15 A Challenge to Perceptual Theories of Emotion

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15.1 Introduction

Perceptual theories of emotion hold that emotions are analogous to perceptions in key respects. On such accounts, emotions are seen as episodic, intentional-cum-qualitative comportments that represent the world as being a certain way (see Döring 2007; Tappolet 2016). They are said to display features such as informational and inferential encapsulation and involuntariness. Moreover, considerations concerning emotional experience in infants and non-human animals seem to mitigate against more demanding cognitive theories, for instance those that take emotions to be judgments. While there is a prima facie plausibility to the perceptual account, in particular with regard to salient, short-term emotional episodes with rapid onset, I will argue that the perceptual theory is misguided. I will focus on a consideration centered on the dimension of emotional self-relatedness. Human emotions not only possess world-related content, but at the same time manifest a salient condition of the emoting self, such as standing concerns, commitments, or evaluative orientations (see Slaby and Stephan 2008). I argue that this characteristic self-relatedness of emotions is responsible for a key dis-analogy between perceptions and emotions, one that comes to the fore in cases of recalcitrant emotions (see Helm 2001). These cases make it clear that emotions come with a specific form of self-involvement that accounts for the persistence of emotional attitudes even in the face of counterweighing evidence. Moreover, emotional self-relatedness cannot be spelled out in representational terms. Genuine self-*involvement* is a fundamental dimension of being-in-the-world. It cannot be separated off into an isolated epistemic capacity. In emotional experience, the agent figures as an actively involved and directly concerned "party," not as something that the emotion merely contains information about. The self, one might say, is not represented by an emotion, but is *manifest* in emotional experience.

In the final section of this chapter (15.8), I will outline a consideration in favor of the conceptuality of human emotions. Here too,

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the dimension of emotional self-relatedness plays a central role. This comes to the fore when one acknowledges that the human capacity for emotional self-relatedness belongs to the broader dimension of self-hood, what I propose to call, with Charles Taylor (1985), human self-understanding. Based on this, my claim with regard to conceptuality is simple on the surface: given that emotions are beholden to a lived self-understanding, and that a self-understanding in the demanding sense requires concepts, emotions likewise require concepts. Yet, obviously, this claim needs a lot of unpacking, with regard to both the nature of concepts and the idea of a human self-understanding as informing emotional comportment. In terms of the relevant understanding of concepts, I adopt Joseph Rouse's distinction between normative status and operative process accounts, and argue that emotions are conceptual on a normative status account.

In putting forth my understanding of emotions as conceptual, I also provide a meta-theoretical consideration for why it is important to employ complex examples in philosophical work on emotions. This goes against the prevailing tendency to focus mostly on short-term emotional episodes in a manner that abstains from considerations pertaining to context, for instance standard cases such as fear of the neighbor's dog. It is time for philosophers of emotion to leave the neighbors' dog alone, and to focus instead on cases that convey more of the personal, historical, and situational complexity of real-life emotions.

15.2 Tappolet on Emotions and Perceptions

Christine Tappolet has provided one of the most encompassing, rigorous, and spirited articulations of a perceptual theory of emotions in her monograph *Emotions, Values and Agency* (2016). This book presents and weighs the most relevant arguments that have been advanced so far in favor and against the perception analogy. Before I present critical considerations that I take to speak against Tappolet's core claims, I briefly state what I take to be important aspects of her view.

First of all, I want to applaud the overall architecture of Tappolet's account. Her case for analogizing emotional to perceptual experience is just the starting point for an encompassing approach that sheds light on the complex entanglements of emotion, agency, value, reasons, and epistemic as well as moral responsibility. Instead of offering merely an isolated exercise in philosophical psychology that would zoom in on one class of mental state without considering much else, Tappolet convincingly situates emotion in the wider context of the human situation.

What must be noted also is the clear and thorough way in which Tappolet discusses the pros and cons of the perception analogy in the first chapter of her book. Moreover, she manages to elucidate the

peculiar way in which an emotion can "hold us captive," as it were, for a brief period of time, entirely focusing our attention on an aspect of the world that strikes us as possessing a certain evaluative feature. This is the core intuition behind perceptualism as a theory of emotion, but it has rarely been analyzed so lucidly. However, as I will argue in the following, there is an important dimension of emotional experience that is considerably under-appreciated, even if it is nominally covered, on Tappolet's account. This dimension is what I call *emotional self-disclosure*.

Instead of engaging Tappolet's claims in detail, I will sketch in outline aspects of what might be an alternative framing of emotional phenomena and the domain of human affectivity more broadly, circling in on a theme that is prominent on this alternative perspective. My rationale for such a relatively distant treatment is this: in the philosophy of emotion, as in other areas of philosophy, very much depends on the background framework with which one approaches one's topic. It makes a huge difference, for example, whether one considers emotions as the comportment of persons or as the states of organisms, whether one approaches emotion in a psychologistic framework, moreover one that adheres to a form of methodological individualism, or whether one considers emotions in an interactionist key as relational dynamics unfolding between individuals rather than "in" them. Likewise, it is crucial for the shape of one's account whether one analyzes emotions through an epistemological lens, whether one approaches emotions in an action-theoretic key, or whether one has a broader ontological purview, allowing for other salient dimensions of emotion to assume prominence. I cannot explore all these options here. What I will do is provide glimpses into an alternative outlook that is in some fundamental respects distinct from Tappolet's framework, while it also shares some common ground with hers. My focus is *emotional self-disclosure*. This is the way in which emotional comportment, while disclosing something in the world that matters to the emoting agent, at the same time actively manifests core dimensions of the self. In Section 15.8, I take these considerations as a starting point to address the issue of the conceptual nature of human emotions.

15.3 Emotionality and the Self

Tappolet focuses on emotional *episodes* and their world-directed intentionality. Fear of the dog is paradigmatic. This is a clearly circumscribed episode *of experiencing a dog as fearsome*. Something in the world (dog) is presently apprehended in evaluative terms (fearsome). So as soon as the dog disappears, the fear in question presumably wanes: no object, no emotion. My perspective, by contrast, might be glossed under the following half-joking headline: *Dogs come and go, but* I *have to stay*. Consider what Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, who was no fan of traveling,

said about taking a journey: *The problem with traveling is that you will inevitably take yourself with you on your trip*.[1]

Accordingly, I want to focus on the role of the self, that is, on the specific mode of *self-involvement* on the part of the emoting person, the way a person's cares and concerns are specifically manifest within her emotional experience. Let me note at the outset that I won't thereby reify "the self" into a substantive item, like a homunculus holding court within each of us. What we deal with is a dynamic dimension of *self-understanding*, not with an object of some sort, and not with something that is static or clearly circumscribable. "Self," in my parlance, is short for "self-understanding," and that is a dimension that is lived, from moment to moment, dynamically and in constant engagement with the world and others with whom one interacts, against the backdrop of culturally shared understandings (Taylor 1985; see Slaby and Stephan 2008). What I want to highlight is that emotional experience always comes with a pronounced form of *self-awareness* that points back into this dynamic, somewhat elusive, temporally and structurally open dimension of selfhood. The important question with regard to the nature of emotions is, then, this: *How exactly* does this "self"-dimension figure in emotional experience, and what systematic role does it play in emotional comportment?

15.4 Affective Intentionality: World-Directedness and Self-Involvement

One way to approach this issue starts from the acknowledgment that our affectivity is operative not only when we undergo a paradigmatic emotional episode, such as a marked case of fear, anger, joy, or envy, but that affectivity is constantly there, in the form of a changing dimension of background affectivity that attunes us to what is significant in our surroundings. In the tradition of philosophical thought on emotion and affective phenomena, this background dimension has been called by various names: English-speaking Heideggerians call it "attunement," other phenomenologists favor the term "existential feelings" (Ratcliffe 2008), connoisseurs of German romanticism might say "self-feeling" (Frank 2002), others will simply speak of a person's affective life or revert verbatim to Heidegger's term of art *Befindlichkeit*—or "findingness" in English, a notion pointing to variable "ways of finding oneself in the world" (Heidegger 1927/1962: 172–182, 30; Ratcliffe 2008). Authors with phenomenological leanings have particularly much to say about the affective background. I agree with them that the dimension of background affectivity should be a centerpiece of an approach to human emotionality. On this, Tappolet's account is—with the exception of a few brief passages—noticeably silent.

I will now sketch schematically how this affective dimension might be spelled out theoretically. While the affective background is a shape-shifting,

yet more or less constant, manifestation of a person's evaluative world-orientation in general, *manifesting*—more or less accurately—what is at stake and at issue in her life, the various emotional episodes are the situational *responses* to specific events or goings-on which thereby get evaluated in the light of this overall existential orientation. There is a background attunement to generic dimensions of significance, and then foreground episodes responding to whatever happens situationally that impinges on that standing dimension. Concretely, think of how a background awareness of vulnerability enters into an episode of fear (as soon as a specific danger materializes), or think of how a concern for respect and esteem crystallizes into an episode of anger (vis-à-vis an offense or disrespectful act), or how this same sense of self concretizes into episodes of shame in light of unfavorable displays of one's qualities (or lack thereof) in front of significant others, and so forth.

Glossing emotions as *concern-based construals*, as Robert Roberts does (Roberts 2003), or with Bennett Helm as *felt evaluations* (Helm 2001), or simply as a variable situational sense of what currently *matters* are ways to provisionally capture this (Slaby 2014). Discreteness and distinctness of single emotional episodes, while central in Tappolet's perspective, come out as a secondary characteristic of affectivity. From this perspective, then, much of mainstream philosophy of emotion may be criticized for being in the thrall of what I call *the deceptive salience of the episodic*. Discrete, short-term episodes of emotional upheaval too easily distract attention away from the more stable albeit less turbulent background dimension of attunement.

The paradigmatic emotion for Tappolet is something like "fear of the neighbor's dog" understood as a pronounced perceptual experience of the dog's fearsomeness, where fearsomeness then gets unpacked as what it is about the dog "that makes fear appropriate" (Tappolet 2016: 51). On the alternative approach that I favor, a different schema applies. Fearing the dog is obviously a response to what is acutely fearsome. But the flip side of fearing the fearsome is what one is *fearing for*—namely, oneself. This is because the dog's fearsomeness—as a concrete *dangerousness* of the dog—corresponds to a specific vulnerability on my part, as I might be bitten and injured by the dog, and I lack the abilities to defend and withstand the dog were it to attack me. This entails that others that are more versed in either coping with or fighting dogs would see the dog in a less fearful key—even though they are similarly vulnerable—because they possess more effective coping capacities for situations of this type. Accordingly, the content of an episode of fear of a dog has a characteristic double structure: in revealing the dog's fearsomeness and in virtue of the very same affective comportment, our fear *manifests* our specific vulnerability and putative incapacity vis-à-vis the dog. World-related affective intentionality has as its backside a form of contentful affective self-"awareness." Something matters and is a proper object of

our emotion only insofar and to the extent that it impinges on an acute concern of ours—the world's specific *mattering* and our own *minding it* are two sides of the same coin.

This interplay between world- and self-directedness is essential to affective intentionality. We feel in a certain way toward something insofar as we are affected by it in such and such specific ways (see Slaby and Stephan 2008). In the example at hand, this could for instance mean that during an episode of fear, we enact a mode of being in the world that displays our specifically directed vulnerability—we are *fearfully* confronting the world. Our vulnerability and incapacity is usually not explicitly thought-of, nevertheless it is *manifest* in the form that our posture takes during our fearing the dog; it is a matter of *how* we concretely engage our surroundings during a particular span of time. Obviously there is a lot variance in how this happens, owing to character, training, and situational circumstance—for instance whether we enact our vulnerability in the form of a marked insecurity and confusedness, or whether we might have found ways to evade such disarray by turning our fearsome attention elsewhere by opting to flee the scene rapidly. In any case, the correspondence between a person's, an object's, or a situation's fearsomeness and our own vulnerability in face of it is a matter of specific modes of engagement that unfold over the duration of the fear episode. Heidegger expert Kate Withy has spoken of emotions as "disclosive postures." This characterization nicely captures the way in which our enacted self-understanding (*posture*) gets us situationally in touch with meaningful aspects of the world (*disclosure*) (see Withy 2015).

In light of the view just outlined, it is striking how little Tappolet has to say about the self-relatedness of affective experience. Her account almost exclusively emphasizes the world-directed aspect of emotional experience. This makes good strategic sense for her, as she thereby tones down a major complication for the perception analogy. On a conventional understanding of perceptual experience, perception picks up how things are in the environment more or less regardless of the evaluative attitudes of the perceiving subject. Thus, the less one emphasizes the subjects' attitudes and evaluative outlook in describing emotions, the more prima facie plausibility is conferred upon an analogy between emotions and perceptions. On Tappolet's account, the dimension of affective self-involvement is for the most part outsourced onto evaluative properties in the world. For her, the challenge is not the adjudication of two "directions" of affective intentionality (world-relatedness and self-disclosure). The challenge for her is to explicate a specific class of properties in the world, namely, evaluative properties or "values," in short. The self-relatedness of emotion, where it directly pertains to an emotion's content, is on the whole transferred onto the object dimension, becoming a matter solely of world-directed emotional content. I admit that I cannot yet see how this might work.

15.5 The Evaluative Background

It is important to note upfront that the said background dimension of affectivity—what is at issue and at stake for us when we are engaged with the world—is complex and multiple, not fixed and static. The affective background is a shape-shifting dimension, multiple in itself, constitutively open-ended, subject to change, in need of articulation, never settled once and for all. Various different, sometimes conflicting, and differently weighted concerns coalesce to form such an evaluative orientation. The integration of these concerns or stakes is often shaky, partial, fragile, or unclear—in need of decisions and revisions. It would also be misleading to consider the evaluative background as strictly a matter of *an individual's* outlook. This dimension is permeable toward the social environment, to communal habits, forms of life, collective practices, and norms. It is conceivable that there are cases where it exists predominantly as a collective structure, for instance as the shared evaluative perspective among members of a close-knit community, family, or subcultural niche.

Whether individual or collective, an active process of self-interpretation is necessary to concretize, disambiguate, enhance, or broaden the background dimension, and to get clear on the demands it places on specific comportment. The activity of self-interpretation is often partially self-forming, as bringing into focus what we care about can lead to reconfigurations and reconsiderations of our habitual orientations. Sometimes, an effort at self-interpretation can end merely in the posing of a question (*Is this really important to me? How important? Where do I want to go with this?*), rather than with a definite answer. In light of this, simple examples presented without a specification of context, such as the stereotypical fear of a dog, can detract from the dynamic openness of this evaluative background. This is because, in this case, the background concern in question—our not wanting to be injured by that damn dog—is a standing and stable concern if anything is. So, it will likely be highly constant over individuals of otherwise different constitutions and outlooks and also cross-(sub)culturally. (Although it will not be totally constant, as persons with different degrees of training or experience with dogs likely vary in this regard.) If we complexify the scope of the examples analyzed, if we take profound relationships, careers, entire ways of life, political orientations, allegiances to a nation or some such as the example domain for emotional episodes, things will look rather differently. Based on such examples, it will become clear that the affective background dimension itself is often at issue, as a person's cares and concerns might change or get modified in response to something that happens in these domains or in the wake of ongoing emotion-prompted self-interpretation. Conflicts between individual and group that call for resolution come to the fore here; change and development ensue over time and require revisions of parts of one's outlook, including the adjudication of habitual feelings

to fit new concerns. Not to forget, our affective sensitivity is complexly shaped, down to its nuances, by what is available and articulable within a given culture and tradition, by cultural modes of expression, symbolic resources, and so on. Not incidentally, this foreshadows the issue of conceptuality in affective experience. In order to make sense of a self-understanding's availability to rational reflection, and also to account for its cultural permeability and capacity to incorporate symbolic resources, we have to assume that possessing a self-understanding requires conceptual capacities (see Taylor 1985; Slaby and Stephan 2008).

15.6 Self-Involvement, Not Self-Interestedness

In Chapter 2 of her book, Tappolet dismisses the suggestion that there is a particular self-*interestedness* in emotional experience. We might get angry at a person unrelated to us for a deed that does not personally affect us the slightest. Tappolet discusses the following example: "Imagine a school teacher who wrongly accuses a child in her class of cheating in an examination. You might well feel anger at the teacher, and the motivations that are associated with this anger will thus appear to be other-regarding" (Tappolet 2016: 73).

I agree, this is surely possible. But this does not mean there is no essential relation to the self in affective intentionality. Who thinks otherwise fails to properly distinguish between an individual's concerns and an individual's self-interestedness. "My concerns" are something other than, and exist independently of, my putative "being concerned with myself." Every person has concerns, but not every person is ostentatiously self-interested, let alone on any given occasion that would merit an emotional response. That nasty teacher's action itself may not be directed at me or one of my relations or loved ones, but it may nevertheless painfully impinge on what I care about. My getting angry with a teacher who wrongly accuses a child bears on another component of my overall evaluative orientation: his act might hurt my sense of justice, or my caring for excellence in teachers that teach in my school district. I might also just have a strong background aversion against idiocy and idiotic people, and that impudent teacher might strike me as being one. In any case, some such background story must be true for my anger at that personally unrelated teacher to be intelligible. This shows at least two things: first, that my standing cares and concerns can encompass vastly more than what immediately affects my personal well-being, narrowly construed (the immediate sphere of my personal interests), and secondly, that my emotional responses manifest those evaluative orientations on concrete occasions. This is an important part of what possessing a human self-understanding amounts to. All sorts of things can in this way become adequate objects of my emotional experience. The right sorts of concerns make for a plethora of intelligible candidate objects of emotion. This

will come into view only when the evaluative background dimension is acknowledged and analyzed in sufficient detail.

15.7 Recalcitrant Emotions and the Perception Analogy

This pronounced self-involvement characteristic of affective intentionality needs to figure in the debate on the perceptual character of emotion, yet, to date, this dimension has been rarely discussed. I can offer just one consideration to show how the shape of the debate changes when affective self-relatedness, as outlined above, is given due weight. Tappolet argues against Bennett Helm and Michael Brady about their respective solutions to the problem of recalcitrant emotions. This dispute concerns a powerful objection to the perceptual theory: Why do we call an emotion that persists in face of contrary evidence *irrational*, whereas we won't call the experience of a sensory illusion such as Müller-Lyer or the bent stick under water irrational? Bennett Helm (2001) argues that emotions include a form of assent, *passive assent*, whereas sensory illusions do not. I am not sure whether assent is the right word. But what is crucial here is that in case of an emotion, I cannot distance myself as readily from what I currently experience. In emotional experience, I am touched by what goes on in front of me—an adverse act, a dangerous development, an offensive remark, or a stroke of luck concerns me in such a way that I am inevitably in the thrall of what goes on. This is just to state again that emotions are *self-involving*—in a way perceptual illusions are not. (I think this is the right intuition captured by Descartes' (1649) beautiful title of his emotion-theoretic treatise *Les passions de l'âme*.) Being afraid of a dog, whether that affective state is epistemically warranted or not, means at the very least that *I am actively concerned*; the dog's potential dangerousness is a dangerousness *for me*. Thus, the dog—what the dog might inflict on me—makes a crucial difference to my well-being here and now. Accordingly, I am *fearfully* encountering my situation, I apprehend my surroundings out of an acute sense of vulnerability and incapacity from which I cannot distance myself. I do not *represent* myself as being fragile, incapable, or in disarray on this occasion—*I am* fragile, incapable, or in disarray on this occasion. It is thus likely that this painful awareness persists even when the danger that the dog poses to me has waned. After all, my awareness of vulnerability (in view of the potential dangers posed by dogs or related dangers) will still be to the point, because I am indeed thus vulnerable. My encounter with the dog activates a form of acute affective self-awareness that *gets something right* about my condition, even if it is out of step with what I am presently confronted with (a harmless dog). This is why it is so hard to distance oneself from an emotional experience even in view of what amounts to countervailing evidence.

On the other hand, I can easily distance myself from the content of a perceptual illusion. Usually, it won't "touch" me, it will leave me unaffected for the most part, at least under normal circumstances. The illusory perception's content just hangs there, neutrally and as if at a distance, while in an emotional experience *I am at stake*, I am readily involved, 'it is me'—or something I am closely tied up with—that is currently on the line. Emotional experience is inconceivable without this marked *self-involvement*, whereas mere perceiving presumably is not. This amounts to a robust disanalogy between emotional experience and perceptual experience. In light of this, I cannot see how the analogy with sensory perception should help us elucidate the most central and noteworthy features of emotional intentionality.

Things might look differently on a phenomenologically richer account of perception, for instance on an account inspired by Merleau-Ponty. Here, *all* perception is considered to be affectively self-involving. This is because phenomenologists reckon with an affective dimension as a layer of perception as such. For phenomenologists, a form of evaluative self-involvement figures as a constant, active ingredient of conscious experience *tout court* (see Ratcliffe 2008). This is just another way to spell out the phenomenological conviction that all consciousness has an affective backdrop which is integral to the registering of what is relevant in the world. But this is not my topic here. In the current debate on perceptualism as an approach to emotions, phenomenological considerations are secondary at best, so that, on this debate at least, analogizing emotions with putatively non-affective perceptions is still thought to be a move that is genuinely illuminating.[2]

15.8 The Case for Conceptuality

For the remainder of the chapter, I offer a general take on the question of whether emotions are conceptual or nonconceptual. As in the previous sections, I can only provide the contours of a broader perspective on the involvement of conceptuality—or conceptual capacities—in human existence, rather than engaging with specific arguments or with detailed explications. The debate about the putative conceptuality (or not) of experience has become so complex that it is hopeless to undertake even a half-way adequate overview in the space of a single chapter. The best option is thus to dive right into fray and sketch my own understanding of the central issues. While I am broadly siding with those who follow McDowell and argue for the involvement of concepts in all of human experience, my particular perspective is informed by John Haugeland and Joseph Rouse. Both have done much to illuminate and defend a particular variety of an advanced and transformed McDowellian position, in part by drawing on a reading of Heidegger that was mainly championed by Haugeland (2013). When it comes to the conceptuality of emotions

in particular, my views are also informed by the groundwork of Charles Taylor (1985) and the subsequent development of some of Taylor's ideas by Bennett W. Helm (2001).

On a normative understanding of concepts, as put forth in different guises for instance by McDowell, Brandom, Haugeland, Rouse, and others, the key is not the involvement of concept *tokens* in experience, but the normative accountability of intelligible performances. Rouse calls this a "normative status" account and distinguishes it from an "operative process" account of concepts (see Rouse 2015: especially 40–50). My own label for the view I develop, built on Rouse's normative status perspective, is a "normative capacity approach" to concepts.

On an operative process view, concepts are taken to be concrete entities or processes (be it mental, linguistic, or physiological) that must figure tangibly within all those performances that would then, in virtue of this involvement, count as conceptual. On such an understanding of concepts, considerations that would demonstrate the absence of concept tokens in a segment of experience would show that these types of experience were nonconceptual. An example, discussed in detail by Rouse, is Hubert Dreyfus's critique of McDowell, which is based on phenomenological considerations that apparently demonstrate the absence of intellection in instances of skillful coping (see the contributions in Schear 2013). Opposing Dreyfus's assumptions about concepts, Rouse argues that McDowell can agree with the phenomenological characterization of skillful coping as unreflective, while nevertheless insisting on its conceptual character. Skillful coping, in humans, must be normatively guided by a conception of proper performance in the domain at issue, otherwise we would deal with mere instinctual responses or mechanical habits at best. Required for such normative guidance is not the manifest involvement of conceptual "items" in every instance of such coping. What is required is that reflection and efforts at correction ensue as soon as performances violate the normative standards of the practice at issue. Rouse writes: "Nothing turns on whether a concept is in mind or in brain but only whether one's performances are, or can be, held accountable to the relevant standards in the right way" (Rouse 2015: 46).

Consider how a competent player of blitz chess reacts unreflectively to the solicitations on the chess board, while their performances are nevertheless answerable to the norms of correct chess play. To count as a competent player of chess, and not as a fraud or simulation, the player must be on guard and able to adjust when particular performances go off the rails. Importantly, the player's competence must encompass "skill repair" (Haugeland 1998), which amounts to a higher-order normative responsiveness: when a player's quasi-automatic responses to their opponent's blitz moves begin to go awry repeatedly, efforts at skill repair will have to ensue, because at issue is no longer error on the level of isolated performances, but error at the level of ability or skill. Without such a

meta-capacity for diagnosing and repairing their capacities when they repeatedly fail them, they wouldn't count as a competent chess player for long. Thus, we deal here with a higher-order normativity, a form of normative accountability that pertains not just to performances—specific game actions and their outcomes—but to skills and abilities. For this to be possible, the player's ability to play chess must be guided by a conception of chess play. Such a conception encompasses an understanding of the requisite playing skills and also the material standards of chess boards, chess pieces, and the physical and social situation of play, over and above the formal rules of play (see Haugeland 1998). Concretely, this conception is operative in the form of a constant normative vigilance with regard to first-order performances, an active ability and readiness to assess performances and make the required repairs when called for.

I hold that something similar has to be true of human emotions. The various emotions and emotional dispositions of a person have to be normatively governed, on the whole, by a conception of the overall evaluative perspective of the agent in question. Now, compared to a game such as chess, emotions occupy a more fundamental level. Emotionality does not just pertain to specific abilities or skills, like those required for playing chess, and not just to certain activities, but to our living our lives in general. When it comes to emotions, we move from the instrumental to the existential domain. What is at stake now is the existential question of what it means to live up to a certain conception of a human life as a whole. This complicates the picture massively, given that there is not just one or any definitely settled, uncontroversial conception of what a human life amounts to. Yet, minimally, we can tentatively distinguish between non-existential concerns (winning a chess game against a friend, for example) and those concerns that have existential significance due to their belonging to a conception of what one might call "a human life well lived."[3]

In spelling this out, we can return to the point made above about affective self-involvement. The decisive aspect lies not so much in the emotions' world-related contents, but rather in the way my affectivity lets me address the world or move in the world in general. It is the *posture* or stance, the affect-informed composure or lack thereof that I enact as part of my emotional comportment and thus of my overall being-in-the-world. In this manner, then, my fearful affectability, for example, operates under a meta-disposition that concerns my overall faring in the world. Accordingly, we might use less technical language and call the higher-order disposition in question the capacity to "live competently as a human"—again with the proviso that there is a plurality of substantive ideals of human lives, and potentially massive disagreement about when such a life rightly counts as well-lived. Moreover, in our post-traditional times, such a conception of a human life might be more of an open dimension in constant need of elaboration than a stable normative ideal.

Still, a human life has to be normatively bound in some way on pain of dissolving into chaos.

To stay with the example of fear, this existential normative guidance might demand and allow very different dealings with instances of fear. On many occasions, it might simply mean that we are well advised to let run our fear its course as long as we are capable of responding adequately to the situation at hand. Because obviously, in a world beyond our control, fear will often be appropriate and we are prudent to act out of fear on a good number of occasions: avoiding unnecessary dangers, preventing us from acting recklessly, and so forth. But once our fear becomes paralyzing and impedes our adequate coping (i.e. living up to or in line with our existential outlook), then we are obliged to adjust: either regulate our fear such that it gives way to another attitude, or modify it such that it becomes more conducive to our adequately responding to what is at issue in the situation. Now consider the case where we happen to react fearfully to an ever-broader range of situations, even by-and-large harmless ones, so that our fear, in coming to *regularly* exceed what is proper, becomes excessive. At this point, affective skill repair will have to ensue. We are obliged to work toward changing our fearful disposition in line with what we deem to be at stake in our living our lives. What operates under a specific normative regulation in this case is our *affectability*—the very dimension from which various concrete emotional episodes develop. This affectability, which is not just a standing disposition but crucially also a dimension of background awareness—a way of being composed, a kind of posture, as described above—is shaped in two directions. First, it is shaped according to *what*, specifically, we are supposed to respond to emotionally. This is a range of possible objects, in this case: what, specifically, to fear. Second, it is shaped with regard to *how*—with what orientation or posture—we should respond to these fearsome objects or situations, or whether to react at all. This second affective dimension concerns possible "ways of being ourselves," ways of moving about in the world, ways of addressing what goes on with and around us, as adequately responsive to our overall existential commitment. That is, this second dimension concerns the various *modalities* of our being-in-the-world. Here, skill repair might pertain to work on our attitudes and dispositions. We might attempt to adjust our range of ways to *enact* our fear, so as to live competently with and through it. This can encompass a broad repertoire of specific attitudes and comportments. For instance, it might include the capacity to suppress our fear when and only when this is really called for, but on other occasions it might mean to be capable and ready to act courageously in spite of our fear—thus *owning* our fear, even though we are concretely and perhaps painfully afraid. Or it might mean to desensitize us to certain types of fear objects and occasions, those where other affective comportments will serve us better, and so on (see Slaby and Wüschner 2014).

This returns me to my point above about the need to work with more complex and better contextualized examples. Fitting cases for getting a grip on this intricate normative structure are something like the various coordinated emotions a person experiences within a job or career, in a relationship, or as part of her living as such and such a person, or member of this or that community. There might be many things that tend to make you angry, afraid, disappointed, disillusioned, and so on in your job, or in a relationship, in your neighborhood, and so forth. An adequately attuned affective sensibility is vital to any substantive human endeavor, and a negative sensibility in particular. This is because we need to track occasions where things go poorly, in order to cope successfully, given our overall existential outlook. For example, we need to track and respond to occasions on which we are slighted, upended, hindered, endangered, incapacitated, and so on. To adequately deal with such cases, not just one particular emotional disposition needs to be in place, but a whole bundle of adequately coordinated emotional dispositions (see Helm 2001). At some point, however, such complexly attuned negative emotions might take on a life of their own and get the better of you, they might become habitual and begin to impede your faring in the world, and ultimately impact your well being in negative ways. You might then try to change your circumstances for the better, or try to get others to respond with you to improve your situation. But this won't always work, others might disagree with your evaluation, they might not resonate with your sentiments, you might find yourself at odds with your surroundings. At this point, it is time to engage in what one might call *existential* skill repair. Our overall affectivity, our repertoire of emotions, is no longer in line with our living our life competently, given what we have committed to, or what we sense is—or might be—at issue and at stake in our life. Accordingly, we are now obliged—rationally, *existentially*—to make adjustments. Either we should repair our specific affectability, or else make changes to what we deem to be at stake in this segment of our life, maybe in this particular career, this particular relationship, that does not work for us, or is not viable in light of some ideal we now understand ourselves as being bound to, and so we should make adjustments at this more basic evaluative level, revise some of our deeper commitments (see Helm 2001). Given the openness and perpetual contestedness of conceptions of a good human life, this might entail substantive, radical shifts in what we deem to be at stake and worthwhile for us to pursue in our lives. It is in this dimension, the open-ended *existential* normativity that governs our "living our lives competently," where we have to look for the conceptual nature of affectivity. Our emotions are accountable to what is at issue in our life, and that is an open dimension of situated existential understanding. As such, this is a dimension in need of ongoing cultivation—a cultivation that consists of both elucidation (of what we are and have been already) and active

shaping (of what we aspire to be). Without the capacity to entertain and act in line with a conception of our lives as a whole, however tentative and provisional, and then to bring our specific capacities, affective and agentive, into alignment with this broader conception, and also to adjust and refashion that conception in line with what we newly learn or experience, this would be impossible. It is unfathomable to conceive of such a reflective and self-corrective activity in the absence of conceptual capacities, and in the absence of a practice of conceptual articulation whose reach extends all the way into the minutiae of our affective lives.

Considered abstractly, the normative status approach to concepts requires no more than the normative accountability of those practices, experiences, and ways of being that are putatively conceptual. In practice, however, this amounts to the assumption that the conceptuality of human performances and experiences is grounded in a particular ability, competence, or capacity (that is why I call it the "normative capacity approach"). It is the capacity to reflect upon and articulate—including to make corrections, adjustments, additions to—certain dimensions of our practical self-understanding. In Charles Taylor's parlance, conceptuality manifests in the competence to engage in effective self-interpretation (Taylor 1985): to be able to articulate, so as to make explicit, criticize, revise, or expand—and thus actively shape—what is at stake in one's life, to adjudicate this with particular affective and agentive orientations, and to make adjustments where they are called for, in both directions, i.e. specific skill repair and/or revision of the overall conception. Clearly, with its multi-dimensional normativity spanning single performances, skills, and abilities, and overall practical self-understanding, this general existential competence—our *ability-to-be*—is inconceivable unless we take it to be a conceptual affair. Possessors of this normative ability are capable of bringing any given aspect of their practical and experiential outlook, crucially including affectivity, under reflective scrutiny and open it to rearticulation if that is what the situation calls for.

One final point. It is a particular strength of the normative capacity approach to conceptuality that it does not tie concept users to any *specific* concepts. Contrary to views that spell out conceptuality in terms of a standing stock of concepts that concept users must possess, the normative capacity approach allows for creativity, inventiveness, or radical dissidence with regard to whatever is conceptually established (for a related perspective on the case of language, see Davidson 1986). Thereby, the approach defended here does justice to a crucial yet under-appreciated point about normativity made by Joseph Rouse: "Our normative reach always exceeds our grasp, and hence what is at stake in practices outruns any present articulation of those stakes" (Rouse 2002: 25). What Rouse here says of human practices pertains equally to human emotions: our normative responsiveness to what is at stake in them outruns all our presently available articulations. Saying that our emotions are conceptual is one way to do justice to this important insight.

Notes

1 This is not Pessoa verbatim; I made it up to simplify his thought, expressed in part in the following passage of his *Book of Disquiet*: "So why travel? In Madrid, Berlin, Persia, China, and at the North or South Pole, where would I be but in myself, and in my particular type of sensations? Life is what we make of it. Travel is the traveller. What we see isn't what we see but what we are" (Pessoa 2002: §451).

2 Tappolet acknowledges that one's account of perception might be complexified, for instance when she mentions proposals to the effect that perception, like emotion, is subject to cultural variance and developmental plasticity (see, e.g. Tappolet 2016: 37–38).

3 In times when it is no longer uncontroversial as to what a "human life well lived" amounts to, this is itself a normatively open dimension which might consist more in an open-ended debate or quarrel than a clearly delineated conception. Yet what matters for present purposes is that individuals can normatively distinguish, albeit provisionally, between instrumental and existential concerns, even if, interpersonally, normatively guiding conceptions of human existence or of the good human life may vary radically.

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