Introduction

A New Role for Emotions in Epistemology?

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This chapter provides an overview of the issues involved in recent debates about the epistemological relevance of emotions. We first survey some key issues in epistemology and the theory of emotions that inform various assessments of emotions’ potential significance in epistemology. We then distinguish five epistemic functions that have been claimed for emotions: motivational force, salience and relevance, access to facts and beliefs, non-propositional contributions to knowledge and understanding, and epistemic efficiency. We identify two core issues in the discussions about such epistemic functions of emotions: First, even though it is plausible that emotions are involved in epistemic processes, it may be doubted whether they really matter for the normative question of what counts as knowledge or justified belief. Second, some of the epistemic functions claimed for emotions in general may only be attributed to some specifically epistemic emotions, which have been present all along in traditional epistemology, albeit under different labels such as ‘intuitions’.

Epistemic activities can be very emotional affairs. Curiosity, doubt, hope and fear trigger everyday cognitive activities as well as academic research, which in turn are sources of surprise, frustration and joy. Less intellectual emotions may also play their part when tireless scrutinizing is driven by jealousy, or when an experiment is too disgusting to occur to any researcher.

Nevertheless, emotions did not play a significant role in traditional epistemology and if they were paid any attention at all, they were mainly thought of as impairing cognition. Recently, however, epistemologists and emotion theorists have started to discuss the question of whether the epistemological standing of emotions needs to be reassessed. Are there epistemic functions that can be assigned to emotions? And which emotions are suitable candidates for these functions? These questions are at the centre of this collection of essays.

The significance some epistemologists have attributed to emotions over the last ten years or so can arguably be claimed to be new in the context of contemporary English speaking epistemology. Emotions entered epistemology discussions in the 1990s after having been reintroduced to ethics and moral philosophy some decades earlier. This development has been helped by the rediscovery of emotions in cognitive science (Antonio Damasio’s Descartes’ Error among the best-known

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examples) and by epistemology becoming more closely associated with action theory and moral philosophy, as in virtue epistemology. But while the cognitive significance of emotions was quickly acknowledged and, under headings like ‘emotional intelligence’, made it to newspapers, general interest magazines and self-help books, most epistemologists have been less enthusiastic about emotions. For instance, in Blackwell’s 1992 Companion to Epistemology (Dancy and Sosa 2001), ‘emotion’ is not even listed in the index (neither are related terms, such as ‘feeling’ or ‘affect’) and nothing significant can be found in Kluwer’s 2004 Handbook of Epistemology (Niiniluoto et al. 2004). Over the last decade, however, many strands of research centring on the nature and function of emotions have led to important insights and adjustments, both within and outside of epistemology.

While this introduction focuses on recent research, one should not forget that the idea that emotions matter a great deal in epistemology has a longer history. An example can be found in a surprising passage of Moritz Schlick’s On the Foundation of Knowledge, where he explicitly uses satisfaction, fulfilment and even joy as the criteria for successful validation of inductively achieved hypotheses:

[We] pass an observational judgement that we expected, and have in doing so a sense of fulfilment, a wholly characteristic satisfaction; we are content. It is quite proper to say that the affirmations or observation statements have fulfilled their true mission, as soon as this peculiar satisfaction is obtained. … Once the prediction comes to pass, the aim of science is achieved: the joy in knowledge is joy in verification, the exaltation of having guessed correctly. … Are our predictions actually realized? In every single case of verification or falsification an ‘affirmation’ answers unambiguously with yes or no, with joy of fulfilment or disillusion. The affirmations are final. (Schlick [1934], 382–3)

Affirmations (‘Konstatierungen’) are a core element of Schlick’s foundationalism and, it turns out, they have their ‘true mission’ in eliciting emotional responses. The immediate joy of seeing a hypothesis confirmed and the disappointment of experiencing it falsified make it possible for affirmations to provide the infallible foundation of knowledge and science. This basic function of emotions is echoed in Quine’s observation that Goodman’s ‘new riddle of induction’ is best dealt with by appealing to a feeling of simplicity (Quine 1960, 19). Recently, Christopher Hookway picked up on this remark (Hookway 2003a, 81; Hookway, this vol., p. 54), using it as a starting point for his own contribution to the current debate on emotions and epistemology. Goodman himself started to highlight the epistemological significance of the emotions in the 1960s (Goodman 1976, ch. VI.4). His arguments for adopting understanding, instead of knowledge, as the central epistemic goal were taken up by Catherine Elgin, who developed a comprehensive account of epistemology that gives emotions a prominent role (Goodman and Elgin 1988; Elgin 1996).

In what follows, we first sketch some traditional stances and more recent developments in epistemology (section 1) and the theory of emotions (section 2). On this basis, we will then (section 3) present a survey of various ways in which emotions recently have been claimed to be relevant to epistemology, followed by a

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1 See Lazarus (1999) for a short historical account.
brief discussion of some possible objections to the proposed reappraisals of emotions in epistemology (section 4).

1. Background in Epistemology

Recent developments within philosophical epistemology have prepared the ground for attributing epistemic significance to emotions. These developments are best understood against the background of some core features of traditional epistemological thinking.

Features of Traditional Epistemology

Within the philosophical tradition, epistemology has tended to present itself not as an empirical, but as a normative discipline, often motivated by a wish to answer sceptical challenges. Philosophical epistemologies explore the grounds and validity of knowledge. While the question of how we go about acquiring and maintaining knowledge has countless aspects that call for empirical investigations, epistemology as traditionally understood attempts to tell us what counts as acquiring or having knowledge. Accordingly, questions of the validity of epistemic claims (e.g. evaluating something as epistemically justified, attributing knowledge to somebody) are often contrasted with questions of their formation or genesis, and only the former are treated as epistemologically relevant. This view is often presented by recourse to the distinction between the ‘context of discovery’ and the ‘context of justification’. The resulting picture with respect to the emotions is familiar enough. Research, actual processes of discovering and justifying, may well be driven by all sorts of emotions, such as curiosity or fear of dropping out of an academic career, but these emotions do not play any part in evaluating whether the results of research add to our knowledge. Emotions are important in the context of discovery as they influence the way researchers actually proceed. Nevertheless, they are irrelevant to the context of justification since the validity of the results is independent of such emotions. We will discuss this stance in more detail in section 4.

A considerable part of traditional epistemological theorizing includes a further assumption that contributes to a situation in which emotions were not perceived as epistemologically relevant. Clearly present in Descartes’ Meditations (Descartes [1641]) and prevalent in traditional foundationalist epistemological projects, certainty or infallibility have been conceived as requirements of knowledge. This prioritizes deductive over inductive inferences and it leads to quests for infallible epistemic foundations and algorithms to choose between competing theories. On the face of it, emotions do not make promising candidates for such processes, since their cognitive output seems particularly fallible. The feeling of jealousy, for example, may occasionally help to discover facts that would otherwise go unnoticed; thus it may help acquire knowledge. But all too often it results in nothing but ill-founded suspicion (see Goldie, this vol.).
Apart from attempts to formulate and answer sceptical challenges or epistemic regress worries (e.g. by recourse to foundationalism), contemporary analytic epistemology has long been preoccupied with analysing key epistemic concepts such as (epistemic) justification and, above all, propositional knowledge. Analysis in terms of justified true belief has served as a promising starting point. Again, this model is unfavourable to emotions as long as the justification condition remains tied to inferential relations between beliefs. To say that subject S knows that \( p \) is to say that S truly believes that \( p \) and that this belief is epistemically justified. Whether \( p \) is justified depends primarily on its inferential relations to S’s beliefs.

**Developments Within Epistemology**

A range of more or less recent developments have shaped epistemology in favour of emotions. In this respect, debates about the justification condition of knowledge have been especially influential. According to an important proposal, what is needed for subject S to know that \( p \) is not that S be in a position to give reasons for \( p \), but that S be in a position to rule out relevant alternatives to \( p \) (Dretske 1970; Goldman 1976). Attempts to determine what counts as epistemically relevant in any given situation soon opened the door to considerations previously thought of as alien to epistemology. Some difference between real, felt doubts and idle philosophical paper doubts, for example, could be used to establish that blind tasting Barolo is a relevant alternative to blind tasting Chianti, whereas being a brain in a vat is not. As we will describe in section 3, epistemic relevance and salience have become some of the most discussed functions of emotions within epistemology (see de Sousa 1987; Elgin 1996; Hookway 2003b).

In further attempts to remove the justification condition from the epistemic subject’s cognitive control, it was argued that for a true proposition \( p \) to count as knowledge, it matters not so much whether the subject is in a position to give reasons for \( p \). Instead, we better ask whether \( p \) was produced in an appropriate way, for instance by suitable causal chains (Goldman 1967), by reliable belief-forming mechanisms (Goldman 1976) or by properly functioning cognitive equipment (Plantinga 1986). To some extent, such moves towards ‘externalist’ theories of epistemic justification have blurred the traditional distinction between context of discovery and context of justification. After all, causal chains and the kinds of mechanism that produce or fix beliefs are features of the formation of knowledge.

But even though emotions are often part of processes of knowledge production, they did not immediately attract the externalists’ attention. It was largely assumed that the function of the justification condition, whether spelt out in internalist or externalist terms, is to rule out beliefs that are merely accidentally true. Consequently, only those features of belief-forming processes that systematically contribute to the truth of their products were seen as normatively, and hence epistemologically, relevant. Insofar as emotions seem particularly fallible, they do not seem epistemologically relevant.

The case for emotions is strengthened once principled questions are raised with respect to counterexamples to various analyses of the concept of knowledge. As Hilary Kornblith has recently insisted, at the end of the day we are not interested
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in our concepts of knowledge and epistemic justification, but in knowledge and justification themselves (Kornblith 2006, 12). Mark Kaplan (1985, 354) makes a similar point when he argues that unless it concerns the ‘proper conduct of inquiry’, analysis of the concept of knowledge is idle. The underlying view of epistemology is that it should primarily aim at ‘understanding and advancing rational inquiry’ (Kaplan 1985, 362).

Hookway (1990) suggests a similar shift away from characteristics of static belief systems to epistemic activities. This move is motivated by a pragmatist interpretation of sceptical challenges. Hookway thinks that sceptical challenges undermine the idea that we can simultaneously understand ourselves as participating in normatively regulated inquiries and as autonomous, responsible agents (Hookway 1990, 215). For him, this move towards practices and processes goes together with a widening of the epistemological focus from propositional knowledge to epistemic evaluations in general, as has also been argued for by Goodman and Elgin (1988; Elgin 1996).

Various considerations and claims have been put forward to defend such a development. Knowledge may just be ill chosen as the goal of epistemic activities. It may be too hard to achieve (especially if the tripartite analysis is correct) or it may impose inapplicable standards to our inquiries. Furthermore, knowledge, as it is typically discussed in epistemology, is restricted to propositions. But propositional knowledge may rest upon non-propositional elements, such as categories, concepts and methods. Or it may even be better approached in terms of knowing how to do certain things, such as conducting inquiries or revising one’s beliefs.

Elgin (1996) argues that inquiry is better seen in terms of striving for understanding than in terms of knowledge acquisition. If analysis of epistemic processes is not restricted to their propositional results, but includes non-propositional components of understanding, then values, rules, categories and methods may be epistemically evaluated along with judgements or assertions (Elgin 1996, 122). Related considerations have led to a weakening of the truth-requirement in epistemic evaluations to acceptability (Goodman and Elgin 1988), tenability (Elgin 1996) or ‘enough’ truth (Elgin 2004) to make room for approximations and even fictions that contribute to understanding (Elgin 1996, esp. 122–7; see the discussion in Wild, this vol.).

Such moves towards epistemic processes and activities highlight aspects and properties of epistemic agents that have previously been neglected. Emotional states can be seen as part of this new, broader picture, which is also influenced by philosophers of science such as Kuhn or Feyerabend, who argue for broadly construed scientific rationality to replace the logical empiricists’ ideal of logical procedures in matters of theory choice. One way of spelling out such a notion of rationality appeals to scientists’ decision making. Harold Brown, for example, models the rational scientist on Aristotle’s man of practical wisdom, who is

… a model of the maker of crucial scientific decisions which cannot be made by appeal to an algorithm, and I offer the making of these decisions as a model of rational thought. It is the trained scientist who must make these decisions, and it is the scientists, not the rules they wield, that provide the locus of scientific rationality. (Brown 1977, 149)
Ernest Sosa (1980; 1985), James Montmarquet (1993) and Linda Zagzebski (1996; see also DePaul and Zagzebski 2003) undercut the distinction between internalist and externalist theories of epistemic justification by adopting the notion of virtue from ethical theory and focusing on epistemic or intellectual virtues. This amounts to a reversal of direction of epistemological analysis. In the traditional order, epistemic evaluations of propositions, sentences or mental states were analysed first, and epistemic agents, acts and processes were then accounted for in terms of these analyses. Virtue epistemologists, however, start with normative properties of epistemic agents. Emotions come to play parts within such a strategy by contributing to the analysis of the epistemically relevant virtues or character traits (cf. the critique of Wild, this vol.).

Lorraine Code’s (1984; 1987) and Alvin Goldman’s (1986; 1999) social epistemology further widens the scope from individual epistemic agents to processes within epistemic communities, while feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science examine whether, and in what ways, the gender of epistemic agents may be epistemically significant. The epistemic agent’s emotional involvement is one aspect of the gender differences that are discussed in this context (Jaggar 1989; Diamond 1991).

Two more developments inside and outside philosophy should be mentioned as having led to a surge of interest in emotions. In philosophy, Quine (1969) and others have initiated the project of naturalizing epistemology by assimilating it to psychology and cognitive science. Similar considerations fuelled hopes for a naturalized theory of mental states and concepts, which have contributed to the tendency to assign philosophical significance to empirical research on belief-forming processes and belief-revision (see Fodor 1984; Fodor 1987; Nisbett and Ross 1980; Goldie, this vol.). At roughly the same time, philosophical theories of emotions that emphasize their cognitive significance have been revived (e.g. Kenny [1963]), while the cognitive revolution in psychology started to give emotions a central place (see Lazarus 1999). Some twenty years later, the time was ripe for fusing these trends. Ronald de Sousa (1987) and Damasio ([1994]) combined cognitivist and naturalist aspects with great effect.

In summary, we can identify the following developments within philosophical epistemology that invite epistemological discussions of emotions: relevant alternative accounts and externalism about epistemic justification; calls for a theory of epistemic agents and practices, paradigmatically as opposed to conceptual analysis; opening the focus from propositional knowledge to epistemic evaluations in general; criticism of narrowly construed epistemic rationality within the philosophy of science; the recent prominence of virtue epistemology; discussions of social and feminist epistemology; and finally, the rise of cognitive science and naturalized epistemology.

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2 Hookway (this vol.) appeals to emotions to combine key internalist and externalist commitments; Alessandra Tanesini (this vol.) introduces the concept of intellectual modesty to account for fallibilism about knowledge.
2. The Landscape of Emotions

Any exploration of possible epistemic functions of emotions presupposes some understanding of the variety and nature of emotion phenomena. In this section, we highlight a few general points that help to structure discussions of emotions and to avoid some sources of misunderstanding.

The Variety of Emotions

The first thing worth noting about the concept of emotion is the number and variety of emotion terms. Empirical research suggests that about 300 colloquial terms referring to emotions can be found in the English language (Plutchik 2003, 64–8). These range from ‘anger’ and ‘anxiety’ to ‘indifference’ and ‘interest’ as well as to ‘self-respect’, ‘shame’ and ‘surprise’. Also, philosophers have compiled various systematically organized ‘dictionaries’ of emotions. Descartes’ list in The Passions of the Soul (Descartes [1649], §§53–67) is a prominent example. More recently, Robert Solomon presented an Emotional register – Who’s who among the passions with descriptions covering about fifty emotion terms (Solomon 1993a, ch. 8). Any such list faces the problem of what terms exactly deserve to be included, and the apparent diversity of phenomena classified as emotions raises the question of whether all emotions may be claimed to have epistemic relevance or only those of a certain type.

Attempts at structuring the universe of emotions include taxonomies along dimensions such as intensity (Plutchik 1980, 157–60), backward-looking and forward-looking, positive and negative (Lyons 1980, 89–91; Gordon 1987, 25–32; Prinz 2004b, ch. 7), as well as outer and inner direction (Solomon 1993a, ch. 8). Other ways of organizing the realm of emotions draw on designating certain emotions as ‘basic’, though this is an ambiguous attribute of emotions (see Ortony and Turner 1990; Plutchik 2003, ch. 4). One influential idea is to take some emotions as basic in the sense of ‘elementary’ and explain the others as derivations, mixtures or compounds thereof, in analogy to primary and secondary colours or chemical elements and compounds. There is a long history of attempts at such a reduction including some well-known philosophical proposals such as Descartes’ list of passions primitives: wonder, hatred, joy, desire, love, sadness (Descartes [1649], §69). In cognitive science, Robert Plutchik’s account (Plutchik 1980) is a paradigm of such a position. Alternatives to elementary emotions include the view that the emotions form a multidimensional spectrum which is structured by components that are not emotions themselves (Ortony and Turner 1990). Equally common is the use of ‘basic’ in the sense of ‘pan-cultural’. Empirical investigations in psychology suggest that some emotions can be found in all cultures and have expressions that can be cross-culturally recognized (e.g. Ekman 1999b). This has been treated as evidence for their being relatively basic from a biological, specifically evolutionary perspective. In particular, these findings have been put forward as a challenge to the rival stance that emotions are social constructions (cf. Prinz 2004c). A classical list
of pan-cultural emotions are the ‘big six’: anger, fear, happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise (Ekman et al. 1969).

Notable Distinctions

One reason why ‘emotion’ covers such a remarkable diversity of phenomena is that this term itself is used with a range of different meanings. In modern philosophical terminology, ‘emotion’, the older terms ‘passion’ and ‘affect’, as well as related adjectives are used in a great variety of ways, sometimes with contrasting meanings, sometimes as synonyms. The same holds for everyday language, which additionally tends to use ‘feeling’ interchangeably with ‘emotion’. In theoretical writings, there is a discernible tendency to distinguish between emotions, feelings and moods. Furthermore, ‘affective’ tends to be used in a broad sense, including but not confined to emotions and feelings, but covering, for instance, moods as well (cf. Davidson et al. 2003, xiii; Griffiths 2004b, 240–43). Nevertheless, these are trends, not rules. One always has to be prepared to find divergent uses of ‘emotion’, ‘affective’ and the like, as well as distinctions drawn differently from what is suggested here.

Non-English usage of ‘emotion’ is an additional source of confusion because superficially similar terminology may cover up differences in meaning (see Cassin 2004). In German, for example, ‘Emotion’ has fairly recently been adopted from English and French and has started to replace more traditional terms such as ‘Affekt’ or ‘Gemütsbewegung’. Often, but by no means always, it is used as a synonym for ‘Gefühl’, which in turn is not only the standard translation for ‘feeling’ but also used to cover emotions.

Two distinctions are particularly useful in any discussion of the epistemic relevance of emotions, since they help to avoid some misunderstandings and confusions that are caused by the variety of terminologies in use. First, if an emotion is ascribed to somebody, what does the emotion term refer to? This question calls for distinguishing dispositions, processes, episodes and states. The second distinction concerns contrasting uses of ‘emotion’, ‘feeling’ and ‘mood’, where feelings can be seen as an aspect of emotions among others.

To begin with, there are dispositional and non-dispositional uses of emotion terms (Lyons 1980, 53–6). When we say

(1)  Toby has a fear of flying.

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3 In the wake of this research, ‘basic’ has sometimes been used meaning ‘being a product of evolution’. Paul Ekman (1994) maintains that all emotions are basic in this sense. Furthermore, he now claims that it is actually families of emotions that are basic (Ekman 1999a).

4 Indices of recently published philosophy handbooks suggest that ‘emotion’ is in the process of replacing ‘passion’ and especially ‘affect’ (but not ‘affective’). In psychology, ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ are both widely used, though with various meanings as well (cf. Schwarz and Clore 2007, 385–6; Plutchik 2003, 62–3).

5 Hookway (this vol.), for example, uses ‘affective’ in this broad sense.

6 Ryle (1949, ch. 4) discusses many such sources of potential misunderstandings.
we may want to say that it is a characteristic of Toby that he fears flying; that is, we ascribe to him a disposition to an emotion. If this is the case ‘S has e’ can be interpreted as a shorthand for ‘S is disposed to have e’ or ‘S is the e type of person’. Such a reading of (1) is appropriate in a context like:

(2) Don’t even ask him to join you on this trip. He has a fear of flying.

Alternatively, we may use (1) to talk about an emotion actually affecting Toby (sometimes called an ‘occurrent’ emotion):

(3) The trip to Hawaii was a nightmare for Toby because, suddenly, he had a fear of flying.

In this case, ‘S has e’ means the same as ‘S is affected by e’. The difference between these two usages makes it possible to say something like

(4) Toby’s fear of flying has saved him from actually experiencing his fear of flying.

without contradicting oneself.

Additionally, this latter use of emotion terms can be further differentiated. Expressions that refer to an emotion affecting somebody can in fact refer to a great variety of emotional or emotion related phenomena. There are two relevant dimensions here. On the one hand, emotions have the character of a process. They develop over time, showing a pattern of changing features (Frijda 1993, 382; Goldie 2000, 12–14). This renders emotion terms applicable to anything from long term processes lasting for hours or months to episodes of short duration, in the limiting case even states with almost no discernible pattern of evolution (cf. Solomon 2003, 2). For example:

(5) The trip to Hawaii was a nightmare for Toby, for he started having his fear of flying the very day I suggested the trip to him.

(6) Everything went well, until Toby suddenly had another rush of his fear of flying in the middle of our flight.

On the other hand, having an emotion can include a great many elements or aspects such as feelings, behaviour, bodily conditions and dispositions, including dispositions to certain emotions:

(7) Irritated by his fear of flying, Toby was always on the verge of getting angry with the cabin crew.

7 For further differentiation between dispositions and character traits see Goldie (2000, ch. 6).
Many expressions can be used for referring to an emotion as a whole as well as for picking out one, or a few, of all aspects of an emotion. Often the aspect referred to is a feeling:

(8) As soon as we started, Toby’s fear of flying got even more intense.

Behind this distinction between emotions and feelings lurk important problems concerning the nature of emotions. For there are theories of emotions which claim that emotions essentially are feelings, while others reject such an identification or insist on them being conceptually or factually independent. ‘Feeling’ and the verb ‘to feel’ are themselves used in a wide variety of ways in everyday language. Sometimes they are obviously closely related to emotions, as in ‘I feel angry at him’. For other uses, the relations to emotions are less obvious, as in ‘I feel like having a bath’, ‘I feel hungry’, ‘I cannot feel the vibrations you are talking about’, ‘I feel you should not interfere’ and so on (cf. Alston 1967, 483; Kenny [1963], 36–7). In philosophy, the majority of writers use ‘feeling’ to refer to some quality of consciousness; that is, to some state of awareness, to be described, if possible, in phenomenological terms, similar to the qualia of perception.8 On-going disputes concern the question of what it is that is sensed in a feeling, the relation of feelings to bodily conditions and to behaviour, as well as the questions of whether feelings are accessible by introspection alone and whether they are intentional (cf. Goldie 2000, ch. 3).

Finally, there is ‘mood’, a third term which is used in close connection with emotions:

(9) Ever since Toby flew to Hawaii, he has been a bit down.

A widely accepted psychological definition holds that moods are diffuse, global, low intensity emotions of longer duration (Oatley et al. 2006, 30). Against this it has been quite convincingly argued that the most salient difference between emotions and moods is not their duration or intensity, but the fact that moods do not have a specific intentional object (e.g. Frijda 1993; Goldie 2000, 143–51; Prinz 2004b, 182–8; for sceptical remarks see Plutchik 2003, 63). Emotions, so the argument goes, can be described as intentional affective states, oriented towards rather specific objects. The target of an outburst of anger, for instance, may be a certain word one believes to have overheard. Moods, on the other hand, either lack intentionality altogether or they are non-specifically oriented towards, for example, ‘everything’, ‘nothing’ or ‘the world’. In short, moods are emotions without specific objects, the difference being gradual rather than categorical (Goldie 2000, 17).

To sum up, as emotion terminology is anything but uniform, statements about emotions are often ambiguous. They admit of disposition-to- and affected-by-readings, or of being interpreted as referring to emotional processes of different ‘sizes’ or to some aspect of an emotion, such as a feeling or a bodily condition.

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8 In his contribution to this volume (p. 186), de Sousa draws another contrast between ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’. ‘Emotion’ is reserved for phenomena on a personal level, whereas ‘feeling’ includes subpersonal phenomena as well.