

INTROSPECTION OF EMOTIONS

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Abstract: In this paper, we argue that knowledge of emotions essentially depends on introspecting the phenomenology of emotional experiences, and that introspection of emotional experiences is a process by stages, where the most fundamental stage is a non-classificatory introspective state, i.e., one that does not depend on the subject's classifying the introspected emotion as an instance of any experience type. We call such a non-classificatory kind of introspection *primitive introspection*. Our main goal is to show that, although not sufficient, primitive introspection is a necessary ground to acquire knowledge of emotions. Our main argument is phenomenological: by examining a variety of examples, we suggest that an accurate analysis of the introspective process through which one comes to know, or refines one's knowledge of, one's current emotion requires that one primitively introspects it.

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For centuries, at least since Descartes, introspection was considered as the central and fundamental method for the investigation of human mind. According to the Cartesian tradition, the results of introspection are even infallible and indubitable. Though some philosophers and psychologists were more cautious than Descartes about the epistemic power of introspection (see, e.g., Kant (1786/1883, 'Preface': 141-142), Brentano (1874: 30), Wundt (1897: 21)), almost none of them questioned its fundamentality for the study of mind until the 20th century. Since the downfall of introspectionism and the advent of behaviorism and then of functionalism, introspection has been progressively marginalized. Both philosophers (see, e.g., Dennett 1991, Blackmore 2002, and Schwitzgebel 2011) and psychologists (see, e.g., Nisbett and Wilson 1977, Gazzaniga 1995, Wilson 2002, and Johansson et al. 2005) have discredited introspection, which is now widely considered as an unreliable and untrustworthy method for both psychological studies and self-knowledge acquisition.

Although we agree that the Cartesian claims about the epistemic power of introspection are overblown and should be downscaled, we believe that the pessimistic trend in philosophy of mind and cognitive psychology has *excessively* deflated the role of introspection. Though not necessarily infallible, introspection plays a crucial and fundamental role in the acquisition of self-knowledge (or, at least, of *some* self-knowledge). In this paper, we focus on self-knowledge of emotions and we argue that introspection is necessary for its acquisition.

In particular, we argue that knowledge of conscious emotions essentially depends on introspecting the phenomenology of emotional experiences. By "conscious emotions" we mean "phenomenally conscious emotions." Some emotions may occur unconsciously and thereby unfelt by their subject. *Conscious emotions*, however, are emotions that occur consciously and have *phenomenology*: there is "something it is like" for their subject to undergo them (Nagel 1974)—they

have a subjective and qualitative feel. *Knowledge of conscious emotions* typically implies identifying the type of emotion one is undergoing (e.g., anger, regret); at the very least, it involves an apprehension or acquisition of information about the relevant emotion and its properties. Introspection is the distinctively first-personal process through which we can get knowledge of, or at least acquire information about, our conscious experiences. We argue that introspection of emotional experiences is a process by stages, where the most fundamental stage is a non-classificatory introspective state, i.e., one that does not depend on the subject's classifying the introspected emotion as an instance of any experience type. We call such a non-classificatory kind of introspection *primitive introspection*. Our main goal is to show that, although not sufficient, primitive introspection is a necessary ground to acquire knowledge of emotions. Our main argument is phenomenological: by examining a variety of examples, we suggest that an accurate analysis of the introspective process through which one comes to know, or refines one's knowledge of, one's current emotion requires that one primitively introspects it.

The paper is organized as follows. In §1, we argue that self-knowledge of an emotion requires knowledge of the phenomenology of an emotional experience. In §2, we introduce the phenomenon of primitive introspection and suggest that there are independent reasons for thinking that it is a psychologically real phenomenon (independently of its application to the specific case of knowledge of emotions). In §3, we draw a sketch of the introspective process by stages which, we argue, is involved in the acquisition of knowledge of emotions. In §4, we present some everyday-life examples in which one tries to get or improve knowledge of one's own current emotion. By providing an analysis of these examples, we argue that primitive introspection is a necessary (albeit not sufficient) ground for knowledge of our emotions.

1. Knowing emotions

Emotions constitute a very significant aspect of our life. They often play a crucial role in motivating our actions and they affect our interaction with our environment and with other people. They may reveal to us what we care about and what we do not—our values (Deonna and Teroni 2012)—and are therefore sometimes claimed to be part of what grounds our moral judgments (Döring 2007). By knowing our emotions, we thus come to know one of the most important aspects of ourselves. Indeed, arguably, knowledge of our emotions constitutes an essential stage of the process through which we acquire or improve self-knowledge and self-understanding.

There is no general agreement about the nature of emotions. So-called *feeling theories* (Prinz 2004), inspired by the James-Lange theory (James 1884; Lange 1885), identify emotions with perceptions of bodily sensations. These theories sound particularly plausible when we think about emotions that clearly display a bodily component: fright, for instance, involves sudden increase in heartbeat—one feels as if, so to speak, one's heart is about to leap out of one's chest. Opponents of feeling theories object that, by focusing only on the “innerly directed” bodily-sensation aspect, they overlook the “outwardly directed” intentional and evaluative aspect of emotions—the fact that emotional experiences are *intentionally directed* toward a person, object, event, or situation and involve an *evaluation* of such person, object, event, or situation. Three main theories put intentionality and evaluation at the center of their account of emotions: *cognitivist* theories, *perceptual* theories, and *attitudinal* theories.

Cognitivist theories reduce emotions to cognitive states such as judgments or thoughts (Solomon 1976; Nussbaum 2001). The idea is that emotions are constituted by an evaluative judgment about

a person, object, event, or situation.¹ On this view, being frightened by a snake consists in *judging* that the snake is dangerous or threatening. Cognitivist theories seem to be particularly fit for emotions which manifestly involve an intellectual component; disappointment, for instance, involves a judgment to the effect that one's expectations have been disregarded or frustrated.²

Perceptual theories construe emotional experiences as perceptual representations (as) of evaluative properties (Iye 2008; Mendelovici 2014; Tappolet 2016; Mitchell 2020). On this view, being frightened by a snake consists in *perceiving* the snake and its dangerousness (or perceiving the snake as having the property of being dangerous). Those theories are partly motivated by the thought that, although intentionality and evaluation are a central and essential aspect of emotion, they do not (or not always) take the form of a judgment: judgment, it is argued, is neither necessary nor sufficient to have an emotion. On the one hand, an infant, who does not yet possess the concepts “snake” or “dangerous” and thereby cannot form the judgment that the snake is dangerous, may still feel frightened by a snake. On the other hand, one may judge that the snake is dangerous without *experiencing* fear of the snake.

On attitudinal theories, the evaluative aspect of emotions is *not* part of the *content* of the emotion, but it is rather what constitutes the subject's *attitude* toward what the emotion is about (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 2015, 2020; Scarantino 2014). On this view, being frightened by a snake consists in taking an evaluative, danger-related attitude toward the snake.

Opting for a particular theory of emotions is not our present concern and we aim to remain neutral about what the fundamental *nature* of emotions is. We just assume that, regardless of whether what most fundamentally characterizes the nature of emotions is their sensory, cognitive or evaluative dimension, we should acknowledge that all those dimensions are relevant when it comes to *knowledge* of our own emotions.

What most interests us here is the relationship between emotions and *phenomenology*. To be sure, some emotions may be unconscious and lack phenomenology. *Conscious* emotions, however, always involve *emotional experiences* and emotional experiences have phenomenology.³ Arguably, each emotional experience type has a specific phenomenological profile. If so, then the phenomenal character of an emotional experience is at least part of what *individuates* a certain conscious emotion—what makes it the emotion it is. As before, philosophers disagree as to how to analyze emotional phenomenology. Feeling theorists—unsurprisingly—aim to reduce emotional phenomenology to *sensory bodily* (proprioceptive and interoceptive) phenomenology. Cognitivists, arguably, may want to reduce it to *cognitive* phenomenology, while perceptualists and attitudinalists tend to reduce it to *sensory perceptual* (exteroceptive or world-directed) phenomenology, where part of what appears to be perceived are *evaluative* properties of the intentional object of the emotion. A more sophisticated reductive analysis of emotional phenomenology has been proposed by Uriah Kriegel (2015, Ch. 4), who argues for a ‘conjunctive’ account on which emotional phenomenology is a combination of proprioceptive, cognitive, conative, and algedonic phenomenology. All these are *reductive* accounts of emotional

¹ Some cognitivist theories reduce emotion to belief-desire compounds (Gordon 1987).

² There are also theories that combine the perceptual and the cognitive dimension. On Schachter and Singer's (1962) theory, for example, emotions are a combination of (i) physiological arousal (e.g. increase in heartbeat) and (ii) a cognitive interpretation of it (e.g. “I feel that I am facing something dangerous”).

³ It is plausible to think that conscious emotions do not merely *involve* emotional experiences, but just *are* emotional experiences. Indeed, we tend to think so. However, some theorists argue that emotional experience is just one *component* of conscious emotion (see e.g. Goldie 2000). The weaker claim that conscious emotions constitutively involve emotional experience is both neutral on this issue and sufficient for our purposes.

phenomenology—they aim to reduce the phenomenology of emotions to other kinds of phenomenology. *Non-reductive* theorists (Montague 2009; Dewalque 2017; Mitchell 2020b), by contrast, maintain that, although emotional experiences may and sometimes do display phenomenological features that are characteristic of other kinds of experiences, they also have a *sui generis* phenomenology, i.e. a kind of phenomenology that is *not* reducible to that of any other kind of experience.

We do not intend to adjudicate the reductivist/non-reductivist debate here. What matters to us is that, although they disagree about what emotional phenomenology most fundamentally consists in, most theorists involved in that debate agree on the following: (i) conscious emotions have phenomenology and (ii) such phenomenology may be, at least, sensory-bodily, sensory-perceptual, evaluative, cognitive, conative, or algedonic. These two points we are going to take for granted.⁴

Arguably, the phenomenal character of each conscious emotion contributes to making it the emotion it is.⁵ This is not to say that the phenomenal character of an emotion *exhausts* what that emotion is.⁶ Some features of emotions, such as their intentionality, their valence, their tendency to motivate our action, or their individuation as instances of a recognizable emotional type may be (partly) grounded in something other than the phenomenology. For instance, they may depend on *contextual* factors such as the cause of the emotion, or on *social* factors, such as the social conventions or norms influencing the construing of our emotional-concept repertoire. Still, the role played by phenomenology in the individuation of an emotion is crucial. Arguably, one could not be in a state of sorrow without some particular event or situation appearing sorrowful to one, or without having that sensation as of a lump in one's throat, or without feeling such a deep inner negative oppression, which are typical of sorrow experiences. One could not be in a state of joy and at the same time perceive the object of one's current emotion as threatening, or feel contortions in one's viscera as when one is in a state of anxiety; or be disappointed while experiencing felt approval with respect to what one is disappointed about; or be disgusted by something while feeling attracted, instead of repelled, by it.^{7:8}

To see the same point from a slightly different angle, consider the following case. Imagine you are in a state of intense anger. Your emotional experience may display some of the following phenomenal features: feeling your heart beating hard, your chest as if blood were boiling inside it, your face as if it were on fire, and your head as if it were about to explode (sensory-bodily phenomenology); experiencing a particular person as disrespectful (sensory-perceptual and

⁴ *Nota bene*: we do *not*, by this, mean to assume that sensory-bodily, sensory-perceptual, evaluative, cognitive, conative, and algedonic phenomenology are all *sui generis* (i.e., irreducible to each other). Cognitive phenomenology, for instance, is object of lively debate, the question being whether it is *sui generis* or it reduces to sensory phenomenology, if it exists at all. Although we do assume that there is cognitive phenomenology (there is something it is like to judge that genocide is wrong, or to suspect that somebody left the door open), we remain neutral as to whether it is *sui generis*. Ditto as to conative phenomenology.

⁵ For ease of exposition, from now on, unless explicitly specified, by “emotion” we will refer to *conscious* emotion.

⁶ There are philosophers who argue for a thesis along these lines, though. Uriah Kriegel (2015, Ch. 4), for instance, argues that the existence and identity conditions of an emotion consist in bearing the right relation to a combination of sensory, cognitive, conative, and algedonic phenomenology.

⁷ One may, perhaps, be disgusted by something and nonetheless desire it. In this case, though, the feeling of attraction would be associated with one's concomitant desire, rather than with one's state of disgust. The state of disgust itself must still display the typical feeling of repulsion if it is to be present at all. One would then be both attracted (in virtue of one's desire) and repelled (in virtue of one's disgust) by the object of one's experience.

⁸ For an argument to the effect that evaluative phenomenology (involving the object of the emotion appearing to the subject as having evaluative properties) constitutes (at least partly) the phenomenology of emotions, see Montague (2014).

evaluative phenomenology); feeling the urge to scream, to hurl something on the floor, or hit the person who disrespected you (conative phenomenology); feeling bad, or feeling the unpleasantness of your current state of mind (algedonic phenomenology); having the thought that what that person did was deeply disrespectful vividly present before your mind (cognitive phenomenology). If these phenomenal features were stripped away from your current experience, what would be left? Would your anger be still present? Arguably not.⁹ It thus seems that the phenomenal character of an emotion is an essential part of what makes a certain emotion the emotion it is.¹⁰

Accordingly, when it comes to the task of *knowing* one's conscious emotions, getting a grasp of the *phenomenology* of the relevant emotion is a fundamental stage of the inquiry. Arguably, knowing one's emotion partly consists in *identifying* such an emotion—telling *which* emotion it is that one is having. If, as we have tried to show, phenomenology is an essential aspect of what makes a certain emotion the emotion it is, then knowing an emotion's phenomenology is a necessary element in one's knowledge of one's emotions.¹¹

The following objection may be raised against our claim that knowing an emotion requires knowing its phenomenology.¹² Suppose that someone (that you consider as a reliable emotion detector—say, a trained emotion psychologist) tells you that you are angry. While before you did not have any knowledge of what emotion you were undergoing, now, on the basis of third-person testimony, you come to realize that you are in fact angry. In this case, the objection goes, testimonial evidence is sufficient for you to get knowledge of your emotion—knowledge of the phenomenology is not required. A more fine-grained analysis of the example, however, shows that if your anger is *conscious*, then testimonial evidence is *not* sufficient for you to come to know it. For either your anger is conscious, or it is unconscious. If it is unconscious, then it does not have phenomenology; so, obviously, knowledge of phenomenology cannot be a requirement on knowledge of it. In this case, testimonial knowledge may be sufficient—it may be reasonable to defer knowledge of one's unconscious emotions to a reliable third person. It is partly for this reason that our claim only concerns *conscious* emotions. If, on the other hand, your anger is conscious, then testimonial evidence is *not* sufficient for you to come to know it. It may be that before the psychologist tells you that you are angry you did not *notice* any anger phenomenology. Once s/he points out to you that you are angry, you realize that there is indeed quite a lot of anger phenomenology to be found in yourself. By noticing such phenomenology, you come to know that you are indeed angry—the psychologist is right. Although it triggers your introspective attention and directs it toward the anger phenomenology, the testimonial evidence you get from the psychologist is not yet sufficient for you to get knowledge of your conscious anger: you also need to attend to the phenomenology of your experience and check whether it is consistent with the psychologist's claim. More generally, when it comes to *conscious* emotions, fully deferring knowledge of them to a third person does not seem to be reasonable. Given that the emotion is conscious, the subject is in a position to check whether third-person testimonial evidence matches first-person introspective evidence; indeed, the subject *ought to* undergo such a checking process,

⁹ A similar argument can be designed even for those who believe that there is no cognitive phenomenology at all. For, arguably, even if stripping away all the phenomenal features of anger experience leaves you with some thoughts or judgments to the effect that an injustice or disrespect has occurred, these are not sufficient for you to be in a state of anger—you may entertain the same thoughts while *not* being angry.

¹⁰ Our argument is partly similar to William James' (1884) "subtraction argument."

¹¹ On the essential role of phenomenology in knowledge of conscious emotions see also Whiting (2018, 2020).

¹² This objection was raised, in slightly different guises, by two referees for PPQ.

via knowledge of the phenomenology, if s/he is to be genuinely said to *know* their conscious emotion.

So, knowing an emotion's phenomenology is a necessary element in one's knowledge of one's emotions. To be sure, we do not claim that knowledge of emotional phenomenology *exhausts* knowledge of emotions. As noted, what makes a certain emotion the emotion it is may outstrip its phenomenology, and there is more to knowing our emotions than knowing what emotions they are. Nevertheless, knowledge of an emotion's phenomenology is a *necessary* condition for having a certain kind of individuating knowledge of it.

Moreover, it seems that knowing the phenomenology of emotions is an important aspect of what one *aims at* when one seeks to know one's own emotions. When one wants to know a current emotion of one's, arguably, one wants to know not only *what* emotion one feels (i.e., how the emotion should be categorized), but also *how* the emotion feels (i.e., what its peculiar phenomenal features are).

One cannot get complete knowledge of the phenomenology of one's emotional experience simply by observing one's own behavior or by looking at a scan of one's brain.¹³ Knowing the phenomenology of a certain emotional experience requires a *first-personal* method: it fundamentally depends on *introspection*. Introspection, as we understand it, is the distinctively first-personal method through which one can get knowledge of or acquire information about one's current conscious state. It is *distinctively first-personal* in that only the subject of a given experience can introspect it—one cannot introspect others' experiences. It is directed toward experiences that are *conscious*—one cannot introspect unconscious states—and *present*—one cannot introspect past experiences (even if one can introspect present recollections of past experiences).

On our view, merely *having* a conscious mental state is not yet sufficient for introspection. To introspect a conscious state of one's, one needs also, at the very least, to *attend* to it. Imagine you are drinking some flavory herbal tea while reading this. If you are to describe your taste experience based on introspection, you need, first, to switch your attention from the reading to the experience—arguably, you cannot accomplish the task if all or most of your attentional resources are directed toward the text.¹⁴ Although, arguably, your taste experience is conscious even while your attention is absorbed by the reading, it is not yet introspected until you attend to it. Moreover, for you to get the information that is relevant to your introspective description of the taste experience, your attention toward it needs to be *sustained*. Both drawing and sustaining attention toward a conscious state involve an activity on the part of the subject that is both effortful and voluntary (*cf.* Watzl 2011; Wu 2011). Accordingly, introspection does not occur automatically or passively: it requires an effortful and voluntary activity.¹⁵

¹³ This is consistent with a physicalist account of phenomenal consciousness. For even physicalist theories often recognize that although phenomenal *properties* reduce to neural *properties*, phenomenal *concepts* are not analyzable in terms of neural *concepts* and require first-personal familiarity for their acquisition.

¹⁴ Must *all* your attentional resources be devoted to the taste experience for you to introspect it? Probably not: something less than the totality of attention could be sufficient for introspection (on the plausible assumption that attention is a gradable phenomenon). Exactly how much of the attentional resources is required for introspection is an empirical question we do not intend to address here. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that, for there to be introspection, a considerable amount of one's attentional resources must be devoted to the target conscious state (say, at least 50%).

¹⁵ It may occur that attention is *grabbed* by a certain conscious state (say, because of its suddenness or intensity). In this kind of cases, the *drawing* of attention is *not* effortful or voluntary. Still, if one is to *introspect* the state that grabbed one's attention, one also has to *sustain* attention toward it, which does involve an effortful and voluntary activity.

Introspection may, for all we argue here, be directed at aspects of one's current conscious state that are distinct from the phenomenology. If, for instance, the propositional content of one's current thought or occurrent belief is not exhausted by its phenomenology, such content can nonetheless be a target of introspection—for all we will be arguing here, at least. Regardless of what the different introspectible aspects of conscious life are, what we are concerned with here is introspection of the *phenomenology* of our current conscious experiences, i.e., the distinctively first-personal method through which we can get knowledge of, or acquire information about, the phenomenology of our current conscious experiences. This is what we will refer to by “introspection” throughout the rest of the paper. Introspection of the phenomenology of emotional experiences, we argue, is a fundamental step in the acquisition of knowledge of our own emotions.

2. Primitive introspection

Introspection is often taken to be judgment-like:¹⁶ by introspecting an experience of one's, one forms an introspective thought, or judgment, about it, which typically involves classifying it as an instance of a certain experience type. For instance, by drawing your attention to what you feel in your stomach, you may form the judgment that you feel an unpleasant burning sensation there; in this case, you classify the sensation as “unpleasant” and “burning”.

Here, however, we argue that introspection is *not* always judgment-like. Some introspective states do not involve classifying what is introspected as an instance of any experience type. We call such non-judgmental and non-classificatory introspection *primitive introspection*. In this section we provide some support to the idea that primitive introspection is a psychologically real phenomenon. We also point at some of the features of such introspection. Although the bulk of the paper focuses on the role of primitive introspection in knowledge of emotions, we argue that primitive introspection is a broader phenomenon: not only emotions but all phenomenally conscious states can be the target of primitive introspection. Accordingly, this section's arguments hinge on a broader sample of experiences (not merely emotional ones). The idea is that, quite independently of its role in knowledge of emotions, there are reasons for thinking that primitive introspection is real.

2.1. *The psychological reality of primitive introspection*

Consider the following example. Imagine caressing a chenille pullover with your right hand and considering the tactile experience you are having. To apprehend your current tactile sensation—to acquire information about its phenomenology—you will probably need to draw your attention to it: you need to attend to the sensation you feel on the palm of your right hand. You can thereby form a number of introspective judgments about your sensation. You may introspectively judge, for example, that the tactile sensation you are having is a sensation of softness. Since you have already undergone softness tactile sensations before, you immediately recognize this one as a softness sensation; you immediately classify it as an instance of an experience type you have already encountered—a tactile experience of softness. Perhaps you may have been acquainted enough with chenille pullovers that, when you introspect your tactile sensation, you also immediately

¹⁶ See e.g. Armstrong 1968; Dretske 1994; Shoemaker 1996; Byrne 2005; Gertler 2011.

recognize it as a chenille-touching sensation. Let us call the introspective process we have in this case “reflective introspection”.

Although in the previous case you immediately recognize your experience as an instance of a certain experience type upon introspecting it, it need not be so. If, for instance, you had never touched chenille before, you would not be able to classify your sensation as a chenille-touching sensation. And if you had never had any softness tactile sensation before, you would not be able to classify your sensation as a softness tactile sensation either. Still, you would be able to *introspect* your sensation: you would surely be able to attend to the sensation you feel on the palm of your right hand and acquire information about its phenomenology, although you would not be able to recognize that phenomenology as an instance of any specific previously encountered phenomenology type.

It may be objected that, in the latter case, there is still at least one experience type such that you would be able to introspect your sensation as an instance of it, namely *tactile experience*: at the very least, you can introspectively judge that this experience you are having is an experience of touch. True, but consider someone who has never had any tactile experience—say, because of a condition affecting their sense of touch—who finally has one for the first time while caressing a chenille pullover, right after the condition has been cured. Here there is no experience type such that this person could classify their experience as an instance of it. Nevertheless, they can introspect it—they can introspect it, as we will put it, *primitively*.

An objector may argue that, although the touch-deprived person cannot classify their experience as a *touch* experience, they can still classify it by appeal to a *demonstrative* concept: by attending to the experience, they may “mentally point to” it and thereby refer to it via the demonstrative THIS.¹⁷ Now, we can distinguish two kinds of demonstrative concepts (Gertler 2001). *Descriptive* demonstratives have a descriptive component, that contributes to determining the referent by classifying what is referred to as a token of a certain type (e.g., THAT DOG, THIS PERSON, THAT OBJECT, THIS EXPERIENCE). *Pure* demonstratives, on the other hand, have *no descriptive component*: they only involve the subject’s attending to what s/he intends to refer to and, on that basis, form the concept THIS (or THAT). Although the touch-deprived person cannot refer to their new experience via the descriptive demonstrative THIS TOUCH EXPERIENCE, they may still refer to it via either (a) the descriptive demonstrative THIS EXPERIENCE or (b) the pure demonstrative THIS. However, via neither (a) nor (b) can the touch-deprived person classify their experience *as an instance of a previously encountered experience type*. Via (a), they merely classify it as an *experience* (not as belonging to a more specific experience *type*). Via (b), they do not classify it at all (since, by its nature, the pure demonstrative lacks any descriptive component). Although we think that primitive introspection does not require the use of any demonstrative concept, all we say in what follows is compatible with a view such that primitive introspection may involve the use of either (a) or (b). What is crucial for our purpose is that being in a state of primitive introspection does not involve classifying the introspected experience *as an instance of any previously encountered experience type*.

A further objection that may be raised is that the touch-deprived person can still classify their experience as *new* (i.e., as an instance of a kind of experience they have never had before). This may well be true—though, arguably, such a classification is not required for them to introspect the experience. However, classifying an experience as *new* does not imply classifying it *as an instance of any previously encountered experience type*—indeed, classifying it as *new* implies classifying it as an

¹⁷ This objection was raised to us by an anonymous referee for *PPQ*.

instance of *no* previously encountered experience type. Therefore, ability to such a classification is still compatible with primitive introspection (though it is *not required* for primitive introspection).¹⁸

The touch-deprived person scenario may strike the reader as too far-fetched. There are, however, everyday-life cases featuring what we call “primitive introspection.” First, cases in which one has a kind of experience (e.g., an orgasm) for the first time. In these cases, one simply *cannot* form an introspective judgment about the relevant experience because one does not know how to classify the relevant experience. Second, cases in which, even if one *could* form an introspective judgment, one chooses not to. Some meditation practitioners, for instance, claim to seek to introspectively attend to their current experiences while abstaining from forming any judgment about them. If they actually succeed in doing what they claim they are doing, their practice involves primitive introspection. Third, even when one *does* form an introspective judgment about one’s current experience, there are innumerable aspects of its phenomenology that elude classification and thereby fail to be captured by the judgment. Nonetheless, those subtle phenomenological aspects can be introspected.¹⁹ Therefore, even when one *reflectively* introspects one’s current experience, one may, *at the same time*, introspect it *primitively* and thereby grasp the details of the phenomenology that elude classification—where by “grasping” we mean a kind of apprehension that implies acquisition of information (more on this in §2.2).²⁰

We take these considerations to provide *prima facie* evidence that primitive introspection is psychologically real. For a more complete defense of the psychological reality of primitive introspection, see Giustina (2019a).

2.2. Features of primitive introspection

Like all introspective states, primitive introspection involves an effortful and voluntary activity that requires drawing and sustaining attention toward the target experience. More specifically, to primitively introspect an experience, one must draw and sustain one’s attention toward its *phenomenology*. For you to primitively introspect your chenille touch experience, you need to focus your attention on the way the touch sensation feels to you—to “what it is like” for you to have that sensation.

As noted, primitive introspection is non-classificatory: to be in a state of primitive introspection, not only one *needs not* classify the introspected experience as an instance of any

¹⁸ For a discussion that relates first-exposure experiences and non-conceptuality regarding the specific case of emotional experiences see Mitchell (2020a).

¹⁹ It may be objected that if those subtle aspects of the phenomenology are unclassifiable, then they are just *non-introspectable* (this objection was raised by an anonymous referee for *PPQ*). Now, if introspection is *defined* as a process that *requires* classification (because, say, a process is introspective only if it outputs classificatory judgments), then such phenomenal aspects are obviously not introspectable. If, instead, classification is *not* built into the definition of introspection (if, for example, introspection is characterized as a distinctively first-personal process through which the subject acquires information about their current experience, where information acquisition does not necessarily involve classification), then the claim that subtle unclassifiable phenomenological aspects are introspectable is not obviously false. Regardless of the terminological issue concerning the definition of “introspection,” our substantial claim is that there is a mental process, that we call “primitive introspection,” that involves the subject’s attending to their current experience, and through which they can non-classificatorily acquire information about its phenomenology.

²⁰ Our argument here is somewhat analogous to the *fineness of grain* argument for non-conceptual perceptual content (Evans 1982; Peacocke 1992; Tye 1995; Heck 2000).

experience type—one *must not* do so. Although it can co-occur with reflective (classificatory) introspection, *mere* primitive introspection is inherently free of classification.

Through primitive introspection one apprehends the phenomenology of the target experience—one acquires information about it. When you draw your introspective attention toward your chenille touch experience, you get information about what it is like for you to have that experience—about its ‘qualitative appearance’, so to speak. In primitive introspection, the acquisition of information occurs independently of any classification. When you *reflectively* introspect *that* your touch experience is a feeling of *softness*, the information you acquire is classificatory and coarse-grained: you acquire the information that your experience is a softness experience. When, instead, you *primitively* introspect your touch experience, the information you acquire is non-classificatory and thereby maximally fine-grained: you get information about how *this* experience feels to you, information that is more fine-grained and detailed than the information that this experience feels like an experience of *softness*, or like an experience of touching *chenille*.

To get a better grasp of the kind of information acquired through primitive introspection, consider Fred Dretske’s (1981) distinction between *digital* and *analog* information:

[A] signal [...] carries the information that *s* is *F* in *digital* form if and only if the signal carries no additional information about *s*, no information that is not already nested in *s*’s being *F*. If the signal *does* carry additional information about *s*, no information that is *not* nested in *s*’s being *F*, then I shall say that the signal carries this information in analog form. When a signal carries the information that *s* is *F* in analog form, the signal always carries more specific, more determinate information about *s* than it is *F*. (Dretske 1981: 137)²¹

If you receive the information that your car was crushed by a tree via a text message reading “Your car was crushed by a tree,” the information you receive is in *digital* format (the signal carries no additional information on top of the information that your car was crushed by a tree). If, instead, you receive the same piece of information via a *picture* of your crushed car, the information you receive is in *analog* format (the signal carries additional information about the magnitude of the tree, the part of the car that was crushed, etc.).

The idea, then, is that while by *reflective* introspection the subject can acquire information about the phenomenology of their experience in *digital* format, by *primitive* introspection the subject acquires, at least, information in *analog* format. Through primitive introspection, the subject acquires additional information with respect to what they acquire via reflective introspection. The information acquired via primitive introspection is more specific, more determinate, more fine-grained with respect to the information acquired via reflective introspection.²²

It may be objected that, while the function of reflective introspection is quite straightforward—at the very least, providing the subject with knowledge of the type of experience s/he is undergoing—it is unclear what the function of primitive introspection is.²³ As we will argue in §3 and §4, the primary role of primitive introspection is to ground reflective introspection—it has an *instrumental* function. The information acquired via primitive introspection constitutes the basis for the classification process whose upshot is reflective introspection (more on this in §3). We also believe that, in virtue of providing the subject with analog information about the

²¹ The information that *s* is *G* is *nested* in *s*’s being *F* iff *s*’s being *F* carries the information that *s* is *G* (Dretske 1981: 71).

²² See Giustina (2019b) for a more thorough discussion of information acquisition in primitive and reflective introspection.

²³ We owe this objection to an anonymous referee for *PPQ*.

phenomenology of their experience, primitive introspection constitutes a cognitive achievement in and of itself. This is admittedly more controversial and indeed it is not the main claim we are going to defend in what follows.²⁴ Our main claim is that primitive introspection plays a crucial role in the introspective process that leads to the formation of an introspective judgment; as we will argue in §4, it is a necessary ground to acquire knowledge of conscious emotions.

In sum, primitive introspection is an effortful and voluntary activity that consists in attending to and non-classificatorily acquiring information about the phenomenology of one's current conscious experience.

3. A process by stages

The objects of self-knowledge are quite diverse. Beside knowledge of one's own emotions, self-knowledge includes knowledge of one's propositional attitudes, such as beliefs, desires, intentions and hopes (which may be conscious—occurrent—or *unconscious*—standing), knowledge of one's current thoughts, and knowledge of one's perceptual, proprioceptive, algedonic, bodily, and imaginative experiences. It also includes knowledge of some aspects of oneself that are not conscious but typically emerge in our behavior, such as one's personal preferences, aptitudes, and character traits.²⁵ It is very unlikely that there is *one single* process through which all self-knowledge is acquired. More probably, a variety of processes contribute to the acquisition of self-knowledge. Introspection, on our view, is one of them. Introspection may be supplemented by several different processes, among which behavior observation, inference, testimony, outward perception, rationality considerations, memory, etc. As colorfully pointed out by Eric Schwitzgebel, the formation of introspective judgments seems to involve

a cognitive confluence of crazy spaghetti, with aspects of self-detection, self-shaping, self-fulfillment, spontaneous expression, priming and association, categorical assumptions, outward perception, memory, inference, hypothesis testing, bodily activity, and who only knows what else, all feeding into our judgments about current states of mind. (Schwitzgebel 2012: 41)

However, though introspective judgments may arise from a confluence of different cognitive processes—differently from Schwitzgebel (2012: 29)—we do not take this to imply that a unified introspective process cannot be isolated and described. In this section, we provide a sketchy outline of what, on our view, such a process involves.

3.1. *The stages of the introspective process*

The introspective process can be analyzed into three main stages: (i) *primitive introspection*, (ii) *reflective introspection*, (iii) *descriptive introspective judgment*. We will preliminarily illustrate the process as though it is linear, for clarity of exposition. In §3.4 we will revisit it in light of the complexities of concrete mental life.

²⁴ For a defense of the intrinsic epistemic significance of primitive introspection see Giustina (2018, Ch. 6) and De Vlieger (2018, Ch. 4).

²⁵ Assuming there exists such a thing. See Ross and Nisbett (1991) and Harman (1999, 2000) for a skeptical stance about character.

The first stage is *primitive introspection*. As noted, it involves a state of attentive apprehension, in virtue of which the subject *non-classificatorily* acquires information about the phenomenology of the introspected experience.

The second stage is what we called *reflective introspection*. It consists in classifying the introspected experience as an instance of a known experience type. At this stage, the subject gives or attempts an *interpretation* of the introspected experience: they try to figure out what kind of experience it is. Classifying an experience involves at least (i) *distinguishing* it from other experiences on the basis of its phenomenology and (ii) *recognizing* it as an instance of a previously encountered experience type. Plausibly, this implies applying some *concepts*.²⁶ In particular, it implies the deployment of *phenomenal concepts*, i.e., concepts associated with the phenomenology of experience. Different kinds of experience are associated with different phenomenal concepts: pain experiences are associated with the phenomenal concept PAIN, bluish experiences are associated with the phenomenal concept PHENOMENAL BLUE, and so on. Interpretation therefore consists in mobilizing some phenomenal concepts and applying them to the experience. Phenomenal concepts may be more or less determinate, and any experience may be associated with many phenomenal concepts at different levels of determinacy. For example, a bluish experience may be associated with PHENOMENAL BLUE, but also with its determinate PHENOMENAL COBALT and its determinable PHENOMENAL COLOR. Accordingly, the classification involved in reflective introspection may vary in degree of determinacy. Deploying a phenomenal concept in reflective introspection does not yet require the subject to master the linguistic expression through which such a concept could be expressed in public terms: to have and deploy the concept PHENOMENAL COBALT one does not need to master the *word* “cobalt”.

The third stage is what we may call *descriptive introspective judgment*. It consists in *describing* the introspective experience in publicly accessible terms, i.e., forming a linguistically expressible judgment through which the experience and its phenomenology can be communicated. At this stage, the subject looks for the right words (linguistic expressions) they could use to report their experience and thereby communicate information about it to others. Here, the subject does need to master the linguistic expression(s) through which phenomenal concepts are expressed: to form the descriptive introspective judgment “this (visual experience) is phenomenal cobalt”, besides possessing the concept PHENOMENAL COBALT, one also needs to master the term “cobalt” (and, arguably, the word “phenomenal”).²⁷

3.2. From primitive introspection to reflective introspection

Through primitive introspection the subject attends to the phenomenology of an experience and non-classificatorily acquires information about it. Reflective introspection is based on primitive introspection: the information that is acquired through primitive introspection constitutes the basis for classification.

As noted, the classification process consists in recognizing the introspected experience as an instance of a previously encountered experience type. Part of the job consists in looking for the right concept that applies to the introspected experience (e.g., “is this pain or just itch?”). Another part of the job consists in *refining* one’s classification, i.e., trying to correctly apply a more

²⁶ By “concept” we mean a mental representation F that enables its subject to (i) distinguish Fs from non-Fs and (ii) recognize an F as an F (i.e., as an instance of the type F).

²⁷ For a more detailed description of the second and third introspective stage, see De Vlieger (2018, Ch. 4).

determinate or fine-grained phenomenal concept (e.g., from “this is a phenomenal-blue experience” to “this is a phenomenal-cobalt experience”). In either case, the information provided by primitive introspection is essential to concept application. For, to mobilize the right phenomenal concept, the subject preliminarily needs to have information about the phenomenology to which the concept is to be applied. Quite obviously, for you to figure out whether the concept that applies to your current experience is PAIN or ITCH, you need, first, to acquire information about the experience you are trying to classify.

While engaging in the classificatory process, the subject may also appeal to other cognitive resources, such as memory, inference, reasoning, behavior observation, imagination, and outward perception. For example, it is often through memory that, after collecting information about its phenomenology, one can recognize an experience (“I had the same feeling when I came back from New York...”) and thereby classify it (“...it must be nostalgia”). Or, to give another example: sometimes observing our own behavior may provide further evidence in favor of a certain classification (as when the wide smile you meet in the mirror confirms that yes, you are really happy today).

In sum: the classificatory process involved in reflective introspection is based on primitive introspection and may also recruit various other cognitive resources.

3.3. From reflective introspection to descriptive introspective judgment

The classification outputted by reflective introspection constitutes the basis for the formation of a descriptive introspective judgment, i.e., a judgment that is expressible in publicly accessible terms and through which the experience can be communicated via a linguistic report. The transition from the second to the third stage of the introspective process is performed via what may be called *linguistic mapping*. Linguistic mapping consists in appealing to one’s lexical arsenal to match the phenomenal concepts figuring in reflective introspection with public linguistic expressions and thereby form an introspective report through which one can communicate one’s own experience to others.

3.4. The introspective process

We described the introspective process as if it were somehow linear: from primitive introspection to reflective introspection through classification and then from reflective introspection to descriptive introspective judgment through linguistic mapping. However, the process is more complex than that. Upon primitively introspecting, the subject may immediately apply some phenomenal concept. However, they may subsequently realize that the apprehension on which the application of that phenomenal concept was based was only partial, or incomplete, and thereby judge that that phenomenal concept is not adequate; or that it is too coarse-grained—they may want to seek for a more determinate phenomenal concept. Accordingly, they will introspectively attend to their experience more closely.²⁸ Since they aim to find a more appropriate phenomenal concept, they will need to avoid deploying the previously applied concept in their introspecting. That is, they will need to return to a state of primitive introspection.

²⁸ When the introspected experience is not long enough for one to draw introspective attention back to it, the subject may introspectively attend to a recollection of the original experience.

Similar considerations apply to the third stage—the formation of a descriptive introspective judgment. The subject may associate a certain word with the experience they introspect but turn out unsatisfied with their linguistic choice. Accordingly, they may return either to the second stage, and look for a better linguistic expression to communicate the concept that figures in the content of their state of reflective introspection, or even to the first stage, if they consider that their unsatisfaction traces back to an inadequate conceptualization.

It may also occur that a subject is just unable to get to the second or the third stage of the introspective process. On the one hand, if a subject lacks the phenomenal concept(s) that would apply to the experience they are introspecting, they cannot engage in the classification process. This will prevent them from moving from primitive introspection to reflective introspection. On the other hand, a subject may possess the right phenomenal concept but lack the linguistic expression to communicate it. Sometimes, the subject may try to overcome this problem by appealing to evoking paraphrases or metaphors. However, it may occur that the subject is simply unable to communicate their experiences. (Indeed, it is not so uncommon that people find themselves helpless when it comes to describing their feelings.)

Finally, although primitive introspection typically plays the role of grounding reflective introspection in the way described above, it need not do so. One may well just stop at the first introspective stage (as, for example, in cases of first-time experiences or meditation mentioned in §2) and contemplate or apprehend the experience independently of any classification. Indeed, one way of interpreting one possible aim of meditators is to try and stop our automatic tendency to move away from primitive introspection.

Figure 1 outlines the different stages of the introspective process, as sketched in this section. We now turn to the application of the model presented here to the case self-knowledge of emotion. Our primary aim will be to show that primitive introspection is an ineliminable and fundamental step in the acquisition of such knowledge.

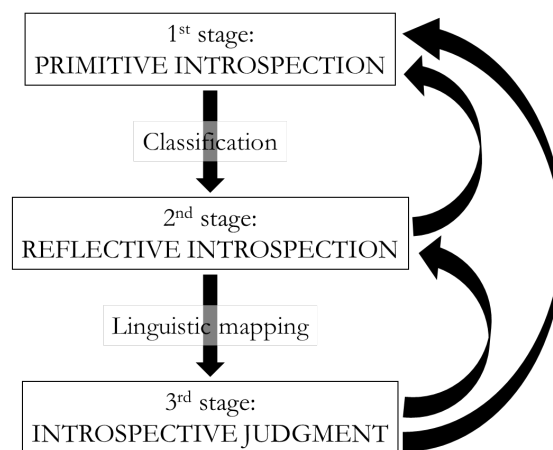


Figure 1: the process of phenomenal introspection, a first approximation

4. Some case studies

In this section, we argue that primitive introspection, though not sufficient, is a necessary ground of knowledge of emotions. For a subject to form, revise, or refine their judgments about their own

emotional experiences, they need to engage in primitive introspection. Primitive introspection is *not sufficient* for a subject to achieve knowledge of their emotions: other cognitive processes, such as behavior observation, inference, testimony of others, outward perception, rationality considerations, memory, etc. may be recruited. However, no combination of such processes is, by itself, sufficient: the judgment-formation process needs to be based on primitive introspection.

Our argument proceeds by examples. We present five case studies, each featuring a subject undergoing an emotional experience and trying to get knowledge of it. The first two cases concern emotions the subject has already undergone and can therefore recognize almost immediately, at least in a coarse-grained way. What marks the difference between the two cases is that in the second the subject tries to refine their judgments about the phenomenology of their emotional experience, even though they are familiar with it. The third and fourth cases feature a subject who encounters a certain emotion for the first time. In the third case, almost every aspect of the phenomenology is new to the subject, and they can perform no classification at all. In the fourth case, although the emotional experience (with its complex and composite phenomenology) is new to the subject, they can recognize some of its phenomenal elements and thus perform a partial or tentative classification. The first four examples feature emotions where the bodily component of the phenomenology is quite prominent—though other kinds of phenomenology (sensory-perceptual, evaluative, cognitive, conative, or algedonic) are also present. This is because bodily phenomenology is particularly apt to illustrate our point, partly because its nuances are perhaps easier to describe than those of other kinds of phenomenology (especially cognitive phenomenology), partly because it is more often the target of primitive introspection (though the other kinds of phenomenology can be the target of such introspection as well). The fifth example features introspection of a “cold” emotion (i.e., an emotional experience where the bodily component of the phenomenology is minimal or absent), to show how our claim applies to this kind of emotional experiences as well.

We will argue that, in each case, primitive introspection plays a fundamental role in the subject’s understanding of their current emotion and is therefore a necessary step in the knowledge-acquisition process. To be sure, this is a limited set of cases. However, we believe that our reasoning generalizes to *any* case where a subject tries to form an adequate judgment of their ongoing emotional experience, whether they have previously encountered it or not, and enjoin the reader to think up counterexamples.

4.1. Immediate recognition of a previously encountered emotion

CAROLINE

She got the job. Caroline feels her heart leaping inside her chest, a smile stretching across her lips, the whole body quivering with impatience and excitement. She feels the urge to jump in the air, run without ever stopping. She cannot stop thinking about how gratifying and stimulating her new work environment will be. The new job feels so exciting to her and the whole world appears to her as an open, welcoming, and wonderful place. She knows that this is joy, that the euphoria is washing over her, like the time she learned that she was admitted to a PhD program. She felt the very same sensations, the same kind of thoughts were running through her mind, and the world appeared to her as it appears now. The same feeling of lightness, like she were floating in the air. The same propulsive sensation, expanding from her chest and making her hop around when she tries to walk. This twofold sensation of tensed excitement and complete relaxation. The feeling that every muscle of her body is ready to do whatever she wants, making her feel like she can face any challenge right

now. An all-encompassing optimism informs the way she perceives people and things around her. She feels complete, open to the world, and radiant. She is so happy!

As soon as she gets the good news, a set of changes occur in Caroline's overall experience, which she can almost immediately recognize as constituents of euphoric happiness. Perhaps, overwhelmed by the intensity of the current emotion, she does not yet form the judgment "This feeling I'm having is euphoric happiness." However, that piece of information is easily accessible to her: if asked about the reason she is hopping around like a grasshopper, she would immediately and effortlessly reply that she is immensely happy. For this information to be available to her, though, she needs to *notice* the goings-on that suddenly feature in her field of consciousness. She needs to attend, at least to a certain extent, to the phenomenology of her current experience and thereby become more focally aware of it. Given the intensity of the experience, the attention shift will not require much effort. Still, in order for her to formulate the judgment, some form of preliminary detection of the phenomenology needs to take place. To be sure, she may use other cues to form her judgment. She may observe her own behavior—hopping around, smiling helplessly—or reason that that job will add much value to her life and will be very rewarding. She recruits her memory when she compares her present state to the intense joy she felt when she entered the PhD program. However, by themselves, these elements are not sufficient to reach a judgment about what she *feels*. She could not compare her current phenomenology to a past phenomenology if she did not apprehend the current phenomenology in the first place; reasoning about the value of her new job supports the judgment that joy is a fitting reaction to it, but is silent about whether joy is actually occurring; and observing her own behavior can only *suggest* to her that she might feel joy (just because she knows that such a behavior is typically associated with this emotion), or it could *confirm* the results of her introspective inquiry, but, alone, it is not sufficient for her to know that joy is occurring. Memory, inference, and behavior observation certainly aid Caroline through the classification process: they help her recognize her feelings as elements of euphoric happiness and thereby classify her emotion accordingly. But for the classification process to get going, such feelings, and in particular their phenomenology, need first to be apprehended.

Caroline's case shows that primitive introspection is an ineliminable and fundamental stage of the introspective process even when an introspective judgment can be formed quite quickly and smoothly. As noted, although she can almost immediately recognize her current emotion as intense joy, a preliminary shift of attention toward the phenomenology of her experience is required for the relevant recognition to take place. Such a preliminary act of introspective attention involves apprehending the phenomenology of her experience; it enables Caroline to acquire the information that constitutes the basis for recognition and classification. To be sure, she does not need to draw *full* attention to the phenomenology to acquire the relevant information: it is sufficient that *some* amount of attentional resources be deployed.²⁹ Indeed, given that she is not interested in a deep understanding of her emotional experience (she just wants to enjoy the moment!), and that she can perform a rough classification based on a relatively small amount of information, the amount of attentional resources devoted to the experience need not be huge. Relatedly, the pre-classificatory attentional act need not extend throughout a long stretch of time—it can be relatively quick. Even if brief and rough, though, such preliminary acquisition of information is required for Caroline to recognize her emotion; therefore, it needs to occur prior to (and thus independently

²⁹ As noted, exactly *how much* attention is an empirical question. We suspect that the amount of attention that is *captured* by the intensity of the experience may be sufficient for Caroline to perform at least a rough classification of her emotion, as long as she *sustains* that amount of attention long enough to acquire the information required for recognition.

of) her classifying her emotion as joy. It is thus non-classificatory—it is what we call “primitive introspection:” being prior to classification, it must itself not involve classification. To be sure, recognizing her emotion as joy may require her recognizing some sub-components of it—phenomenal aspects such as feeling her heart leaping into her chest, her body quivering with impatience and excitement, the urge to jump around, the world’s appearing as an open and welcoming place, and so on. Even so, the same reasoning applies to the classificatory process involved in recognition of the sub-components: for her to classify a phenomenal aspect as *urge to jump around*, she first needs to apprehend its phenomenology and acquire the information that is relevant for classification. As noted, elements other than the phenomenology may ground Caroline’s introspective judgment that she feels intense joy—behavior observation, reasoning, memory. But without a preliminary apprehension of the phenomenology, those elements are insufficient to achieve a judgment about *what she feels*—about the emotional *experience* she is undergoing. So, even though Caroline can almost immediately classify her experience, the classification process needs to be grounded in (an albeit quick and ephemeral act of) primitive introspection.

4.2. Investigation of the phenomenology of a previously encountered emotion

ARTHUR

“Is your wife a teacher too?” Arthur hesitates to answer. His interlocutor suddenly seems threatening and contemptuous to him, and he immediately feels exposed and inadequate. He feels blushing, feverish. He feels burning sensations on his cheeks and on the skin of his face, hot flashes running through his body, his heart beating faster. He feels discomfort, uneasiness, and the urge to escape the eye of his interlocutor, whose gaze is too painful to stand. He feels filthy. He imagines himself answering that he does not have a wife, because his partner is a man, and anticipates a disgusted and derisive reaction from his interlocutor. He feels like a deviant, even though he knows he did not do anything bad. He knows very well what it is that he is feeling. This emotion has accompanied him for so long, showing up every time a conversation skews toward more intimate and personal (love and sexual) matters. Its symptoms are so familiar to him, that he only needs to take a quick notice at what is going on inside him to become aware that he feels *shame*.

Similarly to Caroline, Arthur can almost immediately recognize the emotion that is growing within him, because he has been acquainted with its constituents many times before. However, even though the judgment that *shame* is taking over him can be attained rather quickly, to perform the classification on which the judgment is based he first needs to *notice* the sudden changes happening within him, the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts entering his field of consciousness; he needs to attend to them and collect information about them, even though this process may take just a little amount of time.

ARTHUR (continued)

This time, though, Arthur wants to understand his shame more deeply. He is not just interested in the exact *cause* of his shame. An important part of what he is interested in is the experience itself: he wants to analyze the *feeling* of it. For a long time, he has been able to rapidly detect the symptoms and recognize the emotion very soon after it starts taking him over. As soon as he detected it, he forced his attention *away* from the felt emotion, to keep being functional in the world and carry on the interaction with his interlocutors. He never tried to linger on the details of its phenomenology. He now realizes that, though he is so familiar with shame, he does not yet know it deeply—his knowledge of it is still rather coarse-grained. This time, he decides to isolate himself from the conversation and engage in the exercise of grasping the finer felt aspects of his shame.

In order to carry out this task, Arthur needs to pay closer attention to the phenomenal aspects of his emotion. Since his aim is to achieve a finer-grained understanding of his experience, an understanding that outstrips the quasi-automatic coarse-grained classification he usually performs, he needs to temporarily abstract away from the more unrefined attributions he typically attaches to it. Though the preliminary rough categorization may help him select the aspect of his emotion he wants to analyze (e.g., the feeling of *discomfort*, or his experiencing others *as threatening and contemptuous*), once the relevant aspect has been isolated, he needs to suspend judgment about how it should be classified, if he is to examine the details of its phenomenology. He thereby observes a set of finer-grained sensations and feelings, only some of which he can recognize and label (e.g., “slight oppression in my chest,” or “contortion in my stomach,” or “feeling like a deviant”). For those he cannot recognize or label, he might concoct a new name; he might also still be able to describe them partially, via more coarse-grained attributes that do not yet fully capture the phenomenal details he can introspectively apprehend (e.g., “a pervasive negative feeling that is different from any physical sensation and does not reduce to a specific thought”). At the end of the process, he will have attained a more refined understanding of the phenomenology of his shame experience. This will help him describe the experience in finer detail, though it will hardly enable him to capture in words *all* the fine-grained aspects of the phenomenology he was able to introspectively attend to. Still, his knowledge of his own emotion will have been enriched.

In Arthur’s introspective inquiry, the role of primitive introspection is even more prominent. As with Caroline, a pre-classificatory act of attention and apprehension of the phenomenology is required even for the almost-immediate recognition of his emotion as shame. As before, this act is rapid and requires little effort. However, when Arthur undertakes the task of deepening his understanding of the emotional experience he is undergoing, the pre-classificatory state becomes more relevant and occupies longer stretches of time. As noted, even though he *can* classify his emotion, as well as some aspects or sub-components of its phenomenology, he voluntarily abstracts away from the relevant classification while he attends to them more closely, to grasp the finer phenomenal details. The introspective state he is in when he attends to the phenomenology of his experience while suspending judgment about classification is a state of primitive introspection. Lingering in a state of primitive introspection enables him to acquire additional information about the phenomenology of his shame experience and notice some finer phenomenal aspects he had overlooked. For some of those newly discovered phenomenal aspects he can find a satisfactory description, by applying phenomenal concepts he already possesses (e.g., “feeling of slight oppression in my chest”). In this kind of case, the role of primitive introspection is, as before, that of providing the information that is necessary for recognition. For other phenomenal aspects, he may be unable to elaborate an adequate description via his current conceptual repertoire. If so, the information he collects via primitive introspection can be used to form *new* phenomenal concepts—which he will be able to redeploy in the future, when he reencounters the same type of phenomenal quality. It may occur that Arthur does *not* form new standing concepts based on information provided by primitive introspection. If so, such information is irrelevant to future classification. But even so, having such information available will still enrich and refine his *current* grasp of the experience he is undergoing.

4.3. *Encountering a new emotion (1)*

PABLO

Pablo is engrossed in playing with his Lego Duplo, when, suddenly, a loud, thunderous sound strikes his ears. His heart bursts, he feels it squirting up to his throat, bouncing back into the chest,

and then pounding so loud that he can hear it from the inside of his ears. A blistering electric surge spreads from his chest through the body toward its peripheries and flees out of his hands and feet. Then he feels his limbs shaking vigorously, his heart still beating hard, the whole body weak and exhausted, and his head full and heavy. His room, which until then had been a protective place, feels suddenly unsafe to him. He has no clue about what has happened inside him. He bursts into tears.

Pablo is a child, and this is the first time he is startled. When the sudden noise strikes him, he undergoes a sequence of bodily feelings, as well as an overall state of insecurity, that he is unable to recognize or describe. He has never had many of these feelings before and lacks the phenomenal concepts that would apply to them. Therefore, he cannot recognize or classify his experience as startle. Nonetheless, he is aware of the feelings that constitute his startle experience. Arguably, he can also introspectively attend to them and thereby apprehend the phenomenology of the emotional experience he is undergoing. He can, for example, mentally *point at* one of its phenomenological aspects and wonder “what is *this*?”, where “this” refers to what he apprehends by attending to his experience. Later, he will be able to *recollect* the experience: “*what I felt* before was terrible!” he may think to himself.

In this case, primitive introspection is not just a necessary step in the introspective process: it is the *only* step our subject can achieve. For since he has never experienced startle, he does not possess the phenomenal concepts that would enable him to interpret that experience and thereby enter a state of reflective introspection. Therefore, Pablo cannot move to reflective introspection (and, a fortiori, he cannot form a descriptive introspective judgment): primitive introspection is the only stage of his introspective process. Nonetheless, even though he cannot classify his experience, Pablo introspectively collects information about its phenomenology. He can deploy such information, for example, to form indexical thoughts about his experience while he is still having it (as when he wonders what *that is*), or to recollect it later.

To be sure, by merely primitively introspecting it, Pablo does not acquire any (propositional) *knowledge* of his current emotion.³⁰ Indeed, primitive introspection is not sufficient to form descriptive judgments and thus acquire knowledge about experiences. However, it is sufficient to acquire some *information* about the phenomenology of experience. Although it does not yet amount to knowledge, the information acquired by Pablo is an essential ground for him to acquire the concept of “startle” and thereby acquire the ability to form judgments and get knowledge of startle experiences in the future. So, even if the Pablo example does not yet feature acquisition of *knowledge* of an emotion, it still illustrates (i) the fact that primitive introspection is sufficient to acquire some information about the phenomenology of a first-time emotion and (ii) the fundamentality of primitive introspection for the acquisition of *future* knowledge about the relevant emotion.

4.4. Encountering a new emotion (2)

JULIETTE

Juliette gets on the bus that will take her and other teenagers to summer camp. As she steps in, her eyes meet the gaze of a dark-haired, brown-eyed boy in the front row. Suddenly, she is hit by a pervading and unknown sensation. Something mysterious and intriguing about that boy strikes her. She feels her heart jumping into her chest. She loses her balance and feels her legs going limp. She

³⁰ Though it may be sufficient to acquire some other kind of knowledge, i.e., knowledge by acquaintance, which may not reduce to propositional knowledge. Here we remain neutral about this issue. Thanks to an anonymous referee for *PPQ* for pressing us on this point.

feels dizzy, as if she were on a merry-go-round. She feels feverish, impatient. Hot flashes pervade her body. As soon as she looks away, she cannot wait for their eyes to meet again. When they do, she feels as if an electrical surge hit her heart and then discharged into the earth through her belly, where she now feels a tingling sensation, as if a swarm of butterflies were frantically fluttering in there. She realizes she cannot stop staring at him. He looks impressive to her. Something very unusual is going on inside her! She cannot tell whether it feels good or bad. It just feels strange, pervasive, and very intense. She blushes as soon as the boy looks at her. She wonders if she is *ashamed*. But she does not feel ashamed—she does not perceive herself as inadequate or contemptible. Is she *afraid* of him? No, she does not feel afraid either—he does not look threatening or dangerous to her. She has no idea what is going on with her!

Juliette cannot recognize the emotion she is undergoing because it is the first time she feels romantic attraction. Nonetheless, she can still introspectively explore the emotional experience that pervades her body and mind. Like Caroline, Arthur, and Pablo, Juliette notices some changes in the phenomenology of her experience, which capture her attention. Unlike Caroline and Arthur, and more similarly to Pablo, she struggles to get a grasp of the experience she undergoes. A few aspects of it are somewhat familiar to her (e.g., hot flashes), but most are not. She is therefore unable to classify her overall emotional experience. In the absence of an immediately identifiable phenomenal concept to describe her emotion, all Juliette can do to make progress on her understanding of it is attend to its phenomenology. Thus, she observes a bunch of novel sensations (electrical surge, tingling in her belly, etc.) and perceptions (e.g., the boy looking impressive to her); she also notes some thoughts and desires passing through her mind (e.g., the desire that her eyes meet again those of the boy). She can also try to relate what she currently feels to experiences she had in the past. Upon feeling herself blushing, for example, she wonders whether she is ashamed, but realizes that she is not, because she does not perceive herself as inadequate or contemptible. Therefore, she goes back to the phenomenology and attends to it more closely. By noticing that the boy appears somewhat intimidating to her, she tentatively classifies her emotion as fear. However, by comparing the memory of previous fear experiences (where the object of fear appeared threatening and dangerous) with what she can currently introspectively attend to (the boy appears somewhat intimidating to her, but not really *threatening* or *dangerous*), she revises her judgment and excludes that she is afraid of the boy. Juliette's introspective inquiry does not deliver a definite judgment. However, its results may constitute the *basis* upon which she can learn how to recognize this emotion in the future. The more familiar phenomenal aspects she was able to identify and label can constitute the ground for *communicating* her feelings to other people who, by comparing her reports with their own past experiences and integrating information about the circumstances in which those feelings arose, may suggest to Juliette a label for her new emotion.

Juliette's introspective inquiry relies heavily on primitive introspection. Since she has never felt romantic attraction before, she cannot recognize her current emotion. Accordingly, the non-classificatory state of primitive introspection is predominant in her inquiry. To be sure, there are some aspects of the phenomenology she *can* recognize (e.g., hot flashes). But when it comes to the many aspects she *cannot* recognize, all she can do is introspect them non-classificatorily (i.e., via primitive introspection) and try to collect information about their phenomenology. Such information may constitute the ground for the acquisition of *new* phenomenal concepts. On the basis of what she *can* recognize, Juliette puts forward some tentative classifications (shame, fear). To check their adequacy, she needs to pay closer attention to the phenomenology and collect the information that enables her to compare her current experience with the experience-type denoted by the phenomenal concepts featuring in the tentative classification. To accomplish this task, information-collection itself has to be non-classificatory; for if the task is to check whether a given

classification is adequate, the introspective act through which the task is pursued cannot itself rely on such classification. So, primitive introspection also features in this stage of Juliette's introspective process. When she realizes the inadequacy of her tentative classification, Juliette draws her attention back toward the phenomenology of her experience, to try and find a better characterization. Again, she needs to introspect her experience primitively and non-classificatorily collect information about its phenomenology.

4.5. Introspection of a "cold" emotion

CHARLIE

Charlie is walking through the Galerie Neue Meister. Suddenly, Otto Dix's *The War* captures her gaze. The painting appears impressive to her. As she lingers on its gloomy details, a disturbing feeling grows within her. Some parts of the painting look disgusting, some distressing, some horrifying. She cannot stop thinking about its violence and striking realism. At the same time, she feels as if the painting was imprisoning her gaze: she cannot help keeping looking at it with awe. She certainly does not find it *beautiful*—as instead she did with Hokusai's *Big Wave of Kanagawa*. Still, the seeing of that painting brings about in her an undefinable sense of admiration.³¹

Charlie is young and inexperienced of art. She had some experiences of aesthetic admiration in the past—e.g., when she experienced the beauty of Hokusai's *Big Wave of Kanagawa*—but never of the kind that is elicited by distressing paintings like *The War*. As she focuses on her experience, she can immediately recognize the salient and disturbing aspects of it: the painting appears horrifying, distressing, and violent. She also singles out a feeling of approval or attraction toward the painting, but she cannot make a more specific assessment of it. She certainly experiences aesthetic admiration. However, her understanding of that experience is very coarse-grained: she cannot form a fine-grained judgment about the determinate type of admiration she experiences. She can compare this experience with her memory of her past experience of the *Big Wave*, and judge that both involve felt approval and attraction, but are also importantly dissimilar, in ways she is yet unable to spell out conceptually. She has discovered a new kind of admiration experience—one directed toward horrifying and violent pieces of art.

As before, even classification of the easily recognizable phenomenal aspects needs to rely on primitive introspection: Charlie needs to draw her introspective attention to the experience—to the way the painting and its details appear to her and to the feeling of discomfort they provoke in her—and get information about its phenomenology, on the basis of which she can perform a more fine-grained classification (*looking horrifying, violent, etc.*). When it comes to the positive and less salient aspect of the experience, Charlie can only classify it in a coarse-grained way—in terms of felt attraction, or general sense of admiration. However, the phenomenology she can grasp via introspective attention is much more detailed and complex—she can tell that it is a specific kind of admiration experience, one that is different from any other admiration experience she had in the past. Primitive introspection provides her with information about the specific kind of experience she is undergoing, which she can deploy in the future to enrich her knowledge and understanding of different kinds of admiration experience.

³¹ This example is partly inspired by Mitchell (2020a, 2020b).

5. Conclusion

As it emerges from the previous section's examples, primitive introspection plays a fundamental role in getting knowledge or understanding of one's own emotions. For one thing, it constitutes an unavoidable preliminary stage of the inquiry, since it is required to collect the information that is necessary to classify and therefore describe and form judgments about one's emotional experience. For this reason, it features in the introspective process even in cases (like Caroline's) where the subject recognizes their own emotion almost immediately. For another thing, it plays an essential role in introspective inquiries aimed at *deepening* or *improving* one's knowledge or understanding of one's emotion. Like in the cases of Arthur, Juliette, and Charlie, primitive introspection may be appealed to at subsequent times throughout the introspective inquiry, to check, correct, or refine some tentative or coarse-grained classifications attempted by the subject. Finally, it may even constitute the *only* stage of introspective inquiry that can be achieved by a subject if, for example, they are unable to provide any classification of the introspected experience (as in Pablo's case).

Against the widespread deflationary and skeptical attitude towards introspection, we tried to revendicate the central role of introspection (in particular, of primitive introspection) for the acquisition of at least some self-knowledge (self-knowledge of emotional experiences). Of course, as noted, primitive introspection *alone* is not sufficient to ground one's knowledge or understanding of one's own emotions. As illustrated by our examples, subjects typically need to appeal to a variety of processes and methods (especially memory, but also behavior observation, inference, testimony, etc.) to form introspective judgments about their emotional experiences. However, we hope to have shown that primitive introspection constitutes a *necessary* stage of the introspective inquiry through which such knowledge or understanding is achieved.³²

³² We are very much grateful to Uriah Kriegel for his thorough and generous comments on a previous draft of this paper. The paper also benefitted from comments by two anonymous referees for *PPQ*.

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