

The background of the book cover is a complex, abstract composition. It features a dense network of black, hand-drawn scribbles and lines that crisscross the entire surface. Interspersed among these black marks are several large, semi-transparent pink circles. The overall effect is one of chaotic energy and emotional intensity.

# EMOTIONS RE&SONS

An Inquiry into Emotional Justification

**Patricia S. Greenspan**

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Patricia S. Greenspan

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### **Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent.

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The first draft of this essay was written while I was on a twelve-month fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1983–1984. During the academic portion of that year I was privileged to serve as Visiting Scholar at the University of Bristol, with the opportunity to escape distractions and seek out new sources of stimulation. A special research assignment from the University of Maryland Division of Arts and Humanities, during fall term, 1984, along with my spring term sabbatical in 1987, allowed some time for further drafts done in light of comments I received.

Although I have been working on it on my own time off and on since 1977, even this draft of my essay is not put forth as a finished product. I have not attempted to answer all questions but rather to pose some questions in a new way—and indeed to point up some new questions. Students often have remarked on the inexhaustible nature of the subject, in part a result of its multiple connections to more standard philosophic fields. Whether it seems frustrating or rewarding, this inexhaustibility also makes it impossible to acknowledge all debts to other authors. My notes below are therefore highly selective—if the term can be applied to something dependent on unreliable memory. In any case, I have not even attempted to cite overlapping works from other fields, including psychology, or works that reached me after 1984, except where they actually influenced my own thinking.

While my notes do cite some readers and others who provided me with specific points or objections, a number of people deserve mention here for general advice and criticism. Karen Hanson, who read the whole manuscript twice for Routledge & Kegan Paul, helped me both with astute objections and with the insistence that I not try to please everyone—or deal with all sources of displeasure within the scope of this essay. The essay begins *in medias res*, examining claims about the emotions that a linear approach might treat as “later” issues. To avoid treating them as afterthoughts, however—and in the belief that the more fundamental issues cannot really be settled in advance—I have resisted the temptation to shift the focus of my discussion onto its methodological and other presuppositions. Some of these are noted, as I proceed; but their justification is left to depend on their results. In immediate terms their

upshot is an essay that many readers will find difficult; but my hope is that it yields enough of interest to be worth their labors.

It should be evident, too, that I did not think precision achievable at this stage of the subject, though I have tried to answer those objections I was made aware of. Substantial chunks of my first draft received comments from Daniel Farrell, William Lyons, and Adam Morton. Kathy Lossau, Linda Paul, and Sharen Taylor helped me make further corrections. Early versions of Chapters 2 and 4 were improved by the scrutiny of audiences at Bristol, Trinity College Dublin, Glasgow, Kings College London, Cornell, Cincinnati, and Memphis State. Chapter 3, Section (iv), was read in first draft form at the 1985 Greensboro Symposium in Philosophy, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with Harvey Green as commentator. (Its penultimate draft was published, along with other contributions to the Symposium, in [Philosophical Studies], 50 (November 1986), 321–341. Copyright © 1986 by D. Reidel Publishing Company. Reprinted by permission.) I should add that earlier, unpublished papers, amounting to predecessors of Chapter 6, were tried out on groups at Pittsburgh, Oxford, California at San Diego, Johns Hopkins, Virginia, and Ohio State.

I owe further thanks, for practical assistance, to Maryland Philosophy Department Chairman Michael Slote, former Acting Chairman James Leshner, Routledge Philosophy Editors Maureen MacGrogan and Stratford Caldecott, and my grant referees Annette Baier, Alan Donagan, Daniel Farrell, Amelie Rorty, and Stephen Stich. Finally, let me thank Suellen Evans-Parzow for putting my first draft on diskettes, and Carolyn Marshall, Lorrie Lizak, and Lake Jagger for xeroxing my final draft, along with other special secretarial help as my deadline for submission approached. That deadline brought a number of points suddenly into focus, I should say. To some extent, I have tried to thread them back into my text; but rather than risking further complication of the argument, I have left some work to a later time—and, I hope, to other authors.

Washington, D.C.  
January 25, 1988

I  
EMOTIONS AS “EXTRAJUDGMENTAL”  
EVALUATIONS

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# 1

## Reasons to Feel: Sketch of an Argument

In reaction to the Cartesian account of emotions as sensations, a number of contemporary philosophers have suggested that we explain them in terms of *evaluative judgments*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, fear is not to be construed just as a set of chills, shudders, and the like—introspectively identifiable events of feeling. Rather, it essentially involves a belief that danger looms—perhaps as a cause of sensation or its physiological underpinnings, but at any rate, as a necessary element of genuine cases of fear. This judgment is partly factual but also partly evaluative: It is about the likelihood of harm from some source, with “harm” understood as an evil. Its detailed factual content typically serves to exhibit an “object” of fear—something it is directed towards as a putative source of harm—and thus to distinguish the emotion from objectless sensations, of the sort that might be felt in reaction to the cold. But its negative evaluative content is needed to explain why it amounts to *fear* rather than some other reaction to an envisioned possibility, such as thrilled anticipation—and why fear amounts to a *reasonable* reaction in certain situations.

I grant these points to “judgmentalism,” as I shall call this view; and I shall feel free to rely upon them without reviewing the arguments for them here. But I think they can be incorporated into a broader evaluative view, allowing for propositional attitudes that are weaker than strict belief: states of mind, like *imagining* that danger looms, that involve entertaining a predicative thought without assent. For judgmentalism, as I shall argue, does not do justice to the diversity of emotional phenomena. It also suggests an oversimple answer to justificatory questions, about the reasons for emotions and their role as reasons for action. With belief as the “intentional” component of emotion—the component that is *about* something, and hence is capable of misrepresenting its object—“emotional justification” would seem essentially to be justification for and by belief. I hope to lay the foundation for a subtler account, however, by bringing in a noncartesian element of object-directed *affect*, whose object is an evaluative proposition. Shudders and chills may be about some state of affairs, in short, and the same may be said of generalized comfort or discomfort. I shall use this fact, taken as a “brute” fact, to argue in Part II for a different approach to the justificatory questions on the basis of an alternative to judgmentalism as defended in Part I.

In this chapter I shall not attempt an argument, though, but just a sketch of one, presenting in compact form some points that will reemerge later in this essay with a more detailed treatment of cases.

Let me propose, then, that we look at emotions as compounds of two elements: affective states of comfort or discomfort and evaluative propositions spelling out their intentional content. Fear, for instance, may be viewed as involving discomfort at the fact—or the presumed or imagined fact (I shall say “the thought”)—that danger looms. This gives only a general pattern of analysis and is meant to do no more; further specification must wait upon investigation of particular emotional states. But by breaking down emotions into layered affective and evaluative components, with the latter taken as objects of the former, the pattern should provide us with a way of approaching two main questions of emotional justification:

- (1) How are emotions justified by the situations in which they arise?
- (2) How does emotion function in the justification of action?

At the outset, bypassing issues of moral justification, I have two corresponding theses in mind, based on the interpretation of emotions as “propositional feelings”:

- (1) Although its appropriateness may be explained in terms of belief warrant, the evaluative component of emotions need not rest on reasons adequate for belief.
- (2) The affective component of emotions gives them a special role to play in rational motivation, as “extrajudgmental” reasons for action.

But the two theses will turn out to exhibit some complex links. In particular, the full justification of emotions themselves will depend on (2), as well as on (1)—on the practical “adaptiveness” of appropriate emotions, or their instrumental value as spurs to action.

The implications of my argument will be seen more clearly as the two theses are defended in detail in light of my proposed analysis of emotions. Briefly, though, I hope to use the two theses, especially in my final chapter, to exhibit the special rational and moral significance of emotion as a supplement to judgment. The motivational influence of the full range of emotions will turn on (1), as we shall see, because of the importance of *imagination* to emotional evaluation—particularly evaluation from another person’s standpoint, or “identification,” which I

take to be central to *moral* motivation. The greater part of this essay will focus on (1), since (2) presupposes the distinction it draws between emotion and belief. But my defense of (2) will eventually bring out my reason for stressing the distinction: It allows emotions a role in rational motivation that is not simply parasitic on that of judgment. For "judgmentalism" subsumes emotions under a conventional rational category at the cost of slighting their own role as reasons.

For the moment, an example should help to distinguish the two theses, as claims about *rational* justification, from the common view of emotions as features of fully human sensitivity or the like. Let us look at one of the less sentimentalized cases of emotion: wary suspicion, in regard for one's own self-interest. Suppose I am involved in a business transaction and seem to "pick up on" something about the salesman that puts me on guard about his trustworthiness. My suspicion, in this case, supposing that it does count as a state of feeling, amounts to one of the milder varieties of fear. It is important to my argument here that such states need not be extreme—need not involve "states" in the sense of "agitated states" but simply current *conditions* of feeling. I am not "in a state," in the popular sense of the expression; and the feeling I have is neither very intense nor an experience of some particular sensations, like chills and shudders, that are characteristic of full-blown fear. We may grant, however, that my feeling does go beyond assent to a proposition: that X, the salesman, is likely to mislead me in some way that I would find injurious (injurious to my interests, that is). I am *uncomfortable about* that presumed state of affairs and thus am undergoing an emotion even though my discomfort might resist explanation in terms of any very specific mental event. Rather, it amounts to a general state of negative feeling, perhaps a kind of mental tension, directed towards an evaluative proposition of the sort that is characteristic of fear.

In standard cases the evaluative proposition will be one I take to be true. But in order to allow for the possibility that my emotion parts from belief, I shall use "the thought that [the proposition holds]" as a non-committal expression introducing the object of my discomfort, or what I am uncomfortable about. The expression should not be taken as implying that I am uncomfortable about the fact that such a thought occurs to me; indeed, the thought need not occur to me explicitly. Rather, the object of my discomfort amounts to the *content* of the thought: that I face a threat of injury from X. Because the affective component of suspicion is intentionally directed towards this evaluative component on my view, the emotion may be said to have a propositional "internal" object, along with the object given *in* the proposition, as the source of harm. This means that my suspicion is not just like chills or shudders, or even general discomfort, *accompanying* an evaluative thought in the

way that a headache might accompany the thought that I am losing out in a business transaction with X. Even if it were "objectless," in fact—if its evaluative component did not pick out a particular source of harm—the emotion would have intentional content; for its affective component must at least be directed towards an *indefinite* proposition on my analysis.

The propositional object of emotional discomfort need not be an object of *belief*, however. In the present case we might suppose that I reject the corresponding judgment, since I think I have reason to believe, and no good reason not to believe, that X is entirely trustworthy. He has been highly spoken of by others whom I trust, and I cannot say what it is about his manner on this occasion that stands behind my feeling to the contrary. Indeed, I cannot even say that the feeling is based on something about his manner: Perhaps I am simply uneasy in an unfamiliar situation. So I manage to dismiss the feeling—intellectually, at any rate—as a product of my own inexperience in business transactions. It does persist; but I "explain it away," resisting any tendency to take it as something that would survive the collection of further evidence. Although I keep thinking—entertaining the thought—that X is apt to mislead me, I do not *think that* he is, in the sense that involves assent to the content of my thought. Rather, the case supposes, I attribute it to my own imagination.

My "intuitive" suspicion may be *warranted*, however, even though I do not take it to be and even though the corresponding belief would *not* be, under the circumstances. There may be some features of X's way of presenting himself that do back up my reaction, that is, but are not perceived clearly enough to justify a belief that X is untrustworthy. All the evidence I have—including any memories of my similar reactions on past occasions—counts *against* that judgment. And yet my emotion may be appropriate, not just because in this case it happens to fit the facts, but rather because it is here "controlled by" some relevant features of my perceptual situation. I might have at least *prima facie* evidence for belief, if I were able to specify those features at least roughly; but as things stand now, I do not know enough about the "subliminal" sources of my emotion even to attribute them to its object. I am reacting to something about X's eye movements, say, something whose relevance to untrustworthiness could be explained by a developed science of "body language," if there were one. But from my current evidential standpoint the emotion would seem to be best explained by my own uneasiness. So it seems that the emotion may be appropriate in a case where its corresponding belief is neither warranted nor held.

Some would insist that "belief" be widened to make this out as a case where I do hold—unconsciously, perhaps—that X is untrustworthy. I shall attempt to answer them in Part I, as I exhibit the advantages of

my broader view in application to other sorts of cases. For the moment let me just say that I am suspicious of this apparent appeal to simplicity. Its use in defense of a neatly reductionist theory runs the risk of slighting the special rational significance of emotion. If we are to address the question whether emotions add anything of value to beliefs in this and other cases, it would be well to avoid transferring their intentional content to some attenuated notion of belief. I shall eventually argue, in Part II, that what emotions add to beliefs depends on their partial justification in *extraevidential* terms—in terms of practical “adaptiveness,” or a kind of instrumental value that is not properly brought to bear on assessments of belief warrant. This means that in at least some cases an appropriate emotion may be one that parts from warranted belief. But to make out this rational possibility as a real one, we need to put some limits on the attribution of beliefs. In general, it seems that belief is just one propositional attitude among others. In the present case we may speak of the subject as “feeling as though” *X* is untrustworthy—meaning “feeling” in the broad sense indicated earlier, not so easily picked apart from thought and *possibly* involving belief. Where it amounts to an emotion, though, it also involves an affective state directed towards the corresponding evaluative proposition, which may be held in mind without assent.

This compound feeling sometimes includes or yields an action requirement—a negative evaluation of alternatives to action—as an object of discomfort. In such cases, I want to argue, the emotion may also supplement belief in adding immediate “pressure” towards action. Thus, in the case of suspicion, as long as I am uncomfortable at the thought that *X* is likely to injure my interests, my discomfort puts me on guard against that possibility. It extends to a negative evaluation of failure to watch *X* carefully and thus adds a rational motive—the improvement of my present state of feeling—to any independently perceived (or imagined) need for watchfulness. If only to calm myself, in immediate terms, I ought to pay particular attention to what *X* says and does. This example should indicate how the special motivational force ascribed to emotions depends on my account of emotional discomfort as *object-directed* and hence as serving to hold an evaluation in mind more reliably than beliefs and objectless sensations. The content of even an acknowledged belief need not be an object of current attention; and unpleasant sensations that merely accompanied it might very well distract one from it or from a requirement to act in light of it. By itself, the evaluation of *X* as untrustworthy may be said to give rise to an action requirement, in the sense of a thought that I ought to keep an eye on *X*. But this is just what is sometimes called “a desire in the philosopher’s sense,” covering wants or preferences without any motivational force. Discomfort need not add pressure to this essentially affectless desire where it has no related in-

tentional content but simply amounts to a further consequence of the same evaluation and hence a kind of affective *symptom* of emotion.

It would be no more than an incidental fact about my objectless discomfort, that is, that it would be relieved most naturally and effectively by *acting on* the accompanying desire, taking steps to falsify the evaluation that gave rise to it. Instead, consider how I might respond to a headache caused by the thought of myself as a hopeless failure in business. I might turn attention *away from* the evaluation. Perhaps I ought to work to get rid of the psychological causes of my reaction, calming myself independently of any attempt to lessen the likelihood of injury from X. The same might be said of object-directed discomfort, of course, in a case where my reaction is inappropriate—or where it would be practically maladaptive. I might be dependent on X for some benefit, say, in a case where he would notice and resent a guarded attitude. But let us restrict attention to a case like the present one, where my suspicion is assumed to be warranted and to have the usual sort of instrumental value, even if I have no good reason to think so. On the view proposed here, the emotion itself serves as a reason for action insofar as it yields discomfort *about* an action requirement. Discomfort at the thought that I ought to keep an eye on X—that there is a need to do so, which I have yet to satisfy fully—follows from my suspicion in its situational context and amounts to a *motivating* desire on this view. My discomfort apparently will continue unless and until I satisfy the requirement; so it adds a rational motive for action to that provided by affectless thought and desire, even in combination with affective emotion *symptoms*.

My detailed account of the special motivational force of the emotions will be postponed until I have considered some prior questions about the nature and justification of the emotions themselves. But it will often be anticipated in what follows, particularly in my treatment of the role of emotions in moral motivation; for on my account these issues turn out to be complexly intertwined. Indeed, even here, I really ought to qualify my reference to “the justification of the emotions themselves” as a prior question. This is meant as a reference to emotional appropriateness, taken as implying a kind of “backward-looking” justification—by the subject’s “perceptual” situation, as I shall put it. The contrasting notion, of practical “adaptiveness,” appeals to a kind of “forward-looking” justification, or justification by consequences—in particular, by the role of emotions as spurs to action. In fact, though, my account of the notion of appropriateness will turn out to rest on general adaptiveness; and a *full* justification of emotion will require adaptiveness in the particular case at hand. For the perceptual situation to which an emotion is appropriate justifies it only as an adequately grounded response. It is one that a subject *may* quite rationally forgo, if he can—in favor of belief,

where belief is warranted, or some propositional attitude short of belief but not involving comfort or discomfort.

Consider the case of suspicion once again, and extract my evaluation of *X* as untrustworthy—a “feeling” of sorts, though not yet an emotion, on my view—from its overlay of discomfort, or feeling *tone*. Even on our assumption that I have adequate grounds for the emotion, the evaluation without the discomfort would do just as well for noninstrumental rational purposes—as a “representation,” let us say, of my perceptual situation. I may have “every reason” for feeling tense about a threat of injury, but for representational purposes I have no *compelling* reason. The claim that I actually ought to *feel* suspicious in my business dealings with *X* must rest on some view about the practical insufficiency, without emotion, of my concern for my own interests. An evaluation, especially one from which I withhold belief, is unlikely to have the same grip on my behavior in the absence of negative feeling tone; and it is this fact that lets us complete our justification of the emotion. Appropriateness is not enough to mandate feeling, in short. Where there are no moral “reasons to feel,” as in this case, we need to bring in practical adaptiveness.

*“Adaptiveness” and Rational Self-Interest.* It may already be evident that the term “adaptiveness” covers a range of possibilities, some of which turn out to qualify its initial contrast with “appropriateness.” Distinctions will be introduced as needed via qualifications of the term: “General adaptiveness,” for instance, will be used to refer to the instrumental value of an emotion *tendency*, as distinct from the value of an instance of emotion in the particular case at hand. But the term “adaptiveness” will itself remain broad; and as with some other terms to be introduced later—with scare quotes as occasional reminders—it is semi-technical in the sense of being derived from, but extended beyond, *fairly* ordinary language. In this case its basis is biological talk—also broad (meaning “functional” as opposed to “dysfunctional”) but currently familiar on a more specific application (meaning something like “functional in promoting the survival of the gene pool”). In case the reader expects the term to be given a similarly narrow reading in what follows, I should stress here that I mean to retain even its extension to questions of *social* value. I do think that at least some emotion tendencies are of basic evolutionary importance, as I shall indicate briefly in my treatment of morally significant emotions. But of course I am in no position to substantiate a claim of this sort, except by providing an occasional speculation about how a given emotion might serve communal ends. In any case, the term “adaptiveness” also refers to other sorts of instrumental value, under-

stood as value as a means to some good—initially in application to a particular emotion instance, and indeed a particular self-interested agent, as exemplified by the case of intuitive suspicion.

A familiar philosophical term for what I have in mind here is “utility,” of course, and readers are welcome to substitute this if they can cancel out misleading overtones. However, some who find the term acceptable in ethics seem to have more trouble reconciling the thought of “useful” emotions with the view of them as typically resistant to rational control. It does seem clear that emotional response can often be brought under *indirect* control—by controlling what one thinks about, say, or by rehearsing certain thoughts or activities to inculcate new habits of response. My eventual account of the practical adaptiveness of emotion will appeal to this possibility; but it will also assume resistance to *direct* control, of the sort that we have over action. In this respect and others emotion seems to stand *in between* action and belief, exhibiting some features of both categories; and partly to mark the contrast with action, I shall use a special term for emotional utility. As with “appropriateness” and belief, “adaptiveness” *can* be applied to action. But the fact that it is not the common term in philosophical discourse should actually be helpful in what follows, as long as the reader bears in mind the breadth of its intended meaning. In particular, though it does extend to the promotion of social ends, including group survival, I shall apply it in unqualified form to instrumental value for the agent.

My discussion of motivational force, in fact, will treat the self-interested standpoint as a rational basis for explaining some forms of altruistic motivation via the notion of identificatory emotion. I see no necessary conflict, however, between this approach and doubts one might have about the questionable status assigned to altruism by traditional views of rational motivation. No claim is made here that emotional concern for others would be *irrational* if it were irreducible to self-interest. I do assume, though, that its explanation in terms of self-interest is needed to make it out as “rationally obligatory,” or irrational for an agent to *forgo*—to provide a full justification for it, in short. My argument does not rest on a view of altruism as developmentally derivative or less certain in its origins than self-interest. But it does presuppose a view of self-interest as less easily shrugged off at later stages of development and hence as motivationally more reliable than altruism in standard cases.

At any rate, *emotional* concern for others, as I shall interpret it here, counts as a *subtype* of self-interest. It is important to my account of the special justificatory role of emotion as a supplement to belief that its “extrajudgmental” element amounts to an affective reward or punishment for the agent. One might indeed grant that the assignment of some weight to others’ interests is rationally required on an intellectual level