist that every type of emotion has “a unique quale or feel to it”² in order to accept that there is something it’s like to feel anger, fear, or grief, in any episode of affective experience. In this essay, I wish to explore how the phenomenally felt character of an emotion is intimately linked with what the emotion reveals.

A better appreciation of how the living body is involved in affective experience should help us to understand the distinctive kind of embodied cognition that emotional responses involve. Rather than assuming that bodily feelings are nothing but physical disturbances devoid of intentionality, we should acknowledge that they can be feelings *about* our surroundings,³ which have intentional content and are therefore capable of conveying significant information. The somatic agitation we feel when we are trembling with fear, for example, is not a mere sensation but a felt apprehension of danger. And to feel pangs of guilt is to undergo what might be called a thoughtful bodily agitation.⁴ That is how emotions involve the living body in referring to persons, ideals, memories, possibilities, events, and so on. This demands an account of human emotions, not as hybrids of rational judgment peculiarly conjoined with irrational corporeal commotion, but as feelings through which we apprehend what is significant to us. Our emotions constitute a mode of apprehension that cannot be classified as *either* cognitive *or* bodily because it is both at once. An episode of fear, or of any other easily nameable emotion, should not be regarded as a mindless bodily state or as a disembodied mental state — for neither of these alone would be sufficient for the emotion to exist. Without a sense of some apparent danger, we would not experience fear; yet we also could not be afraid without feeling a shiver of fright.⁵ This implies that the state of fear has an intentional content which is accessible through an embodied affective response of a particular sort, *and* which is inferentially related to other emotions: that is, there is a need for internal consistency between my fear when a potential threat is immediately looming and my subsequent relief when the threat has been averted. To speak more broadly, emotions are experiences by means of which we can recognize or apprehend significant truths about self and world. Thus, as William James says, our emotions remind us “how much our mental life is knit up with our corporeal frame.”⁶ On my account, however, unlike that of most Jamesians, bodily feeling and cognition are elements of a unified affective experience in which the way an emotion *feels* is intrinsically related to what it is *about*.

¹ Max Scheler (1973, 62-63).

² As Jon Elster does: see (1999, 248).

³ On the way in which “bodily feelings” can be “themselves world-directed, or at least intimately caught up into a world-directed state of mind,” see Mark Wynn (2013, 31-32).

⁴ Contra Jesse Prinz’s contention that only a “non-cognitive theory of the emotions” can explain why a “bodily disruption” would be involved in feeling guilt, his own formulation in an informal study asks subjects to imagine “the feeling you have when you think about the fact that you haven’t written back” to an old friend: see Prinz (2007, 59-60).

⁵ Cf. Linda Zagzebski (2003, 117): “it is possible that there are psychic states that are both cognitive and affective,” in such a manner that “the cognitive aspect of the state cannot exist apart from the affective aspect,” and vice versa. Here, I am claiming that this is indeed the case.

⁶ William James (1884, 201).

1 Phobic Fear and Other (So-Called) Recalcitrant Emotions

But what about cases in which somatic turbulence *without* intentional content is apparently sufficient to generate an emotional response? If we could become frightened while knowing full well that no danger is near, simply by virtue of our bodily state, this would suggest that fear need not involve a recognition or awareness of apparent danger. And, indeed, this is the case according to James. He argues that stage fright, for example, is “wholly irrational” since it can be experienced by a person who is “inwardly convinced” that the audience’s opinion of him or her is “of no practical account.”⁷ With this thought experiment, he introduces an alleged counterexample of a type that has been repeatedly employed by other theorists. Robinson, for instance, refers to the case of a person who once had a car accident after skidding in a blizzard, and who now fears skidding on snowy roads “whether or not she is really in danger.”⁸ Goldie also reports that one can plausibly feel that a situation is dangerous while sincerely believing that it is not at all dangerous: he cites Hume’s example of a man “hung out from a high tower in a cage of iron,” who is afraid of falling although he supposedly “knows himself to be perfectly secure.”⁹ Acrophobics can experience “intense fear” of heights, Roberts also contends, although they do not actually think that their well-being is threatened; and Stocker adds that passengers in an airplane could be frightened by the prospect of crashing even without regarding a crash as likely to occur.¹⁰ In similar fashion, Prinz claims that one can fear something despite regarding it as harmless, and others have endorsed analogous views: for instance, that a person who “believes firmly that this spider is not dangerous” could still be “terribly frightened” by it.¹¹ In each of these cases, a person’s felt emotions are at odds with the beliefs that he or she consciously affirms. Examples of this kind are intended to demonstrate that we can feel fear while being convinced that there is no good reason for us to be afraid — and, by implication, that our emotions are liable to conflict with our better judgment. This is often described as the problem of “recalcitrant” emotions. Those who believe that it *is* a problem see the emotions in question as proof that emotions are utterly *unreasonable*, or that they *sometimes* don’t listen to reason, or that they are only *somewhat* rational.

Because phobic fear is so frequently cited as evidence of an alleged discrepancy between emotion and cognition, it merits special attention. Understanding the way that affect and cognition are interrelated in cases of apparently irrational fear might provide us with a key to understanding what distinguishes affective cognition in other cases as well. I am reluctant to view these simply as instances of emotion without cognition or intelligence. It seems that the examples listed above have been too hastily identified as evidence of affective experience being hermetically sealed from reason, and as proving that fear can persist in a person who is *convinced* that he or she has nothing to be afraid of. Whether or not we tremble in the face of a particular object is hardly irrelevant to the

⁷ James (1884, 195).

⁸ Jenefer Robinson (2004, 41–42).

⁹ Peter Goldie (2000, 22–37 & 76–78); David Hume (1978, 148).

¹⁰ Robert C. Roberts (2003, 90). See also Michael Stocker (1996, 38–39).

¹¹ Prinz (2004, 23). The passage about fear of spiders is from Deonna and Teroni (2012, 54). Arguments of this kind are frequently connected with dubious appeals to evidence from neuroscientific research, in particular Joseph LeDoux’s previous contention that cognition and emotion ought to be classified as separate functions, based on the “quick and dirty” nature of an affective reaction such as being startled by a loud noise, and other fairly unintelligent reflex-like responses: see, e.g., LeDoux (1996, 68–69). Yet see LeDoux’s more recent work (2014, 318–319): here, he notes that his work has been widely misunderstood and aligns it with “cognitive theories of emotion” rather than with non-cognitive accounts.

question of how much of a threat we think it poses. My contention is that people who are shaken with fear, which is directed toward a particular object, are *not* entirely convinced that this object is harmless. Those who are frightened *don't* simply “know” that there's nothing to fear: the fearless person is more unequivocally aware that there is no reason to be afraid.

When we study the language used by theorists who put forward such examples, it betrays that they are half-aware of protesting too much. Clearly, someone driving a car in wintry conditions cannot be accurately characterized as knowing “perfectly well” that he or she is in a safe situation, because there *are* evident risks involved.¹² Now, a person who feels terrified of driving may be exaggerating these dangers, but such a case is poorly described as one in which we know that we are safe and yet we're nonetheless experiencing a fear which persists *despite* this knowledge. Ordinarily, *when* a person is afraid, she is acutely conscious of whatever it is that frightens her, and she is aware of it *as* a danger or a possible source of harm. Empirical studies have confirmed that those who fear flying in airplanes tend to hold unrealistic beliefs about the statistical likelihood of crashing, that height phobics report believing that they are likely to fall — and that arachnophobics, compared to other subjects, view a spider bite as much more liable to occur and to cause serious harm.¹³ So are these emotional responses just isolated from rational processing, or do they involve flawed rationality? Rather than assuming that phobic fear must necessarily be non-cognitive and irrational, we ought to accept the evidence which suggests that those who suffer from irrational fear often have cognitive attitudes or beliefs that are in accordance with the fear they tend to experience. That a person feels a certain emotion is *not* epistemically insignificant: it provides evidence, if not the only kind of evidence available, about what he or she believes and how he or she views and interprets the world. One cannot fear something *while* viewing it as harmless, because one does not regard it as harmless in the moment of being afraid.

When we turn to examples in which something of greater moral consequence is at stake, it becomes easier to discern what is problematic about the presumption that a person's fears reveal nothing about the attitudes and convictions that he actually holds. In order to illustrate “an emotion contingent upon a belief I held in childhood, but have since rejected,” Roberts invites us to imagine “that I grew up in a region of the United States where [African-American] people were regarded as sub-human. . . . I believed that their being elevated to a status of equality was unjustifiable and threatened the very fabric of white civilization,” and therefore “my emotions toward black people were then a mixture of fear, resentment, and contempt.” Years later, after he has become convinced that his earlier beliefs were false and has modified them accordingly, all the same “in certain situations I find my former emotions returning,” e.g., “when my sister's date turns out to be a beautiful burly fellow as black as pitch, my immediate response is that old revulsion and anxiety.” How should we account for this? Roberts suggests that, in this example, he *does* truly believe that black people are his equals: yet

¹² On knowing “perfectly well,” see Patricia Greenspan (1988, 23) and Roberts (2003, 89-91). On the evidence indicating that phobics often hold “idiosyncratic cognitions” or beliefs, see Thorpe and Salkovskis (1995, 805).

¹³ See André T. Miller et al. (1998); Bethany A. Teachman et al. (2008); and, Mairwen K. Jones and Menzies (2000). It seems that Cheshire Calhoun is right to find problematic the alleged “belief that spiders are harmless” in someone who fears spiders (1984, 335). The empirical literature showing that phobias involve an increased expectancy of harm is surveyed in Stefan Hofmann (2008).

“they appear to me, in certain lights, not to be equal.”¹⁴ And Robinson presents the following parallel scenario: consider a man, she says,

who for deep reasons going back to his childhood and his relationship with his mother, resents Esther, his female boss. But he does not judge or believe that Esther is unfair and dictatorial: indeed he sincerely denies that she is.¹⁵

It only *seems* to this man that his female boss *is* harsh and unkind: he *feels that* she is this way. In this hypothetical instance, Robinson assures us, the sexist man’s *beliefs* are perfectly in order: he simply tends to focus on women’s behavior “as domineering or hostile,” and this attitude is on her view irrelevant to his cognitive framework. Although he “believes” that women are capable of being fair-minded, he *experiences* them as overbearing and unjust. He feels that this is how women are — to him, this is how they seem — yet, even though he resents them for this, he sincerely believes otherwise. Or so we are told by philosophers who argue that a person’s emotions are divorced from his or her beliefs in such cases as these.

2 Apprehensive Feelings

Yet what is it to hold a belief sincerely? Roberts claims that, “To assent to *p* is to be disposed to say ‘yes’ to the question ‘*p*?’ or ‘Is *p* true?’,” so if one is asked, “Is it true that black people are equal?,” and one answers by saying, “Yes, they are,” then one is therefore unequivocally convinced of their equality.¹⁶ Nor would many philosophers find reason to disagree with this prevalent way of thinking. Robinson obviously shares the same assumption about the nature of belief: while her non-cognitive theory of emotions differs from Roberts’s conception of emotions as “construals” which are not as sharply contrasted with cognitions, both agree that a person’s emotions need not show us what he or she believes. Others share their intuition,¹⁷ but I think it ought to be rejected, for it refuses to acknowledge the intentional or intelligent content of the emotions. If I were the female colleague of the man in Robinson’s example, or the sister’s boyfriend in the case that Roberts depicts, I would question any theory which insisted that the flagrantly sexist or racist emotions felt *toward me* by a specific person were *not* indicative of that person’s cognitive attitudes. Even if I were charitable enough to grant that their avowed beliefs about my race or gender showed me *something* about what they thought, I would know that these professed beliefs did not reveal the whole truth about how they view things — for something *else* is disclosed by their emotions. Calhoun has noted that “our cognitive life is not limited to clear, fully conceptualized, articulated beliefs,” since it also includes those “dark” cognitions which constitute a

¹⁴ Roberts (1988, 195–197). On the “cognitive aspect” of our perceptual and affective experience, and on its phenomenology, see Raja Bahlul (2015, 118).

¹⁵ Jennifer Robinson (2005, 23).

¹⁶ Roberts (2003, 84–85). By contrast, Matthew Ratcliffe notes that “accepting a proposition” is “not sufficient for a sense of conviction” (2008, 184).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Sabine Döring (2014, 125): she can see no reason why anyone would hold “that the judgment which supposedly defines the emotion is somehow unconsciously held and thus not acknowledged by the subject,” in cases where conscious beliefs conflict with felt emotions.

large part of our “unarticulated framework for interpreting the world.”¹⁸ This whole complex background, including but not limited to our consciously affirmed beliefs, forms our affective outlook: and all of our convictions, not only the articulate ones, influence how we respond emotionally.

In many cases, it appears that a person’s irrational emotions reflect his or her unreasonable beliefs. Rather than viewing the distorted emotions as the *result* or the *cause* of the inaccurate beliefs, we ought to note that affect and cognition are aligned just as we should expect them to be. The actor or public speaker suffering from stage fright may honestly believe that the audience members and their opinion pose no *threat* to him, and yet still be quite rationally afraid of the possibility that he will perform badly, granted that he does care about performing well. And to those who fear spiders or mice it may seem likely, if not that these creatures will cause serious injury, that they might run up one’s arms or legs, or get into one’s clothing — prospects that might well qualify as awful. If so, these cases would no longer seem to show that fear can exist without *any* idea of something bad that could happen. If the person who becomes afraid while driving on an icy road is telling herself that she is perfectly safe, it may be that her fear is appropriate while her overtly stated belief is false. If her emotion is responsive to the actual dangers of her situation, then what she *thinks* she knows (namely, that she is in no danger whatsoever), ought to be revised by the insight which is embodied in her affective response. When we rely upon a composed judgment (such as, “I shouldn’t be afraid, I know there’s no danger here”) in order to dismiss an emotional response, we risk being oblivious to the emotion’s content, which can be intricately nuanced and highly specific even if it has not yet been put into words.¹⁹ In short, cool reasoning is not always more intelligent than emotion. If I am an unusually calm driver, this is not because I “know perfectly well” that driving is safe (as, in fact, it is not) but because I am unaware of its risks at the moment, since I am thinking instead about the beauty of the open road, the worth of whatever I will be doing after I arrive at my destination, or something else altogether.

The characters in the examples offered by Roberts and Robinson would be more accurately understood as experiencing a conflict, not between reason and feeling, but between the (cognitive-affective) attitudes they want to endorse and those that govern how things appear to them. Now, such a person could be only paying lip service to non-racist or non-sexist beliefs; however, he may also have good intentions to form a less perniciously biased perspective. Yet, in the event that the latter is true, it’s clear that his more tolerant beliefs have not thoroughly “sunk in”; insofar as they haven’t, though, he does not wholeheartedly believe what he claims to believe, and it would be false to say that he does. Believing is not a binary one-or-zero matter, as if one either simply does believe a proposition or simply doesn’t. Many beliefs are held with lower degrees of conviction that fall short of “full blooded believing,” and a person cannot legitimately be said to *know* that X is true (e.g., that not only Caucasian people are trustworthy) if she experiences the world as if X were false (e.g., by habitually feeling distrust toward non-whites).²⁰ By the same

¹⁸ Calhoun (1984, 338). Cf. Martha C. Nussbaum (2001, 36): “The mind has a complex archaeology, and false beliefs, especially about matters of value, are hard to shake.”

¹⁹ Eugene Gendlin has observed that embodied “felt meanings,” or affective feelings, can be quite precise: they are “not indeterminate,” only “capable of further symbolization.” (1997, 145–146).

²⁰ The phrase “full blooded belief” is from Michael Stocker (1987, 59–60). As he points out, some instances of fear involve *uncertainty*, or the thought that something *might* be a threat. See also Nussbaum (2001, 40–41): a person for whom the significance of a loved one’s death “sink[s] in” will feel “disturbed”; thus, not to feel moved would indicate that this death has not entirely registered in one’s awareness.

token, someone qualifies as being afraid of spiders because, in the presence of a spider, he *feels that* the creature is threatening or takes it to be a threat. Therefore it's disingenuous to claim that he knows perfectly well that spiders are harmless, just because he has explicitly affirmed the truth of a statement to that effect. A more complete account of this case would take stock of the sense in which he has the knowledge that spiders are harmless, as well as the sense in which he doesn't: for he sometimes endorses propositional beliefs according to which spiders are harmless, and yet his intentional attitudes reveal that spiders *do* at other times seem dangerous to him. This is demonstrated by the fear he experiences, for this emotion contains a sense *that* spiders are threatening — which is exactly why his fear is capable of being at odds with his articulate belief that spiders are harmless.

We should not assume that affective feeling is an “extra,” without which cognition remains just the same. The explicit propositional belief that danger is near, minus a felt sense of being threatened, is deficient; and what it lacks is epistemically important. In a person who *is* convinced that danger is near, this conviction incorporates a feeling of being threatened. It would be inconsistent *not* to feel motivated as if to get away from an apparent danger, since we are moved with an awareness that it may be threatening *in* apprehending it as fearsome. If we had ancestors who could dispassionately judge that they were facing something dangerous *without* feeling moved to avoid it, then they were afflicted by a kind of practical irrationality which probably rendered them unfit to survive. Our somatic turbulence, when we experience fear, contains an intentional reference toward the possible source of harm from which we are recoiling.²¹ The feeling of being disturbed by fear is our way of taking in this urgent news about the world, of recognizing a potential threat as such. The person who feels afraid is not undergoing a blind agitation but responding to an object that is apprehended as a potential danger. In the absence of this bodily affective upheaval, he or she would not be recognizing the significance of that particular fact. To believe wholeheartedly that one is threatened, it is not sufficient to endorse an overtly formulated statement about being in the presence of danger: and, likewise, to feel that something is harmful is evidently to be not entirely convinced that it is harmless. The affective feeling of being threatened by an object that one regards (*when* one is not afraid) as innocuous is also problematic. If nothing else, this “recalcitrant” emotion demonstrates that one has ambivalent cognitions about the frightful thing. One's emotions are evidence of conflicting opinions about what is truly the case. When Othello says, “I think my wife be honest, and think she is not,”²² he is giving voice to his own painfully contrary affective experiences of jealous suspicion and calm trust toward Desdemona — *each* of which seems to him well-grounded when he is in the grip of that particular feeling.

Far from showing that emotion and cognition are categorically discrete, phobias ought to remind us that emotional cognition is typically an experience in which one *does*, at least tentatively, accept that things truly are as they appear to be. Acknowledging this allows us to grasp the difference between the belief that spiders are nothing to fear, in a person who is *not* afraid of spiders, and the explicitly stated belief that spiders are harmless, in another person who fears them nonetheless. If a person is afraid, then she must find the world threatening in some respect, at least while she is experiencing fear. For the fearsome *seems* dangerous to

²¹ This is what distinguishes “the emotional commotion of real fear” from dispassionate acceptance of the fact that danger looms, as Richard Shusterman points out (2008, 149). On the intentionality of somatic feeling in such cases, see also Peter Goldie (2000, 58–60): he describes this in terms of “feeling towards.”

²² Shakespeare, *Othello*, III.iii.384.

us, and insofar as we fear it we feel that it *is* a danger. Why should this be viewed as irrelevant to our cognitive attitudes about what might endanger us? Again, assenting to a proposition is not sufficient evidence that one is deeply convinced of its truth, just as denying the truth of a proposition is not sufficient proof that one is entirely convinced of its falsity. Indeed, studies have shown that those who regard themselves as invulnerable to emotional bias are *more* likely than others to be swayed by tacit cognitive prejudices that clash with their avowed beliefs.²³ If we take all of this evidence into account, we will no longer view phobias as proof that the “fear system” is impervious to our cognitions, nor will we misunderstand recalcitrant emotions in general as showing that beliefs per se are divorced from emotional responses. The fact that people tend to exaggerate the dangers of air travel, and to believe that airplane crashes are much more common than they actually are, is seldom cited as evidence that our beliefs as such are irrational and likely to mislead us. Emotions such as phobic fear can involve faulty rationality without being unreasonable in the sense of not answering to reason or lying wholly outside the realm of rationality.²⁴ Unlike in the case of certain perceptual illusions, which continue to appear the same way to us even once we know that the appearance is illusory, “successful therapy of phobic fears” can eliminate false beliefs about the object *and* make it no longer seem dangerous.²⁵ After this change, a person no longer finds his or her attention intensely drawn to the formerly feared thing as it was before. We will be closer to understanding affective cognition if we cease to assume that the person afflicted by phobic fear has exactly the same convictions about the frightful object as people who *feel* completely unafraid of it.

We will misconstrue these cases if we locate either the dawning apprehension of danger, or any other variety of affective recognition, in a dispassionate judgment which occurs *before* (and could occur *without*) any felt emotion. Theorists of emotion have too often made the error of depicting an appraisal or evaluative judgment as an antecedent, precipitating condition of an affective response.²⁶ And it is also inaccurate to describe emotional cognition as following *after* an agitated feeling has arisen, since it is not as though we first notice a bodily disturbance and then conclude that someone must have died, since our somatic agitation has a grief-like “feel” to it. According to Prinz, because anger simply *is* a perception of certain bodily sensations, it makes sense to reason as follows: “if you experience your body preparing for aggression, then chances are you have encountered something offensive,” yet the somatic changes which constitute anger

²³ See, e.g., Uhlmann and Cohen (2007).

²⁴ Quite sensibly, LeDoux makes the observation that “phobic objects” such as “snakes, spiders, heights,” and so on, “are often legitimately threatening, but not to the extent believed by the phobic person.” (1996, 130).

²⁵ Rainer Reisenzein (2009, 220).

²⁶ Richard Lazarus, for instance, stipulates that “certain patterns of appraisal *cause* particular emotions” (1991, 172–173). William Lyons makes a similarly misleading claim, viz., that an emotional state involves “an evaluation which causes abnormal physiological changes.” (1980, 57–58 & 88). Prinz concedes that “a judgment [that] one’s lover has been unfaithful” may provoke the “embodied appraisal” of jealousy (2004, 98–99). Yet typically, he thinks, the causal sequence is the other way around, and cognitions occur *after* feelings of bodily responses. He assumes that one or the other must come first. So does Robinson, who argues that “cognitive monitoring and labelling of emotions occurs subsequent to an initial gut reaction,” which itself involves only “non-cognitive” physiological changes (2005, 414). Similar problems exist with multi-component and “hybrid” theories, in my opinion: namely, they tend to assume that emotions incorporate discrete aspects that are not unified, and a form of intentional awareness which itself *falls short* of rational cognition. However, research by Klaus R. Scherer provides some evidence in favor of component process models, or componential appraisal theories, of emotion: see, e.g., Scherer and Ellgring (2007). Their emphasis on appraisal is consistent with my account.

carry no information about what the offense might have been.²⁷ But this is false. To perceive the loss of a beloved person just *is* to feel the emotion of grief, with its specific intentional content. Likewise, an object appears frightening insofar as I feel afraid of it, and I feel afraid to the degree that it seems frightening to me. Consequently, we must accept that a form of belief is inherent in affective perception, even if this amounts to nothing more than a tentative acceptance of what immediately appears to be true. In feeling *that* X is Y, that the bear is threatening, we take it *to be* dangerous — that is, we apprehend it *as* a potential source of harm and respond to it as such. These examples illustrate the sense in which there is “a believing inherent in perceiving,” as Husserl and others have noted.²⁸ In this case, our embodied affective feeling of being afraid is the mode of experience through which we recognize the bear as a potential threat.

One apprehends (or misconstrues) a situation *as* threatening, not by making subsequent judgments or interpretations derived from initially unintelligent sense data, but by responding to an aspect of one’s surroundings in a specific manner. When I am suddenly confronted with an animal in my path, and feel that it is likely to harm me, I am aware of it as a threat and I feel afraid. In this unified experience of apprehending apparent danger, I implicitly think that the animal *is* dangerous: the cognitive process of emotional apprehension or recognition can take place quickly and tacitly, and can enable me to know something prior to any act of reflective judgment. A perceptual experience is capable of revealing something true *although* I do not formulate a thought such as, “Here is a creature that might hurt me.” Overtly affirming a proposition is not sufficient, nor is it even necessary, for the emotion of fear to involve cognition: prior to any overt formulation, this affective experience allows one to apprehend an imminent danger.

Explicitly affirmed beliefs of which the subject is transparently aware should not be regarded as the definitive standard for cognition, by comparison with which any other mental state somehow falls short of qualifying as cognitive. Yet, by artificially narrowing the realm of the cognitive, some philosophers are led to the conclusion that our beliefs play “a far smaller role” in human existence than we tend to assume.²⁹ For the sake of appreciating the cognitive attitudes that actually govern our practical outlook and our way of understanding the world, we need to appreciate the distinct contribution that affective experience can make to our knowledge. Emotional upheavals manifest a person’s visceral convictions about reality and value; they enable significant recognitions to “hit home” in a way that is powerfully felt. Some time after his grandmother’s death, the narrator of Proust’s novel returns to a vacation spot where he had formerly stayed in a room adjoining hers. Making a familiar corporeal gesture, he leans forward and starts removing his boots: then, all of a sudden, he is inundated with emotion:

I was shaken with sobs, tears streamed from my eyes. . . . It was only at that moment — more than a year after her burial, because of the anachronism which so often prevents the calendar of facts from corresponding to the calendar of

²⁷ Prinz (2012, 8). On “attributing irritability [or] edginess” to a sensation in the chest or gut, although such states are “attributable to a whole person” only, not to parts of a body, see Bahlul’s helpful analysis (2015, 106–107).

²⁸ Husserl (2001, 66–68). On the ways in which emotions involve “cognitive interpretation” or “seeing-as,” see also Nussbaum (2001, 5 & 127–129).

²⁹ Tamar Szabó Gendler (2008, 663).

feelings — that I became conscious that she was dead. . . . I had only just [now] learned that I had lost her for ever. . . . I clung to this pain, cruel as it was . . . and I longed for the nails that riveted her to my consciousness to be driven yet deeper. . . . I knew that if I ever did extract some truth from life, it could only be from such an impression.³⁰

The painful truth that he recognizes, and the way it feels to recognize this, are aspects of a single experience of apprehensive feeling, or emotional knowing. Although in one sense the narrator already knew of his grandmother's death, he did *not* know it perfectly well. The full significance of her death does not register in his awareness until this later moment. It is only now, "a year after her burial," that "he learns that she is dead," as Samuel Beckett comments.³¹ "For the first time since her death he knows that she is dead, [and] he knows *who* is dead." The upheaval of grief *is* this recognition. To do justice to such an episode of grief, we must reject any theoretical account which insists that Marcel already knew "perfectly well" that his grandmother had passed away, and that he therefore learns nothing with any cognitive content in this later experience of overwhelming emotion. Nonetheless, as we have seen, that is how many philosophers would be compelled (by their own theoretical positions) to interpret Marcel's experience.

3 Neither Mere Feelings nor Mere Judgments

Intellectual activity divorced from corresponding affective feeling is profoundly lacking — not only in its qualitative feel, but also in its epistemic import, or its ability to inform us about matters of significance. The new knowledge introduced to Marcel in the experience described above is axiological: he learns what it *means* to him personally that his beloved grandmother is gone forever. William James is right to say that "fear" minus the feeling of upheaval would not be fear, but it is also true that fear would not be the emotion that it is without any sense of danger. An elevated pulse rate and tingling skin would not qualify as fear if they were induced mechanically, but those same symptoms *could* be an intrinsic part of one's emotional response if they arose with the awareness that one is (or might be) threatened with harm. By now it ought to be clear that we need not choose to focus *either* on somatic feeling *or* on intentional content, because a feeling of bodily agitation can be intentionally directed toward something in the world to which one is responding. The body "is not just an object perceived," as Ratcliffe notes, "but also that through which we perceive," and the embodied feelings characteristic of fear are integral to the experience in which we perceive an apparent threat.³² A similar kind of embodied perception occurs³² when I grasp a cold bottle of water. I do not merely feel that my hand is becoming cold; rather, through my hand I feel the coldness of the bottle. Accordingly, to claim that the somatic disturbance involved in fear is just *caused* by something outside one's own body does not capture

³⁰ Marcel Proust (1982, 783-787).

³¹ Samuel Beckett (1957, 26-28). Emphasis in original.

³² Ratcliffe (2008, 132). Following James, Prinz argues that emotions are perceptions of "bodily states" that are "reliably caused" by things in the environment (2004, 68–69). However, reliable causation does not amount to intentionality. A state that is caused need not carry any information about what has caused it.

the way that one's living body is involved in apprehending the fearful object as such. We are physically moved when we recognize an apparent danger and appreciate its significance, and the turbulent feeling of being shaken by fear is our way of recognizing a looming threat. In this manner, our embodied affective feelings are *about* features of the surrounding world, and they can reveal these features to us in their significance.

The experience of fear is a felt agitation of the living body, by virtue of which one recognizes an apparent danger as such. And the emotion of fear contains an inherent world-directedness or intentionality — in other words, that *how* it feels to be afraid is related to *what* fear is about. Like other varieties of affective upheaval, the emotion of fear thus supports this more general claim: namely, that it is through our emotions that we are able to discern whatever has meaning or significance for us. As I have argued, our *feelings about* that loss are both somatic (“feelings”) and intentional (“about”) at once. To claim that emotions have intentionality, therefore, is not to deny that feelings play a palpable role in affective experience. In order to capture what is distinctive about affectivity, we must acknowledge that “what it is like” to undergo an emotion is to feel *that* the world (or some aspect of it) is threatening, offensive, or whatever the case may be. To account for the qualitative feeling, we must realize that the felt sense in question is directed toward one's surroundings in a specific way. Usually, a person is not self-consciously aware of his or her affective state itself to the exclusion of any awareness of what he or she is upset *about*: when you ask someone to tell you more about his anger, he doesn't *only* describe his physiological sensations — “I'm boiling up!” Or, “my heart is racing!” — instead, he talks mainly about the intentional content of his emotion, or about *why* he is angry. Nevertheless, his feelings of somatic agitation are *intrinsic* to this very emotion, and without the experiential sense of “boiling up” over Z's remark he may not have noticed that Z had ridiculed him, or that his own insecurity about the trait that Z had belittled rendered him vulnerable to reacting in this way.³³ And, in the same experience in which I feel anger for some reason, I “feel myself feeling” this emotion. This is not because emotion is cognitive and *also* bodily, as if these were discrete and conjoined parts, but because affective cognition is tangibly embodied, such that to be convinced that one's circumstances are disappointing *is* to feel disappointed.

As Jean-Paul Sartre observes, “a knowing consciousness that is at the same time an affective consciousness does not have *one part* knowledge and *one part* feeling.”³⁴ An emotion such as grief embodies the powerfully felt recognition of a certain state of affairs: a significant loss. What it means to have lost a beloved person — this particular disturbing truth — registers in our awareness in an experience of turbulent upheaval. Furthermore, there is no good reason for us to assume that such an emotional episode must be either a mental event with physiological consequences or else a bodily process followed by conscious reasoning. Rather, the cognitive and the corporeal are integrated in the unified experience of a particular living person who is meaningfully engaged in the world. In emotional experience, feeling and intentionality are not two utterly discrete processes which are somehow correlated: they are aspects of a single response. The particular apprehension or recognition that an emotion incorporates is inherent in its phenomenal character, and affective feelings therefore constitute modes of

³³ Fiumara writes (2001, 79–80) that, if we had not realized this before, “we learn from anger that someone has offended us, and we even learn about [our] vulnerability” too.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre (2004, 72–73). See Ratcliffe (2008, 27): characteristically, the feeling of somatic agitation “is the emotional apprehension of a situation; the intentionality and bodily nature of the emotion are entangled.”

experiencing and responding to significant features of the world. Our emotions give us a distinctly valuable mode of intelligence, by allowing us to grasp significant truths that we could not have discovered apathetically.

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