

Emotional Knowledge – Emotions' Epistemic Role

ידע רגשי – תפקידם האפיסטמי של רגשות

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**Abstract**

A rehabilitation of emotions (that used to have a bad reputation) has spread through fields such as economics, social and cognitive psychology, and philosophy. This dissertation aims to contribute to the growing philosophical literature that accords emotions roles in rational thinking, decision making, moral judgments and knowledge.

The main question that underlies the dissertation is the following: do emotions have an epistemic role? The rationale behind the positive answer that I provide is the following. An answer to whether emotions have an epistemic role depends in part on what emotions are. Thus, we need an account of the kind of mental state that emotions are, or at the very least an account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a mental state being an emotion. In addition, an answer to the question about emotions' epistemic role must take into consideration that characteristics of emotions may pose limitations on their epistemic role. The five chapters of this dissertation try to do exactly that: provide an account of emotions' indispensable epistemic role, an account that satisfies the constraints that arise from considering what emotions are.

In developing my account of emotions, I reject reductive accounts that liken emotions to perceptions, beliefs, or other mental states. Reductive accounts cannot satisfy the constraints that I argue for. In addition, I argue that we should take seriously the claim that emotions represent a sub-set of evaluative properties (affective-evaluative properties such as *shameful*), and that this entails that emotions do so conceptually. In support of this claim I develop and defend a new distinction between properties that are simple to represent and properties whose representation is more complex. Representationally complex properties require conceptual representation. This distinction and the arguments that support it are relevant to many representational states (such as perceptions) but my focus is on evaluative properties being complex, and the emotions, accordingly, being conceptual. Emotions are therefore far from not involving cognition. However, I also emphasize the importance of emotions' phenomenology and the way it is related to their content.

Another original claim that I defend is that while an account of emotions need not commit to a specific metaphysical view about evaluative properties, understanding what

emotions are and the way they are related to the concepts of evaluative properties, gives rise to the claim that emotions are what fixes the reference of such concepts. These concepts are response-dependent. Emotions, I argue, are the basic way we experience and refer to evaluative properties – a person devoid of emotions does not possess the relevant concepts and can only refer to the properties deferentially.

A characteristic of emotions that I argue (in line with other philosophers) cannot be ignored is their being responsive to reasons. I discuss existing accounts of the way emotions are justified and stress that many of them conflate two independent issues – that of an emotion being *justified* and that of its *representing correctly*. I offer a novel account of what makes an emotion justified and what counts as evidence for emotions. In addition, I argue that emotions have presentational phenomenology and are a distinct type of seemings: evaluable-seemings. Their presentational phenomenology also grounds an epistemic status that has not been discussed with respect to emotions – that of being entitled.

Emotions, I argue, can justify beliefs, a claim that has been defended by several philosophers. The novel account that I develop takes seriously the limitations that arise from emotions' being – unlike perceptions – themselves justifiable. However, it does not understate emotions' epistemic role and shows how and why they are far from being epistemically redundant. It is not true, as some have argued, that the reasons for an emotion can independently justify relevant beliefs. Rather, in many cases, had it not been for the awareness that an emotion can provide, an awareness of the evaluative load of a non-evaluative fact, there would not have been sufficient evidence for the belief. I argue that emotions provide evidence that P in virtue of providing evidence of evidence that P. This account accords emotions with a justificatory force over and above their reasons (they are only partially epistemically dependent on them). I conclude by further arguing that emotions have an indispensable epistemic role, relying on a pragmatic account (with epistemic implications) that has not yet been discussed in this context.

To sum up – the thesis that arises from the dissertation is that emotions are *sui generis* mental states, essentially evaluable and felt, that conceptually represent and present affective-evaluative properties. They are the basic way we experience and think about affective-evaluative properties and they fix the reference of the concepts of these properties. Emotions are defeasibly entitled, can be justified by evaluative evidence and defeasibly justify beliefs in virtue of being evidence of evidence. Although their epistemic role is limited in some cases, they are nonetheless epistemically indispensable.