

# Affective Persistence and the Normative Phenomenology of Emotion

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**Abstract** This paper presents a detailed analysis of affective persistence and its significance – that is the persistence of affect in the face of countervailing or contradictory evaluative information. More specifically, it appeals to the phenomena of affective persistence to support the claim that a significant portion of the emotional experiences of adult humans involve a kind of normative phenomenology. Its central claim is that by appealing to a distinctive kind of normative phenomenology that emotions exhibit, we get a neat personal level explanation of why affect persists. In doing so it introduces and explores an interesting claim that Ronald de Sousa makes concerning the distinctiveness of emotion, explicating it in terms of the idea of affective persistence. As such, the contribution of the paper is twofold: a thesis about emotional phenomenology *qua* its normative phenomenology is presented, and that thesis is used to explain something distinctive about our emotional experiences, namely that they often persist in the face of conflicting evaluative judgements and beliefs.

## Introduction: Rationality, Irrationality and Recalcitrance

Current thinking in the philosophy of emotion understands a significant portion of emotions as rationally significant in at least two ways. First, emotions are *reasons-responsive*, that is to say, that they are (or at least can be) rational responses to pertinent states of affairs. When I respond with fear to the onset of an earthquake, my fear is plausibly characterised as some kind of *rational response* to the (putative) dangerousness or otherwise fearsomeness of the situation at hand. In addition to this, emotions, at least according to several contemporary theorists, have a rational role to play vis-à-vis providing some (usually defeasible) justification for evaluative beliefs which are often (non-inferentially) formed on their basis. My belief that the earthquake is and or was dangerous seems at least *prima facie* epistemically justified in light of an emotional response that seems to 'make me aware' (in whatever precise way) of 'the dangerousness of the situation'.<sup>1</sup> It is contestable whether emotions epistemic or rational role in this second regard is indispensable; perhaps such evaluative beliefs can (and do) find justification in a range of other sources of evidence which are non-emotional (for example, reliable testimony concerning the relevant evaluative states of affairs).

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<sup>1</sup> Such epistemic justification is to be distinguished from other standards which emotions may meet (or fail to meet), such as being *morally justified* or *prudentially justified* (see D'Arms and Jacobson 2000; Deonna and Teroni 2012 for more on this).

Notwithstanding these two ways (no doubt there are also others) in which emotions can be rationally significant, there are a range of cases and contexts in which our (and others) emotions warrant the label of being irrational (or at least fall short of some ideal of being *rational responses*). Classic cases drawn from everyday experience are the emotional responses constitutive of a range of *phobias*, which might also be called *irrational fears* (where the term ‘fear’ can be interpreted somewhat loosely to refer to a cluster of negative emotions which will typically include anxiety, disgust, repulsion etc.). For example, an individual who has an ‘irrational fear’ of spiders (an arachnophobe) will experience strong feelings of disgust, anxiety, panic, and so on, when confronted (say in visual perception) with a small house spider which is entirely harmless. Less extremely, consider cases of what are commonly referred to as recalcitrant emotions, such as a strong fear of flying, which persists in the face of one’s sincerely held evaluative belief that *flying is not dangerous*. The precise character and the extent of (putative) irrationality in play in such cases is a matter of significant debate.<sup>2</sup> After all, there is surely a difference in the degree of irrationality between someone who has a certified phobia and someone whose emotions in particular instances clash with their (supposed) better evaluative judgement. However, it seems fair to say that such recalcitrant emotions fall short of an ideal of *reasons-responsiveness*, where we would certainly prefer it, and indeed expect in standard or ‘good’ cases, that our emotions are responsive to the *evaluative facts* (such as they are, and insofar as we are in a position to recognise them).

Presumably, the irrationality of a recalcitrant emotion, at least as standardly conceived, however, is not merely that the emotion fails to track or be sufficiently responsive to the kind of evaluative facts (‘flying is not dangerous’) that are, we assume accurately, represented in our conflicting evaluative belief(s) and judgements about the relevant states of affairs. Rather, what is striking about so many of these kinds of cases, at least from the viewpoint of rationality and common-sense psychology, is the *persistence* of the emotion in the face of conflicting information, usually information of evaluative import, which we might reasonably expect to quell the emotional response, or at least lessen its felt strength.

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., D’Arms and Jacobson 2003; Helm 2001; Brady 2007: 273-84; Döring 2014: 124-6; Grzankowski 2017: 641-51.

In recent work, I have labelled this latter phenomenon ‘affective persistence’.<sup>3</sup> It is evidently a feature of many paradigm cases of recalcitrant emotion, or at least those in which the relevant conflicting states – the emotion and the evaluative belief – are both *present to consciousness*.<sup>4</sup> Many discussions of recalcitrant emotions take affective persistence and its presence in the relevant cases as a starting point and then go on to examine the significance of the possibility of recalcitrant emotion for understanding and assessing various theories of emotion in terms of the kinds of states emotions are.<sup>5</sup> My interest in this paper will partly be in presenting a more detailed analysis of affective persistence itself and its significance. More specifically, I want to appeal to the phenomena of affective persistence to support the claim that a significant portion of the emotional experiences of adult humans involve a kind of normative phenomenology. My central claim will be that by appealing to a distinctive kind of normative phenomenology that emotions exhibit, we get a neat personal level explanation of why affect persists. The precise details of what this normative phenomenology amounts to will be clarified in due course.

The discussion will be structured as follows: section 1 will introduce an interesting claim that Ronald de Sousa makes concerning the distinctiveness of emotion, explicating it in terms of the idea of affective persistence. Section 2 will then introduce the idea that emotional experiences exhibit a kind of normative phenomenology. And finally, section 3 will explain why if we accept that emotions have the kind of normative phenomenology appealed to in section 2, we get a neat explanation of why affect persists in the kinds of cases introduced above (principally recalcitrant emotions). The contribution of the paper is, therefore, twofold: a thesis about emotional phenomenology *qua* its normative phenomenology is presented, and that thesis is used to explain something distinctive about our emotional experiences, namely that they often persist in the face of conflicting evaluative judgements and beliefs.

## 1. A Parallel Epistemic World

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<sup>3</sup> See Mitchell 2021: Ch.5.

<sup>4</sup> I take it that most discussions of recalcitrant emotion concern at the very least personal level conflicts, if not more strongly episodic states that stand in marked *conscious* conflict (e.g., my occurrent fear as I board the plane and my concurrent conflicting judgement that flying is safe).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the authors referenced in fn.2

In his discussion of emotions and their rationality Ronald de Sousa says the following about affective persistence, pointing towards a case of recalcitrant emotion and gesturing towards a philosophical implication of it:

Cases where disbelieving in ghosts, say, *fails to dispel* the fear of ghosts encourage the thought that emotions form a sort of parallel epistemic world. (1987: 115, my emphasis)<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, this case is not a standard case of a recalcitrant emotion in terms of a subject's holding or otherwise making an evaluative judgement that conflicts with an evaluative appraisal either constitutive of or significantly linked to their emotional response. Disbelieving in ghosts is not quite the same thing as *believing that ghosts are harmless*, although one might think that if one does not believe X exists, then it would be odd to believe that X is dangerous or can do one harm (at least so long as it does not come into existence somehow).<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding this caveat, one might think a reasonably familiar pattern of 'anti-recalcitrant reasoning' might be offered to our friend who fears ghosts. We might say *you should not fear ghosts since you do not believe that ghosts exist* (of course, the individual could rehearse this reasoning themselves). While the presumed defeating consideration here is expressed in an existential judgement about some putative entity, rather than a conflicting evaluative judgement about some (existing) particular object (e.g., *contra* emotion, we judge that the dog is harmless, that house spiders are harmless etc.), the broad idea familiar from these sorts of cases remains the same: despite the soundness of the anti-recalcitrant reasoning, the *affect persists* in the face of a belief which we take to accurately match reality, *pace* the emotion which seems to have in some significant sense gone awry.

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<sup>6</sup> De Sousa continues: 'So perhaps does the related case of emotions experienced in the context of fiction'. There is debate concerning whether emotions directed towards *fictitious* particular objects are genuine cases of emotion, quasi-emotions, or perhaps genuine cases of emotion but which are nonetheless irrational (see Walton 1978 and Teroni 2019: 113-128 for discussion). For my purposes, it is not important to resolve this issue, although I certainly think it would be a mistake to think of emotions in response to fiction as cases of recalcitrant emotion.

<sup>7</sup> NB: there is an obvious difference between believing something is, in fact, dangerous to one and believing that something *would be* dangerous if it existed.

Now, at this point it might be noted that what matters in such cases – at least in terms of understanding some such subject’s personal level psychology - is not whether or not the relevant conflicting belief or judgement is an instance of knowledge, that is, whether it does match the facts. Rather, from the perspective of understanding a subject’s psychology and to gain a better or a more accurate picture of the significance of such episodes, it is enough to grant that the subject *sincerely believes* the relevant conflicting or defeating proposition, in this case, the proposition <ghosts do not exist>.

Further to the above, insofar as we are interested in trying to get a better handle on the phenomenon of affective persistence and the phenomenology of emotion connected to it, our interest is primarily in affective persistence as it is manifest to the subject who is undergoing *fear in this instance*, that is as an episodic emotional experience. The way in which, as de Sousa puts it, 'disbelieving in ghosts...fails to dispel the fear of ghosts' is presumably meant to refer (at least principally) to those familiar everyday instances in which the *fear* is episodically manifest. After all, from the subject's point of view, they might – say in conversation – assert that they *don't fear ghosts* and even cite their disbelief in such entities as some form of evidence to that effect: “of course I don’t fear ghosts, I don’t even believe they exist”. Nonetheless, on a dark night, alone in a ‘spooky’ house, that creeping feeling of an ephemeral presence starts to dominate their thoughts and feelings, and they are overcome with fear concerning the possible spectre haunting their living quarters; at that moment, they could hardly deny that they are afraid of ghosts, experiencing, as they are, an occurrent fear whose intentional object is precisely just that, and yet they may well concurrently believe that ghosts do not exist.

Given this discussion, let’s define affective persistence as follows:

Affective Persistence: The fact that deflating judgements and thoughts whose contents we might expect to temper or negate the emotional response paradigmatically fail to have any substantial effect *during the emotional episode*. The *affect persists* regardless.

Now, given that we are clear on this much, we can rephrase de Sousa’s claim: generalising, affective persistence ‘encourages the thought’, as he puts it, that *emotions form a sort of parallel epistemic world*.

There are at least two readings of this claim that are mundane and don’t suggest any distinctive theses about emotions, their epistemology, or their phenomenology. The

first would be that occurrent emotions can be about – that is be intentionally directed towards – particular objects that not only need not exist, but which their subjects occurrently believe not to exist. Of course, Macbeth’s dagger, and the visual hallucination Macbeth enjoys of it, didn’t exist (it was ‘a dagger of the mind, a false creation’), and Macbeth is attuned to the fact that his visual experience is representing something as being the case (there being a dagger before him) that he believes not to be the case. That intentional experiences, be they occurrent thoughts, emotions, imaginations, visual experiences or other sense-perceptual experiences, can target particulars whose existential status is that of non-existence (of being ‘unreal), is hardly news, and fails to ‘encourage’ any thought concerning the distinctiveness of emotions that de Sousa seems to be gesturing towards as an implication of affective persistence.

Second, and connected to the above point, one might think affective persistence – and more broadly the phenomena of recalcitrant emotions – ‘encourages the thought’, or more simply just implies, that emotions are (or at least certainly can be) *belief-independent*. The idea here would be analogous to how cases of visual illusions, in which the illusion persists despite our conflicting belief that *things are not as they are visually represented as being* (e.g., the Müller-Lyer illusion), are often taken to imply that visual experiences are (or at least can be) belief-independent.<sup>8</sup> But while this is indeed a potential implication of affective persistence – arguably putting pressure on theories of emotion which claim that emotions are constituted at the conscious level by cognitive states like evaluative judgements or beliefs – it doesn’t seem to fit the idea of emotions forming a ‘parallel epistemic world’ any more than it would make sense to think that cases of visual illusion encourage the thought that visual perception forms a ‘parallel epistemic world’.

To understand in more fruitful terms what this claim to distinction for emotions might amount it is necessary to understand what *epistemic world* emotions are (supposedly) *parallel* to. The obvious answer to this is the world of belief. However, I don’t think that tells us much (or enough). A better proposal is the world as it is *evaluatively* judged to be when it is *not* given as such through emotion or affectivity. On one way of developing this idea, we can say that the ‘worlds’ of emotion and evaluative judgement stand in parallel because they are different ways or ‘modes’ of representing the *same evaluative states of affairs* (granting we are talking about cases

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<sup>8</sup> Evans 1982: 123-4 on the belief-independence of perception.

in which the particular objects of those states are the same). Put in more technical language, we might say that the relevant states – emotion and evaluative judgement – have the same *evaluative* representational content (e.g., in both cases, the dog is represented as dangerous, the painting as admirable, the joke as amusing; the face as ghoulish).<sup>9</sup> Connected to this, we might also say that the correctness conditions of the relevant emotion and evaluative judgement will be met when the *same state of affairs obtains*: my judgement that X is dangerous will be correct *just in case X really is dangerous*, just as my emotion of fear which in some sense represents, or otherwise conveys to me, that X is dangerous, will be correct *just in case X really is dangerous*.<sup>10</sup> We might also think that the methods or means by which we might assess whether the relevant evaluative property is instantiated are the *same* for emotion and evaluative judgement, namely by inquiring after the presence of a conjunction of natural properties which jointly constitute an instantiation of the relevant value (or if one prefers, on which the evaluative property supervenes).<sup>11</sup> This might play out in the following way: the dog is not *dangerous* because it is old, has no teeth, and has a meek temperament; the music is *beautiful* because of its distinctive melodies, tempo, timbre etc. In these contexts, these would be the kinds of non-evaluative properties and states of affairs that would be relevant for assessing whether the evaluative property in question was instantiated or whether the relevant evaluative state of affairs obtained.

However, it is not clear we have yet been offered anything that explains what is distinctive of the ‘parallel epistemic world’ of emotion, and indeed why emotions putatively ‘inhabiting’ some such world would be a claim encouraged by reflection on cases of affective persistence as manifest in recalcitrant emotions.

## 2. A Sketch of the Normative Phenomenology of Emotions

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<sup>9</sup> I have argued elsewhere that emotional experiences have evaluative content (see Mitchell 2021: Ch.2; see also Tappolet 2016: Ch.1; Poellner 2016). For dissenting voices on this score, see Deonna and Teroni 2012; 2015. I think much of the analysis here could be rephrased in terms of the idea that emotions evaluative dimension attaches to their attitudinal profile, if that is the view one prefers (what is essential is that emotional experience is *in some sense* an experience of value).

<sup>10</sup> For more on emotions and their correctness conditions, see Deonna and Teroni: *forthcoming*.

<sup>11</sup> See Mitchell 2021: Ch.2, for more on the relation between natural properties and evaluative properties.

What follows in this section is a thesis about the phenomenology of emotions, which goes some of the way to explaining why it would make sense to think of emotions as forming ‘a sort of parallel epistemic world’ (as de Sousa puts it), as one parallel to the world of evaluative judgement (in section 3 I suggest that if we accept this picture, we get a neat explanation of affective persistence). It should, however, be noted that what is offered here is more of a *sketch* for a view of the normative phenomenology of emotion, rather than a full explication and defence.

Let’s first remind ourselves that a distinctive feature of so-called parallel worlds, as represented in science-fiction and beyond, is that while there is significant overlap between ‘the worlds’ there are several critical features that differ. So, we can ask, what is it about the ‘parallel epistemic world’ that emotions putatively inhabit that differs from the world which evaluative judgement inhabits? As we saw above, both purport to represent the same *evaluative state of affairs*, and are assessable as accurate relative to whether the represented state of affairs obtains.

Yet, despite these similarities, we might think that values as *experienced* through affectivity (through emotion) have objectual phenomenal properties – their particular objects *seem* a certain evaluative way to the subjects of the relevant emotions – that is significantly different from the way they seem when they are represented in evaluative judgement, in which the relevant values are not *encountered as such* but are merely judged to be instantiated. Here is how one defender of a version of this claim, in the context of a discussion of the phenomenology of emotions, and drawing on the views of Max Scheler and Jean-Paul Sartre, puts it:

Experiencing something transparently as a value requires experiencing it as making a ‘demand’ of some sort. What kind of demand is this supposed to be...the talk of ‘demand’ here is slightly misleading: grasping something as a demand is not the same as grasping that demand to be justified. But presumably, when I experience something as a value and I take that experience at face value, I do take its ‘demand’, whatever it is, to be justified...What the terminology of an ideal ought-to-be seeks to capture is the familiar intuition that to acknowledge something to be of positive value is to acknowledge that it pro tanto merits or deserves to be or remain actualised, while to acknowledge something to be of negative value is to acknowledge that it pro tanto merits not to be (or remain) realised.’ (Poellner 2016: 265-6)



One aspect of Poellner's view is that values as experienced in emotion have a distinctive phenomenal profile. More specifically, they are experienced as making *justified demands*, where we understand that to mean that they 'claim' or 'say' (or otherwise convey to the subject of affectivity) that they *should be* or *shouldn't be* instantiated or realised. While this claim needs to be explained in more detail, it is clear that to think of the affective experience of values in this way is to think of emotions as having a distinctive kind of normative phenomenology (and as we shall see shortly, a kind of normative phenomenology that isn't plausibly present in the case of evaluative judgement).

However, as a claim about the objectual phenomenology of emotions what reason do we have to accept this? Poellner presents it as obviously following from a 'transparent' – that is unprejudiced – description of *what-it-is-like* to experience values in an affective mode. So, we can first apply it more concretely to cases of emotional experience. Consider the following cases. Say I am struck by the *rudeness* of an individual's behaviour. According to the view under consideration, this involves an *experience of offensiveness* (perhaps more precisely, an experience of the *behaviour as offensive* or of *offensive behaviour*). It seems fair to say that part of the experience of indignation, *qua* its objectual phenomenology, includes some aspect which speaks to the idea that 'this should not be the case'. Something is amiss 'in the world' when we find ourselves taken aback by rudeness, such that something which 'is the case' (a putative exemplification of rudeness), 'ought not to be'. Indeed, this seems reflected in the kinds of actions and behaviour which emotions like indignation motivate, as 'correctives' which seek to in some sense redress the experienced instantiation of something, a negative value, which *ought not to be* (to adopt Poellner's way of putting it). We might express this normative aspect of the phenomenology of indignation linguistically with such phrases as 'he shouldn't have done that', 'that wasn't right', 'that wasn't fair', 'you shouldn't behave like that', 'I can't let that stand', and so on. More dramatically, consider the way certain forms of *violent rage* and *anger*, as more extreme emotional reactions than indignation that still concern 'offensiveness', seek out (sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally) the 'destruction of their object'. Arguably, part of what motivates these behaviours and actions is that in experiencing *grave offensiveness* we experience the instantiation of a negative value that experientially strikes us as *meriting not to be (or remain) realised*, and we sometimes

(when relevant background conditions allow and there are not defeating considerations) seek to redress ‘the world’ by seeking out the annihilation or destruction of that which instantiated the negative value.<sup>12</sup>

What about the positive case? Take being struck by the *beauty* of a vista in experiential admiration. According to the model we are operating with this involves an *experience of beauty*. Arguably part of the phenomenology of *appreciation* and *aesthetic emotions*, is that the values associated with them – *beauty, grace, harmony, excellence* – constitute evaluative states of affairs which, as positive values, we experience as somehow ‘deserving’ to be instantiated. What might support this? Arguably similar considerations as in the case of negative value: we would lament the destruction of the beautiful painting, and might well take significant measures to preserve it. Similarly, we are sorrowful about the destruction or contamination of nature when we take the relevant natural settings to be splendid or awesome. While this evidence is somewhat indirect, arguably one explanation of such value preserving activities and attitudes would be to appeal to an emotional experience of those positive values which includes their manifesting the relevant normative properties, such that *beauty, grace, harmony, excellence*, and so on are experienced as deserving ‘to be’ and to remain actual *qua* the particular objects which they qualify, and that it is part of a transparent affective experience of these values to ‘acknowledge’ them in this way as having this normative status (presenting as an ‘ideal ought to be’).<sup>13</sup>

As a connected thought, it might be noted that an aspect of our folk discourse about emotions arguably reflects this normative dimension. We commonly talk of emotional experiences being *compelling, arresting, gripping, irresistible, enchanting*, and more broadly as having a certain power over us. And this is not simply a matter of the objects of our emotional experiences capturing attention (which of course they do), since all kinds of objects and states of affairs capture attention without our experiences of them being accurately described in those kinds of ‘passion-laden’ terms we just surveyed.

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<sup>12</sup> A similar account seems to ring true in cases of jealousy, envy and resentment. I encourage the reader to apply the analysis in those cases.

<sup>13</sup> NB: Importantly, the claim need not be that all emotional experiences admit of this characterisation. A range of emotions of young children or non-human animals may not involve such normative phenomenology, and there are truncated or pathological emotional responses which do not fit this model. Nonetheless, it is arguably a sufficiently widespread feature of human adult emotional experiences to warrant taking seriously.

Rather it seems such descriptions are tapping into something distinctively normative in emotions' phenomenology.

However, even someone sympathetic to the idea that emotions involve some normative dimension along the lines specified by the view under consideration might claim that it is more plausible that these normative relations (e.g., that a positive value deserves to be or remain actualised, and a negative value merits not to be or remain realised) are *judged contents* rather than non-judicative experiential contents. Further to this, they might suggest that it is certainly no more obvious that such normativity is part of emotions non-judicative content than part of some normative judgement co-present with the emotional experience. Indeed, talk of *acknowledging* such normativity, as Poellner does, perhaps suggests a separate attitude which concerns this normative aspect of value that qualifies the particular object of the emotion (although see the discussion below).

There are several potential responses to this kind of view. First, one might think a *merely judged* content would not be sufficient to motivate the kinds of behaviours, actions, and attitudes – ‘value preserving’ and ‘value destroying’ – which were considered in the description of the cases above. Merely judging that the beauty of nature ought to be *preserved*, or merely judging that the *offensive comment* ‘ought not to stand’, might be insufficient to motivate the relevant value-guided actions. Analogously, consider how it is often thought that *mere* normative beliefs about what one should or shouldn't do can fail to motivate subjects to take appropriate steps to realise or adhere to the relevant norm. Indeed, this is precisely the line Poellner takes in explicating this aspect of the view as found in Scheler:

Such motivating powers, Scheler holds, are essential to the experience of value as value in relevant contexts, and this seems plausible if that experience is or includes a felt, as opposed to ‘emptily’ judged, acknowledgement of the value meriting to be actual. As Scheler puts it, ‘The felt knowledge determines my will immediately without the need for an intervening “I ought”’ (Scheler 1980, p. 217 [1973, p. 210]). His idea here is that the relevant experience, if taken at face value, and given appropriate background beliefs, essentially includes action inclinations by virtue of its intuitively presented evaluative content. Unlike a mere (‘empty’) evaluative judgement, it cannot be motivationally inert (given

suitable background beliefs); nor does it require a reflective acknowledgement of deontic reasons to acquire motivational force. (Poellner 2016: 7)

However, even if we agree that the relevant normativity could plausibly be part of emotions' objectual phenomenology – that emotional experiences have a kind of normative intentional content – this picture will remain less than entirely clear if we can't say more about the idea of *acknowledging value* qua *acknowledging* this normative dimension, and in a way that avoids such acknowledgement being a form of normative judgement.

Luckily, there is a proposal, outlined by Poellner, and which I have recently articulated at length, that provides the resources to cash out this kind of 'acknowledgement' in terms of a non-doxastic *feeling towards*, as a felt valenced attitude of favour or disfavour. Here is an outline of the *feelings-towards-value* view I prefer. Emotional experiences include valenced attitudes of (dis)favour which serve as an 'uptake' of the way things evaluatively seem, representing the evaluative properties of their particular objects on the basis of these felt valenced attitudes.<sup>14</sup> Building in the normative dimension, we have been considering we might now say the following. These valenced attitudes of favour and disfavour are experienced as 'merited uptakes' of the way in which the relevant evaluative property authoritatively demands 'to be' or 'not to be'. So, the attitude of *acknowledgement*, in acknowledging a value's normative standing (so in the positive case that it merits or deserves to be or remain actualised) is to be cashed out in terms of a felt attitude of (seemingly) *appropriate approval* concerning the value's normative standing – the normativity of the experiential evaluative content of emotion is reflected or 'taken up' in a normative aspect of my affective response to it. Naturally, there is significantly more that could be said in explication and defence of this view of emotions' normative phenomenology. However, I want to suggest that if we adopt something in the region of this view, we get a substantive account of the contrast between the 'worlds' of emotion and evaluative judgement or belief (and by dint of this, we also get a neat explanation of the phenomena of affective persistence; see section 3).

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<sup>14</sup> See Mitchell 2021 for a detailed defence of this view.

What we can now say about the contrast between emotional representation of value and the representation of value in evaluative judgement is as follows: while ‘on the surface’ they share an evaluative content – and indeed, our methods of epistemic assessment for both states may be similar if not the same, at least as regards epistemic correctness – there is a critical difference. Emotional experience is an *encounter with value*. In this encounter with value, the relevant values are experienced as including the kind of normativity that has been sketched in this section; the value presents as an ‘ideal ought to be’ (in the positive case) or an ‘ideal ought not to be’ (in the negative case), and this is further reflected in the presence, in emotion, of felt valenced attitudes which are felt as *appropriate* to that normative standing. While this picture of emotions’ normative phenomenology requires being defended in more detail the following should be clear: evaluative judgement includes neither normative content nor normative attitude. To *merely judge* that X is *dangerous, admirable, funny* is not to ‘encounter’ the determinate values as such, and in this respect, one simply misses out what we might call the normativity of value (understood in the specific sense explicated above).

A similar thought was gestured at by Peter Goldie when he suggested that without ‘feeling towards’ – without the attitude essential to emotion – our evaluative apprehension of a particular object is not merely ‘cold’ or non-affective but somehow evaluatively impoverished – it lacks some putative ‘special content’. On this basis, putatively, we do not fully ‘understand’ what it is for something to be *dangerous, beautiful, or disgusting*, without experiencing those values by way of emotion. Deonna and Teroni also at times gesture in a similar direction:

[W]hile these [evaluative] properties can in principle be accessed by the subject independently of his emotion, it often proves difficult to see how he could access them without the relevant emotional sensitivity... Categorising an object as funny or shameful is indeed hardly detachable from the understanding that its properties give one reasons to favour or reject it. And we might wonder what sort of understanding of there being reasons to favour or reject an object we would preserve, were we deprived of the relevant emotion. (Deonna and Teroni 2012: 121-2)

What, however, is this critical and distinctive 'emotional sensitivity' Goldie and Deonna and Teroni are gesturing towards which supposedly underpins evaluative

understanding, and which draws on the contrast between an emotional sensitivity to value and a *mere judgement* of a particular object as instantiating the relevant evaluative property?<sup>15</sup>

An appeal to the normativity of emotion and value, or more specifically the normativity present in an (affective) *encounter with value*, provides an answer. When emotions are overlooked, or we simply fail to experience emotion, we do not merely lose one way of representing value, for which evaluative judgement can non-problematically stand-in. Rather, we lose something essential to somethings being of value, namely its (experientially manifest) normative profile. Non-emotional evaluative representation as in evaluative judgement is therefore not merely a different but significantly degraded form of value-representation – it fails to convey us to a significant aspect of what experiential values are, namely the kinds of properties that, when experienced, make *justified demands* on us to be recognised by way of appropriately affectively responding as we do – as affectively acknowledging an ‘ideal ought to be’ or ‘ought not to be’. Granting something in the region of this picture, the following section details how this contrast allows us to explain affective persistence.

### 3. Affective Persistence<sup>16</sup>

Let’s remind ourselves of the definition we previously gave of affective persistence:

Affective Persistence: The fact that deflating judgements and thoughts whose contents we might expect to temper or negate the emotional response paradigmatically fail to have any substantial effect *during the emotional episode*.  
The *affect persists* regardless.

Tracing back to the suggestive idea from de Sousa, the thought was as follows: cases of *affective persistence* ‘encourage the thought that emotions form a sort of parallel epistemic world’. Put otherwise, we might now frame the thought as follows: there is something distinctive about the ‘parallel epistemic world’ that emotions inhabit that explains why we get cases of *affective persistence* (and indeed why this is such a

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<sup>15</sup> For similar thoughts concerning the indispensability of emotions to ‘full’ or ‘genuine’ evaluative understanding see Prinz 2006: 29-43; Poellner 2016: 1-28; Stocker 1983: 5-26; Johnston 2001.

<sup>16</sup> This section draws partially on material from Mitchell 2021: Ch.5.

widespread phenomenon). In this section I want to suggest that if we accept that emotional phenomenology has the kind of normativity described in the previous section then we get a substantive personal level explanation of why *affect persists* in the way it does.<sup>17</sup> Put somewhat more dramatically, the question we are seeking an answer to is as follows: Why is it the case that when in the grip of an emotion, accompanying conflicting or deflating judgements often have little to no effect on the strength of feeling or occurrence of the emotion, such that we get affective persistence?<sup>18</sup>

Here is one answer to that question: Deflating evaluative judgements, whether that be contraries (*X is not dangerous*) or proportional-calmers (*X is not that dangerous*), are so often found to be ineffective or powerless in relation to affective experience, because of the normativity of values when affectively experienced, as making justified demands 'to be' or 'not to be' which intelligibly motivate the relevant affective attitudes which are experienced *as appropriate responses* to those demands. So, one often cannot help responding as one does, regardless of those contrary evaluative judgements, since the values justified demand 'to be' (in the positive case) are currently being taken up by the relevant valenced attitudes, as *felt (to be) appropriate favour*. As such, it is not usually within the gift of evaluative judgement (or thought) to override or even significantly undermine this nexus of normativity and affect. In the moment, those evaluative judgements and thoughts will strike their subjects as hollow (as 'mere beliefs or thoughts'), such that in contrast to the normative authority of affect, the evaluative assessments they express have no or comparatively little normative authority.

In further clarifying this picture, we can accept the above view of affective persistence, and what accounts for it, and still think that we can train ourselves to quell the 'demands' of specific values on us (or in best-case scenarios, come to not recognise their demands as justified). Indeed, coping mechanisms (e.g., anger management and air safety training) are attempts to disrupt this normative dimension of emotion. Yet the

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<sup>17</sup> Affective persistence may also be explained at the subpersonal level in terms of evolutionary accounts of the development of specific emotional responses and emotional capacities ('affect programs'), which stress their (relative) cognitive impenetrability in terms of their being 'informationally encapsulated' modules (see Griffiths 1997: Ch. 2 and 4; Goldie 2000: 106-111 for discussion).

<sup>18</sup> Note this is not the traditional puzzle of recalcitrance, which is often thought of as concerned with how to specify the relevant emotional attitude in such cases so that we end up with the right degree of (rational) conflict but not (propositional) contradiction (see Grzankowski *forthcoming* for this way of framing the puzzle).

fact that such strategies have to be engaged in at all, such that in the majority of cases evaluative judgement (and in certain cases evaluative knowledge; e.g., statistics relating to plane safety) are (relatively) powerless, attests to the comparative normative ‘power of value’. Moreover, this is what we find in many cases of recalcitrance. I can certainly rehearse those deflating judgements: that ‘turbulence is merely a change in air pressure’ or ‘I am overreacting, it is not as dangerous as it seems’. In the moment, they rarely have any power over my affective state – they ring hollow in contrast to the authority of affect. This explanation of affective persistence also provides the materials for explaining why, at least in many cases, distraction techniques are more effective. If I can shift attention away from the particular object of my emotional experience, I am more likely to succeed in avoiding recognising the ‘justified demand’ of the relevant value as an ‘ideal ought to be’ or ‘ideal ought not to be’. However, to take the flying case again, another bout of heavy turbulence will capture my attention again. And when it does such distraction techniques will be (relatively) powerless.

Further support for this explanation of affective persistence in cases of recalcitrant emotion can be found in the following considerations. One might expect that if evaluative judgement and emotion were on a par in terms of their normative force and profile, then while we would get a phenomenology of conflict when emotional appraisal and evaluative judgement clash, it would be an open question whether we get affective persistence or judgement overriding. Such that in at least certain cases, the deflating judgement would succeed in quelling the emotion. The fact that this is so rare, and that affective persistence is so common, points in the direction of the account under consideration. To repeat, in a certain class of paradigmatic emotional experiences, the relevant values, when affectively experienced, make (seemingly) justified demands on their subjects, as an ‘ideal ought to be’ or ‘ideal ought not to be’, which are ‘taken up’ (acknowledged) by way of felt to be appropriate (dis)favour. In contrast, when the evaluative properties of particular objects are *merely judged or believed* to be some (contrary) evaluative way they are ‘normatively impoverished’. Such *mere* evaluative judgements certainly do not have that kind of normative power that at least some emotional experiences have.

Cases of sexual attraction, although not strictly within the confines of emotional experience, provide striking evidence for the explanation of affective persistence on offer. Think of the case of an individual meeting up with an ex-lover that, as it is often put, they ‘struggled to get over’. Despite their best efforts, and claims to their friends



that ‘this person no longer affects me’, when confronted with the individual of one’s previous affections the power they have to motivate sexual desire is so strong that those previous claims to the contrary ‘melt away’. The evaluative standing of this person, their beauty or alluring character, is once again experienced as an ‘ideal ought to be’ which motivates what is given as felt appropriate sexual desire.

However, are there not instances in which emotion is stopped in its tracks by contrary evaluative judgement? Consider the following case. In discussion with a group of individuals I hear someone say that my friend’s claim is idiotic, and feel rising indignation. Someone else, seeing that I am beginning to look angry, interjects and tells me that that the individual did not say *idiotic* but *idiomatic* and that I must have misheard (which I come to realise that I did). As such, isn’t it often the case that my emotion immediately stops in the face of *corrected judgement*? And does not this show that evaluative judgement can cancel out the supposed ‘normative power’ of an affective experience of value?

Several responses are available. First, we might say that it is not clear we have a full-blown emotional experience. Perhaps such cases are better described as truncated affective responses, where the emotion does not run its course, and so the ‘normative power of the value’ does not get a hold in the same way as in the other cases we have been considering, therefore explaining why a correcting evaluative judgement can defeat it. Second, it bears emphasising that such a case is not a recalcitrant emotion where we have an affective-evaluative appraisal of a particular object which persists in the face of conflicting evaluative judgement. Instead, what we have is a case in which we gain new evidence that an evaluative property was not instantiated (the comment was not offensive). An analogy with the fear of flying example would be coming to know that one was not on a plane but merely in a plane simulator. In such a case, we would likewise expect the fear to subside. Importantly, there is nothing in the view of emotions’ normative phenomenology outlined in the previous section that rules out these kinds of cases; the supposed normative authority of the experienced evaluative property is subject to genuinely authority-defeating constraints and conditions, and when these are sufficiently strong, we should expect the affect to desist in the way described.

As a final note, it is worth mentioning a familiar case which seems to bear out the view under consideration. Consider dreaming that one’s partner has cheated. One often wakes up from such dreams with a palpable degree of bad feeling towards them, and

might even behave in an ‘off-hand’ manner with them. Yet there is no sense in which one accepts that there is any reality to what happened in the dream – one immediately judges that there has been no instance of betrayal which would motivate anger towards one’s partner. However, the negative affect persists for some time and takes a while to dissipate. If we accept the view of emotions’ normative phenomenology sketched in the previous section, we have a plausible explanation of why this occurs. One’s dream involved a (quasi)emotional experience of betrayal as an ‘ideal ought not to be’. The ‘felt normative power’ of this evaluative property is such that it persists even after one wakes up and judges (with as good evidence as one may have) that there was no instance of infidelity.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, let me return to the thought from de Sousa, which has motivated the discussion of affective persistence and the putative normative phenomenology of emotions. The thought as I framed it was as follows: cases of *affective persistence* ‘encourage the thought that emotions form a sort of parallel epistemic world’. In this paper, I have offered one way of vindicating something in the vicinity of de Sousa’s thought. The ‘emotional world’ runs parallel to the ‘world of evaluative judgement’, with both states representing the *same* evaluative state of affairs. However, emotional experience is critically different from evaluative judgement insofar as when one ‘encounters’ value in an affective mode there is a distinctive kind of experiential normativity in play (reflected in both a normative content and a normative attitude). And it is the normativity of value as experienced in emotion that can be enlisted to explain affective persistence: insofar as this normative profile is simply missing in those *mere judgements* of value, that explains why contrary evaluative judgements are (typically) ‘powerless’ in the face of conflicting emotion. While more needs to be said concerning the specific way of developing the claim that emotions exhibit a normative phenomenology that has been offered here, accepting something in the vicinity of this claim allow us to take a significant step in the direction of explaining what is distinctive about emotions as evaluative experiences.

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