

# Emotional Intentionality

MATTHEW RATCLIFFE

## Abstract

This paper sketches an account of what distinguishes emotional intentionality from other forms of intentionality. I focus on the ‘two-sided’ structure of emotional experience. Emotions such as being afraid of something and being angry about something involve intentional states with specific contents. However, experiencing an entity, event, or situation in a distinctively emotional way also includes a wider-ranging disturbance of the experiential world within which the object of emotion is encountered. I consider the nature of this disturbance and its relationship to the localized content of an emotional experience.

## 1. Introduction

It is fairly uncontroversial to maintain that some or all emotions either are intentional states or at least incorporate intentional states. However, there is disagreement concerning the nature of emotional intentionality. One could argue that emotions are composed of other types of intentional states, perhaps some combination of beliefs, desires, perceptions, and/or bodily feelings (where the latter are construed as intentional states directed at one’s own body). But an alternative view, which seems to be gaining in popularity, is that emotions incorporate a *sui generis* form of affective intentionality. I will develop a version of this latter view, with specific reference to *human emotional experience*.<sup>1</sup>

I will assume, from the outset, that contrasts between the ‘feeling’ aspect of emotion and the world-directed intentionality of emotion are misplaced. Many bodily feelings are themselves intentional and their objects are not restricted to one’s own bodily states. Several philosophers have offered largely complementary formulations of this position.<sup>2</sup> In my own work, I have argued that it is *through our*

<sup>1</sup> I am concerned with whether and how emotional intentionality differs from non-emotional forms of intentionality. I will not address the further issue of whether types of emotions can be distinguished from one another by appealing to one or another variant of emotional intentionality.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, M. Stocker and E. Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); P. Goldie, ‘Emotions,

*feeling bodies* that we experience things emotionally, in a manner analogous to tactual perception of entities that are external to one's body and sometimes at a distance from it.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, I have come to suspect that the whole debate over whether emotions are feelings, cognitive judgments, a mixture of the two, or intentional states of some other type (e.g. perceptions) has been something of a distraction. To characterize emotions plausibly in terms of 'judgment' requires postulating a form of judgment that could equally be termed a 'feeling', and vice versa. So there is the risk of descending into a largely terminological dispute, one that eclipses other important aspects of emotional experience.<sup>4</sup> Whichever term we adopt, we are left with something that is, at best, necessary but not sufficient for distinctively *emotional* experience. Every experience of every situation involves evaluations of a kind that could be characterized in terms of world-directed feeling, evaluative judgment, or – for those who dislike both feelings and judgments – affectively charged perception. For instance, my computer keyboard and the pile of notes next to it are currently experienced as significant, as mattering to me in a particular way, given my ongoing attempt to write an academic paper. But I am not 'emotional' at the moment, at least not in a way that could be contrasted with an 'unemotional' frame of mind. So, if the difference between an emotional and an unemotional experience is qualitative in nature (and I will argue that it is), rather than merely

---

Feelings and Intentionality', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002), 235–254; S. A. Döring, 'Seeing What to Do: Affective Perception and Rational Motivation', *Dialectica* 61 (2007), 363–394; J. Slaby, 'Affective Intentionality and the Feeling Body', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008), 429–444; B. W. Helm, 'Emotions as Evaluative Feelings', *Emotion Review* 1 (2009), 248–255; G. Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2014); J. A. Deonna and F. Teroni, 'Emotions as Attitudes', *Dialectica* 69 (2015), 293–311; R. Furtak, *Knowing Emotions: Truthfulness and Recognition in Affective Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, M. Ratcliffe, 'The Feeling of Being', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12: 8–10 (2005), 43–60; *Feelings of Being: Phenomenology, Psychiatry and the Sense of Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Experiences of Depression: A Study in Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of this point, see M. Ratcliffe, 'Grief and the Unity of Emotion', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41 (2017), 154–174.

a matter of degrees, it is something that appeals to judgment, feeling, and/or perception fail to pin down.

I accept that all experiences are plausibly riddled with one or another form of 'affective intentionality'.<sup>5</sup> However, I am concerned with something more specific; I want to pinpoint a type of intentionality that distinguishes *emotional episodes* of whatever duration from other forms of experience (or at least distinguishes *many* of those experiences we tend to label as 'emotions' from other experiences). What renders emotional episodes distinctive is not just an evaluative feeling, perception, judgment, or appraisal, directed at some state of affairs. In what follows, I will address two additional aspects of emotional experience: (a) the manner in which emotion incorporates a wider network of concerns; (b) the dynamic structure of emotion. My central claim is that emotional intentionality has a distinctive 'two-sided' structure. To experience something emotionally is also to experience a potential or actual disturbance of the experiential world *within* which the object of one's emotion is encountered. This disturbance is not a localized experiential content but something that is more diffuse in nature and harder to pin down. It involves habitual ways of experiencing, anticipating, and acting, which are more usually taken for granted by our thoughts, experiences, and activities.

Disturbances of world are essentially dynamic, involving processes of varying duration, which are often experienced *as* processes. Given that the localized object of an emotion destabilizes a wider context *through which* that object is experienced and understood, emotions are often riddled with tensions. These can be subtle or more pronounced. In extreme cases, they are sometimes expressed in terms of an event not making sense, seeming impossible, or not feeling real. I will also show how this dynamic can incorporate a disruption of rational thought. When one's world is disturbed, relationships of implication that are embedded *in the world* and ordinarily presupposed by linguistic thought can break down, in ways that people often struggle to express. With this, there is a distinctive form of uncertainty concerning how to proceed.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, I have considered other types of affective experiences in detail, in particular those that I call 'existential feelings' (see my 'The Feeling of Being'; *Feelings of Being; Experiences of Depression*). But what I have not done is address the standard emotion categories that philosophers and others more usually focus on. This paper is my preliminary attempt to plug the gap.

<sup>6</sup> Although my focus throughout is on the nature of human emotional experience, some of the points I make could be translated into

## 2. The Structure of Emotion

There is general consensus among philosophers that, when we experience something emotionally, we detect its value, significance, practical meaning, or importance to us. It is often stated or implied that such properties are somehow *experienced* (which need not entail that the relevant experience is more specifically *perceptual* in nature). Furthermore, they are experienced as integral to the intentional object of emotion: the rampaging bull appears frightening; the film appears exciting. This might give the impression that *emotional* ways of experiencing things are phenomenologically localized: a particular object of emotion is imbued with certain evaluative properties. I do not dispute that something like this is right. However, it should be added that how something is experienced as mattering to me also reflects a wider set of cares and concerns. To offer a straightforward example, my being afraid of the rampaging bull is symptomatic of the fact that I care about my survival.

What exactly are these ‘concerns’; how, if at all, do they enter into an emotional experience; and how do they relate to a concrete object of emotion? In the philosophical literature, there are various attempts to address such questions. One of the most developed accounts is that of Bennett Helm.<sup>7</sup> He distinguishes between the target of an emotion, the formal object, and what he calls the ‘focus’. The target (or concrete object) might be a raging bull charging in one’s direction, where the formal object would be threat. But what about the focus? Emotions, Helm suggests, consist of ‘intentional feelings of import’.<sup>8</sup> By import, he means the way in which an object of emotion relates to one’s pre-established values. It is only in the light of those values that the object (target) possesses one or another evaluative property. In the case of the bull, I value my life, my bodily integrity, and the avoidance of pain. And so it appears threatening. The presupposed value is what Helm refers to as the ‘focus’ of the emotion. In his words, the focus is ‘a background object having import that is related to the target in such a way as to

---

non-phenomenological talk of *salience-detection* or *affordance* and associated goals of the organism. In that form, they could also be applied to the emotional lives of non-human organisms.

<sup>7</sup> See Helm, ‘Emotions as Evaluative Feelings’; ‘Love, Identification, and the Emotions’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46 (2009), 39–59.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Emotions as Evaluative Feelings’, 249.

make intelligible the target's having the evaluative property defined by the formal object'.<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, Helm makes clear that the relationship between emotions and their foci is to be construed holistically. A given focus, such as valuing my life, implies a range of emotional responses to events, which knit together in rational patterns: if one values *p*, then one ought to fear *q*, experience relief at *r*, and so forth. The foci around which emotional responses cluster are likewise holistically organized. This 'rational structure of values', Helm adds, is 'constitutive of one's identity'.<sup>10</sup> So, to summarize, the focus of an emotion can be conceived of as a web of interconnected values, relative to which something takes on a certain kind of significance. To the extent that these values hang together, a human life has coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness.

Others have couched compatible points in terms of 'concern'. For instance, Frijda maintains that emotions are responses to events that impact on our concerns, and Roberts takes emotions to be 'concern-based construals' of objects and situations.<sup>11</sup> The focus-target relationship is also referred to in various other ways. For instance, Nussbaum emphasizes how emotions reveal the manner in which things are 'salient' to our 'well-being', while Ben-Ze'ev observes that registering something as significant involves relating it to '*a certain background framework*'.<sup>12</sup> Glas conceives of the relationship in terms of 'self-reference', thus emphasizing the 'double intentionality' of emotions - how they are directed at concrete objects and simultaneously at the self. Emotions, he says, reflect a concern for the

<sup>9</sup> 'Emotions as Evaluative Feelings', 251.

<sup>10</sup> 'Love, Identification, and the Emotions', 48. For a discussion of holism, see also Helm, *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Others similarly endorse the view that emotional values are holistic. For instance, in *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, revised edition, 1976/1993), Robert Solomon suggests that emotions involve not simply evaluative judgments but systems of judgments. Ronald De Sousa likewise endorses 'axiological holism' ('Emotional Truth', *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 76 (2002), 247–263).

<sup>11</sup> N. H. Frijda, *The Laws of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2007/2013); R. C. Roberts, 'What an Emotion is: a Sketch', *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988), 183–209.

<sup>12</sup> M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19; A. Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2000), 19.

survival and integrity of the self. They are self-referential, in ways that we do not always have explicit insight into.<sup>13</sup> In other words, they do or at least can tell us something about ourselves – what we care about; how coherent our concerns are. In what follows, I will address the manner in which this ‘focus’ or ‘self-referential’ aspect of an emotion features in emotional experience. I will suggest that it is experienced neither as an internal state of the subject nor as an evaluative property adhering to some entity or situation within the world. Rather, for the most part, it is integral to a wider *experiential world* that operates as a backdrop to our various experiences, thoughts, and activities.

However, this alone does not suffice to pin down the distinctive structure of emotional intentionality. To do so, we need to introduce a further theme that several philosophers have picked up on: the sophisticated, dynamic structure of emotion, something that should not to be set apart from rational thought. As Nussbaum suggests, an emotion is an intelligent process, one that ‘moves, embraces, refuses’. An emotional ‘upheaval’ is not opposed to reason – it is the recognition of something, a way of engaging with and making sense of one’s situation.<sup>14</sup> Consistent with this dynamism, it can be added that certain token emotions and also certain types of emotions are not momentary eruptions but temporally extended processes. For instance, grief and guilt can both persist indefinitely, and their persistence does not demand the constant presence of any particular feeling or other experiential quality. Somehow, they endure from time A to time B to time C, even if the experiences occurring at

<sup>13</sup> G. Glas, ‘Dimensions of the Self in Emotion and Psychopathology: Consequences for Self-Management in Anxiety and Depression’, *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 24 (2017), 143–155, 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Upheavals of Thought*, 45. Solomon likewise places an emphasis on the dynamic quality of emotion. An emotion, he says, is not simply a judgment or system of judgments; it is a ‘purposive attempt to structure our world’ (*The Passions*, xvii). Later, he writes that emotions are ‘engagements with the world’, which are not evaluative presentations of concrete objects but ways of being ‘entangled’ in the world. See, for example, his ‘Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings: Emotions as Engagements with the World’, in R. C. Solomon (ed.), *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76–88. For an emphasis on emotions as temporally extended engagements with one’s surroundings, see also J. Slaby and P. Wüschner, ‘Emotion and Agency’, in S. Roeser and C. Todd, (eds) *Emotion and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212–228.

these three times have little or nothing in common with one another.<sup>15</sup>

I will now show how we can unite the themes of (a) the focus of emotion, (b) the dynamics of emotional experience, and (c) the temporally extended structure of certain emotions, in order to formulate an account of what it is that makes emotional intentionality distinctive. Emotional intentionality, I will suggest, incorporates a dynamic between the focus and the concrete object of emotion, where the object is experienced *through* an evaluative framework but also destabilizes that same framework. To varying degrees and in different ways, emotions undermine the context, the world, within which they arise.

### 3. The World of Emotion

Emotional experience of a given object ordinarily involves a sense of its actual or potential impact on something one cares about in some way.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, an explicit object of emotion can undermine the very structure through which one evaluates and engages with it. There is a circular process of varying subtlety, complexity, and duration, whereby an object of emotion disturbs the context in which it is evaluated, in a manner that feeds into one's ongoing experience of that object. This aspect of emotion has not gone entirely unnoticed. For instance, Pugmire remarks on how an emotion can 'reconstitute its prevailing setting', while Ben-Ze'ev writes, 'Emotions indicate a transition in which the preceding context has changed, but no new context has yet stabilized'. However, to my knowledge, nobody has addressed the relevant dynamic in any detail.<sup>17</sup>

The backdrop to a localized emotional evaluation is experienced neither as a state of oneself nor as a situation within a pre-given

<sup>15</sup> See P. Goldie, *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, and the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ratcliffe, 'Grief and the Unity of Emotion'.

<sup>16</sup> I use the term 'object' to mean the 'concrete object of an emotional experience' - what the emotion is about. It thus encompasses entities, events, and situations - past, present, anticipated, and imagined.

<sup>17</sup> D. Pugmire, *Sound Sentiments: Integrity in the Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42; Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions*, 33. In *The Passions* and elsewhere, Solomon also considers the relevant aspect of experience. However, he does not draw a clear distinction between the evaluation of something, the background to that evaluation, and the way in which the two interact, sometimes referring to all of them as 'emotions' and as 'judgments' or 'systems of judgments'.

world. For the most part, it is etched into the world, into a realm within which we already find ourselves when we think that  $p$ , evaluate  $q$ , believe that  $r$ , or perceive  $s$ . Numerous intersecting patterns of activity and associated relationships of practical implication are specified by this world; they are habitually engrained into our experienced surroundings like trails through a forest. To make this clearer, I will focus specifically on experiences of grief. I will go on to suggest that a distinctive type of interaction between the explicit object of emotion and its wider context, although especially salient in the case of grief, also characterizes emotional experiences more generally.

While working on an earlier paper about grief, I was struck by the following sentence from an autobiographical account by Joyce Carol Oates: ‘Strange to consider that there would be a *home*, now -without my husband- a *home* to which to take his *belongings*’.<sup>18</sup> How should we interpret this? What is at least clear is that grief can involve a profound, pervasive, and prolonged disturbance of one’s life. In her own first-person reflections on grief, Nussbaum describes this as follows:

When I receive the knowledge of my mother’s death, the wrenching character of that knowledge comes in part from the fact that it violently tears the fabric of hope, planning, and expectation that I have built up around her all my life. But when the knowledge of her death has been with me for a long time, I reorganize my other beliefs about the present and future to accord with it.<sup>19</sup>

What does this ‘fabric’ consist of? I do not think it can be principally propositional or linguistic in nature. As the quotation from Oates seems to indicate, it is something that is more usually presupposed by practically-engaged linguistic thought and associated activities. The emotional recognition that a particular person has died occurs against a backdrop of interconnected, habitual activities and patterns of thought. These depend for their intelligibility on variably integrated cares, commitments, and concerns. For some of us, the majority of these activities and underlying concerns relate to a particular person in one or another way: I do these things for her; I look forward to coming home where she will greet me; we do this together in order to realize something that we care about; we can achieve these things together; I cook dinner for us; dinner is something we eat together. The intelligibility of various activities thus depends on one’s relationship to that person. Suppose one habitually does  $p$  in order to

<sup>18</sup> *A Widow’s Story* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 65.

<sup>19</sup> *Upheavals of Thought*, 80.



further value  $q$ . Where the possibility of  $q$  depends on a given person, so does the intelligibility of doing  $p$ , along with associated thoughts about doing  $p$  and inclinations to do  $p$ .

Now consider how the word 'home' is ordinarily used. Although I doubt that we could formulate a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a person's 'home', we can at least acknowledge various connotations that are ordinarily associated with use of the word, including the likes of familiarity, safety, security, comfort, privacy, and family. Equipped with such a list, we can formulate a generic statement along the lines of 'home includes  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ ', where the relevant properties do not relate to anyone in particular. However, when I talk of 'my home',  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  have a more specific, concrete form: the security of returning to a particular person, and the familiarity of certain routines involving that person. Hence, when one says 'I am going home', what one means by 'home' has a particularity to it, a self-referential aspect.

Granted, this aspect is not always at the forefront when one mentions home. When one says, 'I've had enough; I'm going home', one could equally say, albeit rather inelegantly, 'I have had enough of a given social situation and am retreating to my private residence'. In other instances, though, 'homeliness' is more central to one's meaning: 'I just want to be back home'. It is here that tensions arise between the fact of someone's death and the utterance 'I am going home'. Certain of one's experiences, thoughts, and activities continue to presuppose a practically meaningful world, one that has been sculpted by habitual concerns. One also registers, within that world, the death of a particular person. And the significance of what has happened undermines the very habitual framework *through which* it is recognized as significant. The utterance 'I am going home' retains something of its meaning: I can still retreat to my private residence. However, when other connotations of 'home' are more contextually salient, there is an experience of conflict, even contradiction: 'my partner has died and I need to withdraw to the safe place that I share with my partner'. So the utterance is not outright false or incoherent. Even so, there is a tension. In one sense, it is true; in another, it is self-contradictory. And this tension is experienced. Seemingly contradictory but still meaningful sentences can thus be constructed, such as 'I'm going home now, although it's not a home really – not now', or even 'my home is not my home anymore'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I take Ronald De Sousa to be addressing this aspect of emotion, or at least something like it, when he remarks: 'That standard truth-bearers are

Meaning-erosion of this kind is not exclusive to explicitly indexical language and can be much more widespread. There is a kind of self-referentiality implicit in much of our everyday discourse. For instance, it might seem that you and I mean exactly the same thing when we say 'Hyde Park is nice'. However, where Hyde Park has a web of idiosyncratic associations for you, involving a particular person who has died, you may experience much the same tension: 'Hyde Park is nice? How can this be the same *Hyde Park* after what has happened?' Whether and to what extent this form of 'affective self-reference' is at play in an utterance can seldom be determined by propositional content alone. The experienced tension between an event and a habitual framework that conflicts with it is therefore difficult to detect and to convey.

This kind of tension is not specific to spoken and written language, or even to linguistic thought. In the case of grief, one's relationship with a particular person is subtly implicated in the significant properties that entities in the surrounding environment are experienced as having, in associated practically salient possibilities, in familiar configurations of equipment and accompanying practices, and in habitual patterns of thought. So the full recognition that this person has died is also the recognition that something is lost from the world as a whole, that certain things no longer make sense. The emotional evaluation undermines the backdrop against which it arises. It is not that something is *instantly* lost from one's world. Rather, because a profound change in how one habitually experiences and engages with things cannot occur instantly (something I take to be a contingent truth about human psychology), there is a kind of incomprehension: I recognize something of the import of what has happened, but how could it be so when I still inhabit a world with which it is incompatible? Relevant events can therefore seem somehow incomprehensible, unfathomable. The gradual recognition of something's full import illustrates the incompleteness of an initial, perhaps largely propositional, acceptance.

Consider the following passage, from Act Five, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Othello*:

If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife –  
My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.

---

digital representations helps to explain the grain of truth in the often expressed anxiety about the distortion of reality introduced by abstractions. Abstraction is, by definition, a process of pruning details, of ignoring certain distinctions and aspects of reality' ('Emotional Truth', 262).

O insupportable! O heavy hour!  
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration.

One of the things that makes this moment so shocking is the dawning recognition by Othello that 'I have killed my wife', his growing sense of the import of his deed. It is not simply that he has trouble updating a holistic network of propositional beliefs that include 'Desdemona is alive'. A world that he took for granted was imbued with the potential presence of Desdemona. There is a conflict between what he has done and the context of its occurrence. As with 'I'm going home; I have no home', we have 'she'll speak to my wife; I have no wife'. The world endures but cannot be sustained; entrenched structures that rendered intelligible all activity and practical thought are gone. In Othello's case, perhaps there is also a growing recognition that the emotions motivating his deed were somehow shallow by comparison. He did not, in killing Desdemona, recognize the full significance of his deeds, what a world without her amounted to, what it meant to murder his wife. This is an especially extreme and horrifying example of a distinctively *emotional* type of error. One imagines doing  $p$  and considers its various consequences, but continues to obliviously presuppose a stable world as a backdrop to the imagined repercussions of  $p$ . Without living through the relevant emotions at the time, one does not recognize that doing  $p$  will impact on the integrity of that world. So one does  $p$  and, on some occasions at least, faces unanticipated turmoil.

In the case of an especially profound emotional upheaval, of the kind that demands radical revision of entrenched practice, one is confronted with the inadequacy of practically-oriented thought. Relations of the form 'if  $p$  occurs, then  $q$  will be achieved, thus contributing to  $r$ ' no longer apply. As with 'home',  $p$  and  $q$  often have a self-referential rather than generic character. The relations between various concepts and propositions depend on circumstances particular to one's own life. Bereft of those circumstances, one cannot mean quite the same things by them anymore, and so they no longer relate to one another in the ways they did. Hence relations of dependence and implication that were presupposed by one's thought and practice no longer hold, amounting to a profound and distinctive form of uncertainty. There is no way of specifying how to go on, what is to be done. It is analogous to writing '1, 2, 3, 4' and then being struck by the revelation that nothing specifies what comes next; the rules don't apply anymore. This is an inevitable consequence of

structuring one's relationship with a changeable world through sets of concerns that are both intricate and more stable. The two can come apart, such that the latter no longer apply. When this happens, certain patterns of reasoning no longer have a foothold. As Maclaren observes, also in relation to profound grief:

In this kind of grief, we can find not reiterations and recapitulations of old, sedimented meanings and ways of seeing, but rather a genuine openness and vulnerability. The bereaved is not simply asking an isolated question; his very life has become a question.<sup>21</sup>

This is not a matter of 'irrationality', construed as something to be contrasted with an alternative, rational response to the same situation. Rather, it is an unavoidable feature of practical reason. We do not think within the confines of a stable, fully determinate experiential world. Something that explicit linguistic thoughts and mundane experiences presuppose is forever in flux, usually in subtle ways but sometimes more dramatically. And this is what singles out emotional intentionality. While believing that *p*, perceiving *q*, remembering *r*, and various other intentional attitudes operate within a pre-made world (or at least many tokens of those types of attitudes), emotional intentionality has a two-sided structure, where the world in which we encounter the object of emotion is itself in transition, in a manner that is inextricable from how that object is experienced.

Although I have focused principally on grief (which, of course, does not exhaust the emotional predicament of Othello), the same general observation applies to other types of emotion as well: there is a dynamic between evaluative experiences of concrete objects and the contexts that these evaluations both presuppose and reshape. This can be much more subtle and fairly mundane. In such cases, the disruption to one's world is also usually more localized and short-lived. There is also a distinction to be drawn between potential and actual disturbances. Whereas grief concerns something that has actually happened and cannot be reversed, dreading some event involves something that has not yet occurred, which will or might disrupt one's world in a certain way. Nevertheless, *potential* disruptions are also *actual* disruptions. Even the possibility of an event can throw habitual routines into question: one can no longer take things as given in the way one did. For instance, the prospect of having an airport runway built next to one's house is sufficient to

<sup>21</sup> K. Maclaren, 'Emotional Clichés and Authentic Passions: a Phenomenological Revision of a Cognitive Theory of Emotion', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 10 (2011) 45–65, 60.

erode the sense of being at home, with all of the subtle tensions that this involves. Other emotions involve relief from actual or potential disturbances. But, here too, tensions are evident between the localized content of the experience and its context: 'I still can't believe I don't have to worry about it anymore'; 'it's really over – I have to keep saying that to myself'; 'I keep pinching myself to make sure it's not a dream'.<sup>22</sup> Hence, with a few qualifications, what I have said accommodates a wide range of emotions, including the more 'positive' ones.

The full content of an emotional experience therefore eludes us if we inadvertently conceive of emotions as localized evaluative attitudes that arise within the context of a stable, pre-given experiential world. What makes emotional experience distinctive is its two-sidedness: the significance attached to an experienced object destabilizes the context in which it is experienced as significant. To this, I add a further proposal: In the majority of cases, it is not the emotion itself that disrupts. Rather, an emotional process is the manner in which disruption of one's habitual world is acknowledged and, importantly, negotiated. Emotions maintain, actively revise, and repair the world that we find ourselves in when we perceive *p*, remember *q*, belief *r*, or desire *s*. So they are not contrary to reason but integral to a broader 'rationality'; they manage and sustain a structured realm of the kind that reason requires in order to operate.

#### 4. Depth of Emotional Feeling

I have suggested that emotional experience incorporates a distinctive type of interaction between a concrete object of emotion and a backdrop against which it is encountered. I now want to say a bit more about the structure of the experience and, in particular, about how far the role of emotional *feeling* extends. Emotions are often conceived of as episodic and brief reactions to events. For instance, Klaus Scherer

<sup>22</sup> One might think that the distinction between actual and anticipated disruptions tracks the distinction between factive and epistemic emotions, where the former are directed at what is the case and the latter at what is to come. For this distinction, see R. Gordon, *The Structure of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). However, the phenomenological differences between the two are not so clear-cut. Emotional responses to events that have occurred implicate future possibilities in all sorts of ways, and emotional anticipation also involves a change in how one relates to an actual situation.

## Matthew Ratcliffe

defines an emotion ‘as an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes’, which respond to ‘an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism’. He adds that these changes involve a number of different organismic systems and, furthermore, that the burden this places on the organism means that emotions can only be sustained for very short periods of time:

Given the importance of the eliciting event, which disrupts the flow of behavior, all or most of the subsystems of the organism must contribute to response preparation. The resulting massive mobilization of resources must be coordinated, a process which can be described as response synchronization... their duration must be relatively short in order not to tax the resources of the organism and to allow behavioral flexibility.<sup>23</sup>

I agree that emotions are responses to issues of concern. But it is a mistake, in the human case, to conceive of the majority as brief, episodic responses. Unlike a dog or a cat, the ways in which worldly events matter to us reflect complicated networks of long-term cares, commitments, and projects, which intersect with one another to varying degrees. Given the complexity of this structure, combined with how our concerns stretch out into an indefinite future, shaping our activities for years to come, certain happenings cannot be navigated swiftly. They imply profound disruptions, of a kind that can only be fully acknowledged and negotiated over a prolonged period. Hence, if we are concerned specifically with human emotions, it is a mistake to emphasize short-term responses. The structure of human emotion reflects the structure of the human world. In many cases, such as that of grief, human emotions are better thought of as prolonged processes.<sup>24</sup> The integrity of these processes does not depend on the endurance of a specific feeling or ‘*quale*’. The disturbance itself is unitary in nature, impacting on various different aspects of one’s world in virtue of relationships of dependence and implication. Consequently, we can construe the emotional negotiation of this disturbance as a unitary process. So an emotion such as grief, guilt, or joy can be temporally extended, even though the experiences that are constitutive of it may vary considerably from one moment to the next. Those experiences remain part of a dynamic whole, with a distinctive two-sided structure.

<sup>23</sup> ‘What are Emotions? And How Can They Be Measured?’, *Social Science Information* 44 (2005) 695–729, 697, 701–2.

<sup>24</sup> See Goldie, *The Mess Inside*.

How much of this can be attributed more specifically to emotional *feeling*? Suppose we accept that the initial evaluation of an event involves an evaluative feeling towards it. Surely, one might think, this same feeling cannot also include a sense of its own inadequacy, a recognition that the evaluation in question does not yet register the full impact of the event on one's life. My response, in short, is that it can – a feeling can point beyond itself, embodying the recognition that 'there is more to come'. To better understand this, it is helpful to consider the notion of emotional 'depth'. Some emotions are said to be deeper than other. Furthermore, these emotions are sometimes experienced *as deep* or profound. This, I suggest, is closely tied to the recognition that something has to *sink in*, that it will take time, that there is a greater upheaval to come.

Consider a conception of depth developed by David Pugmire.<sup>25</sup> Consistent with what I have said so far, Pugmire associates the depth or profundity of an emotion with the extent to which its object impacts on one's concerns. Those concerns are structured; some are more fundamental than others and there are multi-layered relationships of dependence. So a life ordinarily has an 'architecture', a structure that can be impacted upon by events to varying degrees and in different ways.<sup>26</sup> Emotional depth is symptomatic of how integrated a person's concerns are, coupled with the extent to which an experienced event impacts on those concerns. It can thus be distinguished from intensity. The experience associated with riding a roller coaster might be intense but it does not usually imply a change in the structure of one's life, unlike – say – the receipt of tragic news. Pugmire adds that one must also judge that the relevant scenario really is the case and also that, for an emotion to be genuinely deep rather than just taken to be deep, the experienced significance of events must match their actual significance.<sup>27</sup> Hence the actual depth of an emotion is determined in part by factors external to the relevant experience.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, I have developed a different conception of affective depth, one that applies instead to what I call 'existential feelings' (Ratcliffe, *Experiences of Depression*).

<sup>26</sup> *Sound Sentiments*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> In *Sound Sentiments*, Pugmire also identifies another type of case, which I will not address here, where an emotion is experienced as irrevocably inadequate to an object of emotion, as in certain religious experiences.

<sup>28</sup> Some types of emotion are always deep (or at least ordinarily deep), as with grief, while some tokens of other types are deeper than others, as with the difference between being angry at someone who pushes past you on the street and being angry with someone who has just run over your dog for fun.

For current purposes, I want to focus on experienced depth or, more specifically, the experience *of* depth, regardless of its veridicality. This, I suggest, can be construed as a dimension of emotional feeling; it need not involve a complex of judgments that trace out the implications of an event for a life. The emotional feeling only has to point to something; it does not need to embody a comprehensive grasp of it. What it points to are patterns of unraveling and, in some cases, their potential avoidance. My proposal is that certain emotional feelings embody a non-propositional form of anticipation, a variably determinate sense of how something will or might impact on one's life. In addressing this aspect of experience, I find it helpful to draw on themes in the later work of Edmund Husserl, who addresses how experience has a non-propositional anticipatory structure, incorporating relationships of implication that differ in kind from propositional implication.<sup>29</sup> Affectivity, for Husserl, has its own distinctive kind of 'lawfulness', involving patterns of unfolding anticipation and their experienced negation or fulfilment.<sup>30</sup> Something like this applies here. Granted, whether and how a certain event will impact upon one's world is not always recognized or felt immediately. Sometimes, even the initial recognition takes time. Nevertheless, on many occasions, there is an immediate recognition that something will have profound repercussions; that the habitual patterns of one's world will unravel; that the process has begun. So the feeling points not only to an object of emotion but also towards the world in which it is encountered. What I currently *feel* is not fully captured by the content of a given moment. A feeling of depth is the signaling of a route; it is more like a sign towards something than a map of it.<sup>31</sup> And that sign can be more or less accurate. There is an analogy here with tip-of-the-tongue experiences; the feeling points to something - it is coming, and the determinate content that then

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks (London: Routledge, 1948/1973); *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. A. J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion, see J. Rump, 'The Epistemic Import of Affectivity: a Husserlian Account', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41 (2017), 82–104.

<sup>31</sup> Hence Jesse Prinz gets something right when he suggests that an emotion can represent something without embodying the full content of what it represents, although the specifics of our accounts are in other respects quite different. See his *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).



appears conforms to what was anticipated. Nevertheless, that content was not already *contained* in the anticipatory feeling.

I concede that explicit conceptual appraisals and reappraisals play a role too, but they are not essential to a feeling of depth, to the sense that one's current experience of an event or situation impacts upon its context, in ways that may signal the onset of a prolonged emotional process. With this, one's current emotional experience can incorporate a sense of its being inadequate to the moment, something that will be transformed, surpassed. Consequently, it is possible to experience the procession of feelings as a singular process, an unfolding pattern of anticipation and realization. If emotional feeling is instead conceived of solely as a way in which a determinate object is experienced, then the account remains importantly incomplete. What we are left with is an abstraction from a much larger experience, where the whole can just as plausibly be described as 'felt'. The emotional feeling is itself two-sided.<sup>32</sup>

### 5. The Distinctiveness of Emotional Intentionality

I have argued that, if the term 'emotion' is associated simply with some conception of how we detect salience or experience value, the resulting account is too permissive to pinpoint the distinctive intentionality of occurrent emotion. This applies regardless of whether we appeal to appraisals, judgments, feelings, perceptions, or any other type of intentional state with a circumscribed content. Emotions also involve actual or potential revision of the world within which we feel, believe, perceive, and judge, and within which various propositions and their interrelations are intelligible against a backdrop of habitual cares and concerns.

The account I have sketched here is to be reserved for emotional 'ruptures', involving actual or anticipated scenarios. This is largely consistent with everyday usage of the term 'emotion'. It also serves to identify a distinctive category of experience, one that plays a

<sup>32</sup> We can add that the actual negotiation-process may recruit a much wider range of cognitive abilities. For instance, narrative capacity can have an important role to play in comprehending and negotiating emotional ruptures. See Goldie, *The Mess Inside*; K. M. Higgins, 'Love and Death', in J. Deigh (ed.), *On Emotions: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159–178. Interactions with other people are also a very important consideration. When the way forward is unclear, one often turns to others for guidance.

particular role in our lives. In addition, it implies that intentionality is not a singular kind of relation, even if we restrict ourselves to a phenomenological conception of it. Some kinds of intentional experience arise within a world, whereas others call that world into question.

Does this amount to a unitary account of emotion? There is no prospect of its mapping onto a single, currently agreed inventory of 'emotions', given that no such inventory exists. One could simply stipulate that the relevant dynamic is the hallmark of emotional intentionality and proceed to exclude any phenomena that do not incorporate it from the category 'emotion', at least for certain theoretical purposes. However, the merits of such revisionary exercises are questionable. Less contentiously, I suggest that the account at least captures a 'core' group of emotional phenomena, certain paradigm cases of 'strong emotion'. Furthermore, it can also be applied more widely. Where less pronounced emotions are concerned, the dynamic is present but less conspicuous, more localized, and usually more transient too. So, by focusing on 'deeper' emotions where it is more conspicuous and therefore easier to spot, we can draw attention to a wider-ranging phenomenon. It can be added that various emotions that do not seem to fit the bill tend to be associated with labels such as 'shallow', 'self-alienating', 'inauthentic', 'not genuine', or are construed as deficient in some other respect.<sup>33</sup> Hence they could be construed in normative terms, as a deviation from something else - somehow derivative of it.<sup>34</sup>

Even so, there are exceptions. It is not at all clear that enduring love or hate have the kind of structure I have described. Neither does ongoing enjoyment of an inconsequential pastime. And there many other affective experiences that should be kept distinct. For instance, there are what I call 'existential feelings', which are constitutive of an ability to find things significant in one or another way and thus amount to a differential susceptibility to the various types of

<sup>33</sup> For discussion, see, for example, Maclaren, 'Emotional Clichés and Authentic Passions'; T. Milligan, 'False Emotions', *Philosophy* 83 (2008), 213–230; T. Szanto, 'Emotional Self-Alienation', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41 (2017), 260–286.

<sup>34</sup> Another issue to address is how emotional responses to fiction might be accommodated, given that they do not ordinarily impact upon one's world but are not always appropriately labeled as shallow or otherwise deficient. To speculate, it could be argued that the same dynamic applies, but to a fictional world and its disruption. One can thus experience something of the relevant emotions in a safe environment – insulated from one's wider concerns.

## Emotional Intentionality

emotional disruption<sup>\*</sup>. We might also wonder about the kinds of phenomena labeled as moods, habits, temperaments, character traits, background feelings, feelings of vitality, and so forth. However, the point I have tried to make is not so much about how we should categorize things for whatever purpose. Rather, I have sought to make explicit a seldom-acknowledged type of intentionality that is sometimes at work in affective experience, a two-sided, dynamic experience that can be fraught with tensions. This, I suggest, is what distinguishes at least some 'emotions' from other forms of intentional experience.

*University of York*  
[matthew.ratcliffe@york.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.ratcliffe@york.ac.uk)

<sup>\*</sup> Ratcliffe, 'The Feeling of Being'; *Feelings of Being; Experiences of Depression*.