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Emotions as Evaluative Feelings

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Abstract

The phenomenology of emotions has traditionally been understood in terms of the bodily sensations they involve. This is a mistake. We should instead understand their phenomenology in terms of their distinctively evaluative intentionality. Emotions are essentially affective modes of response to the ways our circumstances come to matter to us, and so they are ways of being pleased or pained by those circumstances. Making sense of the intentionality and phenomenology of emotions in this way requires rejecting traditional understandings of intentionality and coming to see emotions as a distinctive and irreducible class of mental states lying at the intersection of intentionality, phenomenology, and motivation.

Keywords
emotions, evaluations, intentionality, phenomenology

Until about 20 years ago, contemporary philosophers thinking about the emotions were drawn to reductive accounts, understanding emotions in terms of independently intelligible kinds of mental states—typically beliefs, desires, and bodily sensations. The tacit motivation was the thought that since we need an account of these kinds of mental states anyway and since we have a reasonable grasp on how to approach such an account, we can get the emotions for free, so to speak, by providing such a reductive account. Thus, many philosophers (e.g., Gordon, 1987; Kerner, 1982; Lyons, 1980; Marks, 1982; Robinson, 1983) have thought we should understand fear to be simply the belief that something is dangerous, the desire that the danger be avoided (or at least mitigated), and certain sensations or feelings, such as a sinking feeling in one's stomach.

Implicit in such accounts is an understanding of various sorts of distinctions we need to make in order to understand the mind quite generally. Thus, it is generally thought, we should distinguish intentional mental states (like beliefs and desires) from phenomenal mental states (like sinking feelings in one's stomach), for beliefs and desires are essentially stances towards some representational content, whereas bodily sensations are essentially qualitative states that are not about anything at all. Furthermore, within the domain of intentional mental states it is generally thought that we need to distinguish the cognitive (like beliefs) from the conative (like desire). Traditionally this has been done in terms of the notion of direction of fit: *cognitive* states are those with *mind-to-world direction of fit* in the sense that when there is a discrepancy between how we think about the world and the way the world is, we ought to change our minds in order to fit how the world is; by contrast, *conative* states are those with *world-to-mind direction of fit* in that in the face of such a discrepancy we ought to change the world to fit our minds.

Given these distinctions, it looks like phenomenal and intentional mental states are mutually exclusive; moreover, within the domain of the intentional, cognitive, and conative states also seem exhaustive. When we turn to the emotions, we discover that they have both cognitive, and conative elements insofar as, like cognitions, they tell us something about how the world is and, like conations, they motivate us to act in various ways to change the world; moreover, emotions have phenomenal aspects to them—it feels like something to have an emotion, at least in paradigm cases. Consequently, if we are to give an account of emotions it seems we must do so as compound mental states of bodily sensations, cognitions, and conations.

Much of this is, I believe, fundamentally wrong. We can begin to see what is wrong by turning to an article by Jerome Shaffer in which he argues that *because* emotions are simply beliefs, desires, and bodily sensations, "it is easy enough to imagine individual lives and even a whole world in which things would be

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much better if there were no emotion" (Shaffer, 1983, p. 169). However, pretheoretically, it seems obvious that our lives are potentially much richer and more meaningful because of our emotional capacities and, for example, the personal relationships they make possible, and any account of the emotions that fails to acknowledge this ought to be rejected. That said, I don't think our pretheoretic understanding of what emotions are can be fully sustained either. In part this is because the range of things that have been called emotions, ranging from basic physiological responses like startle (Robinson, 1995) to deeply felt responses like love, do not form a natural kind. Rather, part of the job of a theory of emotions is to articulate distinctions among these phenomena that illuminate similarities and differences among them that are explanatorily useful.

In what follows, I shall argue that the distinction between phenomenal and intentional states is not mutually exclusive; indeed, I shall argue, emotions have the phenomenology they do precisely because they have the sort of intentional objects they do: emotions are essentially feelings of things as good or bad in a certain way, and it is because these things feel good or bad to us that we can understand emotions to be pleasant or painful.[1] However, this requires understanding these intentional objects of emotions in a way that forces us to reject the traditional distinction between cognitions and conations. The result is a nonreductive, holistic account of emotions as intentional feelings of import.

Intuitions About Emotions

To flesh out our intuitions about emotional experience, consider a relatively simple example: my fear that an early frost will kill my tomato plants or my subsequent disappointment that they were damaged. Four aspects of such experiences are worth bringing out:

1. In each case, the emotions are *intentional*—they are directed at some object: what I am afraid of is the frost and its potential effect on my garden; similarly, my disappointment is at the damage to my garden. Nonetheless, there is a difference between fear and disappointment in that fear is concerned with things that may happen in the future, whereas disappointment is concerned with things that have already happened. In this respect, fear like hope is *future oriented*, whereas disappointment like anger or satisfaction is *past oriented*.[2]
2. Emotions are *passive* responses to these intentional objects: in being afraid, we feel the danger of a potential frost impressing itself on us, and we cannot simply and directly control whether we feel any particular emotion. (Of course, this is not to deny that we can control our emotions indirectly by, for example, controlling our focus of attention.)
3. Emotions have what we might call an *affective tone*. Fear and disappointment are both negative emotions in that to feel these emotions is to feel bad in a certain way; by contrast, hope and satisfaction are positive emotions in that to feel them is to feel good in a certain way.
4. Emotions in many cases *motivate* us to act, albeit in various ways. Thus, (a) we may tremble from fear or throw things out of frustration; or, (b) we may jump for joy or cry out of sorrow; or, (c) we may be motivated to accomplish some end, as when fear motivates avoiding the danger and anger or jealousy motivates seeking revenge. As my list indicates, there seem to be three importantly different kinds of cases here: (a) *arational expressions* of emotions, where we are drawn to behave in ways that do not have a point; (b) *rational expressions* of emotions, where there is a point to the behavior to which we are drawn even though that behavior is not goal-directed: we celebrate *by* jumping for joy and we mourn *by* crying; and (c) intentional action aiming at some end. In spite of the differences here, the important point for now is that the motivational "pull" of the emotions is itself a part of the very experience of these emotions: to feel frustration, or joy, or anger, is, at least in many cases, to feel these motives well up inside us, where that feeling of motivation is part of what it is like to feel these emotions.

It is tempting to try to account for these four aspects of our emotional experience by appealing to other, more basic mental states as constituents. Thus, it might be thought, the passivity and intentionality of fear can be understood via the perceptual belief that something is dangerous; its motivational pull can be understood via the desire to avoid that behavior (or, as in the case of the arational expression of fear, by underlying physiological processes or dispositions); and its affective tone can be understood via an appeal to bodily sensations. On the face of it, however, this strategy does not fit our actual experience of emotions.

To see this, think more carefully about the passivity and affective tone of emotions. In feeling fear, I feel bad in that something pains me; yet this "something" need not be my stomach or any other part of my body, as the appeal to bodily sensation would lead us to think. Rather, what pains me is the danger the frost presents to my garden: the negative evaluation of the frost as a danger impresses itself on me in my feeling the fear, and my discomfort in feeling the fear just is my feeling of this evaluation. Similarly, that I take pleasure in feeling joy upon discovering some tomato plants are still alive in spite of the frost is not some bodily pleasure such as a literal feeling of warmth; rather, in feeling joy the good of these plants impresses itself on me. Moreover, the felt differences between emotions like fear and anger and disappointment is a direct result of the specific way these emotions evaluate their objects: to feel fear is to be pained *by danger*, whereas to feel anger is to be pained *by an offense* and to feel disappointment is to be pained *by failure*. In short, emotions are pleasant or painful precisely in that they are feelings of these evaluations impressing themselves on us.

This is all very suggestive. Nonetheless, these suggestions—that it is only in terms of their evaluative construal of their objects that we can understand emotions to be pleasant or painful, and that the phenomenology of emotions is therefore to be understood in terms of their intentionality—are at odds with standard theories, which construe the affective nature of

emotions in terms of their "qualitative," "merely phenomenal" (and therefore nonintentional) aspects. Arguing for these suggestions therefore requires understanding more clearly the nature of these intentional-cum-phenomenological evaluations, including both the precise kind of intentionality they have (whether mind-to-world or world-to-mind direction of fit, for example) and how it can be that, for example, the danger is what pains us in feeling fear.

Consider first the intentionality of emotional evaluations. On the one hand, it seems that we should not understand these evaluations in terms of world-to-mind direction of fit, for we can rationally assess our emotions and desires depending on whether their objects really do have the relevant evaluative properties. So without some special explanation, my desires for a pet rock and a saucer of mud seem to be unwarranted precisely because these are things that are not worth pursuing, all other things being equal. Likewise, my fear that the store is sold out of pet rocks or that the mud puddle has dried up is also unwarranted: pet rocks and saucers of mud simply are not worthwhile in ways that would make these mental states rationally intelligible. It seems therefore that we should understand such evaluations in cognitive terms, as having mind-to-world direction of fit. Yet on the other hand this seems to get things backwards in many cases. For the things I find worthwhile may be very different from the things you find worthwhile, and the relativity of worth to individual agents seems to be best explained by differences in my and your *attitudes*, attitudes that seem to be constituted by our desires and emotions. This suggests that we should not understand these evaluations in terms of mind-to-world direction of fit. So, which is it: are such evaluations cognitions or conations?

The answer, as I have argued elsewhere (Helm, 2001), is both . . . and neither. Both sets of intuitions here are correct in that the evaluative properties, the *imports*, things have to us are both a standard of warrant for our desires, emotions, and evaluative judgments and simultaneously are constituted by the evaluative attitudes we have towards these things—indeed, evaluative attitudes that are constituted by none other than our desires, emotions, and evaluative judgments. Yet this implies that the intentionality of these mental states cannot be understood in terms of the traditional notion of direction of fit, which understands cognitions and conations to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Consequently, making sense both of the intentionality of emotions and of the way emotional evaluations can explain the phenomenology of emotions requires taking an alternative path.

Emotions and Import

I have briefly criticized standard philosophical understandings of phenomenal and intentional states. Yet why should we give up philosophical orthodoxies so quickly? The source of the problem for these orthodox accounts is, I believe, a failure to appreciate what I have called the "problem of import."

Philosophers of mind, concerned with the mind–body problem, have focused on belief and desire as the paradigms of cognition and conation. The task of understanding belief and desire therefore gets understood as a matter of understanding how there can be intentional states with these directions of fit, states which can explain our actions and agency. This focus on intentionality leads to an understanding of belief as a kind of informational state, and of desire as a kind of goal-directedness, states which interact in producing actions. Yet if this is all that is required to be an agent, then even systems like chess-playing computers, which display a kind of goal-directedness that is rationally mediated by their informational states, would count as agents, albeit relatively primitive agents.

To anyone not in the grip of a theory, this sounds like a mistake: chess-playing computers are fundamentally different not merely from us persons but also from higher animals like dogs and cats. Genuine agents do not simply have goals that they mechanically pursue; they find certain goals to be *worth* pursuing and pursue them *because* they are worth pursuing. Indeed, it is precisely the concept of desire that makes this intelligible, for desires are to be distinguished from mere goal-directedness precisely in that to desire something is to find it worthwhile. Desire is thus an evaluative notion that is normally intelligible against a background of caring: although we can desire things we don't care about (and this is why my desire for a saucer of mud is unwarranted without some special story making intelligible how this is something I care about), to desire something is normally a mode of such caring, a mode of responding to the worth or *import* it has to us. Genuine *agency* therefore differs from rationally mediated goal-directedness precisely because agency essentially is this kind of pursuit of ends in light of their import to the agent. This suggests an understanding of psychological explanation as fundamentally normative: actions are explained by showing how what was done is the rationally appropriate thing to have done, given the agent's mental state (cf. Davidson, 1980; Dray, 1957). To be an *agent* is to be a subject of import.

If this is right—if to be an agent is to be a subject of import—then to understand agency we need to understand import. The trouble is that import, as a kind of worth, does not seem to have a place in nature as conceived by science, which seems to have no place for worth. Insofar as genuine desire itself presupposes import, we cannot simply appeal to an antecedent notion of desire in providing an account of import, for that would be viciously circular. Indeed, it is only because our commonsense notion of desire presupposes import that it becomes plausible to appeal to desire in giving accounts of other evaluative phenomena, such as the emotions, human well-being, and ethical norms. But if desire does not account for import, what does? This is the *problem of import*, which has been largely ignored by philosophers of mind but which is absolutely fundamental to an adequate understanding of the mind quite generally and of emotions in particular.

What, then, is import? For something to have import to you—for you to *car*e about it—is (roughly) for it to be worthy of attention and action. In part this means you must be reliably *vigilant* for circumstances affecting it favorably or adversely and be *prepared to act* on its behalf. Yet the worthiness of attention and action requires not merely that you have a disposition

so to attend and act, nor even simply that attending to it and acting on its behalf is a good thing; rather, the relevant sense of worthiness implies that such attention and action are rationally required: to fail to attend or act when these are called for by your circumstances is a rational failure, a failure to do what you rationally ought. At a first approximation, the relevant modes of attention and action are emotional.

Consider first the intentional objects of emotions. Most accounts understand emotions to have a *target* (that at which the emotion is directed) and a *formal object* (the kind of implicit evaluation of the target characteristic of each emotion type: thus, fear involves evaluating its target as dangerous, whereas anger involves evaluating its target as offensive). For example, I might be afraid that a late season frost might kill my tomato plants; here, the target of my fear is the frost, which I implicitly evaluate to be a danger (the formal object). At this point we might ask, how is the frost dangerous? The answer must be given in terms of a background concern of mine—the import, say, of having fresh, home-grown tomatoes—for it is only because the target threatens (or intelligibly seems to threaten) this background concern that it is appropriate to evaluate it as dangerous. This background concern reveals a third, often overlooked object of emotions, their *focus*: a background object having import that is related to the target in such a way as to make intelligible the target's having the evaluative property defined by the formal object. As we shall see, the focus of emotions is fundamental to understanding import.

Given this, we can understand emotions to be warranted just in cases where both:

1. The focus has import to the subject, and
2. The target is (or intelligibly seems to be) appropriately related to the focus so as to make intelligible its evaluation in terms of the formal object.

These conditions of warrant make intelligible how emotions are normally responsive to the import of one's situation, and they thereby make intelligible how emotions can get things wrong, as when I feel fear of a killer frost when I do not care about eating fresh tomatoes, or when the tomato plants were so stunted and weak that they could never develop any fruit, and a frost therefore could not harm my chances of getting any tomatoes. Consequently, emotions are, we might say, essentially *intentional feelings of import*.

So far this begins to make sense of the way in which emotions are an important mode of attending to import, but it does not amount to an account of what it is for an object to have import to someone for two reasons. First, such an account requires not merely that something is an object of attention, but also that it is an object on whose behalf one is prepared to act. Second, such an account requires showing how a particular object is not simply an actual object of attention and action, but also that it is *worthy* of attention and action. I shall now argue that the solution to each can be found in the structure of emotions.

Accounts of emotions often assume that we can understand particular emotion types (such as fear) one by one, in isolation from other emotion types (such as anger). This is false, as we can begin to see by considering transitions from future-oriented emotions to past-oriented emotions. Thus, as the relevant events happen in the world, my fear of the killer frost ought to become relief or even joy if my plants survive unscathed, or disappointment if they do not, or even anger if someone maliciously foils my attempts to protect them. Not to experience these other emotions in the relevant circumstances is a rational failure that indicates a defect in one's fear. The recognition of danger implicit in my fear is not merely a response to the target (the frost) as threatening, but also a response to the focus (eating fresh tomatoes) as having import. It is this latter responsiveness to import that demands that we feel subsequent emotions, for there is something rationally wrong with my feeling fear, and so finding eating fresh tomatoes to have import, and yet failing to feel subsequent emotions when that is impacted favorably or adversely. That is, a nondefective fear that finds its focus to have import involves a kind of commitment to that import, and so to feeling the relevant subsequent emotions when appropriate.

It should be clear that this claim about emotional commitments to feeling other emotions is more general than that between future-oriented and past-oriented emotions. For the commitment each emotion involved is a commitment to the import of its focus, and so the relevant other emotions to which one is thereby committed will be those emotions having the same focus. Thus if, contrary to fact, the long-term weather forecast is for an unusually mild fall, I ought to be hopeful that the growing season will be extended and pleased when I continue to get late-season tomatoes. Moreover, I ought to experience a whole range of other emotions that are unrelated to my tomato plants but are focused on my eating home-grown tomatoes: disappointment at being too busy to plant a garden this year, excited by discovering a promising new variety of tomato plants, grateful to my neighbor who sends her excess tomatoes my way, and so on. In short, to feel one emotion is to be rationally committed to feeling a whole pattern of other emotions with a common focus (see Figure 1).

Indeed, generally to fail to have these other emotions is for one's response to fail to be a response *to import*—to fail to be an emotion at all. Consequently, we could not make sense of a creature that has a capacity for one emotion (such as fear) and only that one emotion; this holism is ultimately an implication of the idea that emotions are essentially intentional feelings of import.

This understanding of emotional commitments to import can explain how emotions motivate action. It is because in feeling an emotion we are thereby committed to the import of its target and focus that we rationally ought to act in the appropriate ways. Given that to have import is in part to be worthy of action, a condition of the intelligibility of a commitment as a commitment to import is that it normally motivate us accordingly. For example, to feel fear is not merely to respond to something as dangerous, but to find this to be a bad thing—to have a certain kind of import; such a commitment to import motivates avoiding the danger—an intentional action—by revealing that avoidance to

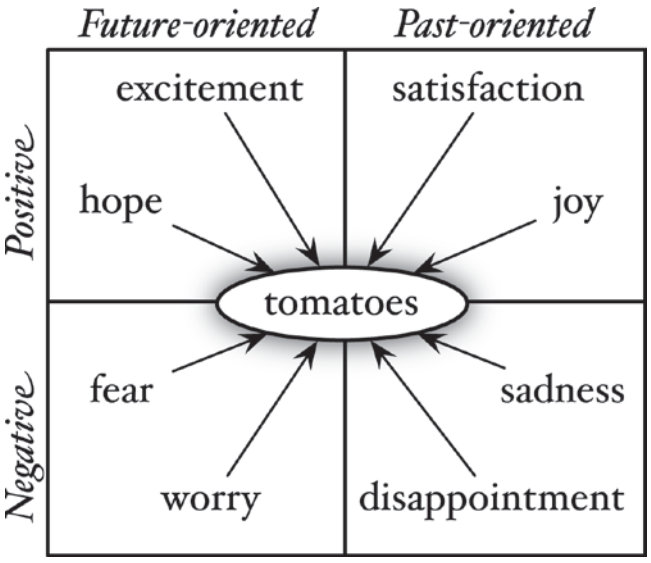

Figure 1. Pattern of emotions with a common focus.

have a point and so to be worthwhile in the present circumstances, all other things being equal. To fail to act when such action is otherwise appropriate is, all other things being equal, to have a defective commitment to import. Consequently, although we can make sense in particular cases of emotions failing to motivate us, and so as involving a responsiveness to import that is defective in this respect, such as when I feel sad without having any impulse to mourn, never or rarely to have such an impulse when otherwise appropriate undermines the idea that the subject even has the capacity for such commitments to import—the capacity for emotions—at all.

So far this explains simple cases of emotional motivation: cases of rational expressions of emotions and of simple goal-directed action. In more complex cases, emotions can motivate us indirectly through their rational connections with desires. Indeed, it may be hard to understand precisely what action an emotion will motivate apart from one's broader understanding of one's circumstances. Thus, I have claimed that fear normally motivates us to avoid the dangers to which they respond; what about my fear that the frost will kill my tomato plants, what actions ought this motivate? The answer, of course, depends on what I believe is best to promote (or sustain) the focus of my emotion, the import of which makes intelligible the relevant evaluation of the target. In this case, my fear, by alerting me to the danger of the frost (and so by committing me to the import of eating fresh tomatoes), motivates me to have a desire to protect the plants on cold nights. Such desires in turn motivate the relevant action in light of the import of avoiding killer frosts and, ultimately, of eating fresh tomatoes.

More generally, insofar as I am committed to this import by my emotion, I am thereby committed to finding certain pursuits worthwhile and so to having the relevant desires, such as the desire to plant a garden. For in having this desire I thereby find the planting of a garden to be worth pursuing, and in the present case this is so only because in having this desire I am responsive to the import eating fresh tomatoes has to me. This suggests, as I have argued elsewhere (Helm, 2001, especially chap. 4), that we ought to bring the notions of target, formal object, and focus to bear in an understanding of desire: to desire something (the target) is to find it worth pursuing (the formal object) in light of its bearing on some background object (the focus) the import of which explains why it is worth pursuing. This in turn suggests that desires and emotions are fundamentally the same kind of mental state—that desires just are emotions, if you like.

One might object that I have gotten things backwards. It is not that emotions motivate us to have particular desires; rather, it is these desires that explain or even constitute our emotions. Although initially plausible, such an objection cannot be sustained in the context of the problem of import. For the challenge is to provide an account of desire that makes sense of it as evaluative—as responsive to import—in a way that could serve this role of explaining emotions. This, of course, requires a general solution to the problem of import; if we accept my account of emotions and desires, we can see how to solve this problem.

I have argued that emotions (and desires) must normally come in broader patterns, where these patterns are rationally structured by the commitments to the import of a common focus they involve. Given these emotional commitments to import, the patterns of emotions and desires with a common focus (and the actions they motivate) are projectible in a way that explains the kind of reliable vigilance and preparedness to act required by objects having import. Moreover, that such patterns are rationally structured makes sense of the idea that its common focus is *worthy* of such attention and action, for to fail to attend and act in ways defined by the pattern is a rational failure. Consequently, what it is for something to have *import* to you, what it is for you to *care* about it, is for it to be the focus of the sort of projectible, rational pattern of emotions just described. The problem of import is therefore solved.

Phenomenology of Emotions

With this account of import as constituted by the emotions, I am now in a position to make good on my earlier claim that we can understand the phenomenology of emotions in terms of their intentionality: that to experience an emotion is just to be pleased or pained by the import of your circumstances. Fleshing out these intuitions requires saying something more about the sense in which import is an intentional object of emotions and about the distinctively affective nature of our emotional response to import.

It may seem that I have said inconsistent things about import as an intentional object of emotions. On the one hand, I have argued, emotions constitute import in that something has import to a subject because it is the focus of a projectible, rational, pattern of emotions. This seems to imply that emotions project import onto the world rather than respond to it as an independent object, and so they must be conative states with world-to-mind direction of fit. Yet on the other hand I have suggested that

emotions are pleasures or pains in that they are feelings of import impressing itself on one: in feeling fear at the frost, it is the danger the frost presents to my tomatoes that impresses itself on me, grabbing my attention and motivating me to act. In this way, emotions are a kind of receptivity to import; indeed, their warrant normally depends on their targets and focuses having import, which means they can be right or wrong about that import. This seems to suggest that emotions are (at least in part) cognitive states with mind-to-world direction of fit. So, which is it: are emotions cognitions or conations with respect to import?[3]

As I claimed above, the answer is both and neither. The key is to recognize that although emotions constitute import, they only do so holistically, by forming broad patterns made intelligible by the way each emotion is a rational commitment to the import of its focus and so to having other emotions with the same focus such that the failure to have these other emotions is a rational failure. Particular emotions in this sense are *modes of caring* about their focuses. Yet such emotional commitments, by establishing a disposition to respond to situations of a kind not intelligible except in terms of the import of their focus, thereby also make sense of the objectivity of import relative to particular emotions. For the appropriateness of particular emotions is to be assessed in terms of whether they are intelligible projections of the pattern of such emotions given the circumstances—whether, that is, they are proper or improper responses to the import of its focus as this bears on the emotion's target. Moreover, the projectibility of this pattern gives content to the idea that emotions are intentional feelings of import, for the pattern of emotions thereby constitutes the agent's receptivity to import, a receptivity that is engaged by circumstances involving import. Conversely, we might say, the import of such circumstances *impresses* itself on us and motivates us through that receptivity. In this sense emotions are like the traditional understanding of cognitions: both responsive and rationally accountable to their objects. Yet such a similarity is not at odds with their also being modes of caring that, like the traditional understanding of conation, constitute the import to which they respond. For the very pattern of emotional commitments that constitutes import is also that which makes intelligible our emotions as a receptivity to such import and so, conversely, of import impressing itself on us. And this reveals that emotions are neither cognitions nor conations as these have traditionally been understood: their intentionality involves neither mind-to-world nor world-to-mind direction of fit insofar as these are conceived to be mutually exclusive.[4]

What is important for the purpose of understanding emotional experience is the idea that emotions are: (a) passive responses (b) to import. That emotions are passive is implicit in my understanding of them as a kind of receptivity to import, which we cannot arrive at simply by making judgments; in this respect, emotions are like perceptions. That emotions are (passive) responses *to import* provides content to the intuition, broached above, that emotions are pleasures and pains. Thus, anyone with rudimentary knowledge about gardening can recognize the potential a hard frost has to kill tender annuals like tomatoes, but only someone who cares can appreciate passively—can *feel*—this destructive potential to be *bad* and so the frost to be a *danger*. In feeling fear, the badness of the threat is thrust upon you, grabbing your attention and moving you—literally—to respond, and this feeling of the badness of the threat is just your being *pained* by the danger it presents.[5] In general, in having an emotion we feel good or bad, we are pleased or pained, not in that we have some special, nonintentional bodily sensation but rather in that we are gripped by the import of our circumstances. The phenomenology of emotions, their essentially affective character, is therefore to be explained in terms of their intentionality.

At this point one might pose the following objection. Emotions, I have claimed, are intentional feelings of import—of things as good or bad in some way; from this I inferred that emotions are good or bad feelings, and therefore that they are pleasant or painful. However, this might seem to be illegitimate, for we ought to distinguish the intentionality of emotions (the way they present their objects as good or bad) from their phenomenology (the character of the feelings they involve as good or bad—i.e., as pleasant or painful). To fail to do this and so to slide from "feelings of good or bad" to "good or bad feelings" is simply to confuse intentionality with phenomenology rather than to offer any new insight into the emotions.

In reply, this objection misunderstands my account of the nature of emotional intentionality, an account that makes legitimate the redescription of emotional feelings of import as pleasures and pains. We should not understand emotional responsiveness to import to be a matter of our initially recognizing that import nonemotionally and subsequently responding with the emotion, as the objection seems to suppose. Rather, in understanding emotions to be intentional feelings of import I have in effect characterized their intentionality as being essentially *affective*, so that recognizing the import in this way is just to have the emotion. To have your attention be gripped by the goodness or badness of your circumstances, and thereby to be moved to act accordingly, is to be gripped by what *matters* to you, by something you *care* about, and—crucially—in a way that essentially involves an appreciation of that mattering. Of course it is possible to recognize intellectually that some event is good or bad, where this recognition leaves you "cold" and unmoved. Emotional feelings of import are different precisely in that, in being passive states, they are experiences of that import being thrust upon you and, because that very feeling of import is essentially motivating, they include a feeling of the impulse to act. In these respects, emotional experiences are like other sorts of pleasures and pains: they are gripping and motivating responses to things as good or bad, responses that have a conceptual connection to the constitution of that very goodness or badness. Indeed, the role that the goodness or badness plays in making an experience pleasant or painful cannot simply be a matter of describing the felt quality of that experience, but must be evaluative and intentional. For it is only because such experiences are evaluative that their affects on our attention and motivation are rationally intelligible.

These facts about emotional experience are what make the intentionality characteristic of emotions essentially and distinctively affective, and this is what legitimates my redescription of

emotional cases in which the target feels good or bad in some way as a matter of being pleased or pained by that target. So, contrary to what the objection supposes, I am not sliding from an intentional understanding of emotional feelings as evaluating their objects as good or bad to a nonintentional understanding of pleasures and pains as qualitative feelings that we might describe as good or bad. Rather, I am providing an account of emotional intentionality as essentially affective, and arguing that this sort of affective intentionality of emotions captures what is essential to emotional pleasures and pains. In short, there is nothing essential to feeling pleasure and pain except this sort of affective response to import.[6]

At this point a second objection might be raised. There is, it might be conceded, a sense of "experience" according to which our experiences are intentional; and surely my fearing the killer frost is intentional insofar as it is about the frost as dangerous. However, to focus exclusively on such intentional experiences is to ignore the importance of the physiology of emotions to their phenomenology. After all, whatever we might think of a Jamesian account of emotions, there is surely a kernel of truth in it. Our physiology plays a central and important role in our experience of emotions, and we very often come to recognize that we are experiencing a particular emotion—fear, say—because we notice certain bodily changes: the rush of adrenaline, the quickening of heartbeat and breathing, dry mouth, sweaty palms, and so forth. Our experience of fear would not be the same without these bodily sensations, the phenomenology of which cannot be reduced to intentionality. Consequently, my account of the phenomenology of emotions cannot be adequate.

In reply, there is no doubt that our experience of many emotions has a bodily component to it, so that to remove the feeling of the relevant bodily changes from our emotional experience would be to alter that experience. Nonetheless, part of the philosophical task in understanding emotions is to separate that which is essential or fundamental to the emotions whenever they occur from that which is a mere accidental (though usual) accompaniment to human emotions. So, which is it: are our feelings of bodily changes fundamental or accidental to our emotions? Unsurprisingly, my answer is that they are accidental.

As a thought experiment, imagine an alien creature, perhaps from another planet, that has a physiology radically different from our own. In spite of this difference, we can readily imagine such a creature experiencing a range of emotions, such as fear, even though we would expect its overall experience of fear to be different from our own precisely because of those physiological differences. That such an alien creature nonetheless feels fear suggests that the physiological differences and the phenomenology tied to these differences are irrelevant to understanding its mental state as fear—are irrelevant to an understanding of the emotion itself. Of course, appeals to intuitions in thought experiments are risky because what we want are not our untutored intuitions but rather those intuitions that are properly informed by, and embedded within, a philosophically illuminating account. Here, of course, I offer my own: for the creature to feel fear is just for the import of various dangers to impress itself on it, resulting in the sort of affective response I have been describing. Alternative accounts are possible, of course, but they cannot ignore the problem of import and so cannot illicitly rely on presuppositions about desires or bodily pleasures and pains to sidestep that problem.

Conclusion

My focus in this article has been on understanding the sense in which emotions are feelings and so have a distinctive phenomenology. I have argued that emotions are intentional feelings of import: essentially affective modes of response to the ways our circumstances come to matter to us. Consequently, I argued, we can understand the phenomenology of emotions—at least that part of their phenomenology that is essential to their being the emotions they are—in terms of their intentionality insofar as such feelings of import, as affective, are a matter of feeling good or bad, of being pleased or pained by a particular aspect of one's circumstances. Sensations of physiological changes that for us normally accompany particular emotions are not definitive of emotional experience in general.

These conclusions have been reached in the context of a broader theory of emotions formed in response to the problem of import, a theory that has wide-ranging implications. The account of emotions is essentially *holistic*: we can understand what it is to have the capacity for one emotion type only in the context of having the capacity for many other emotion types, so that there could not be a creature that had the capacity for only one type of emotion. For to have the capacity for any emotion type is to have a capacity to be responsive to import in certain sorts of situations, and yet that import is constituted by projectible, rational patterns of positive and negative, future- and past-oriented emotions, all with a common focus. The same is true of the capacity for desire, which is also essentially responsive to import and so itself presupposes these broader emotional capacities that make the creature be a subject of import. Consequently, neither the capacity for emotions nor that for desires is reducible to the other, but each is required, along with a capacity for belief, to make sense of agency. This clears the way for us to reject Shaffer's pessimistic assessment of emotions as something we might be better off without and instead to see them as important and essential ingredients in our mental lives.

Notes

1 This understanding of the phenomenology of emotions in terms of their intentionality is present in Goldie, 2000. However, I take seriously in a way Goldie does not the idea that emotions are pleasant or painful—the way the specifically evaluative content of emotions underwrites their phenomenology. This will become clear below.

2 Gordon (1987) argues convincingly that we should replace this distinction with one between epistemic and factive emotions. I agree, but the difference does not matter here.

3 A related objection might be raised: insofar as I understand emotions in terms of import and import in terms of the emotions, it looks like my account is viciously circular and so is no better than attempts to understand import in terms of desire that I criticized above.

4 Consequently, although this account of emotions and import *is* circular, it is not viciously so given the holistic structure, for that holism provides

a context in terms of which we can understand simultaneously what the emotions and import are.

5 It is this aspect of the difference between our intellectual appreciation of danger and our emotional feeling of it that Goldie misses.

6 I argue for this in the context of giving an account of bodily pleasures and pains as intelligible only against the background of import and so of patterns of emotional evaluations; see Helm (2002).

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